

From Skills to Economic Independence: Expanding Opportunities for Women

In collaboration with L'Oréal Pakistan

Women's economic participation has become central to how countries think about growth, resilience and future competitiveness. Yet, while access to education and skills has expanded in many parts of the world, the transition from learning to earning remains difficult for a large number of women. Training alone does not guarantee employment, entrepreneurship or financial independence. Women continue to face barriers to accessing finance, participating in the workforce, mobility, care responsibilities, professional networks, digital access and career progression. These challenges become even more critical at a time when Artificial Intelligence, digital platforms and new forms of work are rapidly reshaping labour markets and redefining the skills required for economic participation. The development challenge, therefore, is to create pathways that enable women to translate their knowledge and skills into sustainable economic opportunities. This requires looking beyond the number of women who receive training and asking whether they can secure meaningful employment, build viable enterprises, access markets and finance, advance into leadership positions and exercise greater control over their economic choices. Closing this gap requires a more coordinated approach in which government, businesses, financial institutions and training providers work together to ensure that skills lead to real and sustained economic outcomes.

This conversation is particularly relevant for L'Oréal Pakistan, whose engagement with women has long been associated with confidence, dignity and self-worth through its broader purpose, '[Create the Beauty That Moves the World](#).' The brand has also supported initiatives that address barriers to women's participation in public and economic life. Through the [Stand Up Against Street Harassment](#) programme, developed with [Right To Be](#) and local implementation partner [Bedari](#), L'Oréal Pakistan has worked to improve women's confidence and safety in public spaces, recognising that freedom of movement and personal security are closely connected to their ability to pursue education, employment and other opportunities. These efforts create a strong basis for a broader discussion on how the private sector can help women move from capability to opportunity and from opportunity to economic independence.

Aligned with the 29th Sustainable Development Conference, this panel will examine how women's economic empowerment must evolve in response to changing labour markets, technological disruption and new models of work. It will explore what is required to ensure that women are not only trained for existing jobs but are also positioned to benefit from emerging opportunities in the digital economy, entrepreneurship, leadership and new forms of employment. The session will bring together policymakers, corporate leaders, financial institutions, entrepreneurs and practitioners to discuss how stronger Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can help close the gap between skills development and economic independence. It will also highlight the role of the private sector in creating more inclusive workplaces, supporting women-led enterprises, expanding access to markets and finance, and

designing opportunities that allow women to participate meaningfully in a changing economy. The specific objectives of the discussion will be to:

- Examine why skills and training do not always translate into employment, entrepreneurship or sustained income for women, and to identify the barriers that continue to limit their economic participation.
- Explore how businesses can move beyond short-term training initiatives and create stronger pathways into jobs, enterprise development, market access and leadership.
- Assess how digitalisation, AI and emerging forms of work can open new opportunities for women while also addressing the risk that existing inequalities may be reinforced.
- Discuss the role of finance, investment and digital financial services in enabling women to start, sustain and scale businesses and achieve greater economic independence.
- Identify practical areas for collaboration between government, the private sector and development partners that can help women move from skills acquisition to sustained economic participation.

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