

# **The Business Case For Women's Economic Empowerment**

## **An Integrated Approach**

**October 2014**

## Growing Interest in Women’s Economic Empowerment

In recent years, amidst increased awareness that empowering women yields a ‘high return on investment’,<sup>1</sup> a growing number of companies have collectively invested more than \$300 million<sup>2</sup> and launched dozens of programs to support women’s economic empowerment.

The majority of these programs aim to expand women’s employment opportunities, training and access to finance. However, for a woman to be economically empowered, she needs both the ability to succeed economically and the power to act on economic decisions.

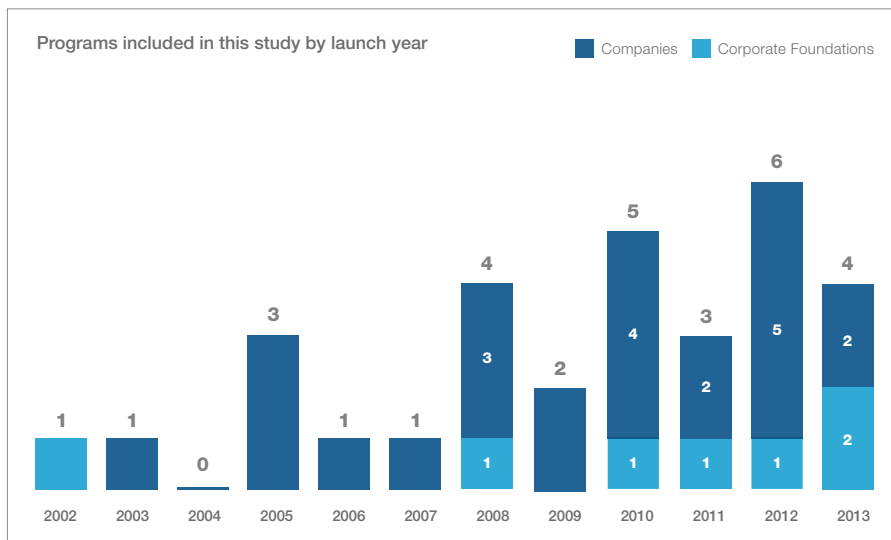
For a variety of reasons, corporate programs rarely address underlying structural and social barriers to women’s economic advancement such as control over reproductive health and family formation, violence, having a voice in society and policy influence.<sup>3</sup>

Oak Foundation hence commissioned Dalberg Global Development Advisors (Dalberg) and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) to understand more in detail corporate-funded women’s economic empowerment programs. This study explores what works and what doesn’t, and provides a business case for how these programs can deliver greater benefits for both the women they wish to empower and for the companies themselves.

**At the core is the hypothesis that women’s economic empowerment programs would be far more effective if corporates implement an integrated approach in partnership with the women’s rights community.**

An integrated approach is based on a human rights framework that delivers the broader conditions necessary for women to thrive and succeed (safety, freedom of movement, health, agency, etc.) as well as training, employment and financial support.

**Table 1: Corporate-funded programs by year of launch<sup>4</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> La Pietra Coalition, 2011; McKinsey, “The Business of Empowering Women,” 2010.

<sup>2</sup> ICRW and Dalberg analysis of 31 corporate-funded programs. Based on publicly available data. Represents current pool of funding including multi-year projects. Not all programs provided investment data.

<sup>3</sup> AWID, “Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots,” 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Dalberg and ICRW analysis; 21 of 31 programs were founded in 2009 or later.

<sup>5</sup> Corporation’ refers to programs housed within a company, including CSR programs. ‘Foundation’ refers to programs run by corporate foundations.

## The Opportunity

More than ever before, business leaders are stepping forward to advance women's economic empowerment. Their efforts position them as a very powerful ally in the broader effort to ensure that all women can fully participate in and benefit from rising global prosperity. Business leaders are now in a unique position to drive even greater impact and stronger growth for their firms—by adopting a human rights-based approach in their efforts to support women's economic empowerment. Companies not only have tremendous financial resources, but also leverage change through:

- **People:** employee policies and the vision of leaders and Board of Directors;
- **Investments:** direct investments, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and foundation contributions;
- **Brand:** company voice, reputation and customers;
- **Purchasing power:** suppliers, contractors, distributors; and
- **Partnerships:** non-profit organizations, civil society, governments, policymakers, investors, industry peers and social entrepreneurs.

Numerous companies are well positioned and motivated to support women's empowerment, especially in developing countries. Research shows that companies see women as an appealing investment – 64 percent of companies surveyed in the United States stated investments in women had or would increase employee productivity and retention in emerging markets.<sup>5</sup>

## The Business Case

Research conducted by Dalberg, ICRW and WITTER ventures, suggests that the best way to encourage corporate action is through compelling arguments and data demonstrating the business value, alongside the social value, of an integrated human rights-based approach.

These arguments, or 'business case,' address a company's business strategy and leadership throughout its value chain. This paper presents eight building blocks (as shown in table 2 below) to help companies and corporate foundations understand what an integrated approach is and how to implement it.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> McKinsey, "The Business of Empowering Women," 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Based on historical data and interviews with ten leaders of corporate-funded programs.

Table 2

## THE BUSINESS CASE

---

There is a powerful business case for companies to advance women's economic power. This approach goes beyond treating women as beneficiaries, but rather as true economic agents. Through this approach, companies can unlock growth, elevate brand and drive loyalty as well as improve the lives of women and girls.

**This approach involves the following three elements:**

- **Understanding the strategic benefits** for business in supporting women's economic empowerment.
- **Leveraging all business assets** through people, investments, brand, purchasing power and partnerships.
- **Applying an integrated approach with eight building blocks** that address the underlying human rights issues that prevent women from realizing their full potential as economic agents.

