

HOW TO INTEGRATE EMPLOYEE HEALTH & GENDER EQUALITY IN YOUR BUSINESS OPERATIONS



IFU

INVESTMENT FUND FOR
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

DFPA

The Danish Family
Planning Association

An investment in **health and gender equality** is an investment in the future of your business

If you ask staff members whether good health is important, they will always answer 'Of course! If you have poor health you cannot work and earn money!' This is common sense. Despite this, staff members in practice do not always put their health first – they face too many competing priorities and are met with barriers in terms of lack of knowledge and finance.

Similarly, it should be common sense that contributing to a healthy workforce is good for productivity and for the health of the business. However, health rights

and particularly sexual and reproductive health issues are topics rarely thought into a company context or a workplace setting. This is an area with an untapped potential for companies.

The business case: Why invest in employee health?

Strategic and gender sensitive investments in employee health is a win-win situation for businesses and for people. Studies of the return on investment (ROI) strongly suggest that company investments in employee health and rights at the workplace not only safeguard the

human rights of the employees, it also benefits the business both financially and socially.

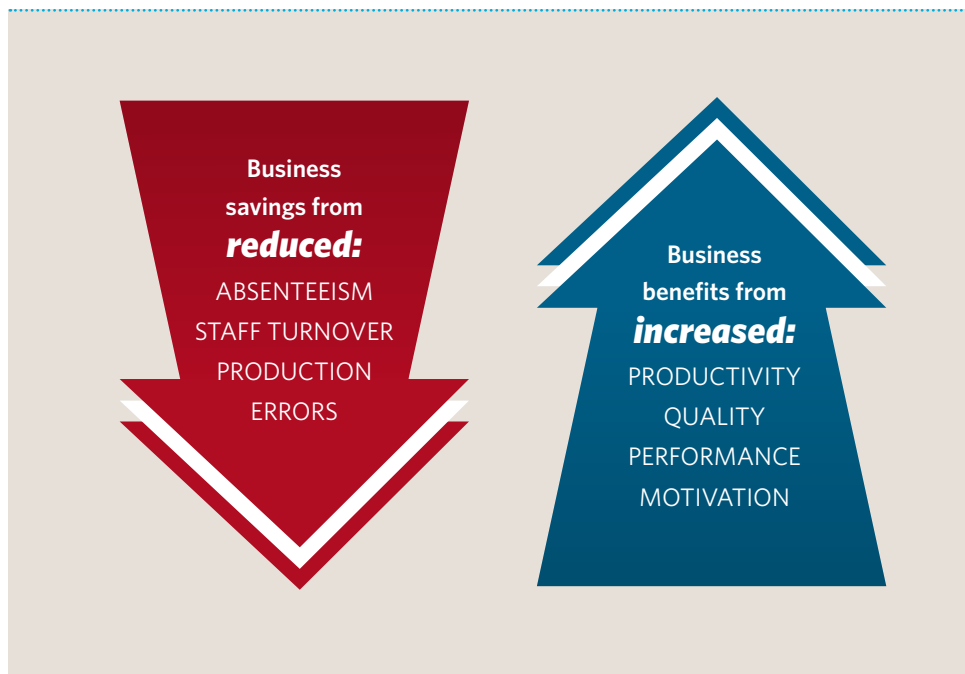
If employees are provided with knowledge about health, including reproductive health and family planning, this results in fewer unplanned pregnancies, better nutritional practice and improved hygiene. This in turn creates healthier employees, which leads to positive changes in terms of sick days, turnover rates, productivity and quality of production¹.

Meeting the reproductive health needs of women creates sustainable growth and development

At a societal level, investments in specifically women's health has also shown to serve as a catalyst for development and economic growth. The long-term benefits of investing in reproductive health include improving women's ability to participate fully in the labor force, which benefits the economy and private sector companies².

Healthy women and children contribute to the economy and growth. According to a report by WHO's Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, for every US 1 dollar invested in key interventions for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, about US 20 dollars in benefits could be generated. Investments in women's health is not only good for people and businesses, it

Benefits of investing in health and gender equality



1) Carve Study "Companies' Return on Investment (ROI) on women's health in the workplace - an overview of evidence and cases"

2) Guttmacher Institute and UNFPA "Adding It Up: Investing in Sexual and Reproductive health"



creates sustainable economic and social development on a societal level³.

