

IN BRIEF



# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES WORKSHOP FOR REPUBLIC OF KOREA

APRIL 2023

## Snapshot

"We want to gain insights from the United Nations on how companies can internalize efforts for gender equality," said one message projected on the screen. "We want to benchmark global companies' practices in implementing gender equality policies more proactively within our organization," proclaimed another. Both of them were written by participants describing their reasons to join a workshop in Seoul on the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), and on what they mean for Korean businesses. The event on April 20<sup>th</sup> brought together 70 business representatives responsible for corporate strategies and human resources, to learn about the UN's gender-equality guidelines for businesses and benchmark global companies' practices. The workshop was filled with enthusiasm from participants taking notes on the lectures and asking questions. Initially scheduled for two hours, the workshop ran over by 40 minutes due to lively interactions between the speakers and participants.



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

Approximately 70 representatives from Korea-based companies and institutions participate in the WEPs workshop on April 20.

The workshop was organized to introduce the Korean business community to the WEPs, jointly launched by UN Women and the UN Global Compact in 2010 outlining seven ways for companies to achieve gender equality in the workplace, marketplace, and community. The UN Women Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality (the Centre) co-hosted this workshop with UN Global Compact Network Korea.

## Words from Organizers

Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

"We believe that companies can take the lead in achieving gender equality through innovation, employment, and finance. Such efforts will not only benefit women and men who work for companies, families, and communities but also the social responsibility and financial performance of companies."

-Jeongshim Lee, director of the UN Women Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality

"I hope that this event today will be a signal to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality and diversity and inclusion within companies and that it will be an opportunity to create substantial change by leading active sharing and discussion."

-Yeoncheol Yoo, secretary-general of UN Global Compact Network Korea



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

"We welcome Korean companies to the global WEPs network of nearly 8,000 signatories. To be a leader in today's global market, gender equality needs to be at the core of business models. It is what stakeholders - investors, business partners, talent, consumers - expect from companies."

-Anna Fälth, director of the UN Women WEPs Global Secretariat



## Gender Equality Means Better Business

UN's Guideline on Gender Equality for private sector

### Keynote Speech

The keynote speaker, Mi Hwa Park, global programme manager for WEPs at UN Women, highlighted the significance of the WEPs. She explained that companies striving for gender equality ultimately become the ones where talents prefer to work, consumers prefer to purchase from, and investors prefer to invest in, leading to long-term profit growth.

[According to a study conducted by UN Women among 350 major companies from G7 countries in 2021](#), WEPs signatories demonstrated improvements in 10 key performance indicators relating to gender equality, namely: the proportion of women on boards, among executives, and in senior management; flexible work; living wage; parental leave; equal opportunities; human rights; social supply chain; gender audit; career development for all employees; and gender balance in the workforce.



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

Mihwa Park, WEPs coordinator, WEPs Global Secretariat, UN Women, delivers a lecture.

Park also presented innovative best practices with regards to each WEPs principle. Examples included an airline company in Latin America to develop female talent due to a limited pool of female workforce. An investment bank in South Africa was showcased as another example that has introduced sponsorship programmes supporting women colleagues behind the scenes, aimed at facilitating their promotion. These programmes go beyond traditional mentoring initiatives that offer in-person support.

### BOX 1

#### The Seven Principles of Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)

- Principle 1  Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- Principle 2  Treat all women and men fairly at work- respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
- Principle 3  Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
- Principle 4  Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- Principle 5  Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- Principle 6  Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- Principle 7  Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

### Case Studies

Global WEPs signatories also shared their experiences. The Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA), a global network of 750 mobile operators, Mastercard, a global card brand, Nestlé, the world's leading food and beverage company, and RSM International, a global network of 120 accounting, tax, and consulting firms, featured in the workshop. They covered all seven WEPs, but highlighted the following four:

# 1 PRINCIPLE

## High-level corporate leadership

Tamara Dancheva, Senior Manager for International Relations at the Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA), explained how its corporate executives have taken the lead in changing the corporate culture. "The decision to join WEPs was also led by our top leadership, headed by the huge feminist Mats Granryd, the Director-General of GSMA," Dancheva noted. For example, the "One GSMA" forum, an employee-led forum discussing diversity and inclusion, is supported by the Chief Financial Officer, Chief Regulatory Officer, and Head of Human Resources. Dancheva emphasized that "it is absolutely critical to have leadership buy-in followed by the employees' buy-in, and once they exchange the feedback, that becomes a part of your company culture."

# 4 PRINCIPLE

## Education and training for career advancement

Amanda Gervay, Senior Vice President for People and Capability at the Asia Pacific office of Mastercard, presented how Mastercard invests in women employees' empowerment through its gender-balance initiatives. For example, Mastercard ensures inclusion of women for every interview in its hiring process. According to Mastercard, globally 81% of its application process had at least one female candidate for all roles. Mastercard also runs a female leadership programme in order to develop career paths for women as well as to amplify their voices within the organization. "We provide training through simulations of real-life scenarios to our vice-president level and above, allowing them to practice leadership skills," said Gervay. "We do aim to have them ready for board seats in the next two or three years."

