

Congress Report- Helsinki

President
Elizabeth Benham

Leading our international organization over the last 3 years has been a great honor. It has been a very special privilege to serve as the 21st President and to represent my country, the USA, as it has been 28 years since a USA president has led the organization. It has also been very challenging in updating the many layers of operations. Much has been accomplished but there remains still more to be done. The Power to Make a Difference, the theme for this triennium has been extremely relevant and important for BPW. In my term as your President I have had the opportunity to visit over 40 BPW countries which reinforced again the value of the direct contact that enriches the relationship with BPW International and it's members. It provided the opportunity to see the needs, expectations and performances of the members while continually recognizing the reality of our international organization in its limitations and potential.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to our members for their kindness, respect and hospitality in the countries visited.

So much work has been done this term with many accomplishments to be proud of and leaving BPW International stronger, more visible, more efficient and financially secure. For this I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to my Executive Board who in each of their mandates have contributed to the successful outcome of this triennium. In addition my heartfelt thanks and gratitude is extended to the Finance Director Sujey Albert and 2nd Vice President Freda Miriklis who have worked tirelessly together with me on the many systems needed to upgrade financial operations and our United Nations systems and partnerships. In addition 1st Vice President Gabriella Canonica contributed to our expansion in growth and executive secretary Dr Jean Murray worked diligently on the constitution reform. The regional coordinators were an asset to their regions with Africa leading the way in regional growth and engagement of the affiliates.

My action plan for 2008-2011 concentrated on 3 main issues:

- 1) Improving the functionality of the organization through a complete review of systems and processes to ensure efficiency and continuity, validating and reviewing all legal documents, requirements and issues of the organization.
- 2) improving communications and organizational knowledge and leadership through real time information platforms such as the website, electronic news (E-news), an annual Presidents seminar (later renamed leaders summit) which when all combined, would provide visible and real value to the members.
- 3) increasing the visibility on the international platform within the core focus of our organization which is about women in the economy and decision making roles through the United Nations and other strategic partners, All the above were based on creating a strong financial base through membership growth and operating within the budget.

Executive Board

The Executive Board had our (3) annual meetings in New York and in 2009 and 2010 we were able to combine them to follow up in the Presidents Seminar and the United Nations Commission on Status of Women (CSW). Having the Executive Board meeting followed by the Leaders Summit and the CSW all back to back added much strain to the limited capacity of the President's office. Additionally in 2010 an 80th Anniversary dinner event was included in the work of the President's office. Presenting high level and professional events requires much more than a few volunteers and the perception that it is done easily and can all be delegated is far from realistic. For that reason the 2011 Executive Board meeting was conducted earlier and separated from the Leaders summit and CSW to allow the Presidents office to manage with its limited capacity of 1 full time staff member.

Although at least 5 days of 10 hour meetings were scheduled for the Executive Board meetings, it is still was not enough to maximize on the face to face value of the executive meetings. This is clearly not enough to manage an international organization and my recommendation is for the consideration of 2 annual meetings. This will contribute greatly to the working of the board and strengthening of the relationships. Of course funding is an issue which requires ongoing focus. Regional meetings were also used to maximize on executive meetings but not all are able to attend due to minimal travel budgets and so this lost opportunity exists. Skype and WebEx meetings were conducted with the officers and regional coordinators on day to day issues and urgent matters. Although computer communication is cost effective as a tool, it still remains inconsistent in quality due to internet issues which adds to the length of the meetings and raises frustrations.

Presidents Office and Organizational Services

The handover process was complicated in that member services had been handled by the past President's office and as the incoming President this was not established. This prompted the establishment of the organization services model that will serve leadership transitions more efficiently. In addition finances were incorporated so that Congress accounts and operating accounts were not separated. To establish easier transitions a permanent congress account has been implemented so that the outgoing President and finance director can continue after congress to reconcile the accounts and when completed can hand them over to the current President and finance director.

The President's office has operated with one full time director. The organizational services model was established with the President's office as the nucleus. It is based on remote outsourced staff assigned to important components of operations and has proven to be successful in the goal of having permanent staff that provide continuity, and ongoing knowledge to support the President and Executive.