From philanthropy to sustainability

Traditionally, companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been understood in a philanthropic sense, as a way for companies to give back to the communities. Recently though, increasing attention has been given to the fact that investments in making your business more sustainable and responsible in its business conduct is beneficial, not only for the people and the planet, but also for your business. Health is at the center of sustainability, and access to quality sexual and reproductive health information and services enables men and women to take care of their health and make informed choices about the number of children they want, and when they want them.

Living up to key human rights principles and national legislation

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), adopted in 2011, provides important guidance on human rights and business conduct:

'Business enterprises should respect human rights. This means that they should avoid infringing on the human rights of others and should address adverse human rights impacts with which they are involved' (UNGPs, Principle 11).

In relation to health and gender equality, the right to health and non-discrimination are two key human rights principles to focus on and in this context, you should ensure that your company operates based on principles of non-discrimination, participatory practices and transparency. It is also important that your company has a clear zero-tolerance towards sexual harassment and violence, and that you have good grievance mechanisms in place, known by the employees, supporting the effort of ensuring equal opportunities and other employee rights. Regardless of the type of company, you must as a minimum comply with national labour law, which stipulates company requirements in the areas of e.g. health and safety, maternity provisions, sexual harassment and health insurance. ■

UNINTENDED PREGNANCIES UNSAFE ABORTIONS

Did you know that if contraceptive needs of all women globally, who want to delay or stop childbearing, were satisfied, the number of unintended pregnancies would drop by 70% (from 74 million to 22 million per year) and unsafe abortions would decline by 74% (from 20 million to 5.1 million per year)? Improvement in maternal health strengthens women's ability to complete their education, maintain a job and will also improve the balance between employment and domestic care responsibilities. The societal benefits of investing in health and gender equality are significant.

Source: Guttmacher Institute and UNFPA "Adding it Up: Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health"

3) http://www.who.int/pmnch/knowledge/publications/summaries/knowledge_summaries_24_economic_case/en/

Investing in gender equality and employee health is a win-win situation

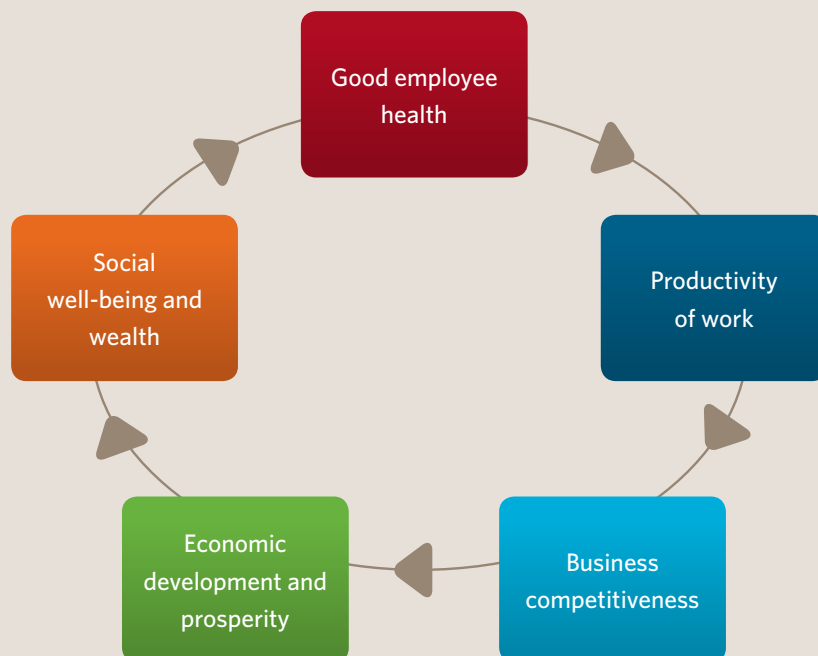
Often, the effect of fulfilling the health rights and gender equality of employees is underestimated and is not seen in relation to work performance and other key business parameters. It is important to address health of employees in the workplace, beyond occupational safety, and it should not be reduced to a private sphere issue. Similarly, putting a stra-

tegic focus on gender equality creates workplaces that are more competitive in terms of attracting and retaining new talents and skilled employees. According to a 2015 McKinsey report, diversity improves the performance of businesses; companies are more likely to financially outperform their competitors if they are gender diverse⁴.

