

REPORT

Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business (WEPs) Taskforce

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Chair: Freda Miriklis, Australia

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The success of the Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business (WEPs) Working Group and overall support of the WEPs by Affiliates resulted in President Benham establishing the WEPs Taskforce in August 2010. The taskforce has since had regular email communication and skype meetings. To this end, the WEPs working group will continue to support the work of the taskforce acting as our immediate secretariat and assisting with the preparation of materials/resources which will be made available to members on-line. The immediate task of the taskforce was to finalise the WEPs Toolkit comprising 10 Fact Sheets that give insights to BPW Affiliates on how to conduct WEPs consultations and events with key stakeholders. The toolkit will be launched by President Benham at the XXVII BPW International Congress in Helsinki.

How we got here

When I started in the 2nd Vice President role the depth and breath of what I did not know about the upcoming far exceeded the small amount I did know. The long history of BPW's partnership with the UN had resulted in a long list of engagement with UN Standing Committees and Taskforces across a broad range of seemingly unrelated issues; the connecting theme of our role at the UN appeared to result in BPW being everywhere but at the same time being invisible; no defined expertise that allowed us to be the "go to" group for any one area of consultation.

In my search for a way to position BPW International as critical UN partners with unique expertise was not at all fruitful until I came across the UNIFEM (now UN Women) and UN Global Compact initiative - Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business (WEPs).

With the full support of the President and Executive, we engaged with the WEP's and what emerged was a key tool that BPW International could use to get back in it's defining role as pioneer and back at the forefront, speaking in a space where women still have a limited or muted voice while at the same time presenting a contextual framework BPW International could use to give context to all our other UN projects and initiatives. **We realised that this was much bigger and more broader than just a set of principles and with strategic positioning BPW International and Federations around the world would have much to benefit.**

With BPW International becoming signatories to the UN Global Compact, the WEPs are the first tool to re-frame our association at the UN in a way that profiles BPW International as the "go to" consultative group for business & commercial related issues. I believe the WEPs initiative has allowed BPW International's role at the United Nations to move from a welcomed and respected participant to actually taking centre stage and actively engaged as a recognised gender expert in the domain of working women and enterprise.

The Journey

The WEPs were officially launched at an invitation only event at the Levin Institute in New York (during CSW54) in March 2010 which President Liz and I attended on behalf of BPW International. The event introduced the Principles, explored their practical relevance for business, and investigated how best to build support for the spirit of the WEPs. Over 100 high level participants attended this invitation only event and the President and I were encouraged by the number of corporations operationalising the WEPs and willing to share their good corporate practices. In June the WEPs were then presented to over 1,000 CEOs for the first time at the 10th anniversary of the

UN Global Compact Leaders Summit in New York. I had the great pleasure of accompanying the President to this event where 39 CEOs signed a CEO Statement of Support for the WEPs - there are now over 180 signatories and the list of CEOs is growing.

The taskforce's immediate focus has been working with members in their regions to realise the *IWD Challenge* - 100 CEO signatures in support of the WEPs for 100 years of International Women's Day. The challenge: 20 signatures from each of the 5 BPW regions. While we were not able to achieve this ambitious target, we are planning to make this a focus (with the full worldwide BPW engagement) next term. I believe that this initiative can be used to propel BPW members, in all countries, right into the boardroom's of some of the worlds largest corporations & onto the radar of government, industry and trade organisations; significantly increasing the profile and influence of BPW Affiliates around the world.

BPW International clearly has a first mover advantage with the WEPs and the opportunity to showcase the results of our efforts. Our involvement with the WEPs continues to grow and testament to this is the reported success of Affiliates. During September 2010 BPW Korea worked in conjunction with the UN Global Compact office in Korea and organized WEPs seminars in Seoul and Jeju, as part of the lead up to the G20 Summit of the top 20 world economies; these events attracted media with over 30 news stories. In a private reception with the First Lady, President Benham also informed her of the WEPs.

