



# Enterprising Women: Expanding Economic Opportunities in Africa (Africa Development Forum)

*Mary Hallward-Driemeier*

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## **Enterprising Women: Expanding Economic Opportunities in Africa (Africa Development Forum)**

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This book brings together new household and enterprise data from 41 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to inform policy makers and practitioners on ways to expand women entrepreneurs' economic opportunities. Sub-Saharan Africa boasts the highest share of women entrepreneurs, but they are disproportionately concentrated among the self-employed rather than employers. Relative to men, women are pursuing lower opportunity activities, with their enterprises more likely to be smaller, informal, and in low value-added lines of business. The challenge in expanding opportunities is not helping more women become entrepreneurs but enabling them to shift to higher return activities.

A central question addressed in the book is what explains the gender sorting in the types of enterprises that women and men run? The analysis shows that many Sub-Saharan countries present a challenging environment for women. Four key areas of the agenda for expanding women's economic opportunities in Africa are analyzed: strengthening women's property rights and their ability to control assets; improving women's access to finance; building human capital in business skills and networks; and strengthening women's voices in business environment reform. These areas are important both because they have wide gender gaps and because they help explain gender differences in entrepreneurial activities.

It is particularly striking that while gender gaps in education tend to close with higher incomes, gaps in women's property rights and in women's participation in reform processes do not. As simply raising a country's income is unlikely to be sufficient to give women equal ability to control assets or have greater voice, more proactive steps will be needed. Practical guidelines to move the agenda forward are discussed for each of these key areas.

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