The (9) permanent positions are: director member services, UN administrator, public relations director supported by a website coordinator and a news coordinator, congress organizer and congress coordinator, coordinator of committees and taskforces and director of Fundraising. The congress approved budget line item for past member services were split into these positions. The design, job criteria, contracts and implementation of this model and learning curve along with training of the staff has taken extensive time and effort by this President but will be much rewarded by the ongoing functionality and continuity.

The staffs are all BPW members working with annual contracts as outsourced providers. They are paid a small salary in relation to the work they do. This needs to be addressed as it will not be sustainable. As an international organization this model of services is the minimum that we should have but financially it must be adequately supported. The Executive Board has proposed an increase in dues that will further support this component of operations.

Another addition to the sustainable operations is the virtual office platform called WebEx / Weboffice (a subsidiary of Cisco systems)that has been set up with a mapped framework of working files accessed by the executive and staff which is password protected and backed up each day. This is a fail proof system for BPW International's knowledge and archive storage and provides for easy, immediate transitions and continuity when leadership changes. The President and finance director work closely with the director of the President's office and member services in maintaining communications tools such as the roster, group emails and databases to accommodate affiliates leadership transitions ensuring proper communications and annual dues invoicing.

The director of the President's office manages the day to day communications and support of the President. Unfortunately the President's office was left without a director since March 4, 2011 due to illness. This was a great loss 3 months before Congress when the heavy preparations for Congress are in effect and to get a replacement director was not possible. Therefore operations have continued with the help of interns and local BPW Members. Communicating with affiliates is an ongoing challenge as Presidents and leaders constantly change, emails are changed and BPW International is not notified. BPW International has no direct connection to the members. This is always a difficult challenge as many times information is not distributed or passed along

in a timely manner. Languages are still an issue as there are many Presidents that are not proficient in English and can only communicate in their mother tongue. Affiliates are not “aware” of their responsibilities and connection to BPW International such as the annual report filing, which is very much needed to view membership and activities and for planning visits by executives. Databases are problematic and require a sustainable system to manage.

Over this triennium, our focus on communications has been of utmost importance and it has steadfastly improved between President’s office and affiliates. Many communiqués have been sent out to collect needed information like constitutions, annual meetings, changes of leadership, the international liaisons, and pr chairs. Databases of all affiliate Presidents and the Board of Directors are always up to date and ready for communications and voting at any time.

Internships

I am most grateful to the ongoing commitment of BPW Korea in sending an intern to the BPW International President’s office each summer. We have maximized on this in this triennium and could not have accomplished as much without this help. The President’s home has been the accommodation for all the interns and this has been a joy and a challenge in keeping up with all the arrangements.

BPW Taiwan also requested to provided interns for the President’s office and this has prompted the establishment of an ongoing official internship program. With the limited capacity of staff in the Presidents office due to budget constraints this is a great benefit and very much appreciated.

Many thanks go to all the hard working interns from Korea, Taiwan and locally who have helped so willingly in the huge workload.

Communication Platform

The website is our main communication platform providing real time access to news, information, events, executive activity, the member’s community, committee and taskforce forums and online registrations for events and Congress. It was newly launched in 2009 with an operating system that allowed for member input into the community and forums, and online payments for multiple requirements. This has taken a major effort on the part of the public relations director, the web administrator and Presidents office. I am most grateful to Ari Canonica our web administrator who works diligently with the team to keep this very professional and innovative. He works many hours and has always been available for updates and changes that required urgent input. The overwhelming positive feedback from members on the quality and user friendly layout of the website has been very much appreciated and endorses the view that we are on the right track in providing value to our members.

Quarterly News

The quarterly news /printed newsletter that was previously used, was considered to be time consuming and unable to provide news in real time which then became old news very quickly.

It was therefore replaced with the bi weekly E-news and in between the bpw news which is posted only on the website. That means news is fresh weekly and continually updated.

Bi Weekly Electronic E-news

The E-news is integrated into the website so that all our members who register on the website are automatically subscribed to it. This is supported by the staff team of the public relations director, website coordinator and news coordinator who collect news from the executive, affiliates and members edit and post the finished components on the website in the relevant categories and then distribute the E-news by email.

