



INNOVATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY





“The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is anything but ‘business as usual’. We need not incremental change, but bold change.

We need an earthquake that will tilt the system altogether, because little and incremental steps will not give us the world that we want.”

—Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women

Achieving the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – and notably the goal on gender equality and women’s empowerment – requires transformative shifts, integrated approaches and new solutions. Based on current trajectories, existing efforts will not suffice to achieve a Planet 50-50 by 2030.

However, innovations in policies, management, finance, science and technology that disrupt “business as usual” are increasingly recognized as a way to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs for all. From mobile banking ventures that facilitate women’s entrepreneurship to e-learning platforms that take classrooms to individuals, social innovations have the potential to serve as powerful tools to break trends and increase awareness, access and the availability of opportunities. This is particularly true for women experiencing marginalization due to their age, ethnicity, education, income, disability, location or migratory status.

At the same time, it is increasingly clear that technology and innovation can be rejected; that they can create new, unforeseen problems of their own; and that they do not benefit all equally. Not only are women under-represented across core innovation sectors, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics, but new technology brings risks of bias and possibilities for misuse, creating new human rights challenges for the 21st century.

Recognizing the unprecedented opportunities as well as the challenges of rapid innovation and technological development for gender equality and women’s empowerment, as well as the importance of innovation to benefit women and men equally, UN Women has included innovation as one of the “drivers of change” in its Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

This brochure showcases some of UN Women’s thoughts and practices around innovation that could accelerate gender equality and women’s empowerment. The examples range from pilot programmes with marginalized beneficiaries to partnerships with start-ups; from frontier technologies to non-tech interventions that challenge mindsets; and from procedural improvements to capacity-building. We hope you will enjoy the reading, and that our sharing will elicit valuable insight and future collaboration.



INNOVATION AT UN WOMEN

UN Women has accumulated a wealth of experience, capability and techniques for overcoming the issues and barriers to women's advancement in technology and innovation. We have been trying novel approaches and challenging existing ways of doing things to develop solutions that add value for women and girls affected by humanitarian and development challenges.

Our current portfolio covers IT projects, innovative partnerships, big data, behavioural insights and new ways to deliver services for a wide range of thematic areas:

Developing the market for innovations that advance gender equality and women's empowerment

Promoting a gender-responsive approach to the innovation process

Promoting innovations created by women, for women

De-risking high-impact innovations that benefit marginalized women

The **UN Women Innovation Facility** supports all UN Women Units and Country Offices in exploring and piloting new solutions that respond to problems faced by women and girls. The pursuit of innovation is grounded in partnerships and the Facility is actively engaging with partners to identify opportunities for collaboration, including with Member States, international organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector.



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK

The Government of Denmark is the founding partner of UN Women's innovation work. Since 2014, the Danish Innovation Fund provides UN Women with flexible and less risk-averse funding to co-identify, prototype and pilot innovative projects that can accelerate gender equality and women's empowerment. It also supports UN Women to strengthen its internal innovation capacity and embed innovation throughout the organization.



Since 2018, the Government of France has been supporting the Innovation Facility's capacity to provide technical advice, develop tools and methodologies, capture and share experiences and learning, as well as to build partnerships.

Innovation at UN Women is about identifying new and more effective solutions that explicitly meet the needs of women and girls and have the ability to accelerate impact.



INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR INDUSTRY-WIDE CHANGE

Innovation and technology seldom benefit women and men equally. This gender gap constrains efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment and prevents women from becoming both developers and consumers of technology that addresses their needs.

Recognizing the transformative power of cross-sector partnerships, UN Women created the Global Innovation Coalition for Change (GICC) in 2017 with private sector, academic and non-profit institutions that collectively wish to improve women access, participation and ability to innovate.

Specifically, the GICC focuses on the following goals:

1. Build market awareness of the potential for innovations developed by women that meet the needs of women and girls
2. Identify the key barriers to women and girl's advancement in innovation, technology and entrepreneurship
3. Work collaboratively to identify and take actions to address these barriers and needs at an industry-wide level

GICC members are key representatives willing to take the lead in making their institutions change agents that will spur innovation, unleash investments and power a more equitable world. They are divided into three workstreams:

GENDER INNOVATION PRINCIPLES:

set standards for a gender-responsive approach to innovation. They engage GICC members but also any interested signatory to improve their organizational and business practices and give them access to specific tools for assessment, guidance and reporting.

