



## Investing in women and girls = changing development outcomes

Investing in women and girls can make a difference to development outcomes. This document outlines some of the compelling reasons why investing in women and girls can result in better development outcomes for everyone. It explores issues relating to health, human rights, economic development, education, protection against violence, food security, climate change, and water, sanitation and hygiene to show how giving special consideration to the needs of women can make a difference for entire households, communities and nations.

During this centenary of International Women's Day, let's change how we approach, respond to, target and even think about these issues.

### **Let's change how we prioritise women's *health*, because if we do, we could contribute to...**

**Decreasing maternal deaths.** Currently, around 40 women die every hour during pregnancy and childbirth (WHO, 2010). In Africa, one out of five African women will lose a baby during her lifetime (compared to one in 125 in developed countries) (WHO, 2005).


**Decreasing the number of women suffering from illnesses due to pregnancy and childbirth** (currently 300 million in the developing world) (WHO, 2005). Sexual and reproductive ill health accounts for one-third of the global disease burden for women of reproductive age (The Allan Guttmacher Institute, 2003). Improved access to information and services could have ripple effects (WHO, 2005); when a mother is alive and healthy, this contributes to her children being less likely to be stunted and more likely to receive schooling and healthcare (ICRW, 2007).

**Improving access to skilled care during and immediately after birth.** Currently, almost half of all mothers and newborns in developing countries do not receive this care (WHO, 2009a). This is often due to women's lack of decision-making power in the household, information or access to health services. Equipping men to have a more active role in promoting women's health can make a difference to women's health outcomes in developing countries (IPPF, 2010).

**Budgeting for HIV programs for women at the national level.** Currently, less than half of the countries reporting to UNAIDS have a budget for HIV programs for women (UNAIDS, 2010). More than half of all people living with HIV are women and girls, and in some developing countries, women aged 15-24 are eight times more likely to be HIV positive than men (USAIDS, 2010a).

**Reducing adolescent pregnancies.** Currently, girls aged 15-19 are twice as likely to die in childbirth as women in their 20s, and girls under 15 are five times as likely to die as women in their 20s (UNFPA, 2004).

**Reducing the number of unintended pregnancies.** Currently these account for 76 million pregnancies in the developing world (The Allan Guttmacher Institute, 2003), which then lead to 19 million unsafe abortions, causing some 68,000 deaths annually (WHO, 2004). Girls aged 15-19 account for one in four unsafe abortions (add up to five million girls every year).<sup>i</sup> Girls need to know about the health risks of adolescent pregnancy (UNFPA, 2004). Up to 35 percent of maternal deaths could be averted through better access to family planning (Bernstein et al, 2008).



**Decreasing the susceptibility of pregnant women to waterborne diseases and malaria** (UNDP, 2009). Education on prevention of disease transmission and access to health services can help make a difference to the health of pregnant women.

**Reducing the incidence of respiratory illness in women.** In most countries, cultural reasons dictate that women prepare food. Cooking over open fires or traditional stoves causes respiratory illness and is responsible for half a million of the 1.3 million deaths due to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease among women worldwide every year (WHO, 2009b). New methods of preparing food and improved awareness on health risks can help reduce respiratory illness.

### ***Let's change how we value women's rights because if we do, we could contribute to...***

**Improving the implementation of domestic and international laws promoting women's rights.** Violence against women and girls violates rights protecting women from abuse and assault. Interventions that raise awareness on rights can help address these situations.

**Reducing incidences of early marriage, violence and female genital mutilation,** which constitute violations of a woman's right to protection of her body.<sup>ii</sup> We can help reduce the incidence of child marriage, which in developing countries results in one girl in seven marrying before age 15 (Population Council, 2008) and 38 percent marrying before age 18 (Lloyd, 2005). Raising awareness, working with men and using alternative rites of passage can be ways of reducing the incidence of these types of rights violations.