Gender equality goes hand in hand with health, as poor sexual and reproductive health keeps especially women and girls away from both education and employment.



Healthy workplace framework



Source: Loosely based on WHO, 2010: Health Workplace Framework and Model: Background Document & Supporting Literature and Practices.

As the figure illustrates, focusing on health and gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health, in a workplace setting is a win-win situation:

- It benefits your company, as employees are healthier, more productive, more motivated and loyal.
- It can improve your company image, which can attract both qualified employees and investors.
- It benefits your employees, who experience better health and improved knowledge about health.
- It benefits women and make them more equal to their male colleagues
- It benefits the communities your employees come from, as knowledge about health can spread to the families and from there to entire communities. ■

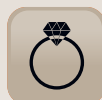
4) <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>

What does it take to make your business a **health champion**?

Which topics or issues should a business consider in relation to employee health and gender equality? The short answer is: It depends. Your business and your employees constitute a unique setting, which requires a tailored approach. When planning your employee health strategy, consider the following:



Do you have many female employees?



Do you have many young, unmarried employees?



How many children do your employees generally have?



What is the educational level of your employees?



What is the financial situation of your employees?



What is the general health situation in the area you are working in?



What is the nutritional situation in the area you are working in? Do you have employees who are mal- and/or undernourished?



How is the access to health services in the area your company operates in?



What is the general access to skilled employees in the area in which the company is located?



How is your employee turnover, and how does your company differentiate itself positively from other employers?

When conducting your opportunity and risk assessment related to an employee health and gender strategy, it is important to take the above questions as well as the geographical setting, cultural context, and health needs of your employees and the surrounding communities into account. This increases the chances of creating a strategy that has an impact and benefits your business. Furthermore, when identifying the most urgent issues

and related solutions, employee involvement is central.

An important topic to consider when working with employee health and gender issues, including sexual and reproductive health, is the cultural context of the area your company operates in. There may be cultural aspects or taboos that can be a challenge to address, partly because it is not always accepted to talk

about sexual and reproductive health topics openly, such as access to contraception or sexual harassment.

In order to address such cultural aspects or taboos, it is a good idea to initiate health and gender information campaigns within the company as well as within the local community to create awareness and accommodate any misunderstandings. ■

How to systematically make **health an integral part** of your company operations?

To enhance the likelihood that your targeted programmes and initiatives are efficient and beneficial for both your company and your employees, it is recommended that you take on a systematic approach to developing, designing and implementing your health and gender strategy.

The following step-by-step process for integrating health and gender equality in your company is meant to guide you through this process.

Roadmap for integrating employee health in business operations





Documenting your company's health and gender activities

It is advisable that implementation of employee health and gender equality strategies is systematically documented, and that calculations of any financial benefits and return on investment are made. By demonstrating both the qualitative and quantitative return on investments from implementing health and gender equality initiatives, you not only make the benefits more visible, you will also be able to identify any unintended effects and adjust initiatives accordingly. These types of inputs are pivotal in order to demonstrate that working with employees' health, including sexual and

reproductive health and gender equality, not only is the right thing to do, but also makes good business sense.

Consequently, calculating the return on investment of health and gender equality focused benefits, represents an important vehicle to documenting both the business benefits from investing in health in the workplace and the immediate improvement of employees' health.

For the purpose of calculations and documentation, it is important to identify

key indicators on how to measure any impact of your initiatives (see figure on page 8) and data sources, and not least to ensure that data collection practices are in place in your company. This is necessary to establish a baseline and will help you measure intended as well as unintended impact. In other words, documentation and calculations on benefits are important to learn from when you develop and design your health and gender equality policies and programmes, as well as when you implement initiatives, and when you evaluate the effects of your efforts. ■

3 steps to **calculate** **your return on investment**

STEP 1:

Establish your baseline before initiating health and gender equality strategy

Document relevant information on key indicators about employees:

- Absenteeism rates/sick days
- Turnover rates
- Employee satisfaction, retention
- Productivity
- Error rates
- Female representation in management

STEP 2:

Implement targeted health and gender equality strategy

STEP 3:

Continuously track developments compared to baseline

Has your company experienced changes in:

Absenteeism, turnover, employee satisfaction, productivity, error rates, female representation?

