

REPORT on CSW 61 for SISWP

March 2017

1. Introduction

The theme for CSW61 was “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work”, a topic that is of particular interest to me.

At a professional level, as a manager and a board director, I often wondered how much better our organisation’s performance could be if we engaged more women at senior levels to contribute to decision-making. All discussions about women in senior positions or on boards seemed to focus on women’s lack of interest in those roles or women lacking the right experience for those roles. There didn’t seem to be any significant change on the horizon because women were ‘genetically wired’ to look after the children. No one seemed to think that perhaps the system needed to be changed to accommodate parents, both mothers and fathers.

So it was with much anticipation that I headed off to New York for CSW61 to learn more about issues affecting women in the workplace. More importantly, I was hoping to hear from people who had successfully affected change in their environments.

2. Key themes from CSW61

There were a number of key themes that emerged from the many sessions I attended. I have grouped the key learnings from my experience below.

2.1 Gender pay gap

The gender pay is real and ongoing. In Australia, the gender pay gap is around 18%. In other parts of the world, the gap can go up to 23% - 24%.

Many people I spoke to before going to CSW61 didn’t believe that the gender pay gap was real. They thought simply that women were paid less than men because they worked part-time or because they had lower level or lower paying jobs. They are shocked to discover that the gender pay gap actually means women being paid less for doing the same work as men.

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, said in relation to the gender pay gap “Society has not kept up with the expectations of women” and that it was important to crack the current norms, stereotypes and practices to achieve empowerment of women in the workplace.

So what are the causes of the gender pay gap?

Julianne Richter, Chief Operating Officer at Edelman, and a panelist at NGO CSW explained that women tend to accept the first offer for a job when they enter the workforce, whereas men tend to negotiate for a better deal. The gap starts there and it’s hard to catch up, particularly when you consider that women often take career breaks in their 20s, 30s and 40s to have children.

Unconscious bias is also a significant contributor to the gender pay gap. It starts with recruitment and continues throughout the organisation.

Another contributor to the pay gap is the fact that women are often carers of others and therefore have to take part-time work to suit their arrangements. This means they often take lower paid

work, which affects their career advancement prospects and ultimately affects their retirement savings. It's a life-long issue.

There are some simple solutions that can be implemented to reduce, and hopefully eliminate, the gender pay gap over time.

Julianne Richter suggests that training for unconscious bias is a good place to start, and that training needs to be provided to both men and women. The training includes simply introducing the notion of unconscious bias because many people are not even aware that they are discriminating based on gender. It is very important to address unconscious bias during the recruitment process, including improving interviewing and questioning techniques.

In New Zealand, there has been much success amongst a group of banks and other businesses that are tackling unconscious bias. During the recruitment process, they de-identify resumes so that the decision-makers do not initially know whether the applicant is male or female.

Undertaking a pay audit is a simple yet effective tool for ensuring that women in that organisation are being paid the same as men doing the same work. In many cases, leaders are not aware that a pay gap exists in their organisation and a pay audit can uncover this problem so that it can be remedied.

In Iceland, they realised that in dealing with unconscious bias, they cannot simply talk about statistics. They must tackle it on a case-by-case basis in individual companies. The Action Group on Equal Pay, a protocol between the Government, the Council of Labour and the business community, monitored progress against measures set out in the action plan for Equal Pay Standards. The objective of the Equal Pay Standard is to create a system to ensure men and women working for the same employer are paid equal wages and enjoy equal terms of employment for the same job or jobs of equal value. To achieve this, they implemented system tools such as classification and ranking of jobs, salary audits and other formal procedures.

In implementing the standard, pilot participants agreed the need for a transparent and fair remuneration system, and those that achieved the standard were able to use the 'equal pay logo' to show their commitment to equal pay. The logo can continue to be used for as long as the certification is valid. All pilot participants agreed that meeting the standard was a big commitment for their workplace but it was worth the effort.

Implementing workplace solutions for working families also helps to eliminate the pay gap. By providing flexibility and paid parental leave for both men and women, plus having access to affordable child care, means that women can participate more fully in the workforce. This also has the added benefit of encouraging men to be more involved in raising children.

Iceland implemented a policy of 3 months parental leave for both mothers and fathers, which could not be transferred from one parent to the other. This made a big difference in leveling the labour market almost immediately as fathers also took leave to care for their newborn children. Now, approximately 90% of Icelandic men use almost the full amount of parental leave.

Workplace policies on not discussing wages with co-workers and, more formally, pay secrecy laws prohibit contribute to the gender pay gap by prohibiting the discussion of wages. By removing these restrictions, pay levels become more transparent and the gender pay gap can be reduced.