These are:

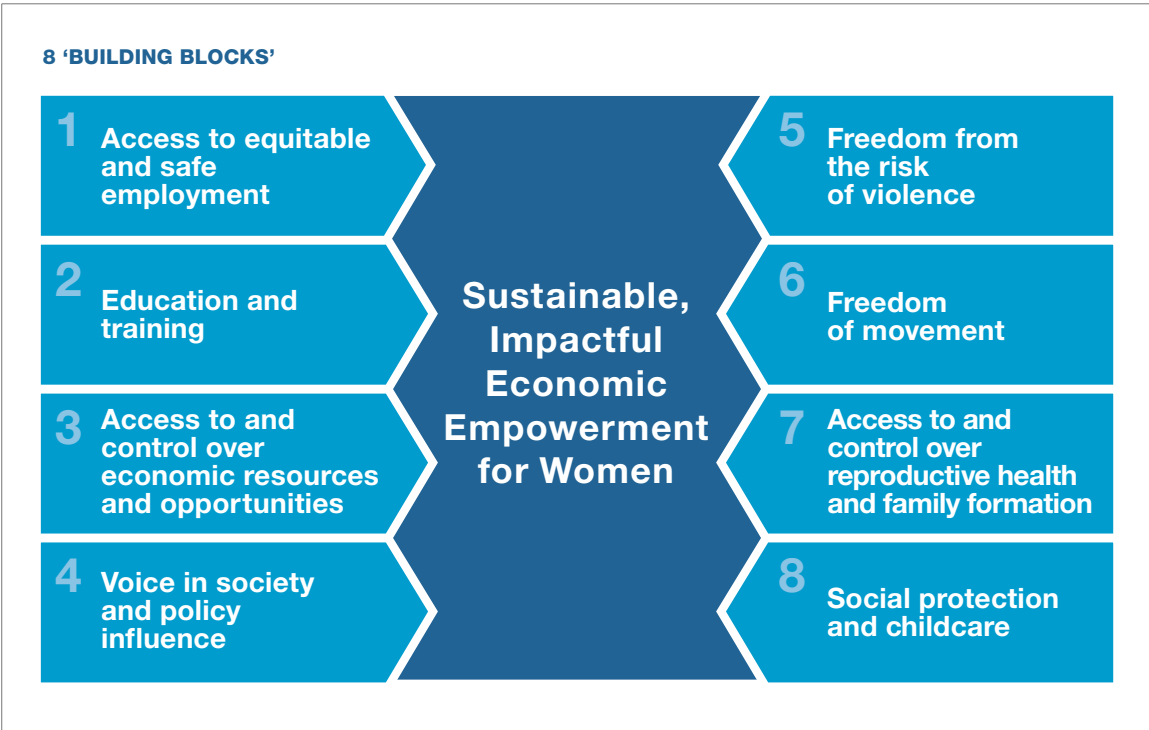
1. **Access to equitable and safe employment**
2. **Education and training**
3. **Access to and control over economic resources and opportunities**
4. **Voice in society and policy influence**
5. **Freedom from the risk of violence**
6. **Freedom of movement**
7. **Access to and control over reproductive health and family formation**
8. **Social protection and childcare**

# Eight Building Blocks for an Integrated Approach

Applying an integrated approach can advance women’s economic empowerment by promoting the broader conditions necessary for women’s advancement.

These eight ‘building blocks’ have been identified as universal requirements for improvements in women’s economic empowerment outcomes and sustainable impact.

Table 3



## Strategic Benefits of an Integrated Approach

**Why an integrated approach?** An integrated approach delivers higher return on investment (ROI) across the corporate value chain, as well as bringing social returns. It is also an opportunity for a company to demonstrate leadership in the growing women’s economic empowerment movement and to contribute to larger efforts for the improvement of women's status globally.

**What is an integrated approach?** An integrated approach addresses the underlying structural barriers to women’s economic empowerment. It utilizes all of a company’s potential levers to create impact: people, investments, brand, customers, purchasing power and partnerships.

**How can companies implement an integrated approach?** Companies can put this approach into action by implementing eight building blocks for achieving women’s economic empowerment.

Table 4

	BARRIERS	BUSINESS CASE	MOTIVATION
WHY?	Some companies are unaware of an integrated approach, or see women's rights as a political or controversial issue that may 'turn off' people in their organization.	“Supporting an integrated approach has business value and is a leadership opportunity in the growing movement around women's economic empowerment.”	Some companies support women's programming in order to generate positive branding and press about their organization and seek business value in a cost-effective, high ROI manner.
WHAT?	Other companies do not know what an integrated approach entails or how it aligns with a smart business strategy.	“Using an integrated approach refers to a more effective way of using all of your organization's levers to create impact.”	Other companies support women's programming because it is a smart business strategy which leverages their business resources and experts.
HOW?	Companies do not feel qualified to use an integrated approach or to move into a space where they are not experts.	“Supporting an integrated approach starts with a simple approach, using eight building blocks, and companies are well positioned to support this.”	Companies see investing in women as a great investment for their business and employees, and want to learn how to do this in a measurable manner across their value chain.

## An Integrated Approach Across the Corporate Value Chain

Applying an integrated approach across the corporate value chain can improve business outcomes.

Table 5

This graphic shows the various roles women can play across the corporate value chain.



### Women as suppliers, contractors and distributors

Studies around the world show women generally are harder-working and generate more outputs than men, but are consistently left behind or left out of economic growth due to systemic challenges. Ensuring women are empowered as suppliers, contractors and distributors will help companies reap business benefits such as:

- **Stronger and larger supplier networks:** Latin American non-profit organization Agora Partnerships found that Agora's women entrepreneurs provided jobs, training and increased wages to other women—thus creating a larger pool of empowered women in global supply chains. One woman created 1,174 jobs in just one year. Overall these women helped grow female participation in Agora's program from 22 percent to 60 percent in 2013.<sup>7</sup>
- **Higher input quality:** Women are an essential part of many value chains. A study on smallholder farmers reported that the majority of crop buyers source from women largely because 'women consistently deliver better-quality crops than men.'<sup>8</sup>
- **Better productivity:** Supporting women-owned businesses pays off financially: The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates women could increase agricultural yields by 20 to 30 percent if given the same resources as men. An integrated approach is needed to ensure that the benefits of this potential productivity can be both realized and sustained.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Dalberg Project for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Ashoka, "Accelerate Women Now: Building a 50/50 Global Economy," Forbes, 15th November 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Man-Kwun Chan, "Improving Opportunities for Women in Smallholder-based Supply Chains," 2010.