SHE INNOVATES GLOBAL PROGRAMME:

connects women innovators worldwide and provides access to tools, resources and events.

4GOOD PROGRAMME SOUTH AFRICA:

promotes women innovators in South Africa and gives them access to the knowledge, skills and expertise they need to grow, sustain and scale their businesses.

A GENDER-RESPONSIVE APPROACH means going beyond acknowledging and raising awareness of gender gaps, to make sure women's and men's concerns and experiences are equally integrated in the design of innovative products or services and that due consideration is given to gender norms, roles and relations.

GENDER INNOVATION PRINCIPLES:

Adopting a gender-responsive approach to innovation means going beyond acknowledging the need for gender equality in innovation and **acting throughout the innovation cycle to ensure that women play a key role at every phase.**

The primary objective of the Principles is to **create a space where members can share tools, lessons learned and rapidly push forward innovative practices.** They are encouraged to set their own specific targets to:

1. Make a high-level corporate commitment to adopt a gender-responsive approach to innovation
2. Design innovations that include women as end users
3. Adapt implementation approaches to ensure innovations meet the needs of women
4. Evaluate gender-responsive impacts by using a data-driven approach
5. Scale innovations that provide sustainable solutions to meet the needs of women and girls

SHE INNOVATES GLOBAL PROGRAMME:

MEETUPS AND EVENTS

She Innovates meetups and events are meeting places where women entrepreneurs and innovators can share ideas, experiences and support each other to overcome the barriers for women in innovation.

MEDIA CAMPAIGN

The She Innovates campaign tackles gender stereotypes by showcasing women who are problem-solvers around the world, who have pioneered innovation and progress across industries.

MENTORING PROGRAMME

In partnership with Led by Her, UN Women created the She Innovates Mentoring programme, designed to bring innovators and industry experts together. A platform was launched in 2019 to digitally optimize talent pools and bring together innovators and industry experts.

LABS

The labs are one-day events that connect private sector expertise with local women innovators to provide women with the support, expertise and collaboration needed to scale their innovations.

AWARD

Teams with innovative solutions that meet the needs of women and girls can apply for any of the MIT Solve's four challenges. Contestants are eligible for the award, which is a grant funding of USD \$25,000 or more.

LOCAL CHAPTER

The She Innovates Chapter programme is being piloted in Alberta, Canada. The objective is to identify local challenges and focus on initiatives that address these barriers to support local women innovators through targeted community-based initiatives.

4GOOD PROGRAMME SOUTH AFRICA:

In a notably male-dominated entrepreneurial ecosystem in South Africa, the 4Good Programme is a 12-month intervention geared to accelerate women-owned innovative businesses by giving them the necessary tools to shift from "survive" to "thrive and flourish mode" and provide:

• Training/skills development (100 Women)

Cohorts will attend bi-weekly, in-person sessions and monthly Webinars. Entrepreneurs will be split into two groups: developers and accelerators.

• Mentoring (up to 100 Mentors)

Each entrepreneur will be match with a mentor to accompany her along her journey.

• Communication and international exposure

Corporate partners and investors will be invited to meet women entrepreneurs and discover their projects at the end of the programme.



EMPOWERING WOMEN FARMERS THROUGH DIGITAL INNOVATION

UN Women is piloting the Buy from Women (BfW) platform under the Global Flagship Programme on Climate Smart Agriculture, to provide easier access to land, information, markets and finance for women farmers.

The platform plays a dual role: it allows women to access pertinent information (prices, inputs, financing) while helping them establish themselves as legitimate commercial entities with records (land/yields, track record of investments/repayments) to secure their financial future or access new markets.

A USER-DRIVEN, WOMEN FARMER-CENTRIC TOOL

Most available market platforms are developed based on the needs of buyers or companies that need to track their suppliers. But the design of **Buy from Women** is directly based on women farmers' needs.

It uses an open source **ERP system** (Enterprise Resource Planning) developed for the farmers, covering multiple functions, and flexible to integrate third party apps. Pilots are based on value-chain-specific analysis to make sure their features integrate local needs and contexts.