**Improving women's control of property and inheritance rights.** Worldwide, women own less than two percent of all property and in many countries, less than 10 percent of women hold title to their land (The Lancet and University College of London Institute for Global Health Commission, 2009). Policy change that allows women to inherit and hold land title, and rights education on legislative changes can address some of the gaps in land rights for women.

### ***Let's change how we consider the role of women in economic development, because if we do, we could contribute to...***

**Increasing the value placed on women's work.** Women produce 60-80 percent of food crops in the world and are mostly unpaid for this labour (FAO, 2010). We can help change perceptions of women's roles, to impact their decision-making abilities within households and communities, and improve their access to and control of economic resources.

**Bringing tangible changes to household health and education.** It has been shown that women and girls will reinvest 90 percent of their income back into their families and communities, which is compared to only 30-40 percent for a man (Fortson, 2003). When women are equipped and empowered to make decisions on household spending, the outcomes for the household are likely to be better overall.

**Increasing women's capacity to earn income.** Improving women's skills and providing vocational training could enable women to have increased bargaining power in the household and community so they can have more access to and control over economic assets.

### ***Let's change how we value women's education, because if we do, we could contribute to...***

**Improving literacy for women.** Currently, 18.3 percent of the world's population is illiterate, and almost two-thirds of these people are women (UNESCO, 2005). Literacy can make a difference, enabling women to obtain better jobs and further develop their skills.

**Slowing and reducing the spread of HIV** by contributing to female economic independence, delayed marriage, family planning, work outside the home and conveying greater information about the disease and its prevention (World Bank, 2009). Raising awareness, providing information and promoting voluntary counselling and testing for HIV can help reduce the spread of the virus.



**Improving health and education outcomes for children.** Research shows that there is a strong relationship between better infant and child health and higher levels of schooling among mothers (Bicego et al, 1993).

**Decreasing maternal mortality rates through investing in education for women.** It is estimated that an additional year of schooling for 1,000 women helps in preventing two maternal deaths (World Bank, 2009).

**Reducing the number of children a woman has.** Early sexual debut and consequent adolescent pregnancy, as well as lack of birth spacing, can cause significant complications for maternal and child health. Education on birth spacing can help; spacing pregnancies by at least two years increases the chances of child survival (UNICEF, 2008). It is estimated that one year of schooling reduces the number of children a woman will have by 10 percent, and this reduction is more profound for secondary schooling. Investing in education is imperative because women with formal education are more likely to use reliable family planning methods, delay marriage and childbearing and have fewer and healthier babies (World Bank, 2009).

**Improving children's education status.** A mother with a few years of formal education is significantly more likely to send her children to school. In some countries, each additional year of education completed by a mother translates into her children remaining in school for an additional one-third to one-half year (World Bank, 2009).

**Increasing women's income.** Research on worldwide trends shows that each extra year of primary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 10 to 20 percent; each extra year at secondary school by 15-20 per cent (Psacharopoulos et al, 2002).

### ***Let's change how we consider outcomes for women after a natural disaster because if we do, we could contribute to...***

**Decreasing the incidence of female deaths during disasters.** Research shows women are up to 14 times more likely than men to die from natural disasters. Interventions targeting women's vulnerabilities – especially because of their responsibilities and workloads – can make a difference (Neumayer et al, 2007 and Peterson, 2007). Research has found that when women's economic and social rights are not protected, more women will die from disasters than men (Neumayer et al, 2007).


**Reducing domestic and sexual violence after disasters.** Following a disaster, it is more likely that women will be victims of domestic and sexual violence, often avoiding shelters for fear of sexual assault (IUCN & UNDP, 2009). We can help reduce the incidence of sexual violence by clearly communicating about health, legal and social services for women after disasters, improving security in temporary settlements, and running awareness campaigns.

### ***Let's change how we intentionally address the issue of violence against women, because if we do, we could contribute to...***

**Decreasing the incidence of sexual abuse.** Currently, up to one in five women report being sexually abused before the age of 15 (WHO, 2009b).

