



# A Roadmap for Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment

A REPORT BY THE UN FOUNDATION AND THE EXXONMOBIL FOUNDATION

**F**unders like the United Nations (UN) Foundation and the ExxonMobil Foundation wanted to invest strategically in women's economic empowerment. Both foundations knew that investing in women is good practice, but to more deeply invest, they needed a clearer understanding of what approaches are most impactful. Through commissioned research, these foundations worked together to improve their own understanding and also that of the broader women's empowerment field. In 2013, the UN Foundation and the ExxonMobil Foundation, released a report and interactive website, *A Roadmap for Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment*.

After years of funding women's economic empowerment programming, the ExxonMobil Foundation sought to better target its funding to areas with a known evidence base. The ExxonMobil Foundation reached out to the UN Foundation, which had years of experience working on gender and women's empowerment, and asked it to compile the latest evidence from the field. "Women's access to income and savings products are areas of great interest to funders and implementers alike, and are issues that everyone can get behind," explains the UN Foundation senior program officer and report



## Key Info



### WEBSITE

[womeneconroadmap.org/the\\_database](http://womeneconroadmap.org/the_database)



### TARGET POPULATION

Women



### APPROACH

All areas

co-author, Rebecca Furst-Nichols. “We know that when women have more money, families and societies benefit, but the evidence to date has been weak in pinpointing the most effective ways to pursue this goal.”

In addition to informing their own strategies, both foundations wanted to provide other grantmakers with accessible information to approach women’s

investment decisions. The Roadmap is intended to steer those investments in an evidence-based direction.

The project commissioned 18 research studies to help identify the most effective interventions to empower women economically. It then brought together more than 45 international experts from academic institutions, international agencies, and

***“Funders know they want to fund women’s economic empowerment programming, but they don’t know where to start. This provides a map to figure out where to start.”*** – Rebecca Furst-Nichols, UN Foundation

economic empowerment work more thoughtfully. *A Roadmap for Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment* provides a macro-level framework to determine the most appropriate type of intervention based on the context and the profile of women targeted. Rebecca explains that the

framework and the report were developed with global-level donors and practitioners in mind: those working from global capitals making investments across a

range of contexts and types of beneficiaries do not have the detailed conceptual nuance of program implementers in the field. Yet, they make major

nonprofit organizations to analyze existing empirical evidence and generate new findings. Based on the commissioned studies, the project compiled a curated database of 136 published empirical evaluations of programs and policies. The database provides donors, researchers, and practitioners with the ability to sort through concrete examples of programs in different countries, their key findings, and links to the empirical studies. The goal was to identify the interventions that contribute to two key outcomes—increases in both women’s earnings and productivity—that could then inform future investments.

The final, publicly available report summarizes the findings of the commissioned research studies. It groups interventions into four main categories of women’s employment—entrepreneurship, farming, wage employment, and young women’s employment—and includes the Roadmap for Action, an interactive map that walks readers through





options of proven, promising and high-potential program interventions based on the selected context and type of beneficiary. The research and final report aim to answer three main questions:

**1 What works?** Which economic empowerment interventions are proven, promising or high-potential, based on the evidence from rigorous policy and program evaluations? One example: Access to savings products works for all women, and women invest their own savings into their businesses, in a way that they may not use credit.

videos, and firsthand experience is critical. For example, research shows that in low-income, socially conservative settings, livelihood programs that combine reproductive health education with income and asset-building show promising results for young women.

Rebecca shares that although many funders may be looking for a silver-bullet approach to women's economic empowerment, there is no such thing, especially when targeting very poor women. "If organizations really want to increase productivity

*"Funders are increasingly influencing policy and practice by creating tools, sharing knowledge, and being more involved in their funding."* – Rebecca Furst-Nichols, UN Foundation

**2 For whom?** For specific categories of women likely to be working for pay or seeking work, which interventions were most effective? The key takeaway: Interventions must be adapted to the type of women being targeted. For example, single agricultural services, rather than a full suite, may be enough to increase productivity of women with larger sized farms, more assets, and more control over those assets, while an integrated suite of services, which target both production and address social constraints, is more successful in raising the productivity of small-scale women farmers.

**3 Where?** How do typical country scenarios influence the success of interventions? The most important piece: Context. The "where" really matters, and so learning about it through literature, interviews,

and earnings for extremely poor women in any measurable way, they need to provide a bundle of services, such as combining an in-kind grant with intensive technical training."

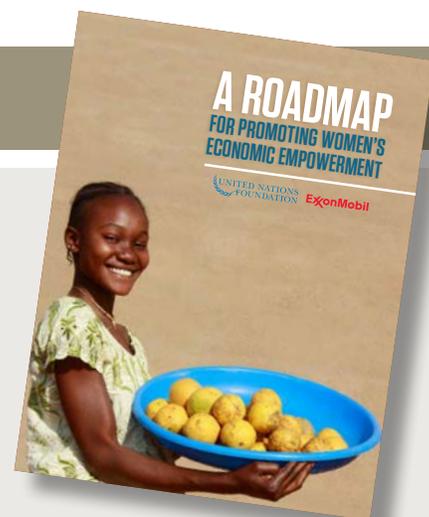
The Roadmap for Action tool was intended to move the philanthropy field forward by offering an easy-to-use framework for accessing this knowledge. Rebecca explains, "The findings from our process were that the field doesn't have a streamlined way of thinking about how to choose interventions, and researchers don't really look at a streamlined set of outcomes. The hope is that this framework will push the field to examine at least a minimum set of similar outcomes that drive toward a common body of evidence." In light of these findings, the UN Foundation and ExxonMobil Foundation

subsequently partnered to produce a set of common direct, intermediate, and final outcomes in their recent guidance note on Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment. This note is intended for

use by program evaluators as well as donors and implementers, and detailed metrics, guidelines, and questionnaires are available on their website.

