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Panel: Women and Innovation

UN Women

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5-7 minutes

It is a pleasure to be here at the UN Women Leaders Forum to reaffirm a shared commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment in achieving sustainable development... an enduring goal for world governments, UN agencies, thousands of NGOs and companies around the world – and a personal one for me since I first marched for women's rights as a teenager in the 1970s.

The Rockefeller Foundation began our centennial celebrations two months ago on the theme of 'Innovation for the Next 100 Years'. As we turn 100 we are reflecting on the hallmarks of our history – and one of them is identifying innovations...scaling innovations...and applying them to seemingly impossible problems. Innovation has characterized the Foundation's most compelling and live-saving work, from the development of a Nobel-prize winning vaccine for yellow fever in the 1930s, to the agricultural techniques pioneered by Rockefeller scientists that enabled the Green Revolution in the 1960s.

We define innovation as a new product, process, or service that is discontinuous from previous practice – and often recombinant – and that yields new avenues for solving acute problems.

Here in Rio we have the chance to leverage and scale innovation to ensure that globalization's benefits are more widely shared, and that its burdens are more easily weathered...to encourage more equitable growth, and to enable women and men, communities and even nations to become more resilient to chronic stresses and acute shocks.

If we think about the world as it was 99 years ago, or 50 years ago, we know that women were not often given the resources, or the platform, to innovate in very public ways. Nevertheless we know that women are instinctual innovators – because after all we innovate when we encounter a problem that can't be solved in the usual way, and women face many problems, constraints and barriers. And we know that women are energetic entrepreneurs, whether we're talking about Ariana Huffington, or the many vendors who ply their wares on streets of every city in Africa.

Today I want to share just a few of the ways we are supporting women and innovation.

First, we collaborate with a range of partners and grantees to foster innovation. We fund Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton's ***Innovation Award for Empowerment of Women and Girls***. The award seeks to find and bring to scale the most pioneering

approaches to the political, economic and social empowerment of women and girls around the globe.

This year, there were three extraordinary award recipients, but I'll focus on one.

Kickstart is a non-profit organization that develops and markets new technologies bought by local entrepreneurs and used to establish new small businesses. Kickstart is helping women move out of poverty by scaling up the MoneyMaker Hip Pump, a simple irrigation tool that is low-cost, manually powered, lightweight, and portable. It allows women farmers to grow high value fruits and vegetables and sell them throughout the year, even in the dry season when there are few other crops on the market and the prices are high. A related financial innovation Kickstart developed is the Mobile Layaway service that enables poor women farmers to purchase a pump through micro-payments over time. This innovative financial savings model could be applied to any capital product being sold at the base of the pyramid.

We also celebrate individual innovators through our annual Innovation Forum. **Jane Weru** was one of the winners last year. Jane is the executive director of the Akiba Mashinani Trust, a non-profit organization that provides slum dwellers with loans and financing as they strive to raise their quality of life. Winning the trust of a few slum dwellers at a time, Jane steered a mapping exercise of slum neighborhoods that led to formalizing 'informal' communities in the eyes of the government. Residents organized themselves around savings and loan federations, and with Jane's support, negotiated with city authorities for better services. Neighborhoods have bought their own land, and built their own upgraded housing, with access to running water, sanitation, and better infrastructure. The Federation now includes more than 60,000 households in 400 informal settlements nationwide.

And finally, we supported an exciting event in February in Kenya - the **PopTech Climate Resilience Lab** - exploring innovation at the intersection of community resilience, climate change, and the empowerment of girls and women. Consider: by 2050, there will likely be over 250 million people displaced by climate change around the world. That's *one in every 45 people on the planet*, a ten-fold increase over today's entire documented refugee and internally displaced populations. Women and girls are among the most vulnerable. The lab brings together a network of climate researchers, gender experts, social innovators, technologists, designers, and community activists to explore new possibilities in this domain. The goal is to identify and collaborate on high-potential new approaches that can be tested and implemented. The work started in rural east Africa with ambitions to expand to other regions on the continent.

We have many rich examples of our support to women-led and initiated innovations. I encourage you to reference our website, and read more about how innovation can empower women by reading the report we funded by the *International Center for the Research of Women* called *Innovation for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality*.