



Women's Empowerment and Hunger

Women's Empowerment: Why Does It Matter to Ending Hunger?

One of the most concrete forms of discrimination is hunger and malnutrition, and women are most often treated with this form of discrimination. Being seen as equally deserving of nutritious food is a fundamental human right.

We cannot end hunger without also achieving gender equality. Why?

- About 60 percent of the world's hungry people are female.¹ That's nearly half a billion women and girls who aren't getting the nutritious food they need for healthy, active lives.
- Women do work that is essential to their countries' economic growth. They are the primary caregivers for children and elders, grow and earn money for food, and do the majority of such unpaid household chores² as pounding grains for cooking.
- Evidence from around the world shows that women are more likely than men to spend additional income on their children's health and education.³ Boosting women's earning power boosts a family's economic prospects.
- "Improvements in the status of women"⁴ was the top factor in lowering child malnutrition between 1970 and 1995, outweighing the seemingly obvious "having more food available."
- Gains in girls' education alone accounted for 43 percent of this progress.⁵ If two neighbors have similar low incomes, but only one has completed eighth grade, the woman who has been to school is far more likely to see her children survive and grow up healthy.

Women's Empowerment: How Is the World Doing?

- How the world is doing depends on one's point of reference. Historically, women have been treated as inferior nearly everywhere on the planet. As recently



as 100 years ago, laws and social norms still commonly viewed women as minors⁶—children who would never grow up.

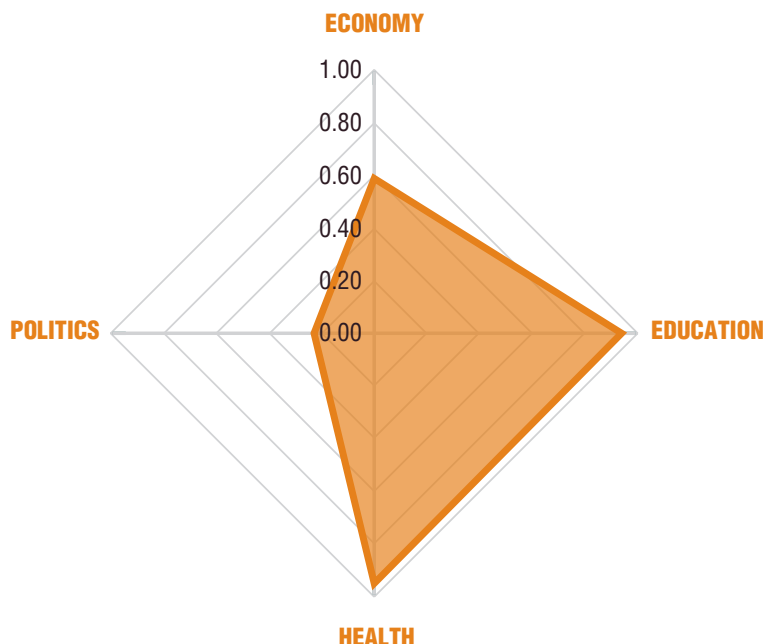
- Today, most national constitutions prohibit gender discrimination. But turning the policy into reality remains an enormous challenge.
- The United States and 192 other countries adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, to be met by 2030. Goal 5 is reaching gender equality.
- The World Economic Forum reports that at today's rate of progress, the world will not reach gender equality until 2133.⁷ We can't afford to wait more than a century for gender equality.

- The Global Gender Gap Index ranks 145 countries on gender equality in four areas. The 2015 Index concludes that since the first Index 10 years ago, “While the world has made progress overall, stubborn inequalities remain.”⁸ The gender gap has been reduced by only 4 percent.⁹
- The world is approaching equality in the areas of health (96 percent of the gender gap filled) and education (95 percent filled).¹⁰
- A major stumbling block is translating women’s educational gains into workplace gains.¹¹ Creating jobs and ensuring equal employment opportunities are major tasks for any country, but no country can afford to waste its human potential.
- Politics has by far the widest gender gap—only 23 percent filled. Women have equal representation in only two national legislatures in the world. One hopeful sign is that 23 percent is a significant improvement over the 2006 level of 14 percent.¹²
- As Bread for the World Institute’s 2015 Hunger Report, *When Women Flourish ... We Can End Hunger*, points out, a major reason for economic and political gender gaps is that social norms disproportionately allocate unpaid care responsibilities to women. These tasks consume time that could otherwise be devoted to paid work, education, and civic engagement. In developing countries, three-fourths of men’s work time, but only one-third of women’s work time, is spent on income-producing activities.¹³
- The other two-thirds of women’s work hours are also vital contributions and should be valued as such.
- Progress in the economic and political realms is self-reinforcing.¹⁴ Momentum will contribute to future gains.
- No country has filled its entire gender gap. In 2015, the closest were Iceland, Norway, and Finland.¹⁵

Civic organizations, churches, and anti-poverty groups in every country are “well placed to make the connections between ending hunger and poverty and women’s empowerment,” Bread points out in *When Women Flourish*. “They can [also] help change social and cultural norms and practices.”¹⁶

GLOBAL GENDER GAP PERFORMANCE, 2015

1.00 = equality



Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2015

Endnotes

¹ U.N. Women, Facts and Figures. <http://www2.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures>

² Bread for the World Institute, 2015 Hunger Report: *When Women Thrive ... We Can End Hunger*, p. 13. <http://www.hungerreport.org/2015/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2015-Introduction.pdf>

³ U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, *Men and Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gap*. <http://www.fao.org/sofa/gender/key-facts/en/>

⁴ Lisa C. Smith and Lawrence Haddad (2000), *Explaining Child Malnutrition in Developing Countries: A Cross-Country Analysis*, International Food Policy Research Institute, p. xii. Cited in Bread for the World Institute, *When Women Thrive ... We Can End Hunger*, p. 13. <http://www.hungerreport.org/2015/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2015-Introduction.pdf>

⁵ 2015 Hunger Report: *When Women Thrive ... We Can End Hunger*, p. 13.

⁶ Harvard Business School, Baker Library Collections, Women and the Law. http://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/wes/collections/women_law/

⁷ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2015. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/>

⁸ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2015, Report Highlights. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/report-highlights/>

⁹ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2015, Press Releases. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/press-releases/>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Global Gender Gap Report 2015, Report Highlights. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/report-highlights/>

¹² Global Gender Gap Report 2015, Press Releases. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/press-releases/>

¹³ Anna Falth and Mark Blacken (2009), “Unpaid Care Work,” Policy Brief, UNDP, p. 1. Cited in Bread for the World Institute, *When Women Thrive ... We Can End Hunger*, p. 77. <http://www.hungerreport.org/2015/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2015-Introduction.pdf>

¹⁴ Global Gender Gap Report 2015, Report Highlights. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/report-highlights/>

¹⁵ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2015, Rankings. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/rankings/>

¹⁶ 2015 Hunger Report, *When Women Thrive ... We Can End Hunger*, p. 9.