Has your company calculated return on investment by:

Comparing the cost of offered health benefits' savings on the above factors?

Health and gender equality at the workplace: **A checklist**

Use the below list to review how your company is doing on health and gender issues. By doing this, you will have an idea of how you are performing and where you can make improvements in your company.

Policies

Review company policies and check that you have the necessary and required policies in place or develop these if they are missing. Ensure that all policies comply with national law and that they are aligned with international labour standards and recommendations. Make sure that all policies are efficiently implemented and that employees are adequately informed in a form of communication that is fitting to your composition of staff. Check if your company has the following policies in place and that they are implemented, so that the employees know them and use them, and managers are fully aware of both policies and procedures:

Your HR policies/employee handbook include the following:

- ☐ A workplace policy addressing HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening diseases
- ☐ Maternity and paternity leave policy
- ☐ Non-discrimination policy
- ☐ Health and safety policy

Is your company health sensitive?

- ☐ Does your company provide any health services for employees?
- ☐ Does your company provide annual/regular health check-ups for employees?
- ☐ Does your company respect all genders' rights to time off for medical care and counseling for them and their dependents?
- ☐ Does your company offer benefits like male/female separate toilets with access to free sanitary pads and condoms in staff toilets?
- ☐ Do you ensure that your employees, in particular during pregnancy, get a nutritious meal?

Health insurance

- ☐ Does your company provide health insurance, which covers sexual and reproductive health issues, including family planning counseling?
- ☐ Does your employee health insurance have equal coverage regardless of position?
- ☐ Does your employee health insurance cover employees' spouse and children?
- ☐ Does your company provide employees with health insurance that includes HIV/AIDS treatment?
- ☐ Does your company have health insurance that includes needed services for survivors of domestic violence?

Pregnancy, maternity/paternity leave and return to work conditions

- ☐ Does your company take any measures to accommodate to employees with children, especially nursing children?
- ☐ Does your company offer flexible working hours?
- ☐ Do you have a return-to work policy for female employees returning from maternity leave, with e.g. shorter working days and time allocated for breastfeeding/extracting milk?
- ☐ Do you allow pregnant employees to attend prenatal care appointments during working hours?
- ☐ Does your company offer support to working families, including, but not limited to, onsite childcare and breastfeeding rooms?

Does your company adequately address sexual harassment?

- ☐ Do you have a sexual harassment policy and a clear zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment and violence at work, including verbal and physical abuse?
- ☐ Does your company have a well-functioning grievance mechanism in place?
- ☐ Has your company, with the involvement of employees, identified and addressed security issues, including potential safety issues connected to travel to and from work?

Occupational health & safety committee

- ☐ Does your company have a health & safety (H&S) committee that meets regularly and have representatives from all staff levels?
- ☐ Does the H&S committee address issues related to employees' personal health and well-being beyond occupational health and safety?
- ☐ Does your H&S committee actively address risks of negative impact on employees' sexual and reproductive health connected to the workplace?
- ☐ Does your H&S committee create room for employees to discuss and exchange experience from each other and peers?
- ☐ Does your health and safety committee work strategically with gender specific risks and challenges?
- ☐ Does your company have an operational grievance mechanism connected to the health and safety committee?
- ☐ Are all employees aware of the importance of reporting work-related ill-health problems made worse by work?

Does your company adequately address HIV/AIDS

- ☐ Does your company have a zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination of employees living with HIV/AIDS, including when recruiting new employees?
- ☐ Does your company ensure confidentiality for employees living with HIV/AIDS, including non-disclosure of employees' HIV/AIDS status to third parties without consent?
- ☐ Does your company provide employees with information about prevention, protection and testing related to HIV/AIDS?

Gender equality in your company

- ☐ Has your company screened workplace policies and practices to ensure that they are free from gender-based discrimination?
- ☐ Does your company use gender-sensitive recruitment and retention practices - and proactively recruit and appoint female employees to ensure a gender balance, including to management positions?
- ☐ Does your company allow flexible working hours for employees?
- ☐ Does your company have both male and female representation in the HR department?

