

## Good Practice for Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment

**3. Global Networking**

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In March 2016, New York City was filled with energy under the unusually warm weather. With an emphatic keynote address, the Costa Rican President set the tone for the annual meeting of the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles, or 'WEPs' for short,<sup>1</sup> held on 15 and 16 March at the UN Headquarters. I recalled last year's meeting, where the audience was astonished by the dynamic report on 20 years of progress since the Beijing Conference in 1995 and future perspectives given by Hillary Clinton, former US Secretary of State.

Each year, about 350 participants from businesses, international organisations, governments and civil society get together at the annual WEPs meeting. Although the meeting is organised by the United Nations, the participants engage in friendly conversation in a relaxed atmosphere. I look forward to this annual opportunity directly to exchange the latest information in lively sessions. I keenly felt that attention was focused on initiatives in Japan as participants from Sri Lanka and the UK told me that the Japanese government and industry were both doing a good job.

Various cases of good practice were reported and discussed at the annual meeting. I was greatly impressed by some of them: the CEO of a leading sanitary products maker in Turkey succeeded with staff training by communicating his intention to empower women in a letter sent to all female employees, while an effective restaurant operator in Mexico locally promoted the economic empowerment of women by contracting with 6,000 female farmers. Some innovative cases were also reported like the Male Champions of Change in Australia, a government programme operated in partnership with the business community. Every year,

I am invariably inspired by the various new possibilities of businesses presented in the meeting.

Many businesses and governments across the globe, in both the developed and developing countries, are seeking to address the changing global economic and social environments through the empowerment of women. Firms that share this idea can leverage the WEPs, as they provide a simple framework for businesses with guidance on how to promote women's initiatives in the workplace, market and at the local community level. Building on the WEPs, a firm can promote the empowerment of women not only through internal efforts, but also in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders including the supply chain, investment companies, local governments and civil society. Since the launch of the WEPs, the WEPs Leadership Group, composed of members from the business community, UN Family, civil society and academia, has been leading the efforts to discuss and develop documents and tools to encourage the adoption of the WEPs.

International organisations and governments have also endorsed the WEPs as global standards for empowerment efforts. Thus, in 2016, the G7 Ise-Shima Leaders' Declaration refers to 'our efforts to promote the WEPs'. In 2015, a follow-up meeting on the WEPs and entrepreneurship was held after the Elmau Summit in Germany<sup>2</sup>. The momentum will be passed on from Japan to the Sicily Summit in Italy next year.

I believe that global networking through the common framework of the WEPs is a promising approach to the realisation of business growth and gender equality. I expect a further increase in the number of female leaders next year on the back of better understanding in the G7 countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Seven principles jointly developed in March 2010 by the UN Global Compact UNGC and UN Women. 1,239 firms around the globe (of which 261 Japanese firms) have endorsed WEPs by 10 June 2016. For more information, visit: <http://weprinciples.org/>.

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<sup>2</sup> UNGC, IMPACT: Transforming Business, Changing the World - The United Nations Global Compact, 2015.