

Women's Empowerment Stakeholders Seek new UN-Business Standards

By Buya Jammeh

Over three hundred participants from business, government, civil society and the UN have called upon governments around the world to increase their efforts to achieve gender equality, economic prosperity and to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the March 2015 annual meeting of the Women's Empowerment Principles Leadership Group (WEPs LG) at the UN, a group of gender activists put forward a proposal called *Unlimited Potential: Business Partners for Gender Equality* as part of the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Speaking at the event, Geena Davis, award-winning actress, founder and chair of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, described media images as an incredibly powerful force in shaping how women and their values are viewed by society.

Davis said: "If we can change what the future looks like on screen, we can change what the future looks like in real life. We need to make conscious choices so we can make absolute and clear steps to mitigate and conquer unconscious bias." Joseph Keefe, chair of the WEPs Leadership Group and President and CEO of Pax World Funds, emphasized the need for a new UN-Business paradigm because it presents an opportunity to activate the UN-Business paradigm and also increase popular participation. "This", he added, "leverages what we each do best and what we all can do together to demolish those glass ceilings and unleash women's economic empowerment."

The "Partnering for Women's Empowerment – Equality Means Business" statement demonstrates how business, governments and the UN can increase engagement to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and other objectives that affect women. The document states that despite the progress that has been made since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), many barriers to women's and girls' empowerment remain. This limits the potential contribution of over half the population to sustainable development and economic prosperity.

It also noted that while the 1995 Beijing Declaration called on governments to take concrete actions to bring about equality for women and girls, the transformational role that business could play to accelerate progress was not explored.

Today's partnership underscores the willingness of the WEPs LG's expanding business community to participate as a key partner in the international agenda to secure women's rights and economic empowerment.

The document, approved at the end of the meeting, called for all stakeholders, including business, to become strategic partners for gender equality by doing the following:

- Making a commitment to end violence against women and girls.
- Facilitating the benefits of women's economic empowerment through government actions to end gender discrimination.

- Investing in women's health, education and entrepreneurship.
- Encouraging and supporting men to 'lead by example' and accepting the responsibility for making changes.
- Drawing on the WEPs roadmap to inform gender equality policies and programs in business, government and civil society organizations.

About the Women's Empowerment Principles

The **Women's Empowerment Principles – *Equality Means Business*** is a joint initiative of UN Women and the UN Global Compact. The principles include seven steps for business to follow to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community.

The principles emphasize that empowering women to fully participate in economic life across all sectors and in all levels of economic activity is essential to building strong economies; establishing more stable and just societies; achieving international goals for development, sustainability, and human rights; improving quality of life for women, men, families and communities; and propelling business' operations and goals.