## Women as employees

Studies show that employee diversity leads to more productive and successful businesses. Female employees bring unique benefits through their perspective, community ties and drive. However, the gaps in women's participation and leadership in the workforce remain stubbornly high- often because of childcare needs. Retaining women, especially at senior levels, poses a challenge for most companies. Empowering and inspiring female employees and ensuring women comprise a share of the leadership team will lead to greater profits, retention and broad market benefits:

- **Better financial returns:** Women in companies mean diversity in the workforce, which is proven to generate greater business returns. Today, Fortune 500® companies with women's representation on their boards outperform those without.<sup>10</sup>
- **Brand ambassadorship:** Female employees can position companies to better serve untapped female consumer markets where gender segregation is high.<sup>11</sup> Women can also help companies boost their brand. In a study on mobile retail channels, mobile network operators consistently stated that female sales agents had superior customer service skills and processed customer queries more quickly than men.<sup>12</sup>
- **Higher retention:** A focus on women's empowerment can boost retention and productivity of company staff, as well as impact women in communities beyond the company. Studies show a link between retaining and motivating female employees and supporting external women's empowerment programs.<sup>13</sup>

## Women as customers

Women are one of the largest growing markets today, with a collective purse equal to three times the size of China's GDP. Yet most companies do not focus on this segment of the market. By engaging female customers, and creating a brand that appeals to women, businesses can benefit from:

- **Increased sales:** Women control over US \$20 trillion of total consumer spending globally. Women make or influence up to 80 percent of buying decisions worldwide, on everything from appliances to cars to medical services.<sup>14</sup> If companies can market effectively to women, they stand to gain millions in increased purchasing.
- **Stronger brand loyalty:** Research suggests more than 80 percent of women perceive that investment marketers do not understand their needs and requirements. More than 70 percent think similarly about car marketing, and more than 50 percent about healthcare and food marketers.<sup>15</sup> By offering products and services tailored to women's unique interests, companies can access an enormous untapped market and capture women's loyalty.

---

<sup>10</sup> Credit Suisse. "Gender Diversity and Corporate Performance." 2012

<sup>11</sup> International Monetary Fund, "Women, Work, and the Economy," September 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, "Women Entrepreneurs in Mobile Retail Channels," 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Internal information from a major private bank, 2014; Dalberg interviews.

<sup>14</sup> Deloitte, "The Gender Dividend," 2011

<sup>15</sup> Dychtwald with Christine Larson, "Influence," cited by Deloitte, 2011.



## Women as members of communities in which companies work

Supporting the economic empowerment of women in communities leads to income growth, larger markets for company products and more experienced talent pools.

- **Higher program return on investment:** When women earn income, they reinvest 90 percent of it in their families, as compared to men who invest only 30 to 40 percent.<sup>16</sup> This 'multiplier effect' boosts social and economic outcomes for entire communities.
- **Sustainable growth:** In a 2009 study, 83 percent of the nearly 2,300 senior private sector leaders interviewed said that growth in developing countries and emerging markets is either 'extremely' or 'somewhat' important to their companies' success over the next 10 years.<sup>17</sup> Businesses know supporting communities is essential to their growth – and supporting women specifically will make this growth steadier.
- **Increased profits:** 34 percent of private sector leaders report increased profits as a result of their efforts to empower women in emerging markets. As population growth declines, empowering women will be key to increased labor and profits in developed markets as well.

## Applying Business Levers for More Effective Change

**Companies and corporate foundations can apply an integrated approach by:**

1. Funding or creating integrated programs themselves;
2. Asking funding recipients or their implementing partners to adopt an integrated approach;  
or
3. Partnering with women's rights organizations or women's funds.

