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of women in economics

Newsletter 2019: Women in Economics

**Esther Duflo, the youngest economist and 2nd women to win the Nobel Prize in Economics:
a true inspiration for all of us**

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"I only decided to do economics when I realized that economists have this wonderful position in the world in which they can take the time to study problems deeply and come to conclusions, but when they are ready to say something they can talk to policymakers. And I thought, "wow this is a great job, this is the job I want to have". So I did come to economics only when I realized that economics could change the world." --- Esther Duflo, Channel 4 Interview November 2019.

Esther Duflo has been awarded this year's Nobel Prize in Economics together with Abhijit Banerjee and Michael Kremer. She is the second woman to ever receive the Nobel award in the economics discipline. Furthermore, she received the prize at the age of 47, making her the youngest person to receive this prize. Despite her young age she accumulates a stellar record of contributions and recognitions. Prior to the Nobel Prize, she obtained the John Bates Clark Medal, the MacArthur 'genius' grant, the Princess of Asturias Award and the BBVA Frontiers of Knowledge Award, among many others.

Esther Duflo's academic career has been impressive in many dimensions. She has made breakthrough contributions in the fields of economic development, labor, education, and political economy. But the impact of Duflo's work goes beyond the economics discipline: she has led a movement that has revolutionized the way economics informs policy. The use of Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) applied to social policy has led to the accumulation of highly reliable causal estimates of the effects of a large number of policies. The early criticisms to RCTs—mainly, lack of external validity and difficulties in the scale-up of policies—are being addressed by implementing similar RCTs in different settings, larger in scope, and by combining them with careful theoretical work. Economists are working closely with governments in multiple settings to design policies that work, based on scientific knowledge. The demand for evidence-based policy is increasing throughout the world, particularly in developing countries.

Duflo, has been the key driving force behind this movement. She was one of the founders of the Jameel Poverty Action Lab in 2006 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This organization, whose main motto is "*Translating Research into Action*", has supported more than 900 RCTs that have impacted the lives of more than 400 million people around the world.

The opening quote in this article illustrates the main motivation behind Duflo's work: making the world a better place, especially, for the most vulnerable individuals of the world: those that live in poverty.

Duflo did not grow up wanting to be an economist. She found the discipline too abstract and detached from practical considerations. It was only when she learnt that economics rigor can be applied to solve practical problems and inform policy, when she decided to become an economist. Her work has greatly contributed to transform our profession into a more data- and policy-driven discipline.

Esther Duflo, is also a true inspiration for young economists, women in particular. In addition to her research on women empowerment in developing countries, Duflo has been an advocate of the revision of certain social norms that may be discouraging talented women to join our profession. For instance, in an interview with nobelprize.org she said: *"it's how people talk to each other and address each other in seminars that we need to work on to ensure it's more respectful and will be more acceptable for women to think they don't have to play the games of shouting at each other."*

She also said: *"Showing that it is possible for a woman to succeed and be recognized for success I hope is going to inspire many, many other women to continue working and many other men to give them the respect that they deserve like every single human being."*

I also hope that this year's Nobel Prize inspires many—especially women—to follow Esther Duflo's steps in using the rigor that characterizes the economics to inform policies that can tackle the biggest challenges that we face in the world today.