

**Women as Drivers of Collective Benefit:
A Case for Philanthropic Investment**

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Abstract

Equal access for women to education, economic opportunities, and health care is widely recognized as a fundamental issue of human rights. At the same time, a substantial body of scholarly literature documents the vitally important contribution that women make to the provision of such public goods as child health, nutrition, education, household production, and economic security. Initiatives that enhance women's capabilities to flourish are therefore not only a moral imperative for nations, but also important strategies for national development and philanthropic investment.

Initiatives that center on expanding opportunities for women accelerate the attainment of goals aimed at building healthy societies and economies. A substantial body of evidence supports the notion that improvements in women's lives – in their health, education, and economic well-being – have far-reaching effects that extend beyond women themselves to have positive impact on the lives of others. Simply put, when women thrive, children, households, communities, and societies thrive, thus making women 'smart' investments both for national development strategies and for philanthropic efforts to promote collective benefit.

A few examples can serve to illustrate this claim. Women as mothers, for instance, hold a special place in most people's lives. Evidence shows that, in addition to the love and nurturing that are associated with motherhood, mothers have a unique and powerful influence on the likelihood that we will live to see our fifth birthday, that we will have adequate nutrition to develop both physically and cognitively, and that we will withstand the debilitating and often deadly effects of childhood illness. Evidence from around the world points to maternal health and education as critical pathways for these outcomes.

The strong correlation between maternal survival and child survival has been well-documented in studies from all over the world (Katz, et. al, 2003; Peña, R., Wall, S. & Persson, 2000; UNICEF, 2005). When mothers die in childbirth, children's chances of survival are drastically reduced (Greenwood, et al., 1987). In Nepal, infants of mothers who died in childbirth are six times more likely to die in the first week of life, 12 times more likely to die between 8-28 days, and 52 times more likely to die between 4-24 weeks (Katz, et al., 2003). One cross-national study of 86 LDC countries found that two of the strongest predictors of child mortality were maternal mortality and female secondary school enrollment (Shen & Williamson, 1997).

Women's education has been strongly linked to child survival (Peña, Wall, & Persson, 2000). A child whose mother can read is 50% more likely to live past the age of five, and each additional year of maternal education reduces the likelihood of infant mortality by 5-10% (UNESCO, 2011). In Bolivia, researchers found that infant mortality was significantly greater in households where women had no education when compared to households where women had completed some secondary school. In fact, the strong link between women's education persists throughout childhood (Frost, Forste, & Haas, 2005). Maternal education has been shown to be significantly associated with child nutritional status in Ghana (Tagoe-Darko, 1995). Health knowledge, literacy, and numeracy skills help mothers diagnose and treat childhood diseases and given an environment with sufficient resources, maternal education can influence child nutritional outcomes by promoting utilization of modern healthcare, improved healthcare knowledge, and reproductive behaviors (Abuya, Clerai. & Kimani-Murage, 2012; Glenwwe, 1999). Mothers who attend school, particularly through secondary school, are more likely to be exposed to modern society and to be more receptive to public health interventions aimed at preventing and treating childhood diseases (Bhuiya, Streatfield & Meyer, 1990; Martin & Juarez, 1995).

The more educated a women is, the more likely she is to be the primary decision-maker with regards to her children's health (Jejeebhoy, 1995) and the more control she is likely to exert over household resources (Frost, Haas & Forste, 2005). In that role, she is more likely than

mothers with little or no education to draw attention to a child's illness and to seek medical attention (Caldwell, 1993). Maternal education has also been linked to improvements in women's reproductive health in areas that have a direct impact on child survival and health: lower fertility rates, reproductive complications at low-risk ages, and longer birth intervals (Cleland & van Ginnekan, 1988).

