



Girls first



International Day of the Girl Conference 2014  
**Investing in girls: a good business!**



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## Dreaming of a job

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By signing the so-called ARENA Declaration, the directors of Accenture, ASN Bank, AmsterdamArena, Team Relocations, Basic Water Needs, TUI Nederland, AkzoNobel and JH Textiles have agreed to work with Plan Nederland for the next three years in order to increase the access to 'decent work' for young women aged 16-24 in developing countries. A ninth company Jobbird (online recruitment) spontaneously agreed to also sign the declaration during the conference.

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## The ARENA Declaration on more and decent work

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**“Today, we commit ourselves to working together to increase young women’s (16-24 years) access to decent work opportunities in developing countries in the next 3 years”.**

**We agree that,**

1. We need to invest in girls and young women so that they have the knowledge, skills and self-confidence in order to fully participate in employment and decent work.
2. We need to increase young women’s access to decent jobs.
3. We must address and prevent the discrimination, violence and hazardous conditions.
4. We will monitor the individual commitments that accompany this Declaration.
5. Within 6 months, we will jointly assess progress and agree on the next steps. Plan Nederland and the organizing partners will continue to facilitate this process.



Parliament members Ingrid de Caluwé and Roelof van Laar also expressed their support for the collaboration between businesses and NGOs in developing countries. It is also a priority in the policy of the Dutch Minister Ploumen of Foreign Trade and Development.

Jeroen Roodenburg, former ambassador to Iraq and current Director Sustainable Economic Development and Ambassador Private Sector & Development Cooperation:

“I have been working at the ministry of Foreign Affairs for 22 years and have always focussed on partnerships between businesses and NGOs. The corporate sector is always one step ahead and this is crucial. I am impressed with how the private sector and NGOs develop centres of knowledge. NGOs help businesses find employees encourage fair business cultures and are important in ensuring that the government here and in the country concerned stay on track.”



# Youth unemployment among young women

At the moment there are 600 million young people out of work and with no training. Youngsters are two or three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. From this number, young women are two times more likely to be unemployed than young men.



### Monique van 't Hek, director of Plan Nederland:

“Women and young girls make up two-thirds of the 2.5 billion people in the world that live below the poverty line of \$2 a day. In general, women do not have equal rights to work and are paid less than men for equal work and hours.

Half of the women in the world do not take part in the labour market. This is not only a missed opportunity in terms of the skills and potential of these women, but it is also damaging for the world as a whole. Estimates from the World Bank show that global Gross National Product would rise by 5.4% if the sexual inequality between men and women was eliminated. This would mean increased fairness, richer consumers and less worldwide poverty”.

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## Ten rules for a sustainable economy

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Across the world, many people benefit from globalisation but not everyone profits equally,” according to Ursula Wynhoven, Chief of Governance and Social Sustainability for the UN Global Compact, the UN initiative that stimulates sustainability in the profit-sector. “UN Global Compact was set up with the vision to work on a more

sustainable and inclusive economy. We have ten rules in relation to human rights, work, the environment and tackling corruption and we ask companies to sign these pledges. UN Global Compact helps businesses strengthen the position of women in organisations”.





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## **“It was love at first sight for Accenture and Plan”**

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Babiche Veenendaal wants Accenture together with Plan to give 700,000 young people training and help in finding work or starting their own enterprise the next few years. It is important to link young people and employers to each other, to ensure that young people have the right knowledge and skills so that they are interesting for future employers. In addition, Accenture used its influence to entice employers to offer young people a decent job and salary. The partnership with Plan is crucial, explains Veenendaal.

“It was love at first sight for Accenture and Plan. We have the same approach: professional, pragmatic and hands-on. When the Philippines were severely affected by hurricane Haiyan, Accenture immediately rushed to help. But we need an organisation like Plan. Plan knows the countries and works in areas where we do not have a access.”

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## The snail on the Wall of China

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“May I ask you something?” asked Jennifer Midura, Director of Strategy and Acquisitions for AkzoNobel, an leading international paint and coatings business and producer of specialist chemicals. “How much time would a snail need to cross the Great Wall of China? The answer is: 212 years. If we continue at the same pace, it will take just as long, i.e. 200 years, before there are as many women as men in the British parliament and it is undoubtedly the same in the Netherlands. So even here there are enormous steps to be taken and we are currently proceeding at snail’s pace.

Women are scared of positive discrimination but the truth is that the playing field is not the same for us.” AkzoNobel, along with Plan and Arena do, selected and then trained Brazilian youngsters to be stewards in the stadiums where the World Cup football was held.