Annual Report

Based on a resolution from the Mexico Congress we are proud to have produced the 2009 and 2010 annual report that was distributed to the board of directors, affiliates, members, corporations and partners. The very professional document highlights achievements and incorporates a message from the President and activities of all the Executive Board members. Many thanks go to our Executive Secretary and Wikje Allink from BPW Netherlands who produced them in the format that will now be established as an ongoing annual publication.

Roster

The roster has served us well but it is a separate software that is now outdated and needs to be replaced with an integrated component of our website which has better security and privacy protection. The tool supports our affiliates in real time member status for the finance director and communications.

Woman of the Week

The woman of the week is another feature maintained by the President's office using an ongoing working list of member candidates evenly distributed by regions. This highlights accomplishments of our members, raising their visibility and that of BPW International. It has been well received and is updated bi-weekly. The process involves identifying candidates and then collecting a photo, CV, bio and a signed consent form to allow BPW International to feature the member on the website. This is an ongoing process, and at any time there are about 10 members on the waiting list. Executives contribute to the prospect list with the main scout being the President as she travels and meets up with all the accomplished members.

Business Pages

The business pages were previously standalone software, and in 2010 they were updated and integrated into the website to attract more of our business members and to make it easier and more user friendly. As a business member myself, I believe in and fully support this tool but am disappointed by the lack of subscriptions and activity of our business members. I am still not satisfied with the tool as it needs more work to attract the full activity and usefulness that would be desirable.

It is clear that our members use external products such as Linked In much more and this is also the case with Facebook. After much deliberation as to the procedural management and sustainability, I decided that BPW International could no longer stay isolated and therefore also created a BPW International Facebook page. This has been very successful with hundreds of BPW Friends engaging on the platform. This also adds to the social media and communications tools that we now use commonly.

Regional Web Pages

This was also a separate standalone system that required training for the regional coordinators to be able to update. This was integrated into the website and the website coordinator now posts the news etc in the regional pages based on instructions from the regional coordinators. This is a better model for continuity as the Regional Coordinator's time is best spent on more direct activities with the members in the region and collecting the photos and news for posting, and not learning the technology.

Video Messages

I am most grateful to our Public Relations chair; Mary Scott who luckily lives on Long island and through her expertise, was able to provide many video messages to affiliates for their functions when I was not able to attend. As it is impossible from a budget and time perspective for the President to be everywhere, I utilized this opportunity and to further connect with the members. This does require technical expertise in order to be professional, and in the future perhaps can be addressed with a budget allocation for a local expert to support the President.

Finances

Currency and bank account streamlining was a major goal to facilitate operations, income, expenses and service to members. This was successfully accomplished. Our operating accounts are separated from Congress accounts for ongoing better management during leadership changes.

Income increased with membership growth, supported by the essential dues collections systems with increased contact and communications. The Finance Director is congratulated for having a collection rate of 94% in 2009 and 96% in 2010. Our own very secure credit card system has also been implemented and reduced the costs of the previous PayPal system, which was troublesome to European members. We have operated within budget while implementing all the upgrades. A resolution from Mexico had to be recalled (3% retention of the budget) as there were no funds allocated to the Constitution review and reform committee that was voted to receive one. This was an oversight of Congress and therefore all resolutions with budget impacts must be decided before the financial budget is approved to avoid this in the future.

Online payments

BPW International formerly used PayPal as the website payment process but ongoing logistical issues and increased costs prompted us to obtain our own credit card processing through SaferPay.

This is a highly secure system for our members and now allows for our members in all countries to pay dues, make donations, business page payments, friends payments, conference registrations and event payments easily online.

Seminars

With the annual Presidents seminar (renamed the Leaders Summit) has come further innovation and support systems. The online registration and payment system for these and other regional /national events has provided efficiency to the members and the finance director in managing the income and expenses which has been very beneficial to reducing the risk of loss.

