

Women's Empowerment Principles

Equality Means Business

A joint initiative of UNIFEM and the UN Global Compact

Principles in Brief

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
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.

Introduction

Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors and throughout all levels of economic activity is essential to:

- Build strong economies;
- Establish more stable and just societies;
- Achieve internationally-agreed goals for development, sustainability and human rights;
- Improve quality of life for women, men, families and communities; and
- Propel businesses' operations and goals.

Yet, ensuring the inclusion of women's talents, skills, experience and energies requires intentional actions and deliberate policies. The Women's Empowerment Principles provide a set of considerations to help the private sector focus on key elements integral to promoting gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community. Enhancing openness and inclusion throughout corporate policies and operations requires techniques, tools and practices that bring results. The Women's Empowerment Principles, forged through an international multi-stakeholder consultative process led by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), provide a "gender lens" through which business can survey and analyze current initiatives, benchmarks and reporting practices.

Informed by real-life business practices, the Principles help companies tailor existing policies and practices — or establish needed new ones— to realize women’s empowerment. The Principles also reflect the interests of Governments and civil society and will support interactions among stakeholders as achieving gender equality requires the participation of all actors. As a leader in gender equality, UNIFEM brings three decades of experience to this partnership effort with the UN Global Compact, the world’s largest corporate citizenship initiative with more than 7,000 business participants and other stakeholders involved in more than 135 countries.

In an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, utilizing all social and economic assets is crucial for success. Yet, despite progress, women continue to confront discrimination, marginalization and exclusion, even though equality between men and women stands as a universal international precept—a fundamental and inviolable human right. Nearly all countries have affirmed this value through their recognition of the standards contained in international human rights treaties, which articulate for states a broad range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Distinctive documents highlight a spectrum of state responsibilities and human rights protections for women, indigenous peoples, children, workers and people with disabilities. Additionally, internationally agreed-on documents such as the Beijing Platform for Action adopted by all 189 countries at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the Millennium Declaration adopted by 189 countries in 2000, contribute to the overarching human rights framework.¹

These international standards illuminate our common aspiration for a life where the doors of opportunity are open to all. Where people can live free from violence, exercise legal redress and expect states to live up to their obligations to respect and protect the human rights of women, men and children and provide appropriate government services such as education and health.

These conventions inform national law and help shape common values adopted by institutions throughout the world. Business leaders, working in close association with their peers, with governments, nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations², seek to apply these international standards that uphold an individual’s rights through their specifically designed policies and programmes. Their corporate commitment, reflected through the company’s mission statement and supported through public reporting on policies and practices, attests to the growing realization of how important these values are to business and their communities.³

While much has been accomplished through the integration of principles and actions on corporate responsibility, diversity and inclusion, the full participation of women throughout the private sector – from the CEO’s office to the factory floor to the supply chain – remains unfulfilled. Current research demonstrating that gender diversity helps business perform better signals that self interest and common interest can come together. UNIFEM, the UN Global Compact, other leading UN agencies, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum, reinforce the findings.⁴ Governments also recognize that women’s inclusion drives development, and acknowledge that achieving the Millennium Development Goals and national economic and development plans requires⁵ rapidly moving towards gender equality.⁵

In a globally interdependent political, social and economic environment, partnerships play an increasingly vital role to:

- Create a vibrant business environment involving a broad partnership of actors, enablers, contributors and innovators to open opportunities for women and men; and
- Enable the active and interactive participation of governments, international financial institutions, the private sector, investors, nongovernmental organizations, academia and professional organizations to work together.

Women's Empowerment Principles

1. Leadership Promotes Gender Equality

- a. Affirm high-level support and direct top-level policies for gender equality and human rights.
- b. Establish company-wide goals and targets for gender equality and include progress as a factor in managers' performance reviews.
- c. Engage internal and external stakeholders in the development of company policies, programmes and implementation plans that advance equality.
- d. Ensure that all policies are gender-sensitive – identifying factors that impact women and men differently – and that corporate culture advances equality and inclusion.

