



AID-FOR-TRADE: CASE STORY

THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE

Empowering Young Women in Trade Paradigms



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CASE STORY ON GENDER DIMENSION OF AID FOR TRADE

Empowering Young Women in Trade Paradigms



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Executive Summary

This case-story will showcase the analysis and findings of the *2010 State of the World's Girls Report* (Girls Report) on girls living in urban centres and accessing Internet Communication Technologies as a key pillar of a new global trade paradigm. In addition the case-study will draw on evidence from Plan's *2009 State of the World's Girls Report* which established that young women in particular are paying a heavy price for the recent financial crisis with more women being pushed into the sex trade and more girls being sold into prostitution. This case story will discuss how investment in young women's IT skills could ensure a healthy and productive school to work transition that will benefit nations and put a stop to intergenerational poverty. Plan will showcase one of its projects from Egypt proving ICTs are key to building young women's resilience allowing them to enter global value chains on equitable terms. Finally we will outline key recommendations for action.

1. Issues Addressed

Within the next decade, one billion young peopleⁱ – the majority of whom live in developing countries – will enter the global labour market and form the next generation of parents.ⁱⁱ The world faces the tremendous challenge of providing economic opportunities and decent work for this gigantic cohort of young people.ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time, we are now officially an urban planet. More people now live in cities and towns than in villages.¹ Each week, three million people are added to the cities of the developing world.² Plan estimates that by 2030, 1.5 billion girls will be living in cities.^{iv}

This current generation of girls and boys has had more access to education than any other and should be better poised to participate in, and benefit from, global economic development. The proportion of girls enrolled in primary and secondary education has increased substantially since 1990.^v 83% of girls are now in school. But girls' and young women's share of employment and decent work has not kept pace. There is a stark failure to translate these educational gains into gainful employment and this is blocking economic and social progress for us all.

As they grow up, girls and young women play an important economic role in the households, communities and labour markets of their countries. This contribution is facilitated by life in the city which has much to offer adolescent girls. They are more likely to be educated and find work, and less likely to marry young in a town than in a village.

- A girl is much more likely to go to school if she lives in a city – in developing countries, school attendance for girls from 10 to 14 is 18 per cent higher in urban than in rural areas, and 37 per cent higher for young women between 15 and 19.
- Girls have access to better services and better healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services. In one study, over 37 per cent of women in urban areas said they used condoms to avoid AIDS, compared with only 17 per cent of rural women. And 87 per cent of urban girls and women said they had 'ever used' a condom as opposed to 57 per cent of rural girls and women.
- Girls are less likely to be married at an early age – for example, in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, 50 per cent of young women in rural areas are married by the time they are 18, which is about twice the rate of young women in cities.
We also know that:
- If the work opportunities for young women were equal to their education or capacities – the average household income would grow. If women's labour force participation had increased at the same rate as education during the 1990s in the Middle East and North Africa, the average household income would have been higher by 25 per cent.^{vi}
- If more young women were economically active – there would be fewer girls getting married at a young age. Education and employment are linked to young women postponing marriage and scheduling births later in life.^{vii} Delayed marriage and fewer children means a bigger chance of increasing per capita income, higher savings and more rapid growth.^{viii}

In general, apart from agricultural work, cities offer young women more employment opportunities than rural areas. Many older adolescent girls in cities, particularly in Asia, find themselves working in factories in export-processing zones or in call centres. In Indonesia, for example, export-oriented sectors employ more than twice the national average of young people.

Young women are particularly likely to be employed in these industries; case studies in Bangladesh showed that many young women preferred working in factories to their other choices: agriculture or domestic service. This is true elsewhere too. Cho Cho Thet is 15 and works in a garments factory in Rangoon, Burma. She works for 14 hours a day, seven days a week and is paid \$35 a month. She is given free accommodation and meals of rice and vegetables. But she says she still prefers this to working in the fields. "Working under a roof is better than working in the rice field under the sun or the rain. I don't feel tired at all here."

One of the advantages of city life can be the prospect of greater access to and better training in ICTs. Access to new information technologies and the media can make a huge impact on young women's lives, introducing them to new ideas and ways of thinking that open up huge possibilities and opportunities.

According to the UN, "ICT provides a main tool to reduce discrimination and to empower women for all type of activities, since information and capacity to communicate and to enrol in decision-making processes are the basic pillars of empowerment."^{xix} With IT-related industries the fastest growing and most flexible in the world, these industries have the potential to open up new learning opportunities that cut across existing physical and cultural boundaries, offering innovative possibilities in ongoing education and in peer to peer learning.^x As a result, ICTs are uniquely placed to overcome traditional gender based discrimination barriers. For instance, one of the methods of promoting young women's livelihoods through e-commerce – buying and selling goods and services on the internet – is being pioneered in South Asia. SEWA, a women's trade union in West India, is offering women working in the informal sector e-commerce opportunities which directly link buyers to sellers and eliminate the middleman. This means women can sell their products directly and therefore increase their profit margins.^{xi}