Encouraging women in to higher paid jobs and encouraging them to negotiate better salary packages is also a tool for reducing the pay gap. There is also a need to better value the professions undertaken traditionally by women, such as teaching.

H.E. Ambassador Patriota explained that alliances between NGOs and the private sector are very important in closing the pay gap. The private sector has a big role to play in this space because the pay gap is a much greater problem in the private sector than the public sector. He suggested that incentives be given to businesses meeting standards, such as certifications, seals and awards, in much the same way as was implemented in Iceland. He also suggested that restrictions could also be used to affect change and cited an example from Switzerland where private businesses were excluded from government procurement lists if they did not meet equal pay standards. Ambassador Patriota believes that incentives and disincentives are helpful in accelerating the reduction and eventual elimination of the gender pay gap. This is required because on current trends it will take over 70 years for this issue to be resolved.

2.2 Women in leadership

There are still not enough women in leadership positions and this means that issues such as gender pay gap and discrimination in the workplace are not addressed satisfactorily. Further, according to Ms Mlambo-Ngcuka, “There are not enough leaders in the world who have zero tolerance to gender inequality.” This needs to change if gender equality is our goal.

There was discussion at a number of sessions about quotas for women in leadership positions, in the workplace, on boards and in politics. People against quotas often talk about merit and ensuring the ‘best person for the job’ gets the job. Also, women who are against quotas say that they want to get the job on their merits, not because of a quota.

According to Ms Mlambo-Ngcuka, there is a need for quotas at this time so that the required changes can happen. She suggests the use of quotas now as a special dispensation, but they will not be needed forever. This is particularly obvious when considering unconscious bias previously discussed. Quotas can be used as a way to accelerate implementation of gender equality goals because it’s not sufficient to wait for trends to take their course and we need to make progress more quickly.

Iceland has again been at the forefront of implementing tools to address women in leadership. While they recognise that there are arguments for and against affirmative action gender quotas, the 2008 global financial crises was the trigger for Iceland to implement quotas to increase the number of women in leadership. They recognised that business was too male dominated and they wanted to address that quickly.

The outcomes of affirmative action were that it increased the number of women on boards overall, especially in medium-large companies. In smaller companies, there was little change. There was also almost no change in the number of women in the Chair role, and this is likely due to the fact that boards elect their own Chair and unconscious bias may continue to hinder these results.

Interesting, it was noted by Iceland that women tend to get leadership positions in times of crisis or downturn, when the chances of failure are high. This can perpetuate the notion that women are not qualified or experienced enough for these positions. In their studies, they also found that women were generally in favour of quotas, whereas men, especially young men, were generally against quotas.

The study also found that, in the workplace, men did more networking, were more often headhunted for jobs and spent at least eight hours per day at work. The job became more than just work and men tended to form friendships at work and were keen to fit in to the group. Males were more likely to have a partner that earned less and worked fewer hours than they do. Females were more likely to have partners working at least as many hours as they do and earn the same or more money. It was also recognised that male CEOs work longer hours, travel more and do less childcare than their female counterparts. So the question was asked – is it okay that male CEOs do less childcare and delegate responsibility for that to someone else?

Germany last year introduced a new law requiring 30% of board seats in the top 100 public companies to be held by women. A requirement of this law is the implementation of the so-called ‘Empty Chair Policy’. This means boards that cannot find enough women to fill the board seats have to leave the positions vacant (or the chairs empty) until they do. Men cannot be recruited to fill these roles.

At the opening of CSW61, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Antonio Guterres, stated that empowerment of women must be a key priority. Women have what they need to achieve, and empowerment is about removing the structural barriers. The implementation of quotas may be one step in increasing women’s empowerment.

At a town hall meeting on my final day at CSW61, the Secretary General of the UN stated that, in his experience, where there is gender parity, decisions are better. This is a clear indication that tools to improve gender equality need to be implemented with haste, including quotas.

2.3 Women’s workforce participation

Women’s workforce participation rates are affected by a number of key areas:

- Access to reliable and affordable childcare;
- Access to free or affordable education;

In New Zealand, a greater percentage of women work on weekends and abnormal hours because that’s the only way they can get back in to the workforce.

In Finland, they have increased the rate of women’s workforce participation by implementing some key changes, including:

- Flexibility for childcare to include nighttime hours of operation;
- Free lunches at school for all school-aged children;
- Personal taxation system instead of a family taxation structure.