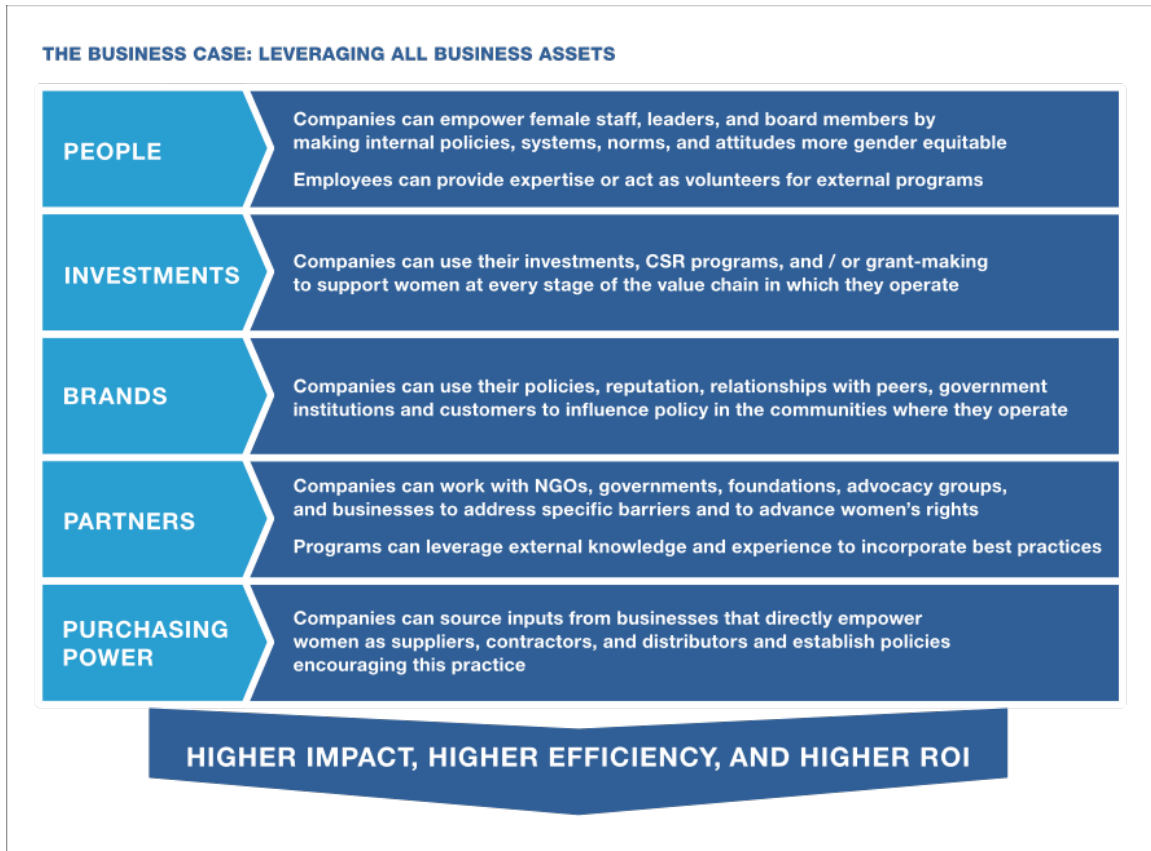
In all cases, companies and corporate foundations should consider leveraging the wide range of business assets available to them.

---

<sup>16</sup> Nike Foundation, "The Girl Effect: Not Just about Girls: Engaging Men and Boys," 2009.

<sup>17</sup> McKinsey & Company, "Business of Empowering Women," 2010.

Table 6



Given each company or foundation's unique interests and skills, each program will have different targets and methods. Women's organizations and women's funds are well positioned to partner with companies on an integrated approach. These organizations can identify and design suitable activities to ensure all eight building blocks are addressed, and can assist companies in finding expert implementation partners.

**Table 7 Building blocks and activities for an integrated approach to women’s economic empowerment**

Building Blocks for Women’s Economic Empowerment	Roles of women in the corporate value chain			
	Women as suppliers, contractors/distributors	Women as employees	Women as consumers	Women as members of communities
Access to equitable and safe employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pursue and expand business with women-owned suppliers (e.g. Danone Egypt’s MCC Project)</li> <li>Encourage industry to pursue business with women suppliers, contractors, and distributors</li> <li>Contract only with businesses using non-discriminatory policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively recruit and retain women within company (e.g. McDonald’s Global Women’s Initiative)</li> <li>Enact and enforce corporate policies for right to equal work, equal pay (e.g. Diageo’s Plan W)</li> <li>Enact and enforce corporate policies for maternal and paternal leave</li> <li>Ensure safe work environments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use packaging, marketing, and brand materials that represent women as valued employees</li> <li>Provide information on employment opportunities at sales touch points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train local leaders and institutions on value of recruiting and retaining women employees</li> <li>Support right to equal pay for equal work</li> <li>Support right to equal employment opportunities</li> <li>Advocate for stronger laws and enforcement for safe workplaces for women</li> </ul>
Education and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support programs that train women as suppliers, contractors, and distributors (e.g. Nestlé’s work with women in Cocoa Supply Chain, Gap’s P.A.C.E. initiative)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure equal access to education and vocational training programs</li> <li>Provide equal opportunities for continued higher education (e.g. scholarships, part-time work and study)</li> <li>Provide equal opportunities for networking and mentorship, especially with women leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer communications products tailored to women</li> <li>Offer education financing products tailored to women</li> <li>Provide information on schools, education, training, and connectivity programs at sales points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create or support education, training, and connectivity programs tailored to women (e.g. Intel’s She Will Connect)</li> <li>Support entrepreneurial skill programs for women (e.g. Coca-Cola’s 5by20)</li> <li>Create or support programs to recruit and retain women educators</li> <li>Support rights to primary and secondary school</li> </ul>
Access to and control over economic resources and opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contract with businesses who support financial literacy and financial stability among women employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide financial literacy programs for women employees</li> <li>Provide women-tailored financial advisory services</li> <li>Assist female employees to obtain asset documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer financial products tailored to women (e.g. ExxonMobil’s Business Women)</li> <li>Provide information on women’s rights to credit, capital, land and property at sales points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support programs offering financial services, advising, and training tailored to women (e.g. HERFinance, Qualcomm’s Mentoring Women in Business)</li> <li>Provide credit or capital to female-run businesses (e.g. Goldman Sachs’s 10,000 Women)</li> <li>Support women’s right to credit, capital, land and property</li> </ul>
Having voice in society and influencing policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contract with businesses who have and promote women leaders</li> <li>Contract with businesses with equal promotion rules and gender-friendly leadership cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enact and enforce corporate policies for equal promotion</li> <li>Provide equal access to management training and leadership skill development</li> <li>Encourage women to seek out leadership positions inside and outside company</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use packaging, marketing and brand materials that respect and empower women and promote female leadership</li> <li>Provide information on women’s rights to promotion, leadership, and decision-making at sales points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support programs that promote women leaders (e.g. Bank of America’s Mentoring Women in Business)</li> <li>Support right to equal promotion rules &amp; rates</li> <li>Support right to equal participation in discussions and decision-making (e.g. H&amp;M Conscious initiative)</li> </ul>