Congress

A new registration tool was integrated into the website for the congress registrations and also future regional conferences to support the regional coordinators. It is multi functional and tracks different components of the conference including dinners, workshops, visa requirements and accompanying persons

Donations

A more systematic approach was needed to offer opportunities for our members to provide support by individual donations to our sister members that have been affected by devastating natural disasters as exemplified in Haiti, Pakistan and Japan. A system was established for the website. This has worked very well as BPW International can monitor the donations and provide the funds to the recipients in a formal manner for rebuilding projects. This is more sustainable, transparent and easier for the donors.

Accommodation has also been made for donors who wish to contribute in kind services or products such as airline miles or office supplies. This is still new and needs to be promoted more.

Legacies

A formal legacy process is now on the website for members to view and implement if they wish. It allows BPW International to have knowledge in the case of legacies which in the past have only been announced by lawyers of the estate. BPW Members can view and download choices in how they wish to support BPW International through a legacy or in memory of a loved one.

Membership

Membership growth is improving and is still the main component of our foundation and financial strength but retention and functionality of new clubs and federations are still problematic. The new Federation of USA was established in June 2009 with the filing of a new legal name EPW USA (Enterprising and Professional Women USA) due to compliance because the BPW name was trademarked by the BPW USA and its Foundation in the USA. The new EPW USA Federation was established after BPW/USA (a non member of BPW International since 1993) closed due to financial difficulties. The EPW federation is known as BPW - USA at BPW International and continues on a new path after functioning for many years as individual state federations. The long process of reconciliation with BPW USA did not come to fruition and essentially prevented a new federation of forming in the USA. We have established only one other federation in this term in Turkey but that will not remain so for long with all the new and many associate clubs that have been formed. Our website and promotional collateral have served us very well in gaining more members.

Legal Issues

Complete reviews of all the organization's legal issues have been addressed regarding past and present contracts and partnerships. All staff now have contracts as outsourced providers which are reviewed and renewed annually according to performance. Outstanding issues like the organization's legal registration, which did not exist, was completed and I am happy that BPW International is now registered in our birth city of Geneva, Switzerland as a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization (NGO) Ownership of all website domain names, recurring accounts, memberships and partnerships are all under BPW International and connected to the Presidents office generic email for continuity. Our registration now allows us to also move forward in registering our International Trademark which is a more in depth and costly but very much needed component.

80th Anniversary

2010 Marked our 80th anniversary year and all year long we had many programs for this big occasion. An anniversary logo, new brochures and promotional materials were created and distributed to all affiliates to raise the visibility worldwide. A large 80th logo button was created and used by all members attending the CSW in New York, which created a high sense of importance and visibility for BPW.

Travel

Having previously served as Vice President with extensive direct contact with our affiliates and members my goal was also to improve on the internal and external perceptions of our international network. I worked closely with the regional coordinators and fully participated and supported them in all 5 regional conferences including the Young BPW Conference held in Las Vegas. In addition I attended many BPW national conferences and major events of Federations and associate clubs. I was fortunate to visit over 40 countries this term. The personal interaction with the members was so important and their strong support and trust was very much appreciated. My schedule also entailed many non BPW venues and conferences with speaking engagements and high level round table participation requirements with our partners such as APEC WLN and Business Summit in Singapore and Tokyo, the United Nations Global Compact in New York (MDG Summit and Global Compact Business Leaders Summit) and Turkey (LDC IV), the International Trade Center (ITC) in Geneva and China (The World Export Development Forums and the Global Platform), the US State department in Washington, DC and the European Parliament.

NEW YORK

The United Nations in New York is the venue for the annual commission on the Status of Women (CSW) This is of high value as a benefit of membership in BPW International provides accreditation for our members to attend. In the last 3 years the number of members participating has risen to a high of almost 300. This provided

the opportunity to offer the annual Leaders Summit prior to the CSW, maximizing the opportunities for travel efficiency and an added New York experience.

