

GLOBAL REPORTING INITIATIVE

THE GLOBAL REPORTING INITIATIVE HAS PIONEERED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORLD'S MOST WIDELY-USED SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING FRAMEWORK. THIS BLOG PROVIDES A SPACE FOR STAKEHOLDERS IN THE REPORTING PROCESS TO SHARE INSIGHTS ON SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING TODAY. PLEASE NOTE THAT THE VIEWS OF AUTHORS ON THIS BLOG ARE NOT NECESSARILY THE VIEWS OF THE GLOBAL REPORTING INITIATIVE.

SUNDAY, 7 MARCH 2010

One Day a Year is not Enough

We are fast approaching **International Women's Day** on March 8th, which has been observed since in the early 1900's. This year's theme is **Equal Rights. Equal Opportunities. Progress for all.** This is not just about human rights, morality and feeling righteous. It's about survival, surthrival (did I invent that word, or did I retrieve it from my subliminal consciousness?), sustainability, and in a business context, sustainable business and accountability. Wherever you are, something will be going on around International Women's Day. One event I strongly regret I won't be able to attend on March 9th is a special meeting of the **UN Global Compact** and **UNIFEM**, at which the **Women's Principles for Business** will be launched. I am privileged to have been part of the International Advisory Group who reviewed the first draft of these Women's Principles. The finished document is excellent guidance for developing gender equal workplaces. The principles are:

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

Together these principles, supported by detailed how-to statements, address both the elimination of inequalities and the promotion of equality. If they are endorsed and assimilated by all the business leaders subscribing to the Global Compact, then **2010 will be a great year for women, and for men, and for business.** As women take their well-deserved place on the corporate stage, they create more space for men, not less. As you may notice, transparency is a key

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principle. We must demand that businesses, in their CSR or Sustainability Reports, or in any other channel, account for the way they are enabling the inclusion and advancement of women.

Pioneering Sustainability: Anita Roddick

One of the early practitioners of this kind of accountability and transparency with regard to equality and gender balance was THE pioneer of sustainable business, a bold and brave woman, the late **Dame Anita Roddick**, whose spirit lives on in **The Body Shop**, which she founded in 1976 and continues to blaze trails despite a much criticized and feared change of ownership. Anita's **"Business as Unusual"** which I read some years ago is what I call a life-changing book – one of those books full of insights which your mind always leads you back to when you are reflecting about "profits with principles" and the positive power of business, and women, to change the world. Anita wrote: *"As business people, we have world-wide capability and responsibility; our domains transcend national boundaries. Our decisions affect not just economies, but societies, not just the direct concerns of business, but the world problems of poverty, environment and security"*. Anita didn't believe that *"the proverbial glass-ceiling would be shattered in her lifetime"*. She calculated it would take 1,000 years for women to achieve equal managerial, economic and political status to men. More quotes: *"If a woman can decide who gets the last toffee, a four year old or a six year old, she can negotiate any contract in the world... I treasure the Company of women. I love their laughter. I am astounded by the ability to keep communities together around the world....we need to press for greater gender equality on a massive scale.... Women simply have to be listened to"*. The Body Shop published their first 300-page 1995 Values Report in January 1996, a time when most Companies had never heard of social auditing, **consulting over 5000 people in the process**. This was ground-breaking, and a precursor to the 3,000 or so reports that are now published each year around the world. The Body Shop is still publishing independent sustainability Values Reports, and the **2009 report** continues to inspire, and includes a review of the Body Shop **award-winning Stop Violence in the Home campaign**, to protect those at risk from domestic violence (mainly women, of course).

The place of gender equality, diversity and inclusion: two points

First, is that **gender equality begins at home, at the corporate hearth**. As I have been known to repeat, preaching gender equality when there is one woman on your Board and two on your executive team is **WomenWashing**. We must demand that Companies report more transparently about gender. The **GRI Practitioners Guide to Gender in Sustainability Reporting** attempted to map this out. Amy Augustine, of Calvert, ([@amydaugustine](#)), another impressive woman

leading sustainability, said that *"only 7 percent of the 636 companies in the 2007-08 Calvert Social Index® surveyed provide the detailed demographic data required for full Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO-1) disclosure, making it difficult to assess progress for women and minority employees from the factory floor to the executive suite."*

See Calvert's report [Examining the Cracks in the Ceiling](#). When are we going to see real change ? It's time we raised the roof, not slipped through the cracks in the ceiling. Right, guys and gals?

Second, **the place of gender equality in the broader context of diversity and inclusion**. I had the opportunity to reflect on this again this week in the company of two more inspiring women : [Juliana Oyegon](#), the Chief Diversity Officer at the World Bank and [Kaye Foster Cheek](#), the global Human Resources VP at Johnson and Johnson at a private reception at the home of the US Ambassador to Israel, Mr William B Cunningham, which preceded a [conference](#) at which these women spoke the following day. (See pictures of Juliana and Kaye on the [US Embassy photo stream](#)) . This was a conference organized by yet another strong and mission-driven woman, [Tziona Koenig-Yair, the Israeli National Equal Employment Opportunities Commissioner](#). Juliana says that diversity is about survival, not just about accepting each other. Kaye says diversity is a journey, and you need to keep travelling and involving everyone along the way. She gave some great examples of how Johnson and Johnson journey to diversity, including tangible examples of how a diverse workforce assists in attracting a diverse customer base. Check out [J&J's last CSR report for 2008](#). In the talk about diversity, however, a strong focus was on minorities and more general dimensions of diversity that prevent truly equal participation in the workplace. But heck, if Companies cannot create equality for women, what hope is there for smaller minority groups and non-mainstream employees? If you can't do it with women, with 50% of the population to choose from, you can't do it with anyone, right? The key is talking the business case for diversity, because most leaders still see diversity as a nice, ethical, moral, feel-good feel-benevolent type of activity. Let's be nice to everyone and show that we don't discriminate. That'll do wonders for our reputation. Great attitude. But, guys and gals, why should we settle for this? Diversity, like the womenomics of gender equality, is also about business. That's the language that CEO's need to hear. It's about adding value through innovation, reduced workplace conflict, attraction and retention, reduced employee turnover, improved customer service, higher productivity - all of which support the economic bottom line as well as the others.