UN Women did some research in Turkey and reported on the findings. If Turkey shifted 1% of its annual budget in to childcare the results are astounding. It would create 719,000 new jobs, which is 2.5 times more than if the same amount of money was spent in the construction sector. 73% of these new jobs would go to women. It would also create more permanent jobs compared to the same money spent on road construction. The research clearly shows that if governments invest in social infrastructure, there are greater benefits in the outcomes.

2.4 Unpaid work

Non-paid work, such as caring for children, the ill, the disabled and the elderly, is still not recognised for its true value. According to Dr Mabel Bianco, NGO CSW’s Woman of Distinction for 2017, this work is still largely undertaken by women and therefore without women, the world wouldn’t be able to achieve anything.

This theme was also highlighted by Radhika Balakrishnan, Faculty Director, Centre for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University. She believes that we need to recognise women's unpaid work and measure it. Governments need to calculate its contribution to GDP so that women's unpaid work can be properly valued.

Further, there is a need to redistribute the responsibility for unpaid work. The bulk of unpaid work, including household work and caring for others, is still undertaken by women, even when that woman is also working outside of the home. We have an obligation to have the conversation about sharing the workload. Importantly, we need the flexibility for men to be carers because they have the right to be carers, for their children and other family members.

The Hungarian government hosted a session on work/life balance, and the role of women in providing unpaid work was at the forefront of the discussion. They provided some examples of how they had made a difference to the balance in their country. They believe in the importance of choice for working parents, either to stay at home with support or go back to work. For women who want to return to the workforce, they encourage the use of flexible working hours and work-from-home arrangements to accommodate parents with young children. Their parental leave requirements provide that an employee's job must be held for her until her youngest child is three years of age, or five years of age in big families. This also applies to fathers.

Hungary has also recently introduced the 'Grandmother Pension'. Women who have worked over forty years are eligible for a full pension to allow them to retire and look after grandchildren, which in turn allows the mother to return to work.

2.5 Women's access to finance

Access to financial instruments, such as loans, is often limited in scope and value. One of the panelists at the NGO CSW forum lamented that "When they talk about women, it's micro-financing. For everyone else, it's just financing."

Encouraging women to get more involved in entrepreneurship is one way of addressing some of the entrenched issues in the traditional workforce. It allows women to be their own boss, have flexibility in their work arrangements and take on leadership positions. However, access to finance for women wanting to start their own business can be difficult.

2.6 Engaging men and boys

It became clear over the week I spent at CSW61 that one of the most important ways of addressing gender inequality was to engage men and boys. At the opening of CSW61, Ambassador Patriota said, "Men need to be engaged as gender equality advocates." For things to improve, we will have to challenge our rigid notions of masculinity and manhood. This may be uncomfortable for many men and women.

Iceland is again at the forefront of this work with the launch of the Barbershop Toolbox. Developed by UN Women under the #heforshe program, the purpose of the Barbershop Toolbox is to provide a platform when men can learn about the benefits of a more gender equal world. Men must be part of the solution – they must own their actions, hold others accountable and change the norms around gender.

The Barbershop Toolbox is an online collection of tools aimed at mobilising men and boys, which can be used by many different groups including NGOs and political parties. The name comes from a space dominated by men and it's designed to be a space where men learn about gender equality, its benefits and how to get involved.

The concept is about including men in the conversation, not excluding women. Most of the tools can be used in mixed groups or men-only groups, but the male-to-male dialogue is a very important part of the program.

The Barbershop Toolbox includes a range of tools, which are all available online at no cost. The first step is to choose the right tool for your purpose, such as a leadership sessions or increasing engagement with men, and the kit provides step-by-step instructions on how to implement the tools.

In order to get men and boys to turn up to the conversation, it's important to take the conversation to men in places where they are comfortable, such as sports clubs, and also to find a champion within that club or group. In acknowledging that gender equality is not an easy conversation to start amongst men, it was recommended to engage the 25% - 33% of men who already believe in gender equality and use them to reach out to others through the toolkit. Humour also works well in getting the discussion started.

3. Other learnings

3.1 Advocacy training

I participated in an advocacy training session organised by the NGO CSW team. Before attending the session, I knew about many of the topics raised, such as the purpose of CSW, the content of the SDGs, etc. However, the real benefit of the session was an explanation of how all the pieces of the puzzle come together.

There was also a practical exercise during the session, which was a way of practicing how to undertake advocacy in a real situation.

3.2 The process of international diplomacy

According to Ms Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General of the UN and Deputy Executive Director UN Women, CSW is an opportunity for the governments of the world to re-commit to gender equality, as well as focus on the implementation – the 'how to'. Most importantly, it is through CSW that member states are pushed to make new commitments to improve gender equality and the outcome of those discussions is the agreed conclusions document.

