

Gender: high impact investment

Despite their under-representation in parliaments and other formal decision making spheres, women and girls play key roles in economic and social development and the growth and maintenance of civil and democratic societies.

Indeed, as understood by leading global organisations such as the United Nations and The World Bank, women and girls are often *the* pivotal agents of change – initiating and driving reforms that are less likely to come about through other means.

There is no effective development strategy in which women do not play a central role. When women are fully involved, the benefits can be seen immediately: families are healthier and better fed; their income, savings and reinvestment go up. And what is true of families is also true of communities and, in the long run, of whole countries.

Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General United Nations New York 8 March 2003

Time and time again, evidence around the world shows that direct investment in women and girls can trigger and achieve deep social transformations – reducing birth rates, child mortality, improving health, nutrition, education, stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS, nurturing self-sustaining community organisations, encouraging grass roots democracy and caring for the environment.

Supporting women's education, health and increased control over household resource allocation directly improves the well-being of children. Female borrowing, such as through micro credit, has been shown to have a greater impact on children's school enrolment than male borrowing. Investment in adolescent girls is shown to break intergenerational cycles of poverty.