**Decreasing the incidence of female genital mutilation.** Currently, approximately 100-140 million girls and women have experienced female genital mutilation or cutting, worldwide (WHO, 2010). Alternative rites of passage which focus on celebrating cultural milestones without cutting can be effective in reducing the rates of female genital mutilation.

**Reducing the prevalence of physical or sexual violence.** One in three women will be raped, beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused at some point in their lives (UNIFEM, 2004), and experience serious health consequences such as injuries, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, depression and chronic diseases (WHO, 2009b).



## Let's change how we strengthen women's *food security*, because *if we do, we could contribute to...*

**Increasing the value placed on women's role in food production.** It is women, mostly those on small farms, who provide up to 80 percent of agricultural labour and produce 45-90 percent of domestically consumed food (The Lancet and University College of London Institute for Global Health Commission, 2009). Emphasising the importance of their role in income generation can improve their standing within households and communities.

**Improving access to credit, which can help to improve food security.** In some countries female smallholders receive less than 10 percent of the credit awarded to male smallholders (FAO, 1998). Ensuring women are well-represented in credit schemes and providing skills training can be effective in improving their food security.

## Let's change how we respond to the effects of *climate change on women*, because *if we do, we could contribute to...*

**Reducing the impacts of drought on women.** Research shows that the collection of water will become increasingly burdensome as it will take longer and be more difficult to locate water sources (WHO & UNICEF, 2006).

**Improving nutrition for girls.** Research shows that girls' nutrition suffers most during periods of low consumption and rising food prices (IUCN & UNDP, 2009). Monitoring nutrition levels and introducing drought-resistant foods can help reduce poor nutrition.

**Reducing the incidence of vector-borne and waterborne diseases** that are exacerbated due to the effects of climate change, such as malaria and diarrhoea, which women and children are especially vulnerable to (WHO, 2003). Raising awareness and providing access to health services can help reduce disease. This can also contribute to decreasing the burden on women, who traditionally care for the sick.

## Let's change how we think about *water, sanitation and hygiene outcomes for women* because *if we do, we could contribute to...*

**Reducing distances travelled and time spent by women and girls collecting water.** In developing countries, fetching water often falls into the hands of women and girls and the distances they travel can be detrimental; they often walk long distances over treacherous terrain, carry heavy vessels, miss school and are vulnerable to assault (World Vision Australia, 2009). Ensuring water sources are accessible and well-lit can help reduce the workload and risks for women and girls, as well as encouraging men to contribute to household tasks.

**Improving access to toilets for women.** Currently, approximately 1.3 billion women and girls in the world lack access to a proper toilet (WHO/UNICEF, 2004). Clear hygiene communication and improved privacy of toilets can help prevent open defecation and reduce the spread of disease.

## References

- Bernstein S, et al. (2008) 'Sexual and reproductive health: completing the continuum', *The Lancet* (372): 1225-6.
- Bicego, G. T. & Boerma, J. T. (1993) 'Maternal Education and Child Survival: A Comparative Study of Survey Data from 17 Countries', *Social Science and Medicine* 36 (9): 1207-1227.
- FAO (1998) 'Rural Women and Food Security: Current Situation and Perspectives'.
- FAO (2010) 'Women and Food Security'. Available online at <http://www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/Women/Sustin-e.htm>.
- Fortson, C. (2003) 'Women's Rights Vital for Developing World', Yale News Daily.
- ICRW (International Center for Research on Women) (2007), 'The Lancet Special Issue for Women Deliver'.
- International Labour Organization (2004), 'Facts on Women at Work'.
- IUCN & UNDP (2009), 'Training Manual on Gender and Climate Change'.
- Knowles, S., P.K. Lorgelly and P.D. Owen (2002) 'Are Educational Gender Gaps a Brake on Economic Development? Some Cross-Country Empirical Evidence', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 54: 118-149.