2. Equal Opportunity, Inclusion and Nondiscrimination

- a. Pay equal remuneration, including benefits, for work of equal value and strive to pay a living wage to all women and men.
- b. Ensure that workplace policies and practices are free from gender-based discrimination.
- c. Implement gender-sensitive recruitment and retention practices and proactively recruit and appoint women to managerial and executive positions and to the corporate board of directors.
- d. Assure sufficient participation of women – 30% or greater – in decision-making and governance at all levels and across all business areas.
- e. Offer flexible work options, leave and re-entry opportunities to positions of equal pay and status.
- f. Support access to child and dependent care by providing services, resources and information to both women and men.

3. Health, Safety and Freedom from Violence

- a. Taking into account differential impacts on women and men, provide safe working conditions and protection from exposure to hazardous materials and disclose potential risks, including to reproductive health.
- b. Establish a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of violence at work, including verbal and/or physical abuse, and prevent sexual harassment.
- c. Strive to offer health insurance or other needed services – including for survivors of domestic violence – and ensure equal access for all employees.
- d. Respect women and men workers' rights to time off for medical care and counseling for themselves and their dependents.
- e. In consultation with employees, identify and address security issues, including the safety of women traveling to and from work and on company-related business.
- f. Train security staff and managers to recognize signs of violence against women and understand laws and company policies on human trafficking, labour and sexual exploitation.

4. Education and Training

- a. Invest in workplace policies and programmes that open avenues for advancement of women at all levels and across all business areas, and encourage women to enter nontraditional job fields.
- b. Ensure equal access to all company-supported education and training programmes, including literacy classes, vocational and information technology training.
- c. Provide equal opportunities for formal and informal networking and mentoring.
- d. Offer opportunities to promote the business case for women's empowerment and the positive impact of inclusion for men as well as women.

5. Enterprise Development, Supply Chain and Marketing Practices

- a. Expand business relationships with women-owned enterprises, including small businesses, and women entrepreneurs.
- b. Support gender-sensitive solutions to credit and lending barriers.
- c. Ask business partners and peers to respect the company's commitment to advancing equality and inclusion.
- d. Respect the dignity of women in all marketing and other company materials.
- e. Ensure that company products, services and facilities are not used for human trafficking and/or labour or sexual exploitation.

6. Community Leadership and Engagement

- a. Lead by example – showcase company commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment.
- b. Leverage influence, alone or in partnership, to advocate for gender equality and collaborate with business partners, suppliers and community leaders to promote inclusion.
- c. Work with community stakeholders, officials and others to eliminate discrimination and exploitation and open opportunities for women and girls.
- d. Promote and recognize women's leadership in, and contributions to, their communities and ensure sufficient representation of women in any community consultation.
- e. Use philanthropy and grants programmes to support company commitment to inclusion, equality and human rights.

7. Transparency, Measuring and Reporting

- a. Make public the company policies and implementation plan for promoting gender equality.
- b. Establish benchmarks that quantify inclusion of women at all levels.
- c. Measure and report on progress, both internally and externally, using data disaggregated by gender.
- d. Incorporate gender markers into ongoing reporting obligations.

The Women's Empowerment Principles, the product of a collaboration between UNIFEM and the UN Global Compact informed by an international multi-stakeholder consultation, are adapted from the Calvert Women's Principles®. The Calvert Women's Principles were originally developed in partnership with UNIFEM and launched in 2004 as the first global corporate code of conduct focused exclusively on empowering, advancing and investing in women worldwide.

Endnotes

¹ Gender equality has been recognized as a human right since the establishment of the United Nations. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the 1976 international covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) all contain clear statements on the right of women to be free from discrimination. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the General Assembly in 1979, obliges signatories to undertake actions to ensure gender equality in both the private and public spheres and to eliminate traditional stereotyped ideas on the roles of the sexes. Importantly, governments at the 1995 Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, laid out specific actions set to attain the equality and empowerment standards set by CEDAW, in the Beijing Platform for Action. For more information on legal instruments and other relevant international standards of particular importance to women's human rights and gender equality, including CEDAW and other treaty bodies, see: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm>.