Before going to CSW61, I had no experience of any kind with multi-lateral, international negotiations. The process of negotiation for the agreed conclusions document was an entirely new learning. The Australian government was particularly helpful in this regard, organising nightly briefings to provide updates on progress to the Australian NGO representatives.

3.3 Soroptimist International

Attending CSW61 also provided me with the opportunity to learn more about SI on a global level. For the seven years of my membership, I have been focused mainly at a Club and Region level, and attending CSW61 allowed me to appreciate SI's work at a higher level.

Networking with other Soroptimists from around the world was invaluable. I enjoyed learning about their projects and their advocacy work, as well as finding out how other clubs and Federations operate. I had many conversations about advocacy and awareness raising, as well as fundraising, and I gathered lots of ideas to bring back to my own Club.

I learned so much more about the history of the Federations and the organisation overall, and I have no doubt that this will assist me in the future if I am fortunate enough to contribute at a higher level.

I particularly enjoyed sharing and discussing ideas and issues with my SI sisters in an informal setting. I'm very much looking forward to meeting them all again at another forum – hopefully in Kuala Lumpur in 2019, if not before.

4. Future actions

Some future opportunities for advocacy and projects for SI Griffith, and potentially other clubs in the region and Federation, include:

- Raising awareness of the gender pay gap.
Other groups have created events to highlight the inequality created by the gender pay gap. For example, 4th April is recognised as Equal Pay Day – a woman has to work until this time each year to earn the same amount as a man earned last year.
- Encouraging training for the gender pay gap.
Working with medium - large businesses and organisations in our local area to implement training programs for unconscious bias, change recruitment practices such as de-identifying resumes, and also to undertake pay audits to ensure women in their organisations are being paid the same as men doing the same work.
- Raising awareness about the economic value of unpaid work.
- Undertaking campaigns to engage men and boys in the gender equality conversation.
This will include investigating the use of the Barbershop Toolbox to start these discussions in our local community.

5. Publicity

5.1 Prior to CSW61

Prior to attending CSW61, the local newspaper, The Area News (Fairfax Media) did a story about my upcoming trip and tied it in with International Women's Day. It also featured a fellow member of SI Griffith and it was a great way of promoting our club to the local and regional community.

Griffith woman Sonia Casanova prepares to attend the 61st UN Council on the Status of Women

Hannah Higgins
@hannahhiggins1
7 Mar 2017, 5 p.m.

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: Griffith Soroptimists Marj Johnston and Sonia Casanova are on top of the world. PHOTO: Hannah Higgins.

As women worldwide celebrate International Women's Day on Wednesday, one Griffith woman is preparing to take a seat at an international table alongside policy makers and game changers pushing for change.

Sonia Casanova is set to attend the 61st UN Council on the Status of Women in New York this March, after receiving a scholarship to attend as part of the Soroptimist International Federation delegation.



The full article can be found at <http://www.arennews.com.au/story/4513654/women-on-top/>

5.2 During CSW61

During the time I spent at CSW61, I posted regularly on social media about my experiences and what I was learning. All posts were made public and used #CSW61SWP for easier reference. This allowed my SI sisters in my Club to follow my journey closely. A sample of the social media posts is included below.

Sonia Casanova at General Assembly Hall, UNHQ.
 March 16 at 11:37pm · New York, NY, United States · 🌐

Iceland leading the way on equal pay. A transparent, fair remuneration system is a big commitment but worth the effort. #CSW61SWP #CSW61Aus #SIGriffith




Like Comment Share

Allison Balind, Robyn Galloway and 22 others

Sonia Casanova added 2 photos and a video — at General Assembly Hall, UNHQ.
 March 17 at 1:18pm · New York, NY, United States · 🌐

Gender equality is a whole of society issue. Iceland at the forefront again today with the launch of the Barbershop Toolbox, engaging with men and boys to change the discourse on gender equality. #CSW61SWP #CSW61Aus #SIGriffith #HeForShe



Like Comment Share

Cheryl Patten, Damian Anguita and 18 others

1 share

Kay Mitchell Thank you so much for sharing this inspiring speech.
 Unlike · Reply · 2 · March 17 at 2:28pm

Laraine Nicholls Sonia I am so very proud of you my dear . XxxX
 Unlike · Reply · 2 · March 17 at 9:48pm

Sonia Casanova at General Assembly Hall, UNHQ.
 March 16 at 11:42pm · New York, NY, United States · 🌐

