



## Economic Development and Empowerment

Improving women’s and girls’ economic status is one of the most powerful tools for advancing their rights and improving their lives.<sup>1</sup> As women and girls increase their economic standing and status within their communities, society as a whole shares the benefits, from rising economic growth to improved public health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Women make up the majority of the estimated 1 billion people living in poverty worldwide,<sup>3</sup> so efforts to increase their access to education and training, jobs, and economic opportunities is a vital step in promoting development and pulling nations and communities out of poverty.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the many educational advances that women have made in recent decades, gender inequality in the world of work persists. Since the 1990s, women’s labor force participation has stagnated. Globally, only 55% of females ages 15-64 are in the work force, compared to around 80% of males.<sup>5</sup> On average, women receive lower pay than their male counterparts and are often relegated to lower-skilled, lower-wage jobs.<sup>6</sup> Women comprise an estimated 43% of the agricultural work force in developing countries,<sup>7</sup> but have less access to training, are less likely to own or have rights to own land, and produce lower yields than male farmers.<sup>8</sup>

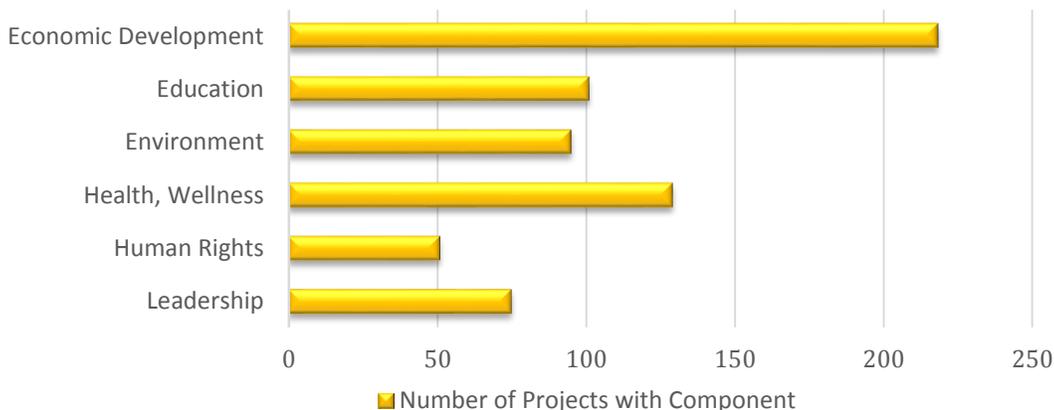
*Studies from a wide range of economies including Egypt, the Euro Zone, Japan, South Africa, and the United States show that raising women’s rates of employment and labor force participation would directly boost economic growth and gross domestic product.<sup>5</sup>*

From 1970-2013, VGIF invested more than 958,000 USD in 218 projects to support women’s economic development and empowerment across East Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. These projects reached more than 53,000 people, including 8,300 girls and close to 31,000 women.

### VGIF grantees used a range of strategies to advance women’s and girls’ economic status including:

- Training women and girls in vocational and technical skills including light manufacturing, computer use, handicrafts, and agricultural production and processing;
- Equipping women’s collectives through machinery and supplies to produce marketable goods;
- Supporting women to develop small businesses through micro-finance, licensing support, childcare, and training.

VGIF Projects by Topic Area



## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Supporting Entrepreneurship for Indigenous Women



The “Weaving Hope: Livelihood Support for Displaced Women of Esperanza” Project by Madagway Babaeyon was funded by VGIF in 2012-2013 to establish a weaving center to provide business development opportunities for indigenous women displaced by regional violence in the Philippines. The project equipped a weaving center with looms and machinery, trained women and girls in *hinabol* weaving, and supported women to sell cloth to increase their incomes and economic status. In addition, Madagway Babaeyon conducted a business development study to identify best practices for marketing the cloth and sustaining the women’s small businesses.

The project served 30 women and 20 girls. In addition to raising their monthly income, women became more involved in community decision-making and increasingly vocalized their opinions on community affairs over the course of the project. As one project organizer stated, “**the women have been able to**

**discuss other personal and community issues such as their health and the settlement of conflict among some community members. This increase in their capacity for decision making is a positive indicator...**” of the overall gains made through the project.

## VGIF ACHIEVEMENTS: Economic Development and Empowerment

From 1970-2013, VGIF funded **218 projects** that included a component to promote women’s and girls’ economic development and empowerment. The projects reached approximately **39,180** women and girls and **53,300** people overall, including men and boys.

The majority of projects focused on **individual skills and vocational training, business development support, and equipment and supplies** to help women develop and sustain small businesses and other income-generating activities. An average of **245 people** were reached through each project.

<sup>1</sup> Anne Marie Golla, Anju Molhatra, Priya Nanda, Rehka Mehra, International Center for Research on Women, *Understanding and Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment*. (ICRW, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> UN Women, “Economic Empowerment”, available at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment>.

<sup>3</sup> Women Watch, “Women and Poverty”, available at [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/women\\_and\\_poverty\\_3001.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/women_and_poverty_3001.htm).

<sup>4</sup> See above ICRW.

<sup>5</sup> The World Bank, “Data: Women are less likely than men to participate in the labor market in most countries”, available at <http://data.worldbank.org/news/women-less-likely-than-men-to-participate-in-labor-market>.

<sup>6</sup> The World Bank, *Gender at Work: A Companion to the World Development Report on Jobs*. (The World Bank, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture*. (FAO, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.