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SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW ON “CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN INVENTORS AND INNOVATORS IN USING THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY SYSTEM”

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1. The Annex to this document contains a Summary of the Literature Review on “Challenges for Women Inventors and Innovators in Using the Intellectual Property System”. This study has been undertaken in the context of the Development Agenda Project on “Increasing the Role of Women in Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Encouraging Women in Developing Countries to Use the Intellectual Property System”.

2. *The CDIP is invited to take note of the information contained in the Annex to the present document.*

[Annex follows]

SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW ON “CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN INVENTORS AND INNOVATORS IN USING THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY SYSTEM”¹

Despite marked improvements in gender equality, gender gaps persist in patenting and in women’s ability to commercialize their creative and innovative output. WIPO has commissioned this literature review to improve the understanding of the challenges facing women inventors and innovators, and to recommend measures to address these challenges through new programming. Doing so is important not only as a matter of equity but also because supporting women’s innovative potential would positively impact inventiveness and would bolster economic growth and productivity.

Though tracking female patenting activity is challenged by the lack of systematic and consistent sex-disaggregated data collection, the available data shows a clear and continued gender disparity in patenting. Very few women patent as individual inventors. Individual female inventors have accounted for just 3 percent of patents since 2005. Women are most likely to be named on patents as part of a team of inventors, particularly mixed-gender teams.

At the same time, the gender gap in patenting has been narrowing over time. According to WIPO data, women were listed on close to a third of international patent publications in 2017, and the number of patents featuring at least one woman on the team of inventors has been rising more rapidly than the average of all patents. When women do patent, they tend to cluster in particular fields, and in certain types of environments. For example, women are more likely to patent in academia than in corporate or government environments.

A variety of complex and multifaceted factors have led to women’s under-representation among inventors and innovators and have hindered their success. Women’s lower labor market participation rates and lower entrepreneurship rates globally diminish the share of potential female innovators from the get-go. Some constraints start early in life, these include the lack of childhood exposure to role models, and female under-representation among science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) degree holders, including in the fields of study, and in degrees that are rich in innovation. The available talent pool of women that could turn to innovation, therefore narrows early on. Even when women are in STEM fields, they are less likely to be in patent-intensive fields of study and still patent at lower rates. Other challenges include lower promotion potential, discrimination, lack of career advancement, family constraints, and conscious or unconscious bias. Available data also shows that women consistently obtain less access to funding, either as entrepreneurs or researchers, and that they lack strong professional networks. Women also face lower participation and slower career advancement in research, authorship, and academia, where patenting is likely to occur. Such challenges are often exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the importance of intellectual property (IP) registration, financial and administrative barriers in the patenting process, and underlying gender bias in the IP law. These issues are often only compounded for women in developing countries.

To address these challenges and narrow the gender gap in patenting, concerned action is needed across a number of interrelated dimensions, by a variety of actors. The report provides detailed recommendations for how WIPO and its Member States can work towards gender equity in patenting. Achieving this goal will be a long journey, and will require a clear commitment to remedying the disparities, bolstered by dedicated, long-term resources.

[End of Annex and of document]

¹ The full document is available at: https://www.wipo.int/ip-development/en/agenda/work_undertaken.html