Roles of women in the corporate value chain					
Building Blocks for Women's Economic Empowerment	Women as suppliers, contractors/distributors	Women as employees	Women as consumers	Women as members of communities	
	Freedom from the risk of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contract with businesses who enforce policies against harassment and gender-based violence</li> <li>Contract with businesses who enforce policies for workplace safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enact and enforce corporate policies against harassment and violence, integrating the needs of women</li> <li>Publicly support women employees who come forward as victims of violence</li> <li>Educate men within company against gender-based violence</li> <li>Ensure no business activities directly or indirectly support exploitative trades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide information on anti-violence support programs and rights at sales points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create or support programs reducing exploitative trades (e.g. sex trafficking), harassment and gender-based violence (e.g. Diageo's Plan W)</li> <li>Support prosecution of harassment or gender-based violence in customer communities</li> <li>Support right to protection against harassment and gender-based violence</li> </ul>
	Freedom of movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contract with businesses who ensure safe transport for women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure safe transport options exist to and from company locations</li> <li>Support equal study and work abroad programs</li> <li>Provide, support or subsidize drivers training programs for women employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide information on women's transport rights and support programs at sales points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create or support programs improving availability and safety of transport options for women</li> <li>Support right to move freely inside and outside national borders</li> <li>Support right to seek education and employment freely inside and outside home country</li> </ul>
	Access to and control over reproductive health and family formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contract with businesses who offer women-sensitive healthcare policies</li> <li>Contract with businesses who enforce policies for equal rights to healthcare and health-related absences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enact and enforce corporate policies for equal right to healthcare and health-related absences</li> <li>Provide health insurance that meets needs of women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer products tailored to women's health and wellness</li> <li>Provide information specific to women's health and family formation rights in relevant products and packaging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support women's right to make decisions regarding family formation</li> <li>Create or support healthcare and family formation programs tailored to women (e.g. Nike's Girl Effect)</li> <li>Invest in programs and infrastructure focused on women, maternal, and child health</li> </ul>
	Social protection and childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contract with businesses who provide equal access to long term savings, insurance, or other social protection mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide education to women employees on long term saving</li> <li>Support risk sharing or insurance mechanisms tailored to women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer social security and risk sharing products tailored to women (e.g. MetLife Foundation's Safety Net Programs)</li> <li>Provide information on social security and risk sharing programs at sales touch points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create or support programs facilitating risk-sharing for women</li> <li>Support right to equal investment and financial management opportunities</li> </ul>

## The Evidence

Dalberg and ICRW assembled an evidence base on the characteristics and impact of corporate-funded women's economic empowerment programs.<sup>18</sup> The analysis also explored where and how companies can realize even greater impact by incorporating human rights into their approach.

**Table 8: Primary areas of focus for corporate-funded programs<sup>19</sup>**

Company	Suppliers	Employees	Customers	Communities	General Impact
Coca-Cola	●	●	●	●	●
DANONE	●				
Diageo	●	●	●	●	●
Gap Inc.	●	●			
Kellogg	●				
MAS Holdings	●	●			
McDonalds		●			
Nestlé	●				
Vodafone	●			●	
Walmart	●	●			
Bank of America	●				
Calvert Foundation					●
Chevron					●
Credit Suisse					●
DKNY	●				●
ExxonMobil					●
General Mills					●
Goldman Sachs					●
H&M Conscious Foundation					●
HSBC					●
Intel					●
Kraft					●
Levi-Strauss Foundation	●	●			
MetLife Foundation					●
MTN Foundation	●		●		●
Nike Foundation					●
Nokia			●		●
Qualcomm			●		

<sup>18</sup> The evidence base for this report consists of a representative sample of 31 of the largest corporate-funded women's economic empowerment programs run by 28 companies and corporate foundations. Table 7 lists the 28 companies and corporate foundations analyzed in this study.

<sup>19</sup> Desk research conducted by ICRW, 2014.

Desk research of these 31 programs revealed that little data exists on the impact of corporate-funded programs, due to three main barriers.<sup>20</sup>

1. **There is limited publicly available evidence.** The analysis relied upon publicly available evaluation reports. While many companies conduct internal measurement and evaluation, this data was not available in a consistent enough manner to be included in the analysis.
2. **Many programs are relatively new.** Nearly two-thirds of programs studied were formed in the last five years. Over one-third of initiatives studied were launched in the last two years, leaving limited opportunities for longitudinal measurement.
3. **Impact is extremely hard to measure.** Most companies track the size and scope of their programs, but longer-term change and social impact are difficult to assess due to a lack of standardized metrics and measurement methods.

As a result only three of the 31 programs studied provided empirical evaluations with quantitative metrics beyond size and scope. (For complete methodology, see Annex 1, p. 16).

### Three Impact Evaluations

Three companies – Nike, Gap Inc., and Goldman Sachs – have completed impact evaluations through an external evaluator. Though these three evaluations alone cannot provide deep insight into ‘what works’ in corporate-funded programs, they do provide some understanding of the range of evaluation approaches programs are using.

The evaluations include:

- **The Nike Foundation’s Towards Economic and Sexual/Reproductive Health Outcomes for Adolescent Girls (TESFA) program**, implemented by CARE Ethiopia. This program aims to improve the sexual and reproductive health and economic well-being of married girls in Amhara. It combines a village savings and loan program with sexual/reproductive health programs and efforts to enhance the social status, voice and safety of child brides.
- **Gap Inc.’s Personal Advancement, Career Enhancement (P.A.C.E.) program**, is a workplace education and life skills training program designed to empower South and South-East Asian entry-level garment workers in their professional and personal lives. The program also seeks to improve the retention and promotion of women and overall productivity of participating factories.
- **Goldman Sachs’ 10,000 Women initiative** is a five-year global program which provides underserved women-owned small and medium enterprises with business and management training, access to business networks and links to capital. Students also receive mentoring and post-graduate support from partner institutions, local businesses and Goldman Sachs employees.

---

<sup>20</sup> Desk research conducted by ICRW, 2014.