2. Objectives Pursued

Young women who are economically empowered in decent, secure work or successful small businesses, and who enjoy equal rights to property and land ownership, are better equipped to create a solid future for themselves, their families and communities. We know from extensive research that mothers of all ages are more likely to spend their income on the welfare of the household, so creating the conditions for the next generation to move out of poverty.^{xii} An economically independent young woman has more power in the home to make decisions that affect the health and education of family members.^{xiii} In times of crisis, such as the death of a breadwinner or the decline of an economy, the economic capacity of a young woman is often what keeps the family afloat.^{xiv}

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have financial value for adolescent girls and young women. In the Cherie Blair Foundation survey, 41 per cent of women reported having increased income and professional opportunities through owning a mobile phone.³² "By being better connected, women feel safer, find employment, start businesses, access banks, learn about market prices and altogether benefit socially and economically," said Cherie Blair.³³

"In today's world, computers are the tools we use for work, to learn, to communicate and to find out about the world... In terms of employment opportunities, with new jobs, 95 per cent are going to require some kind of technology," says Wendy Lazarus of The Children's Partnership in the US.³⁴

4. Problems Encountered

Although more young women are entering the workforce in certain sectors and regions, youth unemployment as a whole is on the rise.^{xv} A global deficit of decent work opportunities means that youth make up 25 per cent of the global working-age population but account for 43.7 per cent of the unemployed. For example, South Asia has 29 per cent of young women in the labour force compared with 64 per cent of young men. Similar gender gaps exist in the Middle East and North Africa, where close to one-third of women aged between 15 and 24 are unemployed, compared to less than one-quarter of young men.^{xvi} In Latin America too, younger women are finding it harder to get jobs, while in Sub-Saharan Africa – which has seen a climbing rate of unemployment among youth over the past decade – the gender gap is bigger still.

Globalisation and urbanisation has created opportunities for young women in new industries, but it has also opened up new forms of exploitation. For example, deregulated labour markets have become a hallmark of economic liberalisation, and are characterised by the trend not only towards *feminisation* but also *informalisation*.^{xvii} This means that while increasing numbers of women are finding waged work, more and more of these jobs fall outside the formal regulated sector, where social and legal protection are lacking.^{xviii}

In addition there are fears that the impact of the financial crisis has pushed more young women and girls into the sex trade. Desperate families sell their daughters into prostitution for basic survival. "Factories are closing everywhere – and now the women are being approached by sex traffickers asking if they want to go and work in the West," said Jitra Kotchadet, union leader and women workers' activist in Thailand.^{xix} In Jakarta, Indonesia, it is estimated that two to four times more women became sex workers in 1998 than in 1997 after the Asian financial crisis.^{xx} "Crises always mean a boom for the illegal sex trade with the influx of women desperate for livelihood," says De Jesus from GABRIELA, a women's organisation in the Philippines.

"An average person with a computer, modem and search engine can find violent, degrading images within minutes – a search that could have taken a lifetime, just 15 years ago."
Donna Hughes³⁴

Internet Communication Technologies are exposing adolescent girls to images of violence, exploitation and degradation of women at a time in their lives when they are developing sexually. We know that more girls than boys are affected by sexual exploitation worldwide, and that one in five women report having been sexually abused before the age of 15.³⁵ The internet creates intimacies with total strangers that seem safe, and so adolescent girls have become prime targets for modern methods of abuse, including trafficking via the internet, mobile phones and other communications technologies. Or as one expert put it "the internet is just a new medium for old kinds of bad behaviour".³⁶ It is now possible for someone to snap a degrading photo of a young girl and disseminate it in seconds.

One study in the UK found that adolescents, particularly those in the 16 to 17 year-old age group, were in serious danger of "online seduction".³⁷ Adolescent girls are also vulnerable to online solicitation or 'grooming' (securing a girl's trust in order to draw her into a situation where she may be harmed). This enables sex offenders to engage girls on many levels, from sexual chat to enticing them into physical contact. The recent case of a young woman in the UK who was raped and murdered by a man she met through Facebook illustrates the real and present dangers these types of online solicitations can pose to adolescent girls.³⁹

5. Factors for Success

As many technologies become cheaper and easier to access, it is crucial that adolescent girls and young women, as well as young men, are able to benefit from their use. In emerging markets, such as India and in South East Asia, young women form an important pool of labour for the expanding service sector in banking and insurance, particularly as workers in call centres.^{xxi} All of this shows that, despite the attendant risks, young women are indeed economic agents, with tremendous potential to engage in economic opportunities within the scope of changing labour markets.

If they don't acquire the skills of modern technology they will be disadvantaged in the workplace. "We badly needed a new oven, but when I talked to my children, they said that we could manage, and that we needed a computer more than hot food!" (mother in Egypt)

Plan's programming has shown the ICTs can be a force for stemming harmful traditional practices such as FGC as well as navigating young women off the street and into productive and healthy employment. For instance in Egypt, Plan's child media programme, Esmoona (Hear Us Out), is a weekly programme on terrestrial state TV in which children and young people discuss issues such as child abuse, gender equality, street children and education. Young people, and this must include girls, use their new skills to show officials what needs changing in their communities.

"People now take us seriously after they've seen the show. Also, the officials were able to see the problems in our community and how it is affecting us so it encourages them to take action," explains Amar, one of the participants.

