



LEARNING BRIEF

The business of gender equality

Insights and impact from working with business partners

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I. About the BPP

Cross-sector partnerships are essential to meeting global development challenges. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) established the Business Partnerships Platform (BPP) to enable DFAT to partner with the private sector – to co-create and to share risks and rewards for development impact.

BPP partnerships have a clear pathway to scale and can deliver shared interests – sustainable social impact and ongoing commercial returns. One of the expected social impact outcomes is for partners to adopt and implement strategies to empower women.

While gender equality and women's empowerment are key objectives of the BPP, working with the private sector requires a flexible approach. The business environment is ever-changing and businesses need to be adaptive to keep up with change.

The BPP works in a supporting capacity, understanding the nature of business, and provides advice to help businesses to

understand their impact on women, the barriers women may face and identify and manage potential risks to women and girls. With this information, businesses, together with NGO partners, are developing strategies to empower women.

A key insight from the BPP is that businesses which initiate their own gender analysis are more likely to take ownership of the process. A gender analysis examines the differences in women's and men's lives, including those which lead to social and economic inequity for women. A gender analysis can raise issues within the business that require action. Having ownership of the process is more likely to lead to action and long-term change.

While the timeframe that is needed for significant change is often longer than the BPP timeframe - on average a BPP initiative is 24 months - the BPP has found a strong willingness from business to learn and do more to promote gender equality.

2. How we work

The BPP works with partners to integrate gender equality in all stages of BPP processes, including application and selection, implementation, and results measurement.

This focus reflects recognition that gender equality is critical to the achievement of the global development agenda, while also recognising the benefits to business of gender equality in the supply chain.

DFAT is strongly committed to being at the forefront of global efforts to empower women and girls and promote gender equality around the world. The expertise it brings in gender is a key contribution to BPP partnerships.

Planning: the BPP supports successful business and NGO partners to develop and lead a gender analysis. The results help to inform a gender strategy for their initiative.

Initiative reporting: reporting on how the initiative is contributing towards gender equality, and reports wherever possible using sex disaggregated data.

Ongoing support: the BPP works closely with initiatives to identify areas where we can provide support on gender strategies.

When the BPP works with partners we look at the different roles women and men play in the value chain as:

Producers

Consumers

Suppliers

Leaders

Poultry producer, Ramrati Deva Singh, banking her profits in Madhya Pradesh, India © BPP/iMentor



When the BPP works with partners we focus on three aspects of women's empowerment:



1. Access and control of assets:

When women have access and control of key assets, they are able to contribute to business as investors, employees, producers, consumers and suppliers.

Assets allow women to earn income and invest in a business, promoting their empowerment.

BPP achievements:

Most BPP partnerships include one or more strategies within their business plans to promote women's access to assets. Examples of strategies that are unlocking opportunities for women include access to training, access to equipment and materials, access to financial services, access to land, and access to networks that support and empower women.



2. Increase in agency:

When women are provided with opportunities and men are engaged to lift constraints to women's agency, women take leadership roles and are able to share their knowledge, skills, experience, and insights with their families, communities and to business.

BPP achievements:

The BPP works closely with businesses to design strategies which seek to give women more agency and power in their lives. These include promoting women to leadership or senior management roles; policies and practices that support equal pay for equal work; providing flexible work conditions for staff; supporting women to play visible roles in the value chain; and encouraging women to be involved in negotiating terms of trade.



3. Protection:

Due to poverty, many women in the communities targeted by BPP are vulnerable. Women are also particularly vulnerable to economic shocks, lack of legal protection, environmental impacts, corruption, and displacement. These vulnerabilities can limit women's potential to participate in business, thrive and achieve gender equality.

BPP achievements:

A key priority for the BPP is to ensure that initiatives reduce women's vulnerability wherever possible. At a minimum, the BPP works with partners to ensure that interventions do no harm – that is, that interventions do not deepen gender inequalities, increase risks for women or entrench women in undervalued roles.

3. From the BPP Portfolio

The impact of businesses empowering women as producers, consumers, suppliers and leaders:



Amreen, Field Supervisor at the Pollinate Group, India © Pollinate Group



Perise, Secretary, Savai'i Coconut Farmers Association, Samoa © Fairtrade ANZ



Beverlyn, SolaPayGo Customer, Papua New Guinea ©BPP/Sarah Wiles

1. Access to Assets

“After I took up that job, my family never had to go through hardship for daily meals. I am able to provide a good education to my two sons, one of my sons is pursuing a bachelor’s in computer application. My husband is very supportive and helps me in the household chore. I started my job to sell products and now I help others to sell products. I share the workspace with my mentors and senior managers at the office, I feel proud.”

A BPP partnership with DFAT, Pollinate Group and Greenlight Planet is providing women with economic opportunities. The partnership is empowering women as leaders of change to distribute products that improve health, save time and save money. The solar products it sells benefit women as they provide extra security at night and an opportunity to work from the home in the evening, earning additional income.

2. Increase in Agency

“The women in the association, we need to have the courage to carry on.”

A BPP partnership with DFAT, Fairtrade ANZ, Samoan manufacturer, Krissy Co and the Savai'i Coconut Farmers Association (SCFA) is adding value to coconut crops. The SCFA is important to coconut growers as it allows individual farmers to work together to achieve stronger outcomes. The BPP worked with the partners to advocate for women's representation on the Board of the SCFA. This led to a change in their constitution and the appointment of Perise as the secretary of the association. Perise has had to overcome entrenched social and cultural barriers to her leadership. There were times when men refused to speak to her. Under Perise's leadership the SCFA is now offering gender equality training to its farmer members and the number of women in the association has grown.

