



# It's time for big business and men to step up

BY SALLY HASLER / DEC 16, 2013 8:34AM

Big business has a duty, and a responsibility, to support women's workforce participation. That's the message I delivered to 1,500 young leaders from 171 countries at the annual One Young World Summit in Johannesburg. And in the spirit of the Summit, I needed to share my solutions to make it happen – not just talk about the problem.

I was one of six speakers chosen to talk about how we turn gender equality rhetoric to reality. At first I struggled thinking about how I could be relevant when I was talking to people from countries where women still can't vote, work, go to school, or even drive. My life experience is from Australia and Hong Kong, where, on the whole, these rights for women and girls are protected by law and largely upheld.

But gender inequality still exists throughout society in Australia and Hong Kong, especially during women's professional careers. Women can still expect:

- 17.5 percent less pay in Australia and [20% less in Hong Kong](#)
- to experience some form of sexual harassment or discrimination – over [28% of women in Australia](#)
- to be overlooked for promotions or opportunities because of subtle gender bias about leadership aptitude.
- to take a career break or a less ambitious job because affordable childcare isn't readily available in Australia, or because of traditional cultural expectations in Hong Kong where almost a quarter of women stop working when they get married.

For too long, women have been trying to fix these things themselves: by working harder to balance work and home, undertaking extra training, attempting to break through the glass ceiling.

My message to the young leaders of the world is this -- if we are really serious about creating a fairer and productive future for young women we need to stop fixing the women and start working on the men.

Big businesses, which are overwhelmingly run by men, have significant power to change outcomes for women around the world. Companies like GE operate in 130 countries, Citi operates in 160. That's 160 opportunities to support gender equality. And they should want to. Gender equality is an economic imperative – research shows it improves company performance. Investors link it with a higher return on investment. The IMF estimates the global economy misses 27% of GDP growth per capita due to the gender gap in the labor market.

We need to educate leaders on the case for greater female participation, and challenge gender bias, stereotypes and traditional views. We need more male champions. We need to reframe the way we think about women and working and stop placing limitations on their desires and abilities to pursue ambitious, successful careers. And we need new solutions.

### **Parental leave models**

We can't have equality in the workplace until we have equality at home. Businesses should adopt more innovative parental leave models that encourage active fathering and tackle the stigma of parental leave, to support both men and women to care for children. And encourage women to return.

### **Child care**

Businesses can help women access affordable quality child care – in many countries this is the difference between women working, or not. They can fund childcare, help find places or even build adjoining child care centres.

### **Measuring gender inequality**

Businesses should measure gender inequality in their organisation, set targets and evaluate managers on meeting those targets. What gets measured, gets done.

### **Sponsorship**

Business leaders should seek out and sponsor female talent and recruit others to do the same. Men have top-level sponsors who advocate for them and open doors. Whereas, women often have mentors who provide advice and support. If every powerful man in this world pulled 1 woman up with him, the number of female leaders would rise rapidly.

### **Share and learn from one another**

Businesses should share best practice, debate solutions and learn from one another.

I learnt at One Young World that the battle for gender equality is not restricted to one country. It is a global battle. Businesses operating globally have the ability to lift women's workforce participation, supporting human rights and much needed economic growth.

My call to action? I told delegates to go home and challenge their companies. To find out how their employer are supporting women in the workplace – at home and abroad – and ask yourself and them what can they do better?