## All three programs reported significant advances

- **TESFA's evaluation suggests that the program's approach achieved very positive results.** TESFA had the most rigorous evaluation of the three evaluated initiatives, using a longitudinal study and a control group. Attribution between program activities and observed impacts is strong. TESFA is an example of a program using an integrated approach attuned to both the needs and rights of the target population. The lives of married adolescent girls in the TESFA program improved significantly in economic, health and social terms. This included large gains in communication between the young wives and their husbands, decreased levels of gender-based violence, improved mental health among participating girls, increased investment in productive economic assets, and improved knowledge and use of sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning.

TESFA addresses five building blocks of women's economic empowerment. These include: education and training, access to and control over economic resources and opportunities, having a voice in society and influencing policy, freedom from the risk of violence and access to and control over reproductive health and family formation.

- **The P.A.C.E. evaluation demonstrates how a structured workplace-based program with specific empowerment goals can achieve measurable impacts.** Across five countries and large sample sizes, female garment workers in P.A.C.E.-participating factories improved their self-confidence, their communication and negotiation skills, and their professional advancement. P.A.C.E. factories experienced higher overall productivity compared to non-participating factories. Importantly, P.A.C.E. sensitized male factory owners and managers to the potential productivity increase of empowered entry-level women employees. Though not every measure had a control condition, the consistent pattern of positive changes in both social and business outcomes across all six sites indicate the reliability of the evaluation findings.

P.A.C.E. addresses four building blocks of women's economic empowerment. These include: access to equitable and safe employment, education and training, access to control over economic resources and opportunities, and having a voice in society and influencing policy.

- **The 10,000 Women evaluation showed multiple positive results, relying primarily on qualitative data.** These independent evaluators conducted in-depth interviews with women who participated in the program, in addition to analyzing quantitative data on participants tracked over time. In order to better attribute results to the program itself, data was also collected from women who were not program participants.

Half of graduates have at least doubled their revenues since participating in the 10,000 Women program. The median number of employees for participating women's businesses increased from 6 to 10 in the 18 months after the program conclusion. Nearly 100 percent of graduates interviewed expressed that 10,000 Women had strengthened their business skills and helped improve their business performance, and a number of women also described how the program gave them increased confidence to engage in male-dominated sectors to make independent business decisions.

10,000 Women addresses three building blocks of women's economic empowerment. These include: education and training, access to and control over economic resources and opportunities and having a voice in society and influencing policy. While this initiative took a slightly less comprehensive approach than TESFA or P.A.C.E. in terms of building blocks used, it provides an example of what can be accomplished by combining the three building blocks most often utilized in corporate women's economic empowerment programming.

Overall, these studies highlight the need for more and better metrics in the field. Companies and corporate foundations should consider conducting more rigorous evaluations to help build this evidence base and to better understand program impact. Private foundations and NGOs committed to advancing women's rights can also play a role in addressing these measurement gaps.



## Recommendations

Interviews with corporate-funded programs revealed that most business leaders want to better understand and improve the impact of their programs, and are open to additional guidance on how to do so. Interviewees were receptive to the concept of an ‘integrated human rights-based approach,’ especially when the concept was explained operationally and broken down into eight building blocks.

Women’s rights advocates can support business leaders in adopting an integrated approach through the following:

**Step 1: Inform.** Philanthropists, funding groups and NGOs that advocate for women’s rights should communicate the business value of an integrated approach using messaging tailored to specific companies and corporate foundations.

Those partners can deliver three key messages:

- **‘An integrated approach increases a company’s ROI when investing in women and delivers greater social benefits.’** Advocate for and inform companies and corporate foundations of the business case, particularly the building blocks of women’s empowerment, and the different levers at business’ disposal. By adopting this approach, companies can simultaneously increase financial and social profits.
- **‘Strong measurement is key.’** Corporate funded programs can benefit from collecting more and better data based on social impact evaluation methods and the experience of the women’s rights community. By sharing the findings widely, all partners can learn from the evidence of ‘what works’.
- **‘The time is now.’** Amidst the growing momentum for women’s economic empowerment, this is the time to design programs that enable lasting, systematic change and truly drive results for both women and businesses.

**Step 2: Convene.** Philanthropists, funders and practitioners can bring together companies, their advisors and partner organizations from different sectors to share experience and learning. Discussions should aim to foster trust and collaboration for stronger, more integrated programs.

**Step 3: Support.** Philanthropists, funders and practitioners can help corporate-funded programs effectively adopt an integrated approach to their programs. In guiding companies and corporate foundations towards addressing structural barriers, funders and practitioners can:

- Assist companies and corporate foundations in analyzing and understanding which additional building blocks are most essential for improving their existing programs.
- Identify partners that can work with corporate-funded programs to tackle structural barriers, and strategize how program resources can be allocated to support additional building blocks without diverting from current activities.
- Help companies and corporate foundations set clear, measurable objectives that track sustainable program impact, in addition to output and outcome metrics.
- Dedicate resources to the development of research, learning and evaluation of the implementation and impact of an integrated approach for women’s economic empowerment.

**Step 4: Build evidence.** A broader evidence base must be developed to advance learning on women’s economic empowerment. Stakeholders should support initiatives that contribute to the evidence base, in order to develop:

- **Quantitative data.** Anecdotes and stories are valuable tools for communicating impact, but they must be coupled with systematically collected quantitative data over time to build a credible case for impact.
- **Comparisons.** A larger number of comparative impact studies need to be conducted to examine how different program approaches—especially those aligned with an integrated approach—are achieving or failing to deliver women’s economic empowerment outcomes.
- **Clear metrics.** Companies and corporate foundations need to partner with professional research organizations to ensure their measurement systems are aligned with their program goals, and that ‘empowerment’ is measured rigorously and systematically.