In Japan, BPW International successfully amplified the global impact of the local Affiliates by presenting the WEPs at the 15th APEC WLN Meeting by strategically planning and working with key APEC stakeholders including - the APEC Organising Committee, several economies, UNIFEM Headquarters and Liaison Office Japan, BPW Japan and founders of APEC WLN. As a result of our combined efforts, President Benham and I lobbied our respective economies and the President organized WEPs badges that were given to prominent leaders. As part of the execution of a highly successful awareness campaign, President Benham also organized WEPs badges (that became highly sought after) and convened an impressive panel discussion that received the highest score ranking amongst participants. As the principle Australian Representative for the WLN Drafting Committee I worked with my colleagues Patrice Braun, Linda Brown and Barbara Robertson (now BPW Australia members) and the Australian government to ensure that the WEPs were included in the recommendations to APEC Leaders and Ministers and lobbied with other economies for their support. The WEPs were unanimously accepted by the drafting committee and included as one of the three pillars for inclusive growth. Our coordinated efforts were officially recognised by UNIFEM/UN Global Compact in their 3rd international newsletter. BPW American Samoa also launched their WEPs event during a leadership seminar as a strategic way to start a long term project of integrating the WEPs into the corporate and government environment of American Samoa.

South Africa is leveraging our increased profile and standing with industry and commerce to move themselves to the forefront of social change using the framework provided by the WEPs as a platform, they are planning a major WEPs event where they are proposing to also launch three initiatives: Women on Board Register, Women own Enterprises Certificate - run in conjunction with the government, working with women run, owned and operated businesses to provide access to various trade mission opportunities and tenders; *Running businesses illegally* - providing assistance to small and micro businesses that are not legal operations. Sponsors have already been sought and R1.5million already secured.

In North America the Long Island club is working with media outlets and working with Prudential Life Insurance company which is known for its work family balance policies on a WEPs launch; the Mayor and local government authorities and the Chamber of Commerce have also been contacted.

The WEPs theme continued into 2011 with the BPW Leaders Summit, New York – “BPW Means Business”, Harmony Club, New York, preceding CSW 55. BPW Istanbul convened a highly successful Women's Empowerment Principles -- Equality Means Business Forum prior to the Global Summit of Women in Istanbul, Turkey in May 2011, that attracted dignitaries and national

media coverage. The President of BPW Turkey arranged for the official WEPs booklet to be translated in Turkey at the WEPs Forum.

I would like to thank the members of the taskforce for their valuable contributions and work in furthering the awareness raising of the WEPs. As focal points for your regions they stand willing and ready to support you.

BPW International's powerful footprint across 5 continents can achieve strong results when unified by purpose. The results are equally beneficial for BPW International and affiliates at - grassroots, club level, national and international level. The WEPs offer a practical approach to advance women and point the way to a future that is both more prosperous and more fair for everyone and our increased influence with the business and industry arm of the United Nations - the Global Compact - allows us to support affiliates in all regions to build the same increased influence in their own country by using the WEPs as a tool to get a seat at the table and be recognised as the gender voice in business. As usual BPW Affiliates have already realised this potential have experienced first hand new opportunities that an international initiative can bring when we partner with major UN entities and women's organizations to raise awareness for women's advancement, unleashing women's economic capacity.

Never before in history have there been so many forces working together for gender equity. Growing research shows that engaging women in the leadership and decision making roles of enterprise and industry results in greater profits and increased productivity. We always knew it was true but now we have the evidence. In our evolving partnership with the United Nations Global Compact we have been able to leverage our work on the WEPs to legitimately claim our status as recognised gender expert in the domain of working women and enterprise – a space where there is currently no other organised gender voice.

We have the skills, we have the resources and we have the knowledge to lead the women's empowerment agenda. It is time to put words and ideas into action and for all of us to work together so that we can benefit from the rewards of fresh energy and new opportunity to strengthen the BPW International influence and profile in all countries.