



[www.upliftbras.org](http://www.upliftbras.org)

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## **If your mental picture of a women in the developing world is without a bra, this is usually not by choice.**

Uplift Project collects used and new bras, and ships them on request to communities where bras are unaffordable, or unavailable. Getting bras donated is easy, getting them to women in need is not easy.

**Why bras?** A litre or so of pain sensitive fat swinging loose of either side of your chest is not convenient. The bra is the first world solution for that problem.

Bras are complex garments, expensive to make compared with a t-shirt, very specific in fit. In many Pacific countries new good quality bra costs a week of a teacher's wage. A second hand one costs 2 to 3 hour's wages, if she can find it. Cheap new bras perish quickly in tropical conditions. They may last 2 months as it can take 2 days to get a bra dry and the stitching rots out.

A 2012 report from Solomon Islands said in a tight family budget, food and education costs come first. It would be absolutely selfish for a woman to spend on a bra. A bra is seen as an incredible luxury item.

A bra provides dignity. Women going to formal meetings, job interviews, celebrations or medical appointments will borrow a bra if they don't own one. Of course the borrowed bra doesn't fit. Uplift has a report of 7 families in a squatter area in Fiji sharing one bra.

School girls in PNG, Solomons and Fiji report wearing 2 or 3 t-shirts under a school uniform to disguise breasts.

Dignity and privacy are vital in countries with high levels of sexual violence.

A bra gives the ability to exercise. Uplift has worked with several National sports teams from the developing world. Most team members were A and B cup women. Beach volleyball is unpleasant without a bra, exercise for cardiovascular health is not likely.

A bra provides support and catches leaks when breast feeding. Uplift had one women come into a fitting session with a cloth nappy tied around her chest under her shirt to catch leaks.

Bras help prevent intertrigo, rash and fungal infection in the fold between body and breast. Air flow in the fold prevents the rash developing.

In the developing world, there is no reconstruction after mastectomy. Bras and breast forms provide privacy.

Equally, there are no breast reductions. Bras go up to an L cup, producing a lifetime of embarrassment and pain. Even women in the USA and UK appear on GoFundMe trying to raise the cost of this surgery.

**In which countries have we provided bras? (21 total)**

Fiji, Solomon Islands, PNG, Tonga, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Kiribati

Philippines, Cambodia, Bali, Laos, Timor Leste.

Sri Lanka, Pakistan. Kashmir.

Botswana, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana

Australia, New Zealand

**Is it cultural imperialism?** A senior PNG woman bluntly said, "If you are worried about that you are 100 years too late." Uplift supplies only to request, we do not force bras on anyone.

**How big organization?**

We have about 300 Australians involved. Generally we have branches in all states and Territories of Australia. We have about 200 drop off points across the country.

We have collection branches in NZ and Singapore, and distribution branches in Botswana, Fiji and Solomon islands.

**Do Australian women need bras?**

Australian women in remote communities have difficulty accessing bras. They are not in the community store. Larger cup sizes are often particularly expensive, and pensioners here can struggle to afford them. Homeless women, those in refuges and refugees all struggle to get bras.

**Are there secondary gains in this project?**

Often during distribution there are talks about women's health and domestic violence.

A bra distribution is a huge social event, a reason for communities of women to meet together, and share a common experience. Neighbours who have met and are no longer strangers, and help each other more readily.

YWCA PNG said bring babies in for immunization, get a bra. There was a higher immunization rate.

A recent report from Solomon Islands said women feel awe at being given such a priceless gift, as they had not thought that women outside of the Solomon Islands cared about them. The same story came from the NT. A remote community with 300 women asked for bras. We asked women to post bras to them, and the community received 5,000 bras in 3 months. (The guy who flew the mail plane

complained about the weight.) These women did not think that women in the cities cared about them, but the parcels came from every city in Australia.

The bra is a very personal proof that women are respected and valued by those able to donate. We hope that indicating to women that they are valued will help empower them.

Distribution is generally organized by women's groups. In societies with large gender power imbalance, women involved in distribution often develop new skills and find they are capable of more than they thought.

**Where do we get bras from?** Most Aussie women have one bra in the drawer that isn't comfortable. It is too expensive to throw away, and the op shop don't want it. These bras flood in. Businesses often have excess stock to donate.

**What are the challenges of this project?** Transport is our greatest challenge. Getting donations moved around Australia, and then to the countries that need them. It is 15c a bra if we send whole shipping containers, \$1.30/bra if we post. Becoming tax deductible gift recipients in 2015 made a huge difference. Great help comes from our long time shippers ANL, and truckers Gilbert's Transport in SA, and recently from Logwin Air and Ocean. 2019.

For our receiving organizations, keeping bras secure and dry, and distributing them is the challenge. If we ship full 20' containers, 28 cubic metres of storage must be found. It can take 6-9 months for a small organization to distribute that volume of stock. As a bra can sell for 2 hour's wages in a local market, a banana box of 80 bras is worth a month's income, and is worth stealing. Politicians can buy a vote with a bra.

Some parts of pacific nations will be a week or more boat travel from their capital. Our distributors make huge personal commitments to do this work. In extreme cases, bras have been backpacked over mountains, and rowed tens of km along coastlines. On larger land masses vehicles are hired and volunteers give weekends and annual leave to distribution.

We are strictly non-denominational, as some churches will distribute only to their own members, and we do not wish to assist organizations teaching submission or gender power imbalance.

**Our ultimate dream?** To have the bras we supply create jobs and work skills. Ideally there would be an Uplift Shop or market stall in capital cities that employed women rescued from the sex trade/ domestic violence, and gave them work training and income during rehabilitation. Free The Girls.org do this already. Travelling bra vendors could serve other regions. We know women would prefer the dignity of paying what they can afford for a bra, and having choice, not receiving a handout. It takes strong local organization partnerships to do this however. Much of that dream is well outside our current expertise.

Our other dream is to be able to provide breast reductions for women who have no hope of ever being relieved of macromastia.