“Since they have a camera and a computer, they can use it to go out and shoot a garbage or sewage problem in the area, come back, do the editing and then send the tape to local authorities,” explains Mohamed Kamal, Plan’s media coordinator.

Factors for Failure

What stops girls using technology?

Research for the 2010 ‘Because I am a Girl’ report found that there are six key factors that prevent girls from taking advantage of technology.³³

1. **Discrimination** – Girls are still viewed as second-class citizens in many societies.
2. **Numbers** – Boys both outnumber girls and tend to dominate access to computers.
3. **Confidence** – Because they don’t have equal access at school, girls may be less confident than boys when it comes to going into IT jobs because they don’t feel they have the same skills and knowledge as the young men competing for the jobs.
4. **Language** – In order to use these technologies, English is usually a requirement, and for girls with only basic literacy in their own language, this is a major barrier.
5. **Time** – Girls’ domestic roles, even at a young age, mean they have less free time than boys to explore and experiment with new technologies.
6. **Money** – Girls are less likely than their brothers to have the financial resources to pay for, say, a mobile phone and its running costs, or access to the web in an internet café.
7. **Freedom** – Boys are also more likely to be allowed to use internet cafés because parents are concerned about their daughters going out on their own.

6. Results Achieved

A Call to Action – girls and tech

1. Increase girls’ access and control over IT hardware
2. Invest in maths, science and vocational education for girls
3. Expand and improve online protection mechanisms
4. Stop violence against girls online
5. Implement international legislation and increase collaboration
6. Teach girls how to protect themselves

Invest in girls

Training projects that really benefit girls and encourage them to become IT literate do exist; a number of organisations run technology camps and IT training both in and out of school. Other organisations use mobile phone technology to help improve literacy or to convey basic information about health and other problems that help keep girls safe. Girls and young women are very aware how important IT skills are – in Egypt, Alya told her mother that they needed “a computer not hot food”, a computer is much more important to her than an oven.⁴⁷

And the pace of development in the ICT sector is only going to accelerate. The question is – will the world work together to ensure that girls are equipped with the skills they need to seize the opportunities that the digital world offers them and not simply stand by as old forms of abuse are perpetuated and exacerbated by the power and reach of the online world?

7. Lessons Learned

We need to listen to adolescent girls’ views and ensure that their voices are heard by decision-makers. We need to learn from what they have to say. We need to include them in research, in planning and in policies. We need to invest in girls’ skills and ensure that they have access to information, the skills to use it and the power to protect themselves. And finally, we have shown that what many of them have achieved in the face of adversity is truly remarkable. We need to celebrate these achievements and ensure that all girls, wherever they live in the world, have the same chances in life as their brothers.

8. Conclusion (applicability to other programs)

We are living in hard economic times. The effect of the current global economic downturn touches us all and comes as a stark reminder that we live in a globalised and interdependent world. It is a world where the

actions of bankers on Wall Street or in the City of London have a profound impact on people's lives and options across the globe. But it is also a world in which economic dependence is a two-way street – where the economic prosperity of each of us ultimately relies on the economic prosperity of all.

And yet, we are sitting on a gold mine. The 500 million adolescent girls and young women in developing countries are a major untapped resource for global economic prosperity. Unlocking the economic promise of girls and realising their rights is not only an opportunity for their own empowerment but raises the prospect of economic progress for all. When it comes to stimulating economic growth, there is little that brings higher returns than investing in girls and young women, as this report will show.

In richer countries a whole generation of young people is emerging from school, college and training schemes into a world where companies have stopped hiring and whole industries are down-sizing. This is bad enough in itself and threatens their long-term future, and ours. In poorer countries where food shortages, fuel increases and the financial downturn are further depressing individual livelihoods and national economies, the poorest are at even greater risk of hunger, vulnerability to disease, and sexual and economic exploitation; the very survival of the weakest is threatened. In these circumstances girls, whatever their inherent abilities and potential, will be the most vulnerable: the least likely to survive, be fed, go to school, stay healthy, receive a loan or have any chance of making a decent living. In times of economic crisis families make hard choices, and girls, because they are valued less, suffer disproportionately.

If we turn our backs on this generation at this time, if we fail to invest in these communities and the individuals in them, we doom a whole generation of girls, and their children, to poverty and ignorance. A small amount of seed money could produce a great harvest.

The success of international efforts to boost primary education for girls proves what can be done when there is a real will to do it. And girls themselves know what tools they need to improve their chances of success in the global economy: education, IT and communications skills.

But entrenched discrimination against girls and young women not only holds them back, it impedes economic progress for all in the societies in which they live. Despite improved equal rights legislation, a better understanding of how gender impacts on opportunity, and sound business arguments for equality and diversity, girls' chances of developing the knowledge, skills, support and confidence to become economically active remain considerably less than those of their brothers. This remains the case even in countries where girls' educational achievement is higher than their brothers.

This inequality is not only unfair; it is also short-sighted. The world over, a lack of investment in girls results in increased poverty and the squandering of a precious resource. This must change. Poverty may have a woman's face, but sustainable economic prosperity has the face of a girl.

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