3. Protection

“Before Sola PayGo we were using kerosene lamps and kerosene lamps have smoke which made us sick. Now that we are using solar we have all the benefits. At night the kids are happy to study and I can make my bilums (woven bags) as well.”

A BPP partnership with DFAT, Australian social enterprise Sola PayGo, telecommunications company bmobile and off-grid solar product manufacturer d.light to develop and distribute solar products. In communities that experience high levels of violence against women, access to solar lighting increases women's safety. The partnership aims to reach 2,500 households. The partners are also committed to creating opportunities for women within their businesses: bmobile has identified a target of 50 per cent female call centre staff, while DFAT's support will help Sola PayGo to review internal policies and processes to ensure they provide equal opportunity to male and female staff. This partnership contributes to DFAT's broader priorities in Papua New Guinea, including electrification and increasing women's economic participation.

The strategies businesses and NGO partners are using to promote gender equality and empower women:



"Eye Mitra" optician training, Bangladesh © Essilor

A business dedicated to empowering women in Bangladesh

A BPP partnership with DFAT, eye glasses manufacturer Essilor, health-promotion organization Grameen Kalyan and training consultancy, MART is expanding Essilor's "Eye Mitra" ("friend of the eye" in Hindi) optician training program for rural youth in Bangladesh.

When the training program first opened in Bangladesh, few women enrolled in the program and those that did often dropped out before completing their training. The BPP encouraged the partners to undertake a gender study to identify the barriers women face in the training program, and as practicing Eye Mitra.

The study found that one of the most significant barriers was a lack of family support, with families and community influencers expressing concerns about women working outside of the home and starting a business. This is now influencing the partnership's approach to the successful recruitment and retention of female Eye Mitras, by involving families and communities directly in the recruitment process and by encouraging prospective students to meet successful female Eye Mitra, giving families and students positive examples of change.



Female dairy producer group © BPP

An NGO supporting a business to deliver its gender strategy in Bangladesh

A BPP partnership with DFAT, Bangladesh SME Corporation Limited (BSCL) and Oxfam is enabling women dairy farmers to access finance to increase the productivity of their operations.

Oxfam brought to the partnership its gender and capacity building expertise and a 4,000 strong women farmer network, complementing BSCL's ability to provide critical access to finance for the dairy farmers. Using its innovative fintech platform, BSCL digitises the farmer's financial data, provides a credit score and arranges funding from its financial network. Training and support from Oxfam is essential to ensure the farmers are able to successfully leverage the funding to grow their businesses.

This is a great example of how the BPP can leverage the experience of different partners to bring value to the private sector and to communities.



University student, Ludsamee, training in livestock management, Laos © 4S/USYD

A business that has initiated and undertaken its own gender analysis in Laos

A BPP partnership with DFAT, Australian agribusiness 4 Season Co., The University of Sydney (USYD) and the Laos Department of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF) aims to improve farmer livelihoods.

When distributing their disease control product to farmers, often only men were present at the training sessions. The partners conducted a study of gender dynamics and learned that women in smallholder farms spend the majority of their time on the farm, while men often work a secondary job to earn income. This has highlighted the necessity to engage women in training and extension activities in order to successfully improve the farm's productivity and disease control. In response, the partners have planned female-only training sessions, at times which fit around women's schedules.

The study also found that women were often the financial decision makers in the household, providing the business with critical insights to ensure their marketing is targeted effectively, and as many communities as possible are able to benefit from their products.

4. Reflections from partners

The impact of the BPP in engaging partners to promote gender equality:

A key success of the BPP is that every business initiative includes at least one strategy that actively seeks to promote women's access to assets and/or increase women's agency voice and power. In some cases, the business was already deeply committed to gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

In a survey for a 2019 Internal Evaluation of the BPP, partners responded positively to engaging with the BPP to promote gender equality:

84% of survey respondents stated that their involvement with the BPP had helped them to develop more gender responsive internal policies.

70% of survey respondents found that the BPP's approach to gender had commercial value for their business.

"Digicel is more aware and more inclined to question how we might impact gender related outcomes. We engage proactively with development actors on how we might incentivise access for women."

DARREN HANNIFFY, HEAD OF
SHARED VALUE, DIGICEL PNG

"Our farmer surveys are now more comprehensive in respect to identifying women's roles in the field and the market place. The team has a much more gender balanced approach to project delivery and we have incorporated gender impact assessment into our next project."

COLIN FORBES, GENERAL MANAGER – ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY AFFAIRS,
BASE TITANIUM, KENYA

"Vietnam Bank for Social Policies did not disaggregate gender data because most of the account holders were households. When they began asking who managed the accounts, they realized that about 60 percent of the account managers were women."

DR. MICHAEL DIGREGORIO, COUNTRY
DIRECTOR, THE ASIA FOUNDATION,
VIETNAM

The BPP is an innovative program that is creating jobs, income and empowering women through cross-sector business partnerships.

The BPP brings businesses, not-for-profits and academia into partnership with DFAT to meet development challenges.

The BPP is built on the concept of shared value where businesses can achieve commercial returns while also delivering sustainable social impact in developing countries.

Since it was established in 2015 the BPP has formed 33 cross-sector partnerships in 16 countries and leveraged \$25.5 million in private sector investment.

Find out more

THEBPP.COM.AU
INFO@THEBPP.COM.AU



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