Suggested **initiatives and activities**



CREATING AWARENESS THROUGH HEALTH TALKS

If your company operates in a poverty prone area, lack of health-related information and knowledge is a common challenge. Consequently, providing knowledge and information is an important contribution to lifting the health of your employees. This can be achieved through regular health talks at the workplace, where a trained health professional talks about various health topics such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, nutrition, hygiene, family planning and malaria. This can improve the health-seeking behavior of employees,

giving them the tools to take better care of themselves and their health. Furthermore, knowledge about health, hygiene and nutrition will spread to the employees' families, which can lift the health of entire communities. It is critical to think carefully of the ways in which health information is provided, both to ensure that the workplace is a safe environment with confidentiality towards information about employees, but also in terms of ensuring that communication is conducted in an appropriate manner. ■



CREATING AWARENESS THROUGH PEER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Through peer education, employee health is lifted through information-sharing and change of behavior, belief and attitudes. Peer education programmes involve training of a group of employees in health topics and communication skills and then allocating parts of their working hours to interact with colleagues – or peers – to share their knowledge about health. Employees often spend most of their productive time together and this can be a casual social work setting that creates a context of easy access, enabling employees to discuss matters related to health.

Peer education contains the potential for cutting through communication, cultural and hierarchical barriers that can exist in a workplace related to gender, race, age and rank in the company. At the same time, it is a low-cost strategy that mostly relies on commitment and support from management and the willingness to allocate time to the peer educators to carry out their activities. It is an information/knowledge-oriented health initiative that works well as a component of a broader health and gender equality strategy, which also entails more concrete health benefits. ■



PROVIDING ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES, INITIATIVES AND FACILITIES

Ensuring that employees have access to health services and facilities can be an appropriate strategy if your company is placed in a rural or remote area, where access to health facilities is limited due to lack of medical personnel or restricted due to poor infrastructure.

Access to health services can be secured in various ways; some larger companies benefit from having an onsite clinic that employees can visit during working hours. By doing this, absenteeism is kept low as the employees do not have to stay away from work to attend health services and at the same time their health issues are being dealt with. If your company is smaller, it can be practical to have a health professional visit your company regularly to attend to employees' issues. It is recommended that any access to health services includes access to family planning counseling and contraception, information and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and pregnancy. Providing this service can reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies among employees and increase your employees' knowledge about how to protect themselves against for example HIV. ■



PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH INSURANCE

One of the most effective ways of securing your employees' access to health services is by providing a company paid health insurance. Having a health insurance that provides access to quality health services for employees and their immediate dependents can create security and safety for your employees, making them able to get medical issues taken care of that they might not have been able to afford on their own. Health insurance benefits should preferably be followed up by a flexibility towards employees who have to attend to health services during working hours. ■



ENSURING A WELL-FUNCTIONING HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE

A health & safety committee in a company is a legal requirement in many countries. A well-functioning health & safety committee consists of members that are trained, meets regularly, conducts periodical inspections of the workplace and has access to all parts of the workplace and all employees. Furthermore, the composition of the members of the committee should reflect the workplace, meaning that management and both female and male employees are represented. Finally, the health & safety committee can be a good place to anchor health-related issues more firmly in the strategic focus of your company. ■





COMMUNITY HEALTH AND GENDER INITIATIVES

As your company and employees are part of a community, the health issues that exist in the communities will also affect your employees and in turn their ability to contribute fully to your company as healthy and thriving individuals. Consequently, it is advised that the local communities are considered in company health and gender equality initiatives whenever possible, and that the company considers how it can reach out to community members with relevant health initiatives. ■



ESTABLISHING FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS

Allowing flexible working hours can be a way for a workplace to accommodate to the needs of especially female employees who struggle with balancing work and domestic chores that are associated with having a family. Flexible working hours can also make it easier for employees to prioritize their health, as it enables them to visit health professionals during the day when they or their dependents have health issues. This is a low-cost company practice, which reduces stress levels and improves the health and general well-being of employees. ■



CREATING AN ENCOURAGING ENVIRONMENT TO MANAGE HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Ensuring that employees have good and trustworthy relations with their managers or supervisors as well as HR is an important facilitating factor for employees to openly address their health concerns in the workplace. Creating an organisational culture with e.g. open door policies and a high level of confidentiality and non-discrimination is an important step to ensuring good health management. ■

Integrate sexual and reproductive health in your company and do your part in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals are 17 globally agreed on goals for a sustainable future, and the aim is that the 17 goals and their 169 targets are achieved by 2030. This cannot be done without innovative partnerships between the private sector, civil society, investment funds, donors and governments. Addressing the sexual and reproductive health of your employees is a way for you to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and making sure your business conduct is in line with requirements from investors, consumers, etc.