² Employees' and workers' rights are addressed by numerous international standards, conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO). While ILO instruments are applicable to both women and men, there are a number which are of specific interest for women workers. See the ILO Bureau for Gender Equality and the ILO Library online Resource Guide – Gender Equality in the World of Work: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/resource/subject/gender.htm>.

Founded in 2000, the UN Global Compact is a strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. See: www.unglobalcompact.org.

In 2005 the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Professor John Ruggie as Special Representative on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises. The mandate includes identifying and clarifying standards of corporate responsibility and accountability with regard to human rights. <https://www.un.org/>.

³ Over past 10 years, there has been an increase in business' attention to corporate responsibility and sustainability reporting through a variety of mechanisms. One example is the UN Global Compact requirement on annual Communications on Progress (see: <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/COP/index.html>). Another example is the global sustainability reporting framework developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), which sets out principles and indicators that organizations can use to measure and report their economic, environmental and social performance. In 2008-09, the GRI worked with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) on a research and consultation project aimed at addressing the gap between gender and sustainability reporting, culminating in the resource document, *Embedding Gender in Sustainability Reporting*, a practitioner's guide to help organizations worldwide create opportunities for women, adopt best practices in sustainability reporting, and improve companies' bottom lines. See: <http://www.globalreporting.org/CurrentPriorities/GenderandReporting/>.

A recent report (January 2010) by McKinsey & Company, 'The Business of Empowering Women', presents a case for why and how the private sector can intensify its engagement in the economic empowerment of women in developing countries and emerging markets. The report draws on insights from interviews with more than 50 leaders and experts in the private and social sectors who focus on women's empowerment, as well as findings from a global survey of nearly 2,300 senior private sector executives, among others. See: http://www.mckinsey.com/clientservice/Social_Sector/our_practices/Economic_Development/Knowledge_Highlights/empowering_women.aspx.

Research by the London Business School Centre for Women in Business found that gender parity in teams leads to more innovation, making a clear business case for diversity. See 'Innovative Potential: Men and Women in Teams, 2007, available at: http://www.london.edu/assets/documents/facultyandresearch/Innovative_Potential_NOV_2007.pdf.

⁴ Additional examples supporting the business case for gender equality include two recent studies on gender diversity and corporate performance by McKinsey and Company, conducted in partnership with the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society. Their research demonstrated the link between the presence of women in corporate management teams and companies' organizational and financial performance, suggesting that the companies where women are most strongly represented at board or top-management level are also the companies that perform best. Further research on female leadership showed that behaviors more often applied by women reinforce a company's organizational performance on several dimensions, and will be critical to meet the expected challenges companies will face over the coming years. See 'Women Matter: Gender diversity, a corporate performance driver' (2007) and 'Women Matter 2: Female leadership, a competitive edge for the future' (2008).

For research and resources of the Women Leaders and Gender Parity Programme of the World Economic Forum, see <http://www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/index.htm>. For information on the World Bank's work on gender, including Gender Equality as Smart Economics – a World Bank Group Action Plan, see: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTGENDER/0,,menuPK:336874~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:336868,00.html>

⁵ The "multiplier effect" of gender equality has been increasingly acknowledged. Studies continue to show that lowering the social, economic and political barriers faced by women and girls extends education, decreases child mortality and vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. Women's greater labour force participation reduces poverty through increased productivity and earnings. Conversely, systematic discrimination against women and girls will make it impossible for many to meet the poverty and other targets of the Millennium Development Goals. Millennium Development Goal 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women, and is one of eight MDGs drawn from the Millennium Declaration, that was adopted by 189 Governments in 2000. The MDGs address the world's main development challenges, and have time-bound and measurable targets accompanied by indicators for monitoring progress, with a timeline for achievement by 2015. Growing concern that the MDGs will not be met is accompanied by growing recognition that achievement of gender equality is critical to achievement of all other MDGs. See: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> and http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2008/MDG_Gender_Progress_Chart_2008_En.pdf. See also, 'The Importance of Sex', *The Economist*, April 2006; and 'Financing Gender Equality is Financing Development', UNIFEM Discussion Paper, 2008.