

August 1, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

The International Council on Women's Business Leadership (ICWBL) appreciates the Administration's policy to engage the private sector for women's economic empowerment and business leadership, especially in the area of access to capital.

Women are empowered to start new or grow existing businesses with the support of policies and practices in the private and public sector. The ICWBL and its Subcommittee on Access to Capital has defined that there are three main market segments regarding expanding women's access to capital and that each market segment requires different policies and programs to effectively address the existing challenges. The three market segments as defined by the ICWBL are 1) non-bankable or micro entrepreneurs; 2) bankable SMEs and micro-entrepreneurs with potential to grow if given access to capital; and 3) high growth start-ups, which are bankable with potential for high returns but require sophisticated financial vehicles such as venture capital, angel investors, incubator and accelerator models.

The ICWBL found that out of all three market segments, the middle market segment would have the greatest impact and would generate the greatest returns for countries. Evidence considered by the ICWBL suggests that South Asia, Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa have the lowest level of financial inclusion and can benefit most from policies and efforts to promote women's financial inclusion. And finally, the ICWBL found that most countries look to neighboring countries for reforms or will consider practices that neighboring countries are utilizing. Therefore, the ICWBL recommends that policies and programs initially focus on the middle market segment. In addition, the ICWBL recommends that best practices and policies from relevant countries be researched, and that strategic partnerships be formed to effectively further women's access to capital.

The ICWBL has four core recommendations, which work along a continuum to help women gain access to capital by 1) raising awareness of the need, reason, and benefits of expanding financial inclusion for women with key stakeholders, 2) promoting policy dialogues of gender access targets in relevant countries' financial inclusion strategies, 3) promoting the adoption of best practices in service and product delivery for women to financial institutions operating in target countries and regions, and 4) reviewing innovative models which leverage technology and regulatory frameworks to expand women's access to capital.

Each of these recommendations leverages existing infrastructure and resources. To support these policy recommendations, the ICWBL recommends four focus areas and appropriate interventions:

1. **“Women entrepreneurs: Mend the Access Gap”** local awareness raising campaign. The ICWBL recommends three main interventions: 1) *Develop a series of Short Briefs and Fact Sheets*: These one-pagers will be shared with all Council members and address the main challenges and inhibiting factors that preclude women entrepreneurs from accessing capital as well as examples of solutions and good practices. 2) *Mass Media and Social Outreach Campaigns, which will target all parts of society.* And 3) *Outreach to young students, both boys and girls, about the importance of financial inclusion and literacy for both men and women.*
2. **Support the inclusion of gender targets in country’s national inclusion strategies.** At the Los Cabos G20 Summit, seventeen governments committed to significantly improve financial inclusion by setting targets and implementing action plans. The World Bank, which was asked by the Mexico G20 presidency to support the implementation of these country commitments, as well as Subcommittee members can work with governments to promote gender targets in their national strategies. A case study of Nigeria’s progressive approach could be highlighted.
3. **Projects to promote gender sensitive business practices in local banks.** The ICWBL recommends three main interventions: 1) Work with the Global Banking Alliance to leverage successful strategies that banks are developing to provide financial products that aim for gender parity. 2) Develop public- private initiatives that expand financial services to women. 3) Work with the IFC, which has a network of 700 banks to raise the awareness and the need to offer financial products for women.
4. **A series of concept notes on policy areas,** regulatory frameworks and innovative solutions to address the access issues of the micro and high growth segments of the market for women users and will also include a focus on models which leverage innovative technologies.

We advocate for more research and collaboration with international organizations, NGOs and private sector leaders on issues around women’s access to capital. There is a critical lack of data in this area, especially regarding gender disaggregated data from financial institutions and how technology can be appropriately utilized to effectively expand access to capital for women. Further research in both of these areas is essential to developing high-impact interventions.

Yours truly,



Cherie Blair
Vice Chair ICWBL



Indra Nooyi
Vice Chair ICWBL



Sri Mulyani
Sub-Committee Chair ICWBL