



**HARVARD Kennedy School**  
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT



# INVESTING IN GIRLS' EDUCATION

## An Opportunity for Corporate Leadership

Shannon Murphy  
with  
Wivinia Belmonte and Jane Nelson

Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative  
Harvard Kennedy School  
September 2009

Written by Shannon Murphy with  
Wivina Belmonte, Corporate Social  
Responsibility Initiative, Harvard  
Kennedy School

Designed by Alison Beanland

© 2009 CSR Initiative at the Harvard  
Kennedy School

#### Rights and Permissions

The material in this publication is  
copyrighted. Quoting, copying, and/or  
reproducing portions or all of this work  
is permitted provided the following  
citation is used:

INVESTING IN GIRLS' EDUCATION,  
An Opportunity for Corporate  
Leadership, Shannon Murphy with  
Wivina Belmonte, September 2009

#### Cover photographs:

Young girl in African school, Randy  
Plett/iStockphoto; Indian schoolgirls,  
Loic Bernard/iStockphoto; Asian  
teenage girls, Aman Khan/iStockphoto

The findings, interpretations, and  
conclusions expressed herein are those  
of the authors and do not necessarily  
reflect the views of the Harvard  
Kennedy School.



## Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>The Context</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>The Challenges: The World as It Is</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>The Opportunities: The World as It Could Be</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>An Agenda for Corporate Action</b>	<b>8</b>
	Core business operations	
	Social investment and philanthropy	
	Public policy dialogue and advocacy	
<b>Examples:</b>		<b>9</b>
	The Adolescent Girls Initiative	9
	Educating Women and Girls Initiative	9
<b>Endnotes</b>		<b>10</b>



**We know that if you get girls into schools and keep them there, you can change the course of a nation.**

Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah – June 2007

**Investment in girls' education may well be the highest return investment available in the developing world.**

Lawrence Summers  
Director, National Economic Council

[Written in his former capacity as World Bank Chief Economist – 1992]

**Every global company should invest in the girl effect. Economists have demonstrated that it is the best possible return on investment. With targeted investments linked to market demand, adolescent girls will reverse cycles of poverty with huge impact on our global economy.**

Mark Parker  
President and CEO of NIKE, Inc.



---

## I The Context

There is an increasing chorus of consensus when the public and private sectors discuss the value of educating girls. Such investments are almost unanimously described in a positive light, both for the long and short term. An influential global constituency, ranging from thought leaders at the World Economic Forum and the World Bank, to prominent business practitioners from many of the world's most profitable companies, is coalescing around the idea that delivering on the universal right to education, with a particular emphasis on girls' education, is one of the most effective ways to generate a significant social and economic return on investment.

The obstacles to girls' access to education around the world have long been recognized as a significant barrier to social and economic progress. As noted economist Gene Sperling said at The Council on Foreign Relations in 2004, "Girls' education is an integral part to virtually every aspect of development. And what is just striking is the amount of hard, rigorous academic data that is, not only about what girls' education does in terms of returns for income, and for growth, but in terms of health, AIDS prevention, the empowerment of women, and prevention of violence against women."<sup>1</sup>

So it is with an eye to both economic progress *and* development that broadening girls' access to quality education around the globe has become an urgent matter.

There are more than 115 million children currently out of school. More than half of them are girls.<sup>2</sup> Because of the particular benefit that *girls* educational participation offers, that a growing number of organizations are working to bolster it. Pursuing universal education for all is important; indeed, it is a central part of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. But focusing on girls poses particular and considerable challenges, and also offers considerable benefits.

These wide-ranging benefits include:

- **Lower infant, child and maternal mortality rates.** Each additional year of female education reduces child mortality by 18 per thousand.<sup>3</sup>

- **Decreased HIV/AIDS infection.** The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS reports, “If every child received a complete primary education, at least 7 million new cases of HIV could be prevented in a decade.”<sup>4</sup>
- **Improved women’s labor force participation and income potential.** According to some estimates, a 1 percent increase in the level of women’s education generates .3 percent in additional economic growth.<sup>5</sup>

These benefits are at the center of a number of public sector programs like the United Nation’s Girls Education Initiative, the Education for All Movement and its Fast Track Initiative, and the World Economic Forum’s Global Education Initiative.<sup>6</sup> Each of these organizations is acting because the research that girls’ education is a causal factor of improved economic and development indicators, rather than their effect is near undeniable.

Moreover, some of the world’s leading brands and private sector companies have acknowledged not only the philanthropic and social benefits, but the economic benefits, of investing in and improving girls’ education, and are dedicating substantial time and resources to the cause. Nike, ExxonMobil and Cisco Systems all support dedicated initiatives that are aimed explicitly at broadening girls’ access to quality education. Many others are starting to look at both the risks and opportunities in their core business operations and value chains that either undermine or enhance the ability of adolescent girls to gain a decent education and opportunities to build their human capital and economic potential. The global community seems to be catching on to what Lawrence Summers noted more than 15 years ago during his tenure as Chief Economist at the World Bank, “Investment in girls’ education may well be the highest return investment available in the developing world.”

