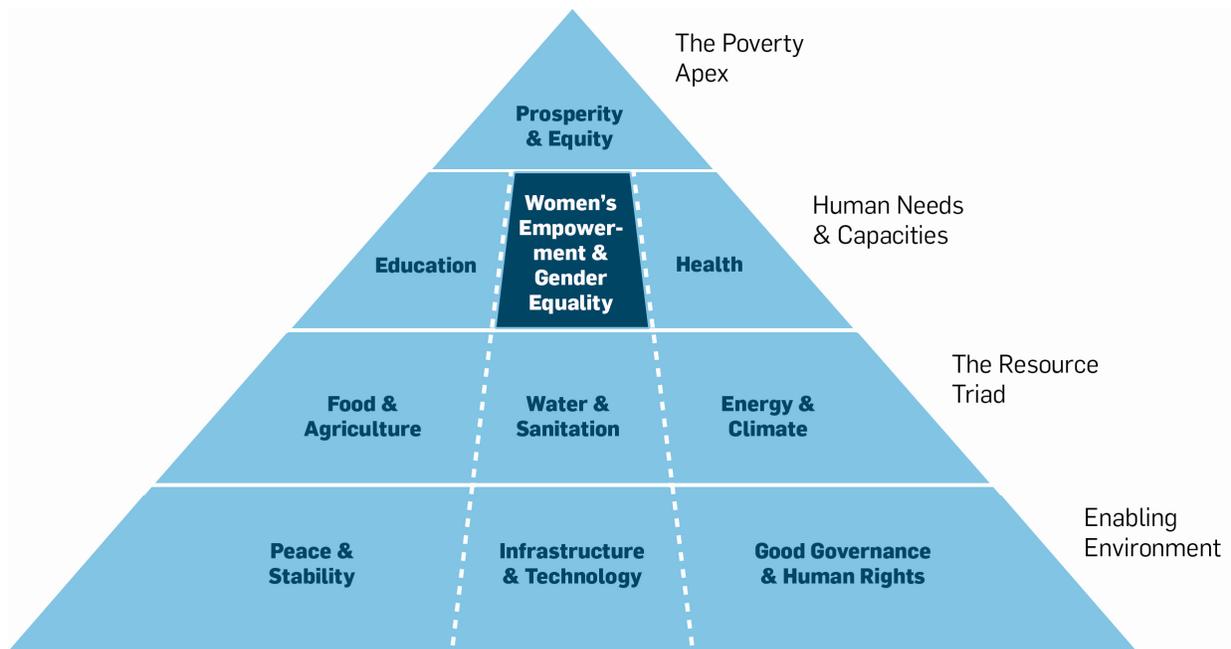


Post-2015 Agenda and Related Sustainable Development Goals Issue Focus: Women’s Empowerment and the Role of Business

Overview

As governments and policymakers work to develop the Post-2015 agenda, the international community is actively discussing the possible scope of potential sustainable development goals (SDGs). The United Nations Global Compact has been asked to bring private sector perspectives and action to the Post-2015 global development agenda, creating an historic opportunity to scale up and align business efforts in order to effectively contribute to United Nations priorities. The overlap between public and private interest in sustainable development is becoming increasingly clear, and the development of the Post-2015 agenda will require an unprecedented level of interplay between business, governments, civil societies and other key stakeholders. This public-private convergence and opportunity space is reflected in the Post-2015 Business Engagement Architecture, released at the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit in September 2013. The Architecture provides a resource and roadmap for how to work with the private sector in the new era.

Related to the Architecture, consultations conducted by the UN Global Compact with thousands of companies and stakeholders revealed that businesses committed to sustainability and ethics are energized by the prospect of a newly articulated set of world priorities—including clear goals and targets. From the input received, the UN Global Compact’s LEAD companies developed a series of recommended goals and priority areas (shown below) that they believe would also empower the private sector to make a substantial contribution in the Post-2015 era.



Source: Global Compact LEAD consultations

LEAD companies as well as endorsers and stakeholders of the UN Global Compact’s Women’s Empowerment Principles – a joint initiative of UN Women and the UN Global Compact - strongly support the inclusion of women’s and girls’ rights and empowerment in the Post-2015 agenda. Further, they have proposed a stand-alone goal on women’s and girls’ empowerment and have stressed the

importance of ensuring that all sustainable development goals be inclusive and gender-sensitive in order to achieve maximum impact and avoid increasing inequalities. The stand-alone goal and related targets are articulated as follows:

“Goal 3: Achieve women and girls’ empowerment, targets include:

- Increase the proportion of leadership positions held by women in public and private sectors to 40 per cent or better.
- Universally recognized and enforced equal pay for equal work.
- Full and equal access of women to ownership, property rights and land titles.
- Reduce rates of violent acts committed against women and girls by at least 50 per cent.”

The purpose of this issue paper is to inform governments and policy makers of the responsible business community’s willingness to contribute to the formation of any women’s empowerment goals as well as future implementation efforts involving the private sector.