Let's celebrate !

You know what, gals, this is our day, let's celebrate! Here is a great post from Aysu Katun on [Women Making strides in Sustainability](#).

Two other women I would add to this list, interestingly, both connected with Anita Roddick, are :

Amy Domini : **Amy Domini**, founder and CEO of **Domini Social Investments**, often called the First Lady of Responsible Investment, the one who put SRI on the map. Anita Roddick mentions Amy in "Business as Unusual". I had the pleasure of hearing Amy Domini talk at a conference some years back. She makes an impact, no doubt about that. [You can read her speech here](#). Both a visionary and a practitioner, Amy has changed business of finance and the world for the better.

Maria Sillanpaa : Maria ([@ThinkWider](#)) is a sustainability pioneer with one of the most impressive records in this field. Maria produced the first CSR-related thesis for her Masters in Finland way back in 1990, and was charged with producing the first Social AND Environmental Report, for which no known methodology existed back then, which culminated in the Body Shop first Values Report, mentioned above. In chatting (or should I say Skyping) with Maria this week, she said: "*I worked with Simon Zadek to develop a methodology for the Values report – this was the post-Brent-Spa era, and one in which the Shell/Nigeria human rights issues were on people's minds, and everyone was pushing for more business accountability for these issues. Anita and Gordon had a political drive to use the Body Shop as a guinea-pig to develop the methodology and show the others how to do it. The Values Report was the first indepently verified comprehensive social report. The mainstream reaction was that this was just a fad, but now the story is quite different. It was both a frightening! and exciting experience, and I truly appreciated, especially as a young female, being given the political space to do something significant. Being a woman never came into it. I never encountered discrimination at Body Shop so I felt my early career was rather cushioned in that respect.*" Maria went on to help found AccountAbility, write a book on **Stakeholder Engagement**, and do many more pioneering sustainability things, including founding her consulting firm, **Sustainability Advisory Group**, through which she continues to drive responsible business practices and transparency, especially in the Middle East where she spends a lot of her time. Maria is also on the **Technical Advisory Committee of the GRI**. On women and sustainability, Maria says, "*Women have a collaborative mindset which fits with the philosophy of stakeholder engagement and dialogue and the multi-disciplinary challenge. There is more openness in women to that*". We agree, right guys and gals ?

And whilst we are in the Spirit of International Women's Day, you can also vote in **Andrea Learned's poll of Women at the Forefront of Sustainability** (Andrea herself is at the forefront of gender equality and marketing to women, but it's bad protocol to write a poll and

include yourself, right?)

See? More women, more sustainability. **Let's Make every day International Women's Day** and let's drive more and more Companies to be transparent about their data, and adopt the Women's Principles and Gender Reporting Indicators and align their practices with their bold declarations. Perhaps we should turn it into **International Promote a Woman day!** More action , more collaboration, more getting it done and less empty declarations of intent. I mean, this day has been an annual event for nearly 100 years and we still get 30% less pay than men in equal jobs. Right, guys and gals ? Before you can achieve equality, you have to eliminate inequality. There is a difference. And doing it for one day a year is not enough.

This article was contributed by: Elaine Cohen , co-Founder-Manager of [BeyondBusiness](#), a social and environmental consulting and sustainability reporting firm, and GRI Organizational Stakeholder. Elaine also writes regular Sustainability Report reviews on [CorporateRegister.com](#), and a popular reporting blog at [www.csr-reporting.blogspot.com](#).

POSTED BY ELAINE AT 08:51 

LABELS: AMY DOMINI, ANITA RODDICK, BEYONDBUSINESS, DIVERSITY, GENDER EQUALITY, MARIA SILLANPAA, WOMEN

2 COMMENTS:



elaine 8 March 2010 14:00

This is a comment by Andrea Learned who was not able to post her comment directly:

What a great, comprehensive post/update on the state of women, equality and sustainability, Elaine. I am passionate about using my knowledge of gender and consumer behavior for the purpose of helping the conventional business thinker engage with sustainability. Gender diversity in the workplace is not a special "help the women" crusade, but is instead very good business. What we have learned about how to engage more traditional thinkers with the idea of women in leadership will also further the cause of helping those traditional thinkers SEE the power in sustainability. I will likely continue to cover the connections in my own blog and in my HuffingtonPost pieces. Given your work and all that is being posted this month by others on the topic of women, leadership and sustainability - my guess is we ARE finally launching a lasting and building conversation.

Andrea Learned - <http://learnedon.com>

Reply



Emmett Walker 27 September 2013 03:30

There are many countries where women still not get their proper right, specially in the third world country. hope it will change soon.

financial advisor Maryland

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