



BSR Conference 2010
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The Gender Lens

Breakout Session Summary
Wednesday, November 3, 2010 | 10:15 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Speakers

- » **Lorie Jackson**, Director, Women's Economic Opportunity Initiative, ExxonMobil Corporation
- » **Daniel Jae-Won Lee**, Executive Director, Levi Strauss Foundation
- » **Sirima Sataman**, Vice President, Global Corporate Social Responsibility, SAP AG
- » **Racheal Yeager**, Manager, HERproject, BSR (moderator)

Highlights

- » When women have control over financial resources, they invest more in health, education, and the well-being of their families.
- » Investing in women and girls is an important component of many companies' corporate citizenship strategies.
- » There are indirect and direct benefits for companies and communities from investments in women and girls.

Memorable Quotes

"Gender equity fuels thriving economies." —Sirima Sataman, SAP AG

"The women we work with ... reaffirm our commitment to fostering the development of women as innovators, problem-solvers, and leaders of economic and social change in their communities. They are a valuable resource for the world." —Lorie Jackson, ExxonMobil Corporation

"There is a shared sense of the importance of looking at gender empowerment." —Daniel Jae-Won Lee, Levi Strauss Foundation

"Women are and will be critical assets in building more sustainable and profitable communities and reaching the Millennium Development Goals." —Racheal Yeager, BSR

Overview

Yeager kicked off the session by acknowledging the importance of investing in women—as potential workers, as consumers, and as builders of more sustainable and profitable communities—in the developing world. Companies are making innovative and profitable investments to improve the status of women.

The session opened with each panelist sharing the objectives and activities of their programs. Sataman explained that SAP's social investment goal is to build better communities by focusing on welfare, education, and helping people reach their full potential. SAP takes a global approach to investing in women. The company offers a menu of options to regional presidents, who are then responsible for customizing the programs. Many of the initiatives are focused on opportunities for women and children.

Jackson then highlighted three reasons for why ExxonMobil started its Women's Economic Opportunity Initiative. First, investing in women is a uniquely powerful way to strengthen communities and economies. Second, the program aligns with community needs and national



priorities in several emerging markets where the company operates. Third, the program complements ExxonMobil's other two corporate citizenship initiatives related to malaria and math and science education. The three core strategies for this program include: developing women entrepreneurs and business leaders, supporting advocacy programs and research to enable women's economic participation, and helping women access technologies that allow them to expand their income-generating activities.

Lee next presented tips for making the case for gender empowerment. He suggested that companies identify compelling opportunities for women's empowerment by diving deep into supply chains and value chains, get down to the community level (companies have a responsibility and social contract to give back to communities), and tell the stories behind the companies' efforts to empower workers. He then discussed the four focus areas of the Levi Strauss Foundation's workers' rights program: training workers and supervisors on labor rights and responsibilities at factory and community levels, identifying asset-building opportunities such as financial education, strengthening the oversight of labor laws and working to build legal aid channels, and advancing workers' health.

The panelists then shared the indirect and direct business benefits that come from investing in women. The indirect benefits include the long-term prosperity of the country, better health care, a general improvement in families' well-being, and poverty reduction. Some of the direct benefits include retaining and expanding access to diverse talent and strengthening the supply chain.

Sataman presented the broad benefits of social investment, which include: improved company reputations, risk management, employee engagement, and potentially greater revenue. She proclaimed that gender equity fuels thriving economies; it helps women and their families, expands local economies, spurs growth, and widens the local talent pool.

Lee next highlighted why suppliers should invest in women workers' health. The business case includes productivity gains from reduced absenteeism and turnover, quality improvements, better worker-manager relations, enhanced recruitment and reputation, fewer sunk costs by proactively using nurses and health workers, and improved worker access to public health resources. He also introduced [HERproject](#)—BSR's factory-based women's health initiative—and shared examples of some of the preliminary ROI results from a HERproject impact study in Pakistan. Factories have experienced benefits such as an 80-percent reduction in absenteeism among a group of workers who received peer education.

During the Q&A session, a participant asked how the panelists set up their programs, calculate the required investment dollars, and monitor the programs. The panelists gave the following suggestions: benchmark to identify the dollar value to be invested, analyze research and speak to international partners to identify the focus area(s) for your program, and rely on local staff to inform and customize the design of the program, which should include partnering with local organizations.

During the second hour of the session, participants divided into three focus groups to discuss health, education, and economic empowerment. Yeager then closed the session encouraging participants to explore how to integrate investments in women into their sustainability strategies. She notified participants of BSR's upcoming research series that will look at women in emerging economies as employees, consumers, supply chain workforces, and community members.

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This summary was written by BSR staff and can be downloaded at www.bsr.org/session-summaries.