UNLOCKING THE BUSINESS POTENTIAL OF SMALLHOLDER FARMERS

Women make up **43%** of the agricultural labour force in developing countries and **59%** in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, women farmers face a number of key structural barriers that limit their access to land, information, finance, infrastructure, technologies and markets.





Only **20%** of land owners are women. **22%** of bank account holders in rural areas in low-income countries are women, and **5%** of women have access to extension services.

Climate change is expected to exacerbate existing barriers and create new ones.

“I have often heard the word digital platform but never really knew what it meant or what it looked like. It is interesting because this platform allows us to communicate with buyers over a distance. The main advantage of using this platform is that it offers opportunities that never existed before to sell our products”.

—Béatrice Jean-Denis, woman farmer in Haiti

BUY FROM WOMEN:

<p>Land tenure insecurity limits women's economic opportunities and leaves them more vulnerable to poverty, hunger, gender-based violence and displacement</p>	<p>Gaps between men and women in ownership and control of physical assets, plus gaps in human and social capital, influence women's ability to access finance</p>	<p>Knowledge of farming techniques is critical to productivity; however, women farmers have inadequate access to agricultural extension and training services</p>	<p>Transportation, infrastructure and social norms constrain rural women's access to markets and participation in farmer organizations and cooperatives</p>
<p>LAND</p> 	<p>FINANCE</p> 	<p>INFORMATION</p> 	<p>MARKETS</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using GPS for land mapping and digital records of land-holding • Forecasting and tracking harvest volume using land data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing virtual financial accounts with mobile wallets • Establishing digital records and facilitating access to credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving text or voice messages from peers or groups on production, storage, prices, transportation, weather, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting farmers, coops and buyers • Facilitating purchases, sales & inventory management

“I want to continue to use the platform and enrich my knowledge. I want to be more independent and become a role model for other women. The platform contributes to gender equality because it encourages women to work and shows that everything men can do, women can do as well.”

—Widjine Clerger, woman farmer in Haiti

COUNTRY PILOTS



RWANDA

Over 76% of economically active women in Rwanda are engaged in agriculture. However, very few of them have fully benefited from the market system due to challenges like poor access to inputs, extension services and finance. Their activities are mostly limited to subsistence farming.

UN Women is partnering with WFP to test Buy from Women with women farmers producing maize.



HAITI

Haiti is beset by traditionally low yields and poor farm-to-market infrastructure. Many women have also seen their livelihoods affected by hurricanes. UN Women is supporting women in disaster-prone areas to build resilience and identify new economic opportunities.

UN Women is partnering with a local social enterprise to develop new economic opportunities in cocoa production, a sector where the global demand is growing rapidly.



MALI

It has traditionally been very hard for women to own land in Mali, restricting their access to resources and the means of production. Women do not have access to relevant information (on crops, markets, etc.), which prevents them from taking advantage of commercial channels and gaining a market share in higher value chains.

UN Women is partnering with local cooperatives and buyers to promote greater access to markets, starting with the production of shallots and shea nuts.



EMPOWERING WOMEN AFFECTED BY HUMANITARIAN CRISIS THROUGH BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY

UN Women is exploring how blockchain technology could potentially be harnessed to address the challenges women and girls face in humanitarian settings and increase their access to socioeconomic opportunities.

Blockchain could be used to create and store verifiable digital identities for refugees or enable trackable and inexpensive cash transfers. As humanitarian crises grow increasingly protracted, with millions of people on the move, technology like blockchain may well hold the potential to address pressing challenges.

UN Women has identified cash transfer as an area in which to leverage blockchain technology to assist women and girls in humanitarian settings. We've joined forces with the World Food Programme (WFP) in testing the inter-agency blockchain project 'Building Blocks' through UN Women's Oases resilience and empowerment centres, which provide cash-for-work programmes, skills training and livelihoods opportunities to Syrian refugee women.

BLOCKCHAIN is a distributed database of immutable digital records that can be accessed from anywhere. It offers users the ability to build and maintain immutable and secure records and to directly transfer digital assets without the need for intermediaries and associated costs.

Women in crisis situations and displacement settings tend to have lower digital literacy than men, and often

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