Addressing economic inequality must also speak to the inequitable distribution of unpaid care work, which is caused, in part, by inadequate physical infrastructure (drinking-water systems, transportation networks, etc.) and social infrastructure (childcare and health care, etc.). Access to improved physical and social infrastructure is associated with increased women's labour force participation. For example, electrification in South Africa reduced the time women spent on housework, leading to a 9% increase in female labour force participation rates.[56] Improving working conditions and instituting family-friendly work policies are also linked to the redistribution of unpaid household work. These workplace policies include improved maternity and paternity leave subsidies, workplace support systems for breastfeeding and childcare, flexible work schedules, and opportunities for telework in areas where this is technologically feasible.

Restrictive or discriminatory gender-based social norms and practices can be enshrined in laws that are prejudiced against women, including in developing countries. Globally, over 2.7 billion women are legally restricted from having the same choice of jobs as men. In the World Bank Group's Women, Business and the Law 2016 report, approximately 90% of 173 economies had at least one legal difference restricting women's economic opportunities.[57] Some laws and regulations limit women's ability to work and/or to access, own, and control property, inheritances, or other economic assets and productive resources on an equal basis with men. As noted earlier, women own a disproportionately small share of the world's land and frequently have limited rights compared to men to secure land ownership in many countries. Globally, over 100 economies still have laws preventing women from working in specific jobs, 59 economies have no laws against sexual harassment in the workplace, and 18 economies allow husbands to legally prevent their wives from working.[58]

Without secure tenancy rights, especially in some countries where there are no inheritance rights for surviving spouses, women may be forced out of their homes upon the death of a husband or have no legal recourse if an abusive partner kicks them out.[59] Even in countries where laws are in place to protect women's access to land or freedom to hold jobs, customary laws and practices can marginalize women and limit their economic security and productivity.

Legal changes are often necessary to ensure women's equality and empowerment. Women's equal rights as economic actors should be defined and secured by formal legal frameworks that are enforced and that take precedence over customary laws and practices. Reforming laws that maintain legal differences based on gender is essential to ensuring women's ability to exercise the following rights: their equal rights to economic participation; their equal access to and shared control over assets such as land; and their equal right to acquire, manage, administer, enjoy, and dispose of property, and other resources.[60]

Additional strategies to address women's economic empowerment include the adoption of gender-appropriate social policies to help advance gender equality. Such policies help prevent individuals and their families from falling into or remaining in poverty, and promote access to health care and education. These efforts can also contribute to economic growth by raising labour productivity and enhancing social stability.[61] These policies should be complemented by awareness-raising efforts to ensure women understand and are able to act on the laws governing their rights.[62] Efforts to address negative social norms and to engage men and boys in promoting equal rights can promote innovative programming for women's economic empowerment. Change will not be sustainable unless men and boys are engaged in a dialogue on gender equality and its benefits for all. Their buy-in and commitment to changing social norms and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequalities and marginalization need to be secured for sustainable development.