Around the world, when women thrive, their households thrive. Women who are income earners are more likely than their male peers to spend their earnings on household goods such as education, food, and medicine (Jouvett, 2000). Household consumption has been found to increase nearly two-fold when women borrow under micro-credit programs as compared to when men borrow (Gill, Pande, & Malhotra, 2007). Were women and men to earn equal incomes, women's income would more likely result in greater positive effects in the household through increased household consumption, higher caloric food intake, and more expenditures on food. One study in Burkina Faso found that if the only intervention implemented was to give women farmers access equal to that of men in fertilizer and other agricultural inputs, household output would increase by 6% (Bafana, 2010; Udry, 1996). In one 63-country study, 43 percent of the decline in malnutrition between 1970 and 1995 was shown to be associated with more productive farming resulting from increases in female education (Smith & Haddad, 2000).

Not only do communities benefit from the 'spillover' effects that women have at the individual and household level, research has shown that communities with higher proportions of educated women are more likely to provide better sanitation, more medical services, and more shared knowledge about ways to strengthen their communities (Alderman, Hentschel & Sabates, 2003).

Importantly, when women thrive, economies thrive. An increase in the share of women with secondary education by one percent has been shown to increase a country's annual per capita income growth by an average of 0.3 percent (Dollar & Gatti, 1999). Women are not only significant contributors to the economy, but economic outputs are greater when more resources are available to them. In Uganda, women's contribution to GDP was estimated to be slightly more than 50% overall, with their economic contribution to agriculture (the source of 99% of Uganda's exports) standing at 75% (Campbell-White, Merrick, & Yazbeck, 2006). Economic output in Zambia was estimated to increase by as much as 15% if women had the same overall degree of capital investment as their male counterparts (Bafana, 2010). And if female farmers had the same access to productive resources as male farmers, the agricultural output in developing countries would increase by 2.5 to 4% (UN Food and Agricultural Organization, 2011). Some analysts maintain that women's labor, both in the workplace and in the household, may be the single most important strategy to reducing poverty in developing countries (Heinz, 2006).

The 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development acknowledged the powerful role that women play in realizing economic growth, stating that "gender inequality diminishes a country's ability to compete internationally" (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2011, p. 5). And it was one of today's best known philanthropists, Bill Gates, who famously asked how a country could expect to compete in a global market when half of its human capital was underutilized. According to

recent estimates by the International Labor Organization, nearly one-half of women's productive potential worldwide is under-utilized as compared to only 10% of male labor productivity (International Labor Organization, 2010).

This well-established literature from over the past 20 years supports the notion that women are major providers of collective benefit for their children, their families, and their communities. Women are uniquely responsible for the development of the next generation of human capital, one of the most important resources a society has. Worldwide, it is women who are responsible for caregiving, household food production, and decisions about their children's health and well-being. When women have opportunities to earn incomes and are active participants in determining how that income should be spent, more household-level investment is made in areas that promote family health and well-being, particularly for children (Quisumbing, Brown, Feldstein, Haddad, & Peña, 1995). Thus, this case for investment in women: if we invest in those goods that promote women's education, health, and economic well-being, society at all levels will benefit.

Philanthropy is one of civil society's most powerful tools by which capital can be reinvested for the benefit of society. And there are as many valuable targets of philanthropic investment as there are needs and opportunities throughout all levels of society and across all genders, ages, races, and ethnicities. Some pay a higher dividend than others. Women are one such high-yield investment as well as a strategic one, particularly if the goal of such investment is to maximize collective benefit.

Among the targets of philanthropic investment in women that promise strong returns for families, communities, and economies are:

- investments in women's health, through greater access to sexual and reproductive health services, antenatal care, and primary care across their lifespans;
- investments in women's education, particularly investment that promote women having access to and staying in secondary school;
- capacity-building in women as agriculturalists and household providers through programs that support women's access to land-ownership, educational activities designed to improve land use, and agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, tools, and arable land and seed stocks;
- support for projects that increase women's access to financial resources through job training; access to rotating savings and credit programs; access to conditional case transfers; and equal opportunities for employment; and
- investments that encourage women's voices in civil society, through support of women-led NGOs and grassroots efforts by women to expand the opportunities and improve conditions for their communities, and by supporting efforts that increase women's representation at all levels of public life.

Only when women thrive, can the world thrive.

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