

# HOW AUSTRALIAN BUSINESSES CAN SUPPORT INVESTMENT IN GIRLS



## Why should Australian businesses care?

The interests of business and the society in which it operates are indivisible.

- A quarter of the population of the developing world are girls and young women aged 10 to 24. As a major untapped resource, they have enormous potential to make lasting contributions to the world around them.
- Today's girls are tomorrow's top managers, consumers and shareholders.
- Investing in girls not only brings high individual returns but provides an unparalleled opportunity to reduce poverty, stimulate economic growth and ultimately transform our world for the better.
- It can also be good for the company 'bottom line', since many experts believe that socially responsible enterprises are better equipped to weather economic crises than businesses which have not embraced the corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda.
- Moreover, as the 2004 Catalyst study of 353 Fortune 500 companies found: "Companies with the highest representation of women on their top management teams experienced better financial performance than companies with the lowest women's representation."
- The study found that Return on Equity (ROE), was 35% higher, and Total Return to Shareholders (TRS) was 34% higher for companies with greater gender equity.

In today's challenging but still promising emerging markets, businesses ignore girls and young women at their peril. With higher levels of education, enhanced participation in society and markets, both as workers and consumers, and increased income, young women are emerging not simply as beneficiaries of social and economic change, but as key agents of that change. Indeed, girls are the trendsetters in terms of social change across the world.

## What businesses can do

### 1. Raise Awareness

There's no greater enemy of inequality than keeping quiet about its violations and if there's one thing we all can do about it, it's MAKE SOME NOISE. Businesses are uniquely placed to spread the Because I am a Girl message through their operating reach.

Plan is not only seeking financial contributions, but to harness businesses ability to make this important noise in the public arena which includes engaging staff, customers and suppliers.

Working with an organisation like Plan International Australia businesses can develop unique and creative ways of contributing to the global awareness of the importance of investing in girls by ensuring we;

- Build the foundation for girls' economic future in the early years;
- Equip girls with economic tools and skills in the middle years;
- Ensure that markets and business opportunities work for young women so that they can achieve full economic empowerment.

We are asking businesses to:

- Inform staff and customers about the campaign through their websites, newsletters, emails and other touch points
- Host business lunches for partners and clients. Plan can provide content and speakers for your event.

## 2. Make an investment

### **Take a policy position, support social change and be the leaders in workforce practice.**

As the engagement of businesses in emerging markets and developing countries continues to grow, investing in girls and young women through core business practices will be increasingly important. Successful businesses need healthy societies to support them, and making social impact part of your business strategy makes sense. Leaders from all sectors will be expected to work together on responses to global poverty wherever it is found. It will not be enough to comply with minimum employer standards; they will be expected to take policy positions, support social change and be the leaders in workforce practice.

Our analysis identified three key areas where business is already making a difference for girls and young women. These are the major intersection points where a social and business value exchange can occur. These can be done in partnership with organisations like Plan.

#### **a) Life skills.**

Some initiatives targeting girls in developing countries aim to augment life skills training, by focusing on financial literacy, decision-making, and coping skills. This sort of education, which is typically left off traditional curricula, is a crucial step towards empowering women.

The World Bank's Adolescent Girls Initiative aims to improve not just the amount of microfinance available to girls, but also their ability to access it and to find safe and reliable employment.

A number of corporations sponsor ongoing programmes to provide skills training, particularly in the IT sector. IBM sponsors camps in a number of developing countries aimed at encouraging the involvement of women and girls in the IT sector.

#### **b) Targeting infrastructure.**

While infrastructure projects are important, physical infrastructure only begins to address the specific issues girls face in accessing public services. It is one thing to build a new school, it is quite another to address the obstacles which prevent girls from attending. The UN Foundation has highlighted, for example, that girls spend up to "15 hours a day fetching water and firewood and doing household chores instead of learning to read and write".

Peregrine has become a Because I am a Girl Business Partner and helped fund Plans sanitation, hygiene and water project in Laos, where rural communities have limited access to protected or reliable water supplies and the burden of water collection usually falls upon women and girls. One of the focuses has been to understand the role of women and girls and will develop strategies to give them greater power in decisions and actions relating to sanitation, hygiene and water in their families and communities.

So, corporate infrastructure spending should be allocated in ways that support a broader development agenda. A community freshwater source, such as a well, frees girls of the daily task of gathering water, while school feeding programmes can eliminate the need for girls to beg or work in order to provide sufficient income to their household.

#### **c) Nurturing economic opportunities and local supply chains.**

In Africa alone more 120 million girls live on less than \$1 per day. This huge group, and their peers on other continents, need sustainable opportunities to take control of their own economic development.

In partnership with the Nike Foundation, BRAC in Bangladesh has reached more than 43,000 girls with a comprehensive package of life skills, microfinance, access to safe spaces and livelihood training. These girls were 40% more likely than non-participants to save money and take a loan to support their small businesses.

### 3. Invest in Girls through Plan in Australia

#### a) Through cause related marketing

If, by purchasing a particular brand, a consumer can support a cause he or she believes in, that brand wins a crucial advantage. Child focused issues, like the Because I am a Girl campaign, is one of the broadest accepted causes to consumers, especially in Australia.

Kenzo will donate \$10 per bottle of FlowerByKenzo sold online until 31 December to Plan's GirlsFund.



**KENZO** supports Plan's Because I am a Girl campaign

**HOW YOU CAN HELP**

Purchase the FlowerByKenzo fragrances online from 1 September – 31 December 2009, and \$10 per bottle of the fragrance sold will be donated on your behalf to support Plan projects and facilitate girls' participation in them.

Plan is a not for profit organisation that works in 49 developing countries to empower communities to overcome poverty, so that children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Kenzo has been supporting Plan programmes since 2000 and this year we are supporting Plan's Because I am a Girl campaign. Based on comprehensive series of reports about the state of the world's girls the campaign highlights how investment in their development, including education, is one of the best ways to end poverty and improve opportunities for all children and their families in developing countries now and in the future.

Find out more at [becauseiamagirl.com.au](http://becauseiamagirl.com.au) • [www.plan.org.au](http://www.plan.org.au)

#### b) Donate

Plan Australia has established a GirlsFund to support our Because I am a Girl campaign – visit [www.becauseiamagirl.com.au](http://www.becauseiamagirl.com.au) . Donations to GirlsFund will be distributed to our priority projects [www.plan.org.au/ourwork/projects](http://www.plan.org.au/ourwork/projects) which include specific activities to help girls and young woman access their rights and respond to the barriers that girls face in each of our projects. This will ensure they have every opportunity to thrive and break the cycle of poverty.

*Give women and girls in Laos greater power in decisions on sanitation, hygiene & water*

While some rural communities have been assisted to build clean water systems, maintenance remains a challenge. Most have limited access to protected or reliable water supplies and the burden of water collection usually falls upon women and girls.

Through our sanitation, hygiene and water project in Laos, Plan is working with communities to develop new approaches to these issues. In particular, we aim to understand the role of women and girls and will develop strategies to give them greater power in decisions and actions relating to sanitation, hygiene and water in their families and communities.



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