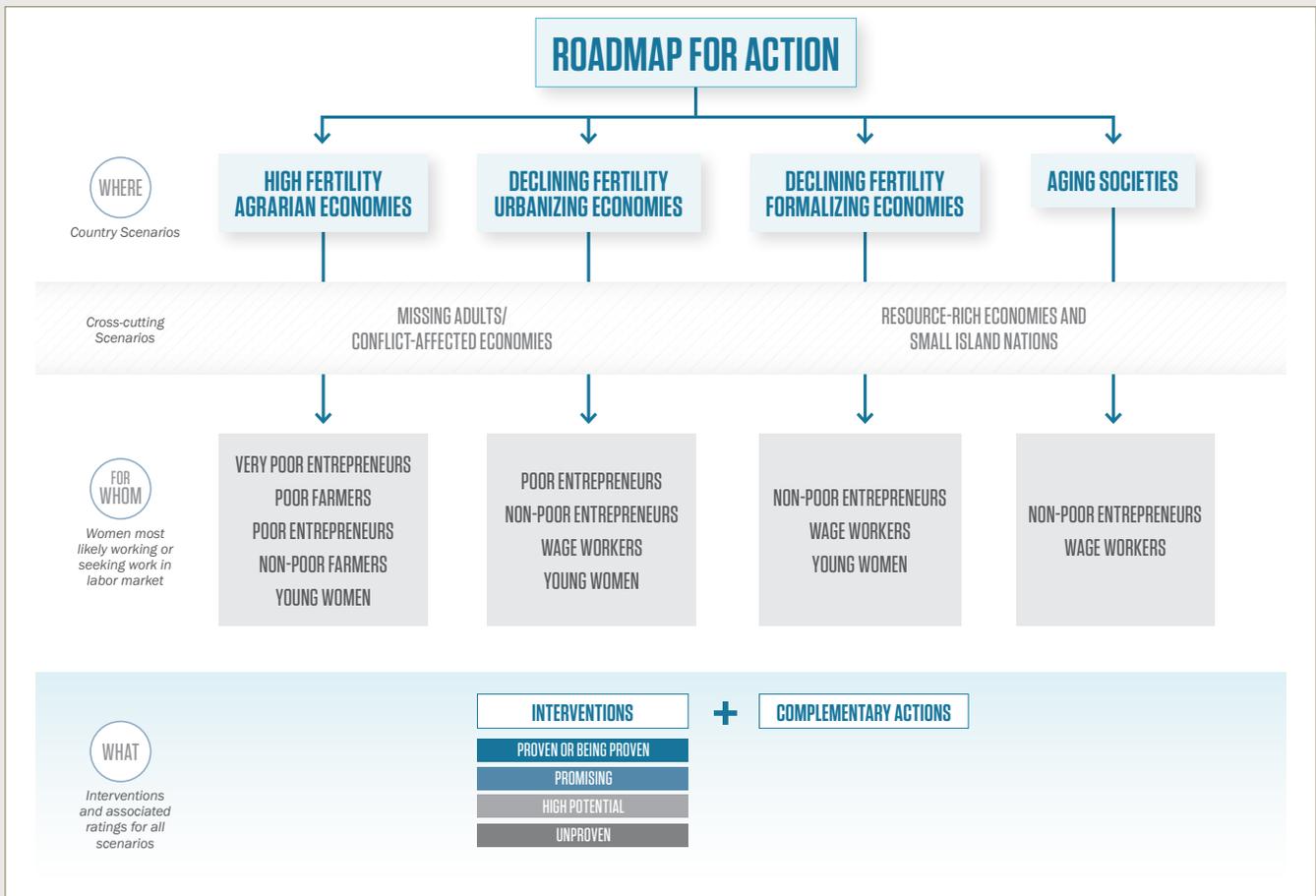
## Facts From the Roadmap

-  Women invest up to 90 percent of their earnings in their families.
-  Women produce half the world's food and in contrast only own 1 percent of its farmland.
-  Companies owned or managed by women represent between 25 percent and 33 percent of formal sector businesses around the world and a larger percentage of informal sector businesses.
-  It has been estimated that raising female employment levels to those of males could increase gross domestic product by 5 percent in the United States, 9 percent in Japan, 12 percent in the United Arab Emirates, and 34 percent in Egypt, simply through the infusion of additional earners in the economy.
-  Globally, a woman is 21 percent less likely to own a mobile phone than a man. This gender gap in ownership widens to 23 percent if she lives in Africa.



# Snapshot from A Roadmap for Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment

The Roadmap is freely available and a tool for any funder thinking about or engaged in women's economic empowerment work. The below snapshot is just a small piece of what the resource offers. For more information, visit [womeneconroadmap.org/the\\_database](http://womeneconroadmap.org/the_database).



Increased attention to investing in women led to the creation of a Roadmap on how to strategically design and fund women's economic programs that are known to work.

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This case study was written by Virginia Zuco and developed for Foundation Center's Equal Footing project. Photos appearing in this case study are used with permission from the UN Foundation and ExxonMobil Foundation.

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