---

## II The Challenges – The World as It Is

The challenges to expanding girls' access to quality education are myriad: logistical, technical, cultural, religious.

Whatever the origin, these barriers contribute to the current state of crisis for many girls and women throughout the world. Moreover, the hardships facing girls negatively impact an ecosystem of people that reaches far beyond the girl herself. These “vicious cycles,” rather than “virtuous cycles,” mean that the burdens borne by girls are subsequently passed on to their children, families and other members of their community.

For example, a 2005 UNESCO report notes that children whose mothers have no education are twice as likely to be out of school as children whose mothers have some education.<sup>7</sup> Uneducated women also have higher fertility rates, lower opportunities for financial independence and earning power, increased rates of HIV/AIDS, and higher infant, child and maternal mortality rates.<sup>8</sup> Girls' education then, isn't just a matter of improving earnings potential in the long term – its power extends to matters of life and death.

The private sector is well suited to address some of the logistical and cultural challenges that face girls' access to quality education. Multinational corporations, in particular, are well positioned for the transfer of responsible business practices and standards, technologies and infrastructure that facilitate knowledge creation and promote gender diversity and more equal access to economic opportunity and human capital development. As employers in tomorrow's job market, they are best suited to help to create today's educational curricula. Perhaps most importantly, they will be among the beneficiaries of this transfer in the long run.

**Girls' education then, isn't just a matter of improving earnings potential in the long term – its power extends to matters of life and death.**

**Those of us who champion open markets must also do our part to create more opportunity to ensure economic growth is more broadly shared.**

Lloyd C. Blankfein

Goldman Sachs Chairman  
& CEO – March 2008

---

## III The Opportunities – The World as It Could Be

The gains associated with girls' education not only manifest in the long term – they can also pay off more acutely, especially in the areas of health, labor force participation and human security. Better educated girls grow up to be healthier women, which decrease the long term mortality risk for her children – a child who loses her mother, especially in developing countries, is more likely to become vulnerable to health or wellbeing challenges. Girls' education also directly impacts productivity levels and participation rates in the labor force. Per the World Bank, women's income rises by 10 to 20 percent for each year of schooling.<sup>9</sup> For agrarian communities, four years of schooling may increase farmers' annual productivity by 9%.<sup>10</sup> In the short term, a girl receiving education is growing her own skill set – both professional and social.

Why should business care about the way the world *could* be? Easy. It is simply a new manifestation of the old paradigm that the business of business being business. As Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein said at the launch of the company's 10,000 Women initiative, “We not only chase GDP around the globe, we try to create it.”<sup>11</sup> Companies are working to increase participation in the global market, for their (and their shareholders') own benefit.

In addition to the girl herself, her family and her community – business benefits from an increased number of educated individuals, regardless of location. And the particular benefits that educated girls bring to their households and community writ large, naturally extend to the employers of these better educated, healthier and more productive individuals.

## IV An Agenda for Corporate Action

As more companies begin to recognize both the business and economic case for investing in girls' education, they are starting to get actively engaged. For many, the best way to start is through social investment and philanthropic activities, while a growing number are also looking at the way their core business operations and value chains can support adolescent girls (and at a minimum cause them no harm). A few pioneering companies are also becoming more actively engaged in advocacy efforts and public policy dialogue to encourage a better enabling environment for support girls education and empowerment. The ideas below offer a practical 'check-list' of actions that companies can undertake to invest in girls:

### SOCIAL INVESTMENT AND PHILANTHROPIC ACTIVITIES

Mobilize core competencies and resources such as money, products, skills, premises and people to help support girls' education in local communities by:

- Supporting education initiatives generally, but especially those focused on empowering girls
- Building capacity of local teachers and community leaders
- Supporting/co-creating gender sensitive and relevant curricula development
- Providing resources to teach ICT skills
- Providing premises for education programs
- Supporting employee volunteerism for knowledge transfer
- Supporting school feeding programs
- Supporting sanitation facilities for school girls
- Donating relevant products
- Providing scholarships for outstanding girls

### CORE BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

Manage risks, minimize negative social impacts and create positive value and role models for girls in host countries and communities by:

- Producing safe and affordable products and services, especially school supplies, ICT technologies, and sanitation and nutrition products, and maternal health products
- **Creating jobs** – attracting, retaining and promoting qualified women who will serve as local role models
- **Building local businesses** –especially those owned by women and those whose products and services support girls education
- **Spreading responsible international business standards and practices** – including nondiscrimination, equal pay policies, and provision of suitable facilities for women

### POLICY DIALOGUE AND ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

Take individual and collective action to influence the enabling environment and support systemic change at a local, national and international level by:

- Working with governments to improve social infrastructure by supporting education reform and quality improvement
- Addressing educational and economic opportunity policies with governments and civil society
- Engaging in global dialogue on issues such as universal education and better healthcare for girls and women
- Supporting local and national governments to achieve respect for human rights
- Advocating for increased levels of government aid for girls' education

The following two profiles illustrate just two of a growing number of private sector contributions to expanding girls' access to quality education around the world.

