

**Presentation to the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee
25 January 2017**

Implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality by 2030.

The role of business in achieving SDG5 in the UK and what can be done to support better engagement with UK businesses on this issue.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were approved by UN Member States in New York in September 2015, then in January 2016 the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development came into effect and the 193 UN member States pledged support but what does all this mean to everyday life for SMEs and corporations and how can business and civil society contribute to ensuring there is global cooperation to achieve these goals?

With their 230 indicators and 169 targets, some commentators translate the SDGs as “Senseless, Dreamy and Garbled” and they are conspicuous by their absence in business circles in the UK. Indeed the British Chambers of Commerce makes no reference to the SDGs on its website (www.britishchambers.org.uk). The concept and title are complex and seem remote whereas they should be taken as a blueprint of commercial best practice for all sizes of company and organisation, so they must be better publicised and mainstreamed. They are aspirational: should they be compulsory? Either way, how can their implementation be measured?

Benefits of SDGs for the economy and for companies

In July 2016 women had 26% representation on FTSE 100 and 20.4% on the FTSE 250 boards. The gender pay gap is currently 18.1% in the UK and just 22% of small and medium-sized businesses are majority women-owned. Recent research by Facebook has found 2.7 million women in the UK want to start a business but have been put off by persistent barriers, representing a lost £10 billion to the economy.

There are 2 blocks to women’s economic empowerment in the UK: self-imposed restrictions and societal-imposed restrictions. There is a documented crisis of confidence among women after graduating and again after childbirth. This is compounded by media stereotyping, violence, discrimination, exclusion and alienation. As the world seeks to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the economic and social contribution of women has to be acknowledged and integrated to build stronger communities and a stronger global economy. The Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved without the participation of women and men together.

The role of Civil Society – case study

Business and Professional Women (BPW) is an international NGO with 28,000 members in 5 regions worldwide whose mission statement is “BPW develops the professional, business and leadership potential of women on all levels through advocacy, mentoring, networking, skill building and economic empowerment programs and projects around the world.” BPW has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and participatory status with the Council of Europe. Members include influential women leaders, entrepreneurs, business owners, executives, professionals and young career women.

The organisation’s advocacy role is to educate people about the issues facing women in their working lives – by organising workshops and public speaking competitions to give them the confidence they lack. BPW’s lobbying role to ensure the legislative framework is in place to help women achieve their potential and thus contribute equally with men to the economy.

BPW lobbied for the formation of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and BPW’s long-standing expertise on the issues facing women at work will empower us to steer the

discussions on the Priority Theme for CSW61 in March 2017, “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work.”

Here are some examples of SDG activities in BPW Federation countries around the world:

BPW Federation country	SDG engagement as at January 2017
Egypt	<p>The Government of Egypt has put its national vision for 2030 that includes the whole framework of the SDGs.</p> <p>The National Council of Women of Egypt which is the Gender Machinery in Egypt (Ministry of Gender) has also adopted the SDGs as its Road map for women’s empowerment in the country.</p> <p>With reference to businesses there are corporates which have already put SDG awareness in their strategies. There is also the UN Global Compact Egypt Network which works for the implementation of SDGs. BPW Egypt has been organizing its annual conference in Cairo. And the main theme of the conference in 2015 was: Economic empowerment of Women and Youth and support of SMEs for the Post 2015 Development Agenda. And in 2016 .The same theme Economic empowerment of Women and Youth and support of SMEs towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals SDGs. So BPW Egypt has been raising awareness and popularizing SDGs among its members Business and Professional Women and among SMEs and Youth</p>
France	<p>BPW works with UN Women France on implementing the WEPs. In France NGOs can be invited to be members of the French delegation at CSW and BPW is part of the delegation since we work with the government on gender equality. We are consulted on our actions and advocacy and asked to make recommendations during consultation and preparatory meetings; economic empowerment and WEPs are our focus and included in the recommendations from 2016.</p>
Brazil	<p>SDGs are being publicised in Brazil by "Global Compact - Brazil Net". See "SDG Compass": https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzeoqYNFvEqycE5WV3BCeUM3cVkJ/view</p> <p>The SDGs are being implemented in Brazil by large companies and SMEs. You can also find micro businesses applying SDGs. See www.pactoglobal.org.br</p> <p>Interestingly, some important Industry Associations are recommending their members to comply with Global Compact. One example of this is the association ABDIB. See: www.abdib.org.br</p>
Germany	<p>As recently as 10/1/17, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation & Development launched its SDG implementation strategy called "One World – Our Responsibility" http://bit.ly/2iTqW6V. In Germany it’s mainly all the UN connected organisations, UN Women, Global Compact concerning gender issues: SDGs are not routinely mentioned by other organisations.</p>
New Zealand	<p>The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has taken a strong role in promoting the SDGs. See https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/peace-rights-and-security/work-with-the-un-and-other-partners/new-zealand-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs/</p> <p>MFAT released a statement on direction in July 2016 https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/media-and-resources/ministry-statements-and-speeches/new-zealand-national-statement-high-level-political-forum-on-sustainable-development/ and some businesses are now engaging with government agencies and particularly the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE).</p> <p>Note that the UN Global Compact is not operational in NZ</p> <p>BPW NZ is one of the partner organisations promoting and administering the Women's Empowerment Principles in NZ, so we see the considerable work being done by both large and small businesses on SDG 5 and also SDG 8 with the development of a tool kit for businesses.</p> <p>Collaboratively many NGO's are publicising the SDG's mainly around SDG 16 Peace and Justice. There has been a huge push in this area this past year with The NZ Police and Joint forces working both internally and abroad. They have represented the NZ Government in the Asia Pacific area.</p> <p>SDG 1 Poverty, The New Zealand government are working on improving child poverty in this country the verdict is out as to whether we are using the right language here as we were criticized by using vulnerable children on the international arena.</p> <p>SDG 2 See delivery into secondary schools: the link http://hekakano.tki.org.nz/</p> <p>SDG 5 BPW New Zealand work, WEPs work, National Council of Women and the White Paper for Gender Equality, also a joint working party (comprising business, union and government representatives) looking at pay equity</p> <p>SDG 6 - New Zealand Government has passed legislation that all regional and local authorities have to work to agreed specifications for clean and healthy waterways.</p> <p>SDG 13 - Deputy Prime Minister Paula Bennett signed the Climate Change pack in Paris early last year.</p>

SDG5 - GENDER EQUALITY AND THE ENGAGEMENT OF BUSINESSES

As the £10 billion in lost UK earnings shows, “Gender” isn’t just a “woman” thing. Hillary Clinton said “**human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights**” (1995) and civil society organisations (CSOs) have a major role to play in educating the public and nurturing engagement. This is best achieved through a caucus approach uniting many CSOs nationally, for example via the UK NGO CSW Alliance, which is network of UK civil society organisations - including BPW UK - who work on themes and issues relating to women and girls throughout their life cycle. The UK NGO CSW Alliance includes expertise from many sectors and reflects the status of women at all stages of their lives, so such a breadth of knowledge positions it to become the institutional mechanism in the UK for gender equality.

The other existing mechanisms to activate are those of the business organisations, such as the British Chambers of Commerce & Industry, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB). Professional organisations such as the Institution of Engineering & Technology (IET) and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

Members of these organisations and institutes offer valuable knowledge of the challenges facing businesses in their daily implementation of SDGs. The primary concern must be to make the process easy and beneficial, avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy so that businesses see the merits of SDG implementation in terms of profit.

There are existing frameworks to measure SDG implementation. All require processes and commitment by companies, which means time and financial investment, so this will deter SMEs from participating unless managed carefully and with clear guidance from government.

WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES - Equality Means Business

Since 2010, companies and public authorities around the world have been signing up to the UN Women and UN Global Compact Initiative on Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs), the world’s largest corporate sustainability initiative.