Business Platforms for Action and Partnership

In addition to gender equality being a fundamental and inviolable human right, women’s and girls’ empowerment is essential to expand economic growth, promote social development and enhance business performance. The full incorporation of women’s capacities into labor forces would add percentage points to most national growth rates – double digits in some cases. Further, investing in women’s empowerment produces the double dividend of benefiting women and children, and is pivotal to the health and social development of families, communities and nations.

Empowering women and girls and achieving gender equality requires the concerted efforts of all stakeholders, including business. A number of business-oriented initiatives have emerged in recent years to address the role of the private sector in relation to promoting respect and support for the rights and empowerment of women and girls. The Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs), launched in 2010, call for a multi-stakeholder approach to gender equality and have generated the support of over 675 business leaders from around the world. Among other things, the Principles highlight the importance creating formal and decent work opportunities for women throughout the pipeline, including leadership and decision-making positions, ensuring equal pay for work of equal value, promoting knowledge, education and skill-building for women and girls, support for women-entrepreneurs and women-owned businesses, and combating violence against women – a major impediment to the empowerment and well-being of women and girls worldwide.

The WEPs, and the efforts of others such as the International Labour Organization, International Trade Centre, International Finance Corporation, UNICEF, Save the Children, the World Economic Forum and NGOs such as Business and Professional Women International that are working to mobilize the business community to help empower women, stress the need for laws and policies that promote equality. Of particular importance is the right to access and ownership of productive assets.

Beyond laws and policies, stakeholders emphasize the need to address stereotypes, attitudes and mindsets that reinforce traditional gender roles and remain a barrier to equality. A key example is the division of paid and unpaid labour between men and women. While the creation of formal and decent employment opportunities for women is critical, the division of unpaid labour, such as domestic and household duties and care responsibilities, between men and women must also be addressed and equalized.

Key Driver: Public Policy and Enabling Incentives

In order to unlock the full potential of the private sector it will be critical to establish proper and effective enabling frameworks and incentives in terms of public policy. Investing in women's empowerment has a multiplier effect and is key to building strong economies; establishing more stable and just societies; improving the quality of life for all communities and achieving international development goals. In order to most effectively address women's empowerment issues in the public policy realm, the UN Global Compact is recommending that governments commit to a number of actions, including:

- Through capacity-building and awareness-raising strive to increase the number of seats held by women in national parliament to 40% and identify strategies to promote women in leadership across all sectors.
- Reduce women's time burden and encourage the equal redistribution of household and care responsibilities including by promoting robust parental leave policies for both men and women and increasing access to day-care and preschool facilities and elder care.
- Establish and enforce laws that guarantee equal pay for work of equal value.
- Establish and enforce laws that ensure equal and full access to land/resource rights/titles, business rights/titles.
- Increase access to jobs for women including through knowledge, education and skills building for women and girls and by supporting women entrepreneurs/women-owned businesses, including through government procurement.
- Combat violence against women and girls including by establishing programmes aimed at changing perceptions and attitudes that condone and justify violence against women and girls and ensuring universal access to safe-houses.
- Mainstream gender equality into all sustainability policies and programmes including those related to energy, climate, water sustainability, and education.

Accountability

In recent years, increasing numbers of companies are reinforcing sustainability efforts with public commitments in relation to accountability, responsibility, and transparency. To build trust and be considered a credible partner in the Post-2015 era, companies should be – and increasingly are – transparent about their social and environmental impacts, and need to be accountable for how their business activities create or deplete value for society and what they are doing to improve their performance.

Principles 1 and 2 of the UN Global Compact and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, endorsed widely by business and the UN Human Rights Council in 2011, call upon companies to respect internationally proclaimed human rights, including the rights of women. This responsibility means that businesses should avoid infringing on the human rights of others and should address adverse human rights with which they are involved. In order to meet the responsibility, the Guiding Principles stipulate that companies need to have a policy commitment to respect human rights, a human rights due diligence process, and processes to enable the remediation of adverse human rights impacts, including establishing or cooperating with effective operational-level grievance mechanisms. Beyond the minimum of respecting human rights, UN Global Compact Principle 1 also calls upon companies to take voluntary actions to support human rights, whether through core business contributions, social investment and philanthropy, advocacy and public policy, or collective action and partnerships.

Participants of the UN Global Compact have made public commitments to the UN Global Compact's ten principles and are required to report annually on their sustainability efforts through a Communication on Progress (COP) report. Further, UN Global Compact participants are encouraged to apply a gender-lens to their corporate sustainability reporting and Principle 7 of the Women's Empowerment Principles emphasizes the importance of using sex-disaggregated data when measuring and reporting on progress.

Generally speaking, the UN Global Compact organizes its companies into three categories based on the level of COPs submitted. These levels – Learner, Active and Advanced – allow the UN Global Compact to encourage and challenge participants to use more sophisticated methodology and release more detailed COPs. Companies are increasingly rising to the challenge to report in a more advanced, detailed and transparent manner. This sort of accountability is crucial in instilling confidence in all stakeholders that companies are truly making meaningful progress towards global sustainability.

At the same time, companies are being encouraged to publicly commit to longer-range sustainability objectives and goals in order to better align their efforts and strategies in relation to the broad global sustainable development agenda.

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