Seventy percent of the trainees were girls. “We are a painting company. We need Plan to develop our training programme. Thanks to Plan, we have now shifted our focus to girls. If you don’t, it will take generations before there are as many women as men in the workplace.





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## A difference after just two months

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So let's get to work. The Saksham project in India is a wonderful example. Saksham offers demand-driven vocational training and helps youngsters aged between 18 and 24 and living in abject poverty. The project will train 4,000 youngsters for a decent job in three years. Sixty percent of the enrollment are girls; the success rate (not only completing training but also finding a job) is 85 percent. Project Coordinator Anamika Sharma flew to Amsterdam specifically to attend The International Day of the Girl. "Finding girls to train for a job is not hard. We have been working in the slums of Delhi for a long time; we know the people. It is more difficult, however,

to convince families to let go of their daughters. The parents, brothers, even the girls younger brothers, have authority over her life. We show them the importance of school and work. Girls can quickly earn more than their fathers. The living standards of the whole family increase if the girls work - after just two months. We also ensure that employers provide a female-friendly work environment. They do not, for example, allow their female staff to go home alone after dark and make sure girls from the same neighbourhood travel to and from work together."

Watch the film about the Saksham project in India



## She was scared of getting bad reputation

“My family always told me that I should be independent. My mother was a senior nurse at the hospital; my mum and dad have just retired. They always assumed that my two sisters and I would get a job. But it’s not the same for the families in the poor neighbourhoods of Delhi where I work.

One of the girls followed a training with us but her mother would not allow her to go to a job interview. I went to see her mother and asked her why. She denied keeping her daughter at home. In the end, she admitted that a family-member had called her: she had seen her daughter out with a young boy. She was scared that her daughter would get a bad reputation. The girl had completed her training with a group of people. I asked the mother to give her daughter a chance and if it went wrong, she could call me. She agreed and let her daughter go and never rang me. Her daughter now works in Costa, an espresso bar. It is exciting, I don’t always win their trust and you never know for sure that the girl will tackle her obstacles.

But when it does work out, I am very pleased! It’s great that you can see a



result after just two months: if a girl works, the entire family can profit from it.

We only admit girls to the training if they are motivated to work. We invest a great deal in them and want to see a return, i.e. that they go out to work. Once we have established their motivation, we hold a meeting with the family. At the start, we ask who makes the decisions in the family because that’s the person we need to convince. Generally, I start with the mothers because they usually want their daughters to have a different life. They have stayed at home themselves and when they reach the age of 35 or 36, and their children are grown up and they are short of money, they begin to wish they had a job outside the home but, by then it is too late. This is what I capitalise on.”



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## Panel discussion

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How does it work, getting more young women in the workplace and, more importantly, what does it take? Adrienne Cruz, gender specialist for the International Labour Organisation (ILO): “Research by McKinsey is crystal clear with regard to what needs to happen. An organisation must say: ‘Equal opportunities is part of who we are’. More power must therefore be allocated to the HR-departments. The businesses that do this transform their companies into more family-friendly workplaces. Because, after all, men would like to take

home leave too.”

It works. So says Carel Breen, director of Arena do Brasil. “It used to be pretty much exclusively men who worked in our football stadiums. The atmosphere was oppressive and aggressive. We wanted to create a more service-oriented atmosphere. Now, 45 percent of our stewards are women: they are better at communicating and resolving conflicts. It works. Our approach towards training and taking on more female stewards is something that can be copied in other stadiums in Brazil.”

Martijn Smid is the director of Basic Water Needs, that develops, produces and distributes water purifiers and creates access to safe drinking water for everyone. “In our factory in India, we found that women are more trustworthy. When we pay the salaries on Friday, we noticed that there were always a few men who didn’t show up the following Monday. But all the women were present. We have therefore started training female entrepreneurs to sell our filters. We also invest in education for young women with Plan. We simply earn more money as a result.”

“But be careful: if over 65 percent of people in the role are female, the status of her role will decrease”, warns Esther-Mirjam Sent. She is a lecturer

in Economic Theory and Policy at the Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen. “Investing in education for girls not only has a positive impact on the lives of the girls themselves, it also encourages economic growth.

Over the period 2005-2015, gender equality, particularly in relation to education, delivered economic growth of 0.4%. And child mortality has been reduced by 32 per 1,000. Research by the World Bank has also shown that developing countries could realise collective growth of 92 billion dollars per year if girls are given the same educational opportunities as boys. As a result of this, the investments pay for themselves many times over”.





Giovanca, ambassador for Plan Nederland, and the ZO! Gospel choir closed the day with a stunning performance of the song “Come Around” which was especially composed for The International Day of the Girl.

**Give girls and young women in developing countries a better chance in the future!**