**For more information contact:**

Oak Foundation, Issues Affecting Women Program  
[iawp@oakfnd.ch](mailto:iawp@oakfnd.ch)

International Center for Research on Women  
Katherine Fritz, [kfritz@icrw.org](mailto:kfritz@icrw.org)

Dalberg Global Development Advisors  
Veronica Chau, [veronica.chau@dalberg.com](mailto:veronica.chau@dalberg.com)  
Serena Guarnaschelli, [serena.guarnaschelli@dalberg.com](mailto:serena.guarnaschelli@dalberg.com)

WITTER ventures  
Lisa Witter, [lisa@wittventures.com](mailto:lisa@wittventures.com)

### Methodology

#### Review of the evidence

- Created a database of corporate-funded women's economic empowerment programs using desk/online research.
- Reviewed websites and confirmed the database by checking relevant initiatives among the 50 top corporate foundations listed by the Foundation Center.<sup>21</sup> These steps resulted in a list of the 31 largest and most relevant corporate-funded women's economic empowerment programs run by 28 companies and corporate foundations, as well as existing studies on corporate-funded programs.
- Reviewed existing evaluations and impact metrics. In cases where clear impact studies have been conducted, summarized results and key findings.

#### Development of the business case

- Developed a definition and eight building blocks for an integrated human rights- based approach for corporate-funded programs, based on existing global human rights documents and current rights-based programs.
- Explored the motivations for corporate-funded programs to uncover why and how an integrated human rights-based approach could be adopted, and what potential barriers companies might face in adopting this approach.
- Conducted interviews with ten corporate-funded program leaders, and additional human rights and women's empowerment experts.
- Drew insights from case studies in other fields and analyzed research from WITTER ventures (Appendix 2, p. 19).
- Analyzed the detailed database of 31 corporate-funded programs.
- Reviewed academic and practitioner literature on rights-based framework and approaches.
- Combined these insights to build the business case for how an integrated human rights-based approach aligns with corporate interests.

---

<sup>21</sup> <http://foundationcenter.org/>

## Caveats

- Research was restricted to women's economic empowerment programs, as opposed to corporate programs addressing other areas of women's empowerment.
- Some programs focused on working-age or married girls (under 18) in addition to women. As a result, the research scope included some programs that address economic empowerment for both women and adolescent girls.
- Only corporate foundations with a clear link to the company or business were included, excluding family or private foundations not linked directly to the parent company.
- Selection of interviewees was purposefully designed to include a diverse range of corporate programs, and was not meant to represent a random selection.
- This analysis is meant to be a working document as all findings are the perspective of this report's authors and were not reviewed by leaders of corporate-funded programs.

# Corporate Sector Funding and Women's Rights – Perceptions, Language, and How to Increase Engagement

## Top 10 Research Findings and Ideas for Further Exploration

June 2014

Commissioned by Oak Foundation

WITTER  
ventures

## Overview and Purpose

Oak Foundation commissioned WITTER ventures to conduct research with the purpose of creating a communications strategy to more effectively influence corporate-sector funding for women's rights. Findings reveal that a more fundamental shift in approach – beyond communications – is needed to build meaningful relationships and that a traditional donor- beneficiary relationship is unlikely to succeed for either group.

This report contains the top 10 research findings and headlines of ideas for further exploration. For more information or questions contact [lisa@witterventures.com](mailto:lisa@witterventures.com).

## Important Note

Despite major differences between the sectors, there is sincere interest from both sides in finding ways to collaborate. Both sectors have expertise that could be better leveraged to build new and improved strategies for achieving women's rights. Women's rights organizations perceive their value in years of experience advocating for women's rights, in their networks and in their deep understanding of grassroots work. The strength of corporate actors lies in their business expertise and influence, resources, brand, market power and ability to establish trends across a broad range of consumers, competitors and the supply chain. It is likely that it is in the inter-sections of these strengths that real sustainable collaborations will thrive.

## METHODOLOGY

### 46 unattributed interviews were conducted with leaders across five sectors:

- Women's rights organizations working internationally or in developing countries;
- Corporations and corporate foundations, mainly in Europe and the US;
- Bridge-builders and organizations who encourage private sector engagement for women's empowerment – usually economic empowerment;
- International non-governmental organizations (INGOs); and
- Women's funds. Reviews of organizational and corporate websites were also compiled, to examine similarities and differences in their use of language, imagery, tone and framing around women's rights.

## Top 10 Findings

### 1. Relationship gap

Interviews revealed that there is limited understanding and knowledge between women's rights organizations and corporations of each other's motives, achievements and rationale for action. While there are a select number of women's rights organizations that do spend time communicating and partnering with the corporate sector, it was reported that many women's rights organizations – especially smaller grassroots ones – don't. Corporates tend to be wary of speaking overtly about women's rights, even if they believe in them, while women's rights organizations tend to be unsure of how to engage corporates effectively and whether they are appropriate partners at all. Several interviewees commented that those representing corporations could better utilize the expertise of women's groups to fill in knowledge gaps.

### 2. Different points of view

Individual vs. Systemic

Corporations tended to communicate a focus on the economic empowerment of individual women. In contrast, women's rights organizations focus on the need to address inequality as a structural issue by targeting the systemic problems women face, such as violence, discrimination and poverty. Additionally, the methodology of women's rights organizations is most often oriented towards longer-term strategies of political empowerment and movement building.

Solutions vs. Problems

In a visual review of websites, corporations tended to put more emphasis on women as solutions, while women's rights groups communicated more about the challenges women face.

### 3. Perceptions on the status of women

Generally, women's rights organizations tend to depict the current landscape as neither positive nor negative, but somewhat 'troubled' and 'in flux' – with a backlash in some countries. Many highlighted the need to continuously defend hard-won gains and described very different degrees of progress for women and girls depending on class, location, political climate, etc.

Corporates tend to view the status of women as improving, noting significant gains for women and girls and emphasizing their potential contribution to development and economic growth.

However, all actors agreed that there is a long way to go before women are truly empowered.

