

New World Bank report on voice and agency for women

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The Australian director of the World Bank's Gender and Development team, Jeni Klugman, just held the UK launch of their latest report.

The report, [Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity](#), is a very powerful and well researched document.

Nothing in it is a total surprise, but the extent of the underlying data is important as it starkly illustrates the colossal constraints women and girls continue to face globally.

And it reinforces the point that gender equality and economic development are inextricably linked.

The extent of violence against women remains shocking, and of course this is not just a developing world problem. A dramatic map of the prevalence of partner violence against women records the fact that 28% of women in Australia and New Zealand have suffered.

The three points that struck me the most were:

- The attempt to measure the economic cost of violence;
- The positive impact of quotas on the political empowerment of women; and
- The importance of the right to own land and property as part of the solution to many of the issues (including the prevalence of violence).

It is this last point where I felt the report misses something important. The importance of assisting women in businesses is under-emphasised.

At the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), we have commenced a Women in Business lending program not restricted to microfinance, but through the major commercial banks.

Recent large loans to banks in Turkey for on-lending to businesses owned or managed by women, and a similar prospect coming up soon in Egypt, are particularly encouraging.

But overall, this is a terrific report and I was proud to see an Aussie heading the team.

[Bob McMullan](#) was formerly Parliamentary Secretary for International Development and is Adjunct Professor at the Crawford School of Economics and Government, Australian National University.

Note: Jeni Klugman will be in Canberra on September 25 to present the findings of this report at a panel discussion co-hosted by the Development Policy Centre and ANU Gender Institute. Speakers include Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick; former Papua New Guinea Member of Parliament Dame Carol Kidu; and Ewen McDonald, Deputy Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. [Register here](#).