## 1 The Adolescent Girls' Initiative

Nike, The World Bank, the governments of, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, & the United Kingdom, and the City of Milan

The Adolescent Girls Initiative (AGI) is an innovative partnership between Nike, the World Bank, the governments of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, and the City of Milan to support expanding economic opportunity for girls and young women.

As a part of the World Bank Group's Gender Action Plan *Gender Equality as Smart Economics*, AGI focuses its resources on young women to support expanding their educational and economic opportunities. AGI helps these girls develop mentors and professional opportunities.

Pilot programs are being developed for deployment in

Liberia, Afghanistan, Nepal, Rwanda, and South Sudan. The program focuses on girls because of the significant body of research establishing what the Nike Foundation has termed, "The girl effect." The girl effect illustrates the power that educated girls have on their families and wider communities.

Said Maria Eitel of the Nike Foundation at the launch of AGI, "Much like microfinance practitioners did decades ago when proving the credit-worthiness of the poor, we intend to demonstrate an irrational gap in the market that severely undervalues adolescent girls' economic potential. It will be girls who rebuild a nation."<sup>12</sup>

## 2 Educating Women and Girls Initiative

ExxonMobil

Founded in 2005 based on "an extensive body of research" demonstrating the short and long term benefits of investing in girls and women, the Initiative works to improve access to education and economic opportunity for females across the globe.

Company CEO Rex Tillerson cited the research as the main motivator for Exxon's work in the area. "We are beginning to see the benefits of our earlier investments and are taking steps to increase the reach and impact of our programs to benefit even more women and girls" said Tillerson at the 2007 announcement of the company's \$5 million in grants for the program.

Truly global in scope, ExxonMobil has partnered with Vital Voices to support educational programs for females in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America. The

company works with NGO partners in countries where ExxonMobil has a significant local presence to deliver high quality educational programming to women and girls in the community.

Exxon's contributions have totaled more than \$20 million since the initiative's inception in 2005. Emem Nkereuwem, a Nigerian woman and 2006 graduate of the Global Women in Management Program says, "I am brimming with new ideas for expanding and enhancing our programs to strengthen the socio-economic lives of girls and women. This program brought the whole world to the table, and now I am part of a great network. Where I thought there were no possibilities, now I feel like there are endless opportunities to touch people's lives and build partnerships."<sup>13</sup>

---

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Gene Sperling, speaking at The Council on Foreign Relations on "What Works In Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World," April 20, 2004
- <sup>2</sup> Global Education Initiative website. Access on September 16, 2009 at:
- <sup>3</sup> The World Bank Group, "Girls' Education: Designing for Success," The World Bank Africa Region Human Development.
- <sup>4</sup> "Learning to Survive: How education for all would save millions of young people from HIV/AIDS," Global Campaign for Education, June 2004: 4
- <sup>5</sup> 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.
- <sup>6</sup> The World Bank Group, Girls & Education homepage. Accessed on September 15, 2009 at  
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/0,,contentMDK:20298916~menuPK:617572~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:282386,00.html>
- <sup>7</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, "Children Out of School: Measuring Exclusion from Primary Education" Montreal, 2005
- <sup>8</sup> The World Bank Group, Girls Education homepage. Accessed at on September 16, 2009 at:  
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/0,,contentMDK:20298916~menuPK:617572~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:282386,00.html#why>
- <sup>9</sup> Lawrence Summers, "The Most Influential Investment" *Scientific American*, August, 1992, page 132
- <sup>10</sup> Christopher Colclough with Keith M. Lewin, *Educating All the Children*, Oxford University Press, 1993.
- <sup>11</sup> Lloyd Blankfein, quoted in Marc Gunther, "Goldman Sees Gold in Helping Women," *Fortune Magazine*, March 12, 2008
- <sup>12</sup> Reuters, "Former President Clinton Announces World Bank, Nike Foundation, Denmark and Liberia CGI Commitment to Unleash Economic Opportunity for Adolescent Girls in Liberia" September 26, 2008
- <sup>13</sup> [www.exxonmobil.com](http://www.exxonmobil.com)



---

### **The CSR Initiative, Harvard Kennedy School**

Under the direction of John Ruggie (Faculty Chair) and Jane Nelson (Director), the CSR Initiative at Harvard's Kennedy School is a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder program that seeks to study and enhance the public contributions of private enterprise. It explores the intersection of corporate responsibility, corporate governance, and public policy, with a focus on the role of business in addressing global development issues. The Initiative undertakes research, education, and outreach activities that aim to bridge theory and practice, build leadership skills, and support constructive dialogue and collaboration among different sectors. It was founded in 2004 with the support of Walter H. Shorenstein, Chevron Corporation, The Coca-Cola Company, and General Motors and is now also supported by Cisco Systems Inc., InterContinental Hotels Group, Microsoft Corporation, SAP, and Shell Exploration and Production.

[www.hks.harvard.edu/m-rcbg/CSRI](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/m-rcbg/CSRI)

Harvard Kennedy School  
Harvard University  
79 John F. Kennedy Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
USA  
[www.hks.harvard.edu/m-rcbg/CSRI](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/m-rcbg/CSRI)