### 4. Trends in women's issues

Interviewees generally agreed on the growing visibility of women's issues as well as a rise in the number of 'non-traditional' donors; but noted that this hasn't resulted in significant and sustained increases in the investment in women's rights.

## 5. Women's rights achievements

Most interviewees found it difficult to name a singular major achievement of the women's movement beyond visibility, although some pointed to success in shifting violence against women from a private issue to a public one. However, this came with the caveat that violence is still not significantly decreasing. Past achievements in law reform and rights were often accompanied by concerns that the changes are still not being implemented and gender equality is still not a reality.

## 6. Language

The language of women's rights, not necessarily the overall concept, seems to be limiting rather than enabling communication. Women's rights organizations and funds usually refer to women's rights or women's human rights in their mission statements. However they also acknowledge that "women's rights" is a term they avoid using with certain audiences, replacing it with "women's empowerment," but add that there is neither consensus nor clarity about what "empowerment" or "rights" really mean.

In some instances interviewees said that the term "women's rights" has even been misconstrued to imply special rights for women, rather than simply acknowledging that women have human rights. Although not widely expressed, this comment provides insight into the external perception of women's rights from those not directly active in the field. If women's rights organizations aim to influence and collaborate with new actors beyond the established community, it is critical that outside perceptions such as these are brought to light and considered.

Corporates said that they don't use "women's rights" for a number of reasons:

- . It is seen as political;
- . It's a "turn off" to people inside the organization – both men and women;
- . They are not experts in it so "why should we be in that space?"; and
- . It is perceived as not naturally aligning with their business strategy.

Several corporations said, "We do women's rights. We just don't talk about it that way or, we just don't talk about it."

## 7. Theory of change

There is consensus that large-scale change for women and girls requires progress on many fronts but views on how to do this vary across sectors. Women's rights organizations tend to emphasize movement building as the best way to achieve sustainable progress on social change over time. Corporates most often run shorter-term programs that fit into the framework of their business plans. Accordingly, the economic empowerment of women (as individuals) tends to be the preferred method of engagement by the private sector.

These differences in approach, though significant, could be leveraged to the advantage of both sectors. Engaging with the corporate sector is a way for women's rights organizations to expand their reach beyond the traditional realm of influence. However, in order for corporations and women's rights organizations to work together, it is necessary to show how and why women's rights are necessary for economic empowerment.



## 8. Talk about money

Several women's rights organizations expressed uncertainty about corporations as appropriate funding partners, given the apparent conflict of interest and differences in their approach to social change and women's rights. Those that are willing to work with corporates admit they are not experienced or fully equipped to optimize these relationships, or even to find appropriate partnerships. While the value of these partnerships and in-kind support has increased, it has failed to translate into substantial financial support for women's rights groups.

## 9. Corporate engagement

Corporates expressed frustration that women's rights organizations perceive them as traditional grant-making foundations. They want to partner with organizations that can design their project, theory of change, and other requests in packages that make sense for the company's mission and bottom line. On the other hand, women's rights groups were frustrated that corporates didn't see women's rights as fundamental.

It was noted that a better way to engage corporates might be through their actual business practices (supply chain, work force development, customers, employees, expertise, etc.) rather than approaching them to fund external projects or programs. Engaging with corporations through internal business practices, though less straightforward and visible, represents an opportunity to make much larger-scale progress on women's rights.

Corporate women's empowerment initiatives are generally initiated from one or several of the following profiles:

- . An internal champion, often a senior woman leader looking for a new challenge and driven by passion for the topic;
- . A male or female CEO with a personal experience (often a daughter);
- . A internal women's employee committee looking for ways to engage their female employees in corporate social responsibility; and/or
- . A marketing executive who identifies a focus on women's empowerment as good marketing to the company's female customer base. Several noted that within the corporate sector there is competition to be first-movers in their sector, be seen as innovators on women's empowerment and that many companies are involved in women's empowerment out of fear of being left out of a new and growing trend.

Women's rights groups mentioned that those leading these initiatives are often people from corporate communications backgrounds and would like to make themselves available as expert resources for corporates in designing and executing women's empowerment programs.

## 10. What about men?

There was overall uncertainty about the role of men in women's rights. Corporations noted they are careful when talking about the benefit of women's empowerment to men. The women's rights movement revealed considerable ambivalence about the role of men, acknowledging the need and willingness to engage but often finding it difficult to do so for various reasons.

## Conclusion

### Opportunity

The process of conducting interviews revealed significant knowledge gaps and differences in approach, but also tremendous interest in collaboration to achieve progress for women and girls. In order to overcome skepticism and distinctions in power structures and business practices, considerable time and investment is needed – especially in relationships and sharing expertise.

### Understanding

An important starting point is for each actor to better understand the realities and motivations of the other – and how they gauge success. For example, corporates and corporate foundations put business first and feel they should not be expected by women’s rights organizations to behave in the same way as traditional donors – their main value in driving change may be in new ways of doing business rather than as sources of funding.

### Transparency

Transparency between sectors will help corporations understand that large businesses can sometimes place a considerable burden on small organizations by demanding detailed reporting and involvement, while providing only project-based funding with little or no core support.

### Ideas for Exploration

The following ideas were suggested to increase collaboration between corporations and women’s rights organizations:

- . Build more personal and professional relationships across sectors; Establish more intermediaries and strengthen current ones like women’s funds;
- . Develop the business case for women’s rights;
- . Develop effective communication of women’s rights organizations, including theory of change, success of the movement (including data whenever possible) and explore new language for empowerment, rights, etc.;
- . Explore alternative sources of funding for women’s rights with a specific focus on high-net worth women; and
- . Create more space for men in women’s rights and understand how to effectively communicate and engage and with them.

### Moving Forward

Engaging with actors from various sectors in the research process built interest and enthusiasm for greater interaction and the possibility of new partnerships across traditional divides. Despite differences in approaches, all interviewees want to achieve the same thing— equality for women and girls to build healthier, safer, and more prosperous communities.