# 5 PRINCIPLE

## Enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices

The efforts of companies extend not only within their organizations but also beyond. Nilüfer Demirkol, Global Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Nestlé, talked about their gender equality efforts within the supply chain. Nespresso, one of Nestlé's brands, for instance, integrated a gender perspective into their own programmes designed for improving the livelihoods of coffee farmers by introducing a gender-analysis tool. They collected the data on the gender gap in their operations in Indonesia, Guatemala, and Ethiopia, and suggested possible actions to close the gap. "This tool is a gender data set which was designed to provide insights that enable action to be taken, ensuring women have access to resources and empowering them to participate in the decision-making process," Demirkol added.

# 7 PRINCIPLE

## Measurement and reporting

Candice Eaton Gaul, Global Diversity and Inclusion Leader at RSM International suggested companies disclose the journey of promoting gender equality with transparent reporting and measurement. Gaul explained: "Businesses who want to be sustainable and successful with global competitiveness have gender equality as a focus at board level as critical governance issue."

She mentioned a few reasons for this. First, diversity provides business opportunities, and when not properly implemented, there are business risks and reputation risks. "Good corporate governance means taking charge of public perception, or perhaps in some cases, public scrutiny," Gaul said. "As a result of hyper transparency of social media and our increasing interconnectedness, we need to be honest about the position of our businesses in terms of the current state, regardless of whether that position is favourable or not."

The second reason is to prepare for actual regulations being enacted. Gaul mentioned that, according to the Gender Pay Gap Report by the World Economic Forum in 2020 and 2021, gender equality has regressed, leading to increased pressure from various research institutions for data disclosure and corrective measures. "We can also see that coming to life in Europe, following the 'woman on boards' directive of the European Parliament laying the path for others to follow."

As emphasized by Gaul, GSMA and Mastercard, who participated in the workshop as speakers, also shared earlier that they publicly disclose key gender equality indicators, including data on the gender pay gap, and take action to close the gap.

Gaul stated that "it is important to be honest even in unfavourable circumstances because it garners the respect of the marketplace and employees. It's courageous to admit that there is a journey for improvement and commitment for action."

## Q&A Session

During the questions-and-answers session, there was a question about how to generate momentum when women colleagues are not actively aware or looking for empowerment. In the same context, concrete suggestions were sought for facilitating promotions of women to senior management positions.

Gaul stated: "Access to opportunity is crucial because it provides individuals with the chance to explore alternative paths, empowering them to shape their future, define their aspirations, and determine their personal development journey."



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

*The speakers of Women's Empowerment Principles Workshop for Korea answer questions in the Q&A sessions.*

"There are divergent opinions regarding quotas, but let's be candid," Dancheva said. "Without setting targets, progress will be stagnant, as targets demonstrate a willingness and commitment to change. [...] If we claim a lack of qualified women for board nominations, why not consider nominating a senior woman who doesn't necessarily hold a vice president position? Lowering the criteria and initiating from there can be a starting point." Furthermore, Park stated: "There is a specific position in companies where women are promoted in large numbers, but compared to positions predominantly occupied by men, their influence is low. It is important not only to increase the number of women executives but also to promote them to key positions where they can exert influence."

It was also mentioned that it is necessary to garner support not only from women but also from men in order to support such an environment. Gervy stated: "Male allyship is of incredibly important. In most organizations today, the reality is that many decision-makers responsible for hiring and promotions are males."

To achieve this, there is a need for an increased understanding that gender-inclusive workplace benefits not only women but ultimately also men. For instance, Mastercard has implemented a gender-neutral policy that provides a minimum of 16 weeks of paid leave to both men and women, aiming to increase male involvement in domestic responsibilities. This initiative aligns with the third principle of the WEPs, which ensures the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.

Ji-yeon Park from Korean retail company BGF, who attended the workshop, said: "As there is a high proportion of men in our company, I needed strategies on how to implement gender equality policies, and this lecture was very helpful."

Another participant mentioned: "It was informative to not only receive an overview of WEPs but also learn about various cases from different companies. I highly recommend WEPs not only to our company but also to our partner companies."



Photo: UN Women/Jaeyeon Jung

*Approximately 70 representatives from Korea-based companies and institutions participate in the WEPs workshop on April 20.*

### BOX 2

#### Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) Eligibility Criteria

All companies committed to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace and community are invited to join the WEPs, whether private, public, state-owned or cooperatives, of any size and industry, established under national law, industry associations, and chambers of commerce. UN Women provides various materials such as manuals and guides, as well as consulting services to WEPs signatories. In response to the high demand, the UN Women Centre in Seoul plans to organize follow-up events for the private sector to continue the discussion on gender equality and women's empowerment through WEPs.