The highlight for 2010 was the celebration of BPW International's 80th birthday. The anniversary dinner held in conjunction with the CSW, Leaders Summit and Leadership training, was celebrated by almost 200 worldwide members and I am most grateful to the support of my home club of BPW Long Island especially Virginia Russell, Pat Giancontieri, Barbara Howie and Eileen Brennan for their support and work that made this a great success. The anniversary dinner was combined with the annual Claire Fulcher dinner (named in 2009) in recognition of her nearly 30 years of service as the BPW International UN representative in New York. 2nd Vice President Freda Miriklis served as the mistress of ceremonies and 1st Vice President Gabriella Canonica presented the 80th anniversary video in collaboration with the five regional coordinators. We had the honor of 4 past international Presidents for the occasion, Yvette Swan, Sylvia Perry, Pat Harrison, Antoinette Ruegg, with messages from Tuulikki Juusela and Livia Ricci. It was a joyous and memorable occasion.

Committees and taskforces

After the Mexico Congress apart from the elected chairs of the standing committees the database of members willing to work on committees and taskforces was almost nonexistent. The chairs were left with few members and so a collaborative effort to establish their action plans were much delayed until members could be found that were regionally representative. A great deal of time was spent in mapping out more specific guidelines and application forms so that more information about the members could be available to assess their expertise and interests in order to connect them to the respective committees and taskforces. This process took almost one year. It became very clear that the committees and taskforces did have not enough support. They do not know each other having never met and being introduced by email makes this process difficult. Once established there was no real ownership or accountability to the chairs. Although group emails were set up for all the committees and taskforces the learning curve in utilizing this was too slow and long and therefore it was not used enough. It seems also that there is a perception of the work not contributing or having much relevance.

In our organizational services a permanent position was created to support the projects, committees and taskforces. This new model was also groundbreaking and the first staffer resigned after only 6 months. Time was taken to find a replacement and our new person Sheila Evans has made every effort to communicate with the chairs and members providing the much needed contact and support for the President and Executive. There are some committees who under good leadership and with passionate members, have performed very well and must be commended. This is the Twinning taskforce and the leadership and lifelong learning taskforce. The President as ex officio was always copied in on the communications and though this may seem to be a negative it is quite the opposite as that engagement yields more awareness and collaborative support through communications and knowledge. The committees and taskforces who operated outside of that model are then almost invisible unless the chair is proactive with regular updates. In this term it was my and the Executive's desire to try to change and improve on the work of our committees. I do see them as extremely relevant to the organization and a professional development pool from where future leadership is identified and made visible. It is my sincere regret that we have been unable to accomplish this due to time constraints and the very slow start up process. My recommendation is that committees should be selected by BPW International as being relevant to our aims and goals, and BPW International should provide many more tools and clear guidance for the work aligning them to the initiatives that are new and exciting. This was the case with the Equal Pay Day taskforce and the Women's Empowerment Principles taskforce where members became engaged through personal selections and after having direct contact with the initiative. The issue was fresh relevant and exciting and the focus from international gave it further motivation. Therefore the outcome of this is clear that without the back end support tools and focus the committees and taskforces are not set up for success. It is my sincere recommendation that we should have less committees and taskforces, so that they can be more focused and they must be armed with the complete knowledge and tools as to the relevance and eventual outcome of the work.

Partnerships and Initiatives

In keeping with the goal of strengthening BPW International's relevance and visibility on the international platform, strategic partnerships were forged with the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) in New York, the International Trade Center (ITC) in Geneva and We Connect International in Washington DC. The 2 main initiatives launched in this term namely the Equal Pay Day Campaign (EPD) and the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP's) aligned with BPW International's aims of Women in the Economy and Women in Decision making roles and have gained the desired results and traction because they are so well connected to the United Nations Global Compact, UN women and with ITC. It has spring boarded BPW International into the position of a leading International NGO and because of the hard work in our advisory role and engagement, this has more than raised our visibility and credibility. But the challenge is to deliver on our position now with results. Visible gains in our advocacy to change policies are key to maintaining our leading position whereby BPW International should be consulted as the expert in these areas. Much work has been done at this level but now more focused efforts have to be maintained so that we can truly maximize on our strengths as an international network without diluting efforts in all areas where we are not well aligned and gains are slow and immeasurable. These efforts will support our platform for gaining funding in the future that can generate reports and educational awareness on our main issues. Building on existing partnerships and working on new strategic alliances are key to our image and future. BPW International has long been a best kept secret. Our new image is high level professional and credible. The ongoing focus on our promotional materials, website and outward image are critical and must be fully funded.

