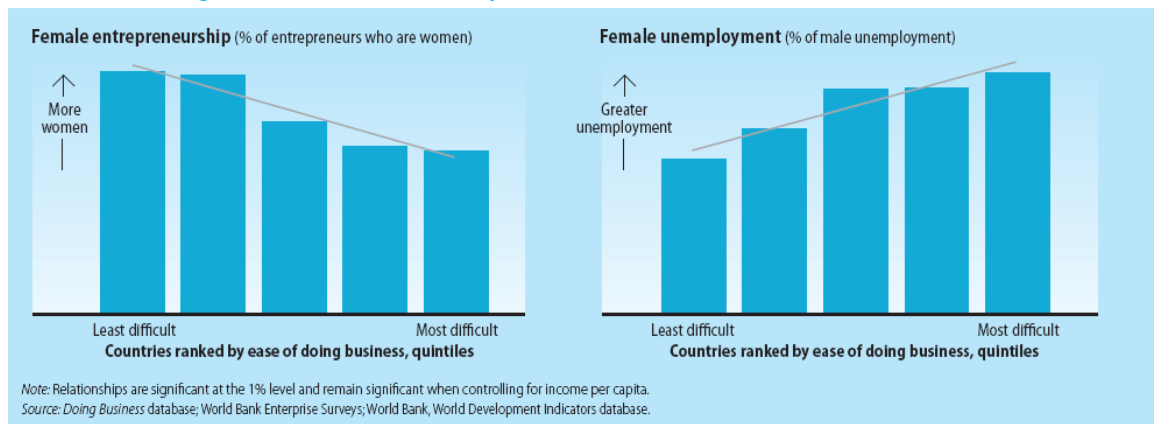


Opportunities for Women: Two-year Research Program (October 2007-2009)

Business friendly regulation leads to higher share of female entrepreneurs and women in the labor force.

FIGURE 1.7
Greater ease of doing business, more women entrepreneurs and workers



Doing Business Gender Project

World Bank Group President Robert B. Zoellick recently endorsed donor requests for the Doing Business project to undertake a two year collaborative research program on reforms that improve business opportunities for women. Doing Business is a joint World Bank and IFC program.



What to expect

- Research that will lead to both a stand alone “Doing Business: Opportunities for Women” publication and feed into the Doing Business 2009/2010 annual reports.
- Identifying laws and regulations that discriminate against women, including compiling a global data base of relevant laws for each country as a useful reform tool for governments.
- Identifying reforms that have the biggest benefits for women.
- Case studies on women entrepreneurs that describe the reasons for their success as well as the main obstacles they face in expanding their businesses.

Examples of Gender Specific Obstacles:

-Until 2006 Lesotho's law hindered women from becoming landowners and engaging in legal acts such as entering into a contract. Similarly, 2 dozen countries have labor laws that prevent women from having the same freedom to work as men. One example is Kuwait, which in June 2007 passed a law prohibiting women from working between 8p.m. and 7a.m., even if they want to. A few countries consider women legal minors and do not allow them standing in court. Instead, a women must be represented by her husband, father or brother. And several countries do not allow married women to start a business on their own, requiring their husband's consent.

-In some regions, such as East Africa, women have fewer inheritance rights than men. That makes it harder to show collateral to the bank when starting a business. More important, it sometimes makes it impossible for women to provide for their children if their husband leaves or dies. Other regulatory requirements – such as the need to obtain a husband's consent before getting a passport, or to locate a business in licensed commercial premises – may also indirectly affect women's ability to participate fully in business.

-Relevant data can help promote reform. In Uganda women's groups formed a coalition to lobby for reforms in business law that would especially benefit women. The result: more awareness of the need for reform and new bills drafted by the Ministry of Finance, now awaiting approval by the attorney general. These include the Companies Bill, the Chattels Transfer Act and personal property and securities laws.

September, 2007: Former US President Bill Clinton publicly announced at the annual Clinton Global Initiative in New York: "*World Bank Group Gender Action Plan to partner with Vital Voices on a systematic cataloging of laws that discriminate against women's ability to earn a living and sustain themselves and their families, beginning with Africa*". This will be published on the Doing Business website to provide governments with comparative information for gender sensitive business friendly reforms that promote shared economic growth.

Donor Involvement: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, UK, and the US are offering support and advice on the new "Doing Business Gender Project: Opportunities for Women".

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