1 NO POVERTY
Access to reproductive health, contraception and information is crucial to ensure that women can participate in the workforce and contribute to the economy. If a woman has many children, getting an education and having a job can be a challenge leaving her family vulnerable to poverty.



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY
Women are more likely to be primary energy managers of their households and spend hours every day collecting fuel and cooking, often leading to poor health conditions due to indoor pollution.



13 CLIMATE ACTION
Climate change affects ecosystems and the agricultural sector, which creates negative effects that disproportionately burden poor women, who bear the main responsibility of food production and water collection.



2 ZERO HUNGER
Many families have more children than they want - or have the resources for - which can make feeding the family a daily struggle, and make it difficult for the women to hold paying jobs while maintaining the household. Furthermore, undernourishment during pregnancy can have severe consequences for the future.



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
50% of the world's working age women are in the labor force (compared to 75% of men), and women often face barriers due to unplanned pregnancies and burdens related to the household. Furthermore, low salaries and poor working conditions constitute a global problem also affecting women.



14 LIFE BELOW WATER
Fewer fish in the world oceans is a threat to employment of women, who often work as seasonal and low-paid labour, e.g. in the fishing industry.



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
225 million women have unmet needs of family planning, and 800 women die every day due to pregnancy related causes. Unplanned pregnancies or pregnancy related health issues, can mean discontinuation of education or work, which can lead to poverty, hunger and be a barrier to sustainable growth.



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
Lack of access to affordable health facilities and health professionals affects poor, rural and vulnerable groups disproportionately, who struggle to reach facilities due to poor infrastructure and access to transportation.



15 LIFE ON LAND
Women are especially vulnerable when climate change degrades land. Women do not own much, if any land, which leaves them with few opportunities, if their land dries out or is flooded.



4 QUALITY EDUCATION
Child marriages, teenage pregnancy and gender-based discrimination and violence harms, especially girls and women in terms of access to and completion of an education. Women account for over 60% of the world's illiterate, and in developing regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa only 23% of poor rural girls finish primary school.



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
Inequality often leads to poverty and large fluxes of migration. This often hinders access to health services and facilities for vulnerable groups, including for rural women and girls, leading to higher maternal mortality and keeping women and girls out of education and the workforce.



16 PEACE AND JUSTICE, STRONG INSTITUTIONS
Girls and women suffer during conflict; sexual assault is used as a weapon of war, the number of child marriages rise, maternal mortality increases and lack of contraception increases the risk of unplanned pregnancies.



5 GENDER EQUALITY
Women are more likely to be impoverished, unemployed, deprived of education and victims of sexual and physical violence than men. Women still earn 24% less than men globally, and only 22% of all national parliamentarians are female.



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES
Urbanization means many people live close together in slum areas, with poor sanitation, lack of clean water and lack of access to clinics with reproductive health services.



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
Partnerships that thematically crosscut the SDGs and involve private and public sector actors and civil society are crucial in ensuring the transformation of the goals into action.



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
Sanitation issues especially affect women's health issues. Access to good sanitary facilities is crucial in terms of keeping girls and women in school and work during their menstruations. Furthermore, women bear a disproportionate burden of fetching clean water.



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
Irresponsible consumer habits contribute to climate change, which affects the poorest countries most. Family planning counseling can improve communities' ability to adapt to new eco-systems.

ABOUT US

IFU // IFU creates development on a commercial basis.

Through investments in private companies in developing countries and emerging markets in Africa, Asia, Latin America and parts of Europe, we help to establish companies that provide a bottom line profit and have derived positive development effects for employees, partners and society.

DFPA // The Danish Family Planning Association is a private, non-governmental organisation (NGO) without religious or political affiliations, and the Danish member association of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the world's largest sexual and reproductive health and rights organisation. DFPA has been working in developing countries for more than 20 years addressing young people, women and men's sexual and reproductive health and rights. In recent years, DFPA has increasingly engaged with the private sector in developing countries, partnering with companies, and workplaces in general, as a platform for strengthening the sexual and reproductive health and rights of employees in a way that benefits both people and companies.

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