Constitution Review

Our mandate from the Mexico Congress through resolution 26 was to review and modernize our constitution. Our organization with 80 years of entrenched traditions, systems and values spread across 96 countries and five continents with various cultures and languages is a very large entity and obtaining collaboration and engagement in this process was a very big undertaking. Our executive Secretary Jean Murray and the committee must be highly commended for the huge work that was undertaken in the process. Many do not understand nor wish to engage in constitutional matters but it is critical as this foundation of the organization is paramount to our future.

Presentations of the review took place at the regional conference in Africa in October 2009 and Latin America in May 2010. The first draft of the new constitution was released in September 2010 and presented in at the North America regional Conference in Las Vegas in the same month. A very fruitful full day of engagement and workshop took place at the European Presidents meeting in Vienna in October 2010, followed by a presentation requesting feedback in a session at the Asia Pacific Regional meeting in Singapore later in the same month of October. Many documents have been made available to all on the website and to the board of directors. Translations have also been provided. The Presidents of Latin America convened on skype and made a submission to the committee. Various members, past international Presidents and executives also contributed. A small group of committed members worked very hard on the process and are sincerely thanked for their efforts. Many members and leaders still were not comfortable with their knowledge nor felt they have the expertise to contribute to the written submission process. This will now become the work of the congress in the debate and decision making process where discussion will be heard from both the positive and negative sides translated into the official languages simultaneously for good understanding of all the delegates. As of this report 60 countries will be represented at the Congress.

Our immediate past President Dr. Chonchanok Viravan in her report at the Congress in Mexico wrote "The Resolution on Organization Review and Funding Strategy" called for a "modern" constitution. During this triennium, the strength of the constitution was put to the test when we had to deal with many challenging situations and tried to introduce reform measures. I was impressed by the strength and flexibility of the current constitution. While it was recommended that some procedural details of the Constitution should be placed into

other policies or procedural documents that can be changed by the Executive Board or Board of Directors in a timely manner, EXCO decided that such changes shall be voted on at Congress in 2011 instead of 2008 – as there are many amendments required from the proposed reform for this congress already. The scope of what it means to modernize the constitution should be defined carefully, as we do not want to weaken the constitution in the process”.

In my past term as Vice President I used the constitution extensively and also through this term as President and found it to be a good working document which served me well. The current draft of the new constitution will be voted on at this congress. It has been shortened to a one page document with all the bylaws incorporated and presented now as regulations. There is a power shift due to structural and governance changes and the clear role of President has been reduced. Therefore I share Past President Viravan’s sentiments that our structural changes and governance must be carefully reviewed so as not to alter or weaken our constitution.

One of the challenges and concerns (due to lack of time) is that the procedure manual which has been written to underpin the constitution and regulations providing the 3rd integrated layer has been released only 3 weeks before congress. This has resulted in leaders advising that there has been insufficient time to review and engage with the members, as most of all the affiliates general assembly’s have already taken place. Congress is the highest decision making body of the organization and therefore maximum time will be dedicated for these draft documents to be decided on by the assembly. My trust and faith lies in the leadership of the organization that will determine the outcome.

Conclusion

While my previous career and life experiences prepared me well for the role of President, the experience has however added dimensions which one could never envision. I have worked very hard to leave the organization with an improved and better foundation for the next Presidents to carry forward and build on. I wish to personally again give my Executive Board my heartfelt thanks for all their work that has contributed to the success of this triennium. My deep appreciation is extended also to the past Presidents, Presidents of all affiliates, our UN representatives, committees, taskforces, leaders, members and staff and who have supported, encouraged, motivated and shown much kindness during this term. The HPC committee who stepped up after many challenges to work for our Congress, the Presidents of BPW Finland past and present and all the volunteers with special thanks to Paula Hjelt Putilin for her support in my many trips to Helsinki and to past President Tuulikki Juusela who has never ending energy and who knows the most people in the world that I have ever come across.

Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to my husband Kenny for having his life completely altered for that last 6 years, for his unending financial support of BPW, his tolerance and patience in “losing me” for the last 3 years, and his never ending encouragement and moral support.

Elizabeth Benham
BPW International President 2008-2011