



INSIGHTS SUMMARY

TRANSFORMING HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Hosted with the Global Financing Facility

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We would like to thank the following speakers:

Lilia Zakirova, Healthcare Public Policy Director, Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa, **MSD**;
Sneha Kanneganti, Private Sector Lead, **Global Financing Facility**; **Sue Tym**, Social Impact Portfolio Senior Manager, **Primark**; **Ronald Wakhu**, Senior Associate, **Health Finance Coalition**;
Maziko Matemba, Director, **HREP-Malawi**, and Global GSOs Representative, **GFF Investors Group**
Moderator: Annabel Beales, Collaboration Lead, **Business Fights Poverty**

This Business Fights Poverty webinar, co-hosted with the Global Financing Facility, explored the critical role of businesses in advancing health outcomes for women, children and adolescents. Millions of women, children and adolescents do not have access to the healthcare that they deserve, particularly in low- and middle-income countries: every two minutes, a woman dies from complications in pregnancy and childbirth. Government health budgets face a \$33 billion funding gap to address this. The private sector is a crucial partner in increasing access to services and securing greater financial investment.

INSIGHT 1: RECOGNISE THE MORAL AND BUSINESS CASE FOR INVESTMENT

Panellists made a strong argument for investing in the health of women, children and adolescents. Morally, these investments address critical health equity gaps and the unique challenges faced by women, children and adolescents – for example, reducing maternal and child mortality, increasing access to sexual and reproductive health care, and addressing cancers that are specific to women. The health of women in particular has a profound ripple effect on families, communities and the overall well-being of societies.

There are also good business reasons for investing in the health of women, children and adolescents, on whom businesses rely

for their current and future workforces. Their health is also key to a flourishing economy; in countries such as Kenya, young people make up over half of the population, so investing in their health is an investment in the country as a whole.

Young people and women are also innovators in their own right. However, they and other entrepreneurs providing health solutions to this demographic often face challenges in building profitable business models, securing investment, and demonstrating impact. Organisations like Health Finance Coalition help innovators to craft compelling impact stories and use blended financing to reduce commercial risk for private investors. Increasing the diversity of people in investment teams and reviewing screening and investment criteria can help remove systemic bias.

INSIGHT 2: EMBED HEALTH INITIATIVES INTO CORE BUSINESS PRACTICES

Companies' philanthropic initiatives can have a considerable impact on the health of women, children and young people. Since its launch in 2011, MSD for Mothers has leveraged NGO partnerships and technology, directly reaching 20 million women and indirectly benefiting over 160 million across more than 200 programmes. Notable initiatives include a transportation hotline in Nairobi for pregnant women and chatbots in India providing reproductive health information.

In addition, the discussions highlighted a shift away from standalone charitable activities towards embedding health initiatives for women, children and young people within core business operations. MSD, for example, has begun applying lessons from its MSD for Mothers programmes to encourage broader uptake of its HPV vaccination to prevent cervical cancer.

Companies outside the health sector are finding ways to support women's health in their supply chains by listening to, and acting on, workers' concerns through initiatives that improve workers' well-being and foster supportive workplace cultures.

Primark's MyLife and MySpace projects in India offer menstrual health education and peer-to-peer mental health counselling, respectively. When workers began to raise sexual harassment as a mental health issue, Primark responded by introducing a programme to establish support systems for women and men who are affected. They are also using tools such as Women Win's Drawing the Line Tool to help factory workers speak up.

INSIGHT 3: FOSTER MULTI-SECTORAL COLLABORATION TO STRENGTHEN HEALTH SYSTEMS

Panellists agreed that collaborative efforts across sectors are essential for building strong and resilient health systems. The private sector can bolster governmental efforts by offering expertise, capacity-building, evidence-based strategies and data to assist with policy decision-making. Public-private

partnerships play a crucial role in healthcare delivery, and setting appropriate incentives and monitoring can help ensure investments benefit women, children and adolescents, especially in underserved areas. Meanwhile, civil society partners such as HREP Malawi, and international partners such as UNICEF, can help engage communities and scale successful programmes, particularly in rural and marginalised communities.

The African Union and CDC have also highlighted the private sector's role in working with governments to shape supportive regulatory environments, foster health sector investment opportunities, and use its convening power to foster more dialogue and alignment between the sectors. Malawi's Ministry of Health has established the first technical working group, which meets on a quarterly basis and enables the private sector to input into the Ministry's financial planning for health.

The Global Financing Facility exemplifies this multi-stakeholder approach, uniting governments, civil society, the private sector and communities to focus on women's, children's and adolescents' health. Its model catalyses financial investment, scales evidence-based interventions and enables partner country governments (such as Malawi) to take the lead in tackling their countries' specific health priorities. In engaging with the private sector, the GFF is focusing on scalability, sustainability and building health system resilience.

CONCLUSION

The session provided insights into the wide variety of ways in which businesses can help improve health outcomes for women, children and adolescents and strengthen health systems in lower-income countries. More information can be found in Business Fights Poverty's report, "Delivering Healthier Futures for Women, Children and Adolescents: What is the role of business?"

RESOURCES

- [Business Fights Poverty \(2024\) Delivering Healthier Futures for Women Children and Young People: What is the role of business?](#)
- [Global Financing Facility \(GFF\)](#)
- [Global Financing Facility \(2023\) Investment Opportunity for the GFF](#)
- [Health & Rights Education Programme \(HREP\) Malawi](#)
- [Health Finance Coalition](#)
- [MSD for Mothers](#)
- [UNICEF: Maternal and newborn health](#)
- [Women Win \(2024\) Understanding Drivers and Prohibitors of Women Garment Workers' Mental Health & Wellbeing](#)
- [Women Win Draw the Line Tool](#)