- Lloyd, Cynthia (2005) *Growing Up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries*, Washington DC: National Academies Press.
- MacDonald, R. (2005) 'How Women were Affected by the Tsunami: A Perspective from Oxfam', *PLoS Medicine* 2 (6).
- Neumayer, E. & Plumper, T. (2007) 'The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy 1981 – 2002', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97: 551-566.
- Peterson, K. (2007) 'Reaching out to Women When Disaster Strikes', *Soroptimist White Paper* [<http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/WhitePaperDocs/WPReachingWomenDisaster.pdf>].
- Population Council (2008) 'Transitions to Adulthood: Child Marriage/Married Adolescents', [[www.popcouncil.org/ta/mar.html](http://www.popcouncil.org/ta/mar.html)].
- Psacharopoulos, G. & Patrinos, H. A. (2002) 'Returns to Investment in Education'.
- The Allan Guttmacher Institute (2003) (Developed with UNFPA) 'Adding it Up: The Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health Care', New York.
- The Lancet and University College of London Institute for Global Health Commission (2009) 'Managing the Health Effects of Climate Change', [<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/global-health/ucl-lancet-climate-change.pdf>].
- UNAIDS (2010) 'UNAIDS Report on the Global Aids Epidemic 2010 Factsheet', [[http://www.unaids.org/documents/20101123\\_FS\\_Global\\_em\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/documents/20101123_FS_Global_em_en.pdf)].
- UNAIDS (2010a) 'UNAIDS Report on the Global Aids Epidemic 2010'.
- UNDP (2009) 'Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change'.
- UNESCO (2005) 'Education for All: The Quality Imperative Global Monitoring Report'.
- UNFPA (2004) 'State of the World's Population'.
- UNICEF (2008) 'Progress for Children: A Report Card on Maternal Mortality'.
- UNICEF (2009) 'ChildInfo: Statistics by Area: Child Protection', [<http://www.childinfo.org/marriage.html>].
- UNIFEM (2009) 'The Facts: Violence Against Women and the Millennium Development Goals', [[http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/EVAWkit\\_02\\_VAWandMDGs\\_en.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/EVAWkit_02_VAWandMDGs_en.pdf)].
- UNIFEM (2004) 'Not a Minute More: Ending Violence Against Women'.
- WHO & UNICEF (2006) 'Meeting the MDG Drinking Water and Sanitation Target: The Urban and Rural Challenge of the Decade'.
- WHO (2003) 'Climate Change and Human Health: Risks and Responses'.
- WHO (2003a) 'The World Health Report 2003'.
- WHO (2004) 'Unsafe Abortion: Global and Regional Estimates of Unsafe Abortion and Associated Mortality in 2000 4th Edition'.
- WHO (2005) 'The World Health Report 2005'.
- WHO (2009) 'Women's Health' Factsheet No. 334, [<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs334/en/index.html>].
- WHO (2009a) 'Newborns: Reducing Mortality' Factsheet No. 333, [<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs333/en/index.html>].
- WHO (2009b) '10 Facts About Women's Health', [[http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/women\\_health/en/index2.html](http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/women_health/en/index2.html)].
- WHO (2010) (Developed by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA & the World Bank) 'Trends in Maternal Mortality 1990 – 2008'.
- WHO (2010a) 'Female Genital Mutilation' Factsheet No. 241, [<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>].
- World Bank (2009) 'Why is Girls' Education Important?', [[www.worldbank.org/education/girls](http://www.worldbank.org/education/girls)].
- WHO/UNICEF (2004) 'Meeting the MDG drinking-water and sanitation target: A mid-term assessment of progress'.
- World Vision Australia (2009) 'Why Women Suffer Most', [[http://www.worldvision.com.au/Issues/WaterSanitationHygiene/Who\\_is\\_it\\_happening\\_to/\\_Why\\_women\\_and\\_girls\\_suffer\\_most.aspx](http://www.worldvision.com.au/Issues/WaterSanitationHygiene/Who_is_it_happening_to/_Why_women_and_girls_suffer_most.aspx)].

Compiled by Téa Slezak, February 2011.

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.unfpa.org/public/site/global/lang/en/pid/3851#facts>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.unfpa.org/public/site/global/lang/en/pid/3851#facts>