

Good evening,

Below please find input to three of the questions posed by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights in their recent Open Call for Input regarding the Working Group's Report on the Gender Lens to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

We understand we have just missed the cutoff for input, but are nevertheless hopeful our input can be considered as the Working Group's report is developed.

**2. Please share any good practices on how to deal with increased marginalisation or vulnerabilities faced by women due to intersectionality, feminisation of work, informal economy, and conflicts.**

Many female workers in global supply chains experience high levels of harassment and violence both at the workplace and at home. This violence, which can be economic, verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual, deprives women of their basic human rights and compromises their well-being. There is increasing evidence that when the well-being of workers suffers, businesses and economies are negatively impacted.

Business for Social Responsibility's HERproject seeks to empower low-income women working in global supply chains through workplace programs that promote improved health, financial inclusion, and freedom from violence. HERproject increases women's access to and control over resources, thereby strengthening women's agency both in the workplace and at home. It also aims to create inclusive workplaces by strengthening management systems and building workplace capacity, further contributing to a supportive and enabling environment for women to maximize their economic potential and thrive. HERproject has produced meaningful impacts through peer-to-peer training, local capacity building, and advocacy with business and government in over a dozen countries since 2007.

Better Work, a partnership between the UN's International Labour Organization and the International Finance Corporation, brings together governments, global brands, factory owners, and unions and workers to promote decent work and improve working conditions in the garment industry in countries where the program operates. Better Work's Supervisory Skills Training program (SST) offers a pathway for leadership and management skills to improve workplace cooperation and build the next generation of effective mid-level management. A [study undertaken by Tufts University](#) (1) shows that the SST results in increased confidence, improved working relationships, reduced worker turnover and increased productivity; furthermore, these results are amplified when women supervisors are trained.

Introducing training programs such as Better Work's SST and BSR's HERproject can help empower women workers, provide opportunities for career growth, promote positive relationships and break down gender stereotype barriers at the workplace. Moreover, these interventions have proven impacts that make the business case – investing in healthier, more inclusive and respectful workplaces leads to increased productivity, reduced turnover among workers, and better business outcomes.

**6. How could policy coherence be improved between different government ministries or departments dealing with women issues and business-related matters?**

Governments are increasingly introducing new regulations that attempt to tackle barriers for working women, including childcare solutions and accommodations for pregnant and nursing women in the workforce. Due to the predominance of women factory workers with children in emerging economies, there is a strong need to ensure that their basic rights are met, and that adequate mechanisms are in place to ensure the welfare of their children. Yet too often regulations meant to protect women fall flat, either because there is weak implementation or lack of awareness about the policies.

In Vietnam, UNICEF is working in concert with civil society groups, employers, and government agencies to identify best practices to ensure that the basic rights of working women are met, and that adequate mechanisms are in place to ensure the welfare of their children. [A UNICEF assessment](#) (2) identified ten critical areas in which children's well-being is directly and indirectly impacted by business – notably, the challenges of working mothers, living and working conditions, and child labor. Vietnam's Decree 85 legislation outlines labor rights for female employees, including access to healthcare, maternity leave, accommodations for nursing mothers, and employer-supported access to childcare; all of which if effectively implemented would directly address the issues surfaced in UNICEF's report. UNICEF is working with government ministries and employers to raise awareness of concrete ways to address these challenges, and build capacity to effectively implement Decree 85 policies that will empower women workers and protect their children.

In Central America, the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) and the Americas Group (AG) are raising awareness and fostering dialogue between brands, factories, government actors, and women's and labor organizations around appropriate childcare options for workers in the maquila sector. El Salvador and Honduras have existing legislation that mandates employer-supported childcare, however implementation has been inconsistent. Through conversations facilitated by MSN and the AG, stakeholder groups who typically do not see eye to eye have engaged in productive conversations and are giving consideration to a variety of models, such as home-based care, facility-based childcare centers, and shared centers for multiple facilities. Notably, workers were also surveyed on their wants and needs, and that perspective has been central to the conversation. This engagement has raised awareness and elevated the conversation while providing a productive forum for relevant stakeholders to come together and explore practical improvements to childcare regulations and effective implementation strategies that will truly benefit the workers they are intended to protect.

## **10. How could media and advertising industries fight against gender stereotyping and disempowerment of women?**

The critical effort to remove gender-based stereotypes in advertising has already begun, and is spearheaded by a number of industry leaders under the banner of the Unstereotype Alliance. Founded in part by UN Women, the Unstereotype Alliance aims to unite companies and industry partners in their shared work toward gender equality, good practices, and responsible marketing. As articulated by UN Women's executive director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, we recognize that "negative, diminished conceptions of women and girls are one of the greatest barriers for gender equality and we need to tackle and change those images wherever they appear. Advertising is a particularly powerful driver to change perceptions and impact social norms."

As part of the creative sector, leaders of media and advertising have the power to impact and influence not only how we see each other, but also how we treat each other. The creative sector, with media and advertisers at the helm, has the ability to move the needle toward a more balanced representation of gender roles, which can in turn help break barriers that have prevented women and girls from achieving their full potential. By removing the harmful images and messages that stagnate women's growth and confidence, we can not only make a positive difference in society, but also across the industry.

There is a clear business case for advertisers to abandon outdated and dangerous gendered stereotypes. According to research undertaken by the World Economic Forum, women exercise enormous purchasing power, controlling 64% of all consumer spending. However, according to research by Unilever, 40% of women don't relate to the women they see in advertisements. This disconnect is harmful for business as well as the consumer. A partnership between The Walt Disney Company and the United Nations Foundation's 'Girl Up' program sought to address these concerns by undertaking a social media campaign to show girls dreaming big. Recognizing the difficulty for women and girls to advance their goals and careers if they do not benefit from seeing examples of women in these spaces, Disney launched a campaign to re-define what it means to be a 'princess.' Shedding the outdated visions of tiaras and ball gowns, Disney looked to its princess stories for examples of perseverance, courage, and bravery. Using powerful imagery and inspirational messages, Disney showed little girls around the world that they can grow up to be anything, or anyone, that they want to be. Similarly, the Unstereotype Alliance released an inspiring video campaign titled 'you can't dream it if you can't see it,' to challenge industry leaders to take a hard look at the messages they sell and the means through which they sell them. When more fair and inspired versions of women and girls are incorporated into advertisements, women are empowered and everyone benefits, including business.

1 <https://betterwork.org/blog/portfolio/supervisory-skills-training-impact-evaluation/>

2 <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/reports/apparel-and-footwear-sector-and-children-vietnam>

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
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