Specifically for business, the WEPs provide a comprehensive approach to achieving gender equality. The CEOs of participating companies worldwide sign a statement of compliance, which entitles them to be accredited on the WEPs website www.weprinciples.org/. This is a powerful differentiator in CSR credentials but out of **1395** signatories, only **23** are based in the UK.

Companies can use the 7 Principles to assess their policies and programmes, and publish the results on their website, annual reports and in tenders. The latter differentiates SDG-engaged companies from their competitors in their social responsibility ethos, making them more attractive as commercial and civically responsible partners:

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and non-discrimination
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality



ISO 26000 – GUIDANCE ON SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Again, this could be a very useful framework for businesses, as the Guidance claims: “Organizations everywhere are starting to see the importance of addressing current threats to their long-term viability and investing in a sustainable future for all.” ISO 26000 offers more than 450 recommendations related to help organisations contribute to the SDG goals because it is now recognised that (corporate) social responsibility is a key measure of performance.

Public and private sector tenders increasingly ask candidate companies to document their CSR credentials as a differentiator between them and their competitors. Citing implementation of the ISO 26000 Guidance as a recognised international standard would be viewed positively.

Global Reporting Standards (GRI) (www.globalreporting.org/standards/)

The GRI Standards are the first global standards for sustainability reporting (non financial). Founded in USA in 1997, they will be launched in Europe this year with events in Zurich and Barcelona. In the meantime, extending the routine ONS reporting by companies in the UK might provide a useful mechanism to report on SDG implementation.

EU Directive 2014/95/EU

EU Directive 2014/95/EU on the disclosure of non-financial and diversity information (for companies with >500 employees) entered into force in December 2014. The first reports are to be published in 2018, looking at the 2017 financial year. The EU Commission is working on non-binding guidelines for companies (to be published spring 2017).

These are all useful frameworks but SMEs will find the welter of information, indicators and targets very challenging to understand and actually see as relevant to their businesses. CSOs and business organisations should work with government to distil this into a manageable and achievable framework which companies see as a true benefit and the key to their sustainability. CSOs can also work downstream with employers in this education process.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDGs, (especially # 5):

FOR EMPLOYERS

- Audit company policies, documentation and inward and outward-facing image; take corrective actions if necessary to ensure gender is treated sensitively
- Actively promote gender equality

- Set up an SDG strategy and measurement framework – using government guidance and reporting mechanisms
- Embrace greater flexibility of working hours for all employees, including those with caring responsibilities (children and elders), eg for medical/dental appointments and nurture greater work-life balance. Reconsider the traditional care roles of women and men.

- Share the company's SDG path with other organisations, publicise activities in annual reports, press releases etc. Build a portfolio of examples for use in tenders and business competitions.

FOR GOVERNMENT

- Ask the BCCI and the FSB to run a survey on SDG awareness and implementation among members – this will provide useful publicity and feedback
- De-mystify and publicise the SDGs as a potential source of company growth. This includes removing the complexity of reporting – develop a standard framework and mechanism (eg ONS reporting)
- Make SDG compliance/policies an element of all public tenders

- Liaise with CSOs and business organisations to identify SMEs to act as SDG ambassadors (speaking to employers, institutions, colleges etc).

- Continue to reduce the gender pay gap – and this will have a considerable effect in closing the gender pension gap too

- Legal and affirmative measures and governmental subsidies to improve child and elderly care systems and to provide parental leave benefits to create appropriate infrastructures for parents to reconcile work and family life

- Include unpaid domestic work as part of the UK's GDP
- Penalise the use of gender stereotypes in advertising and educational literature

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Note on the author:

Joining BPW UK in 1989 and National President (2013-16), having attended BPW Regional and International Congresses, it was CSW59 in 2015 which demonstrated to me the importance of CSOs as humanity's conscience on the world stage. My role as a founder and director of an established and expanding SME with a global client base gives me valuable and pertinent insights to share on the realities facing women employees and employers in a changing workplace.