So great to meet my SI sister Andrea from Soroptimist International of Barbados. Through various projects they are doing an amazing job of supporting older women and incarcerated women. #CSW61SWP #SIGriffith



Like Comment Share

Nicky Deitz-McMillan, Andrea Simon and 45 others

Sonia Casanova added 2 new photos — at General Assembly Hall, UNHQ.
 March 18 at 6:03am · New York, NY, United States · 🌐

My last day at the Commission on the Status of Women and what a way to end ... a Town Hall meeting with UN Secretary General. He said, in his experience, when there is gender parity, decision making is better. I reckon he knows a thing or two so it's probably worth paying attention. #CSW61SWP #SIGriffith



Like Comment Share

Paige Campbell, Greg Murphy and 44 others

Saideh Barlow Your head and heart must be full! 😊 We are looking forward to hearing all about it when you return.
 Unlike · Reply · 3 · March 18 at 7:32am

While I was at CSW61, SI Griffith hosted its annual International Women’s Day breakfast. Over 290 people attended the event and during the opening speeches we made time for a special video message to be shown, which I recorded outside the UN Headquarters. The video also featured messages from Federation President, Theresa Lyford, and International President, Yvonne Simpson. The video was a wonderful opportunity for all our guests to learn more about the work of SI at an international level. (A copy of the video can be provided.)

5.3 Post CSW61

On my return from CSW61, I provided a 30-minute verbal report to the members of SI Griffith about my experiences, including the key themes and key learnings. I was also presented with a certificate of recognition from my club for my participation at CSW61. Below is a picture of the presentation of the certificate at our Club meeting.



I also completed a radio interview that aired on ABC Riverina NSW during the Morning Show with Simon Wallace. The interview ran for over 10 minutes and included information about Soroptimist International and the work we do in general, as well as information about CSW61 specifically. I was able to talk about the issues of gender equality in general, the gender pay gap specifically and the importance of engaging men and boys. (*A copy of the radio interview can be provided.*)

In the coming week, I will also provide a verbal presentation to one of the local Rotary Clubs about my CSW61 experience. It's a particularly important meeting because that Club doesn't have any female members, so it's my first step since returning in engaging men in the gender equality conversation.

6. Conclusion

At the opening of CSW61, H.E. Mr Peter Thomson, said, "Let's be honest with ourselves. Progress has been slow and uneven. Gender equality is still a goal and not a reality." He looks forward to a time when lack of gender equality will be seen as an absurdity.

Attending CSW61 was an opportunity of a lifetime. I will carry the experiences and learnings from CSW61 throughout my life, both professionally and personally, and they will definitely shape the type of leader I want to become. Hopefully, in my lifetime, gender equality will become a reality.

I am hugely grateful to SISWP for providing the funds for this scholarship, particularly given that the Federation's budget is tight. While this investment was large, I hope that my future contributions, both to SISWP and my community, will go some way to repaying the debt.

In particular, I'd like to thank Di Lockwood and Theresa Lyford for their support, guidance and good counsel in preparing for and participating in this journey.

Appendix A: Schedule of events at CSW61

CSW61 is comprised of several different types of events, many of which were open to NGO delegates. As a first-time attendee at CSW, I was encouraged to build a schedule with the following considerations in mind:

- Choose topics that were of particular interest to me and/ or my Club;
- Attend events hosted or co-hosted by SI, or events with SI presenters to show support;
- Attend Australian Government and regional caucus meetings to better understand issues in the Asia Pacific region and network with other local CSO representatives,
- Group events at the same location to minimise travel time between venues and time taken to pass through security checkpoints, particularly given the cold weather.

My final schedule of events is outlined below.

Sunday 12 March 2017		
9.00am – 3.30pm	NGO CSW Consultation Day Session 1: Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, H.E. Ambassador Patriota, Ms Bandana Rana Session 2: NGO CSW Woman of Distinction Session 3: Panel discussion Session 4: Breakout groups UN Choir and Poet Rupi Kaur	
Monday 13 March 2017		
10am – 12pm	Official opening of CSW61	
12.30pm – 2pm	<i>“Future leaders economic empowerment in the changing international work world.”</i>	Parallel event / SI co-presenter Bette Levy
2.30pm – 4pm	<i>“Economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs through online business incubation.”</i>	Parallel event (BPW)
5pm – 6pm	Australian Government briefing	
6.15pm – 8pm	Soroptimist International Reception	SI members event
Tuesday 14 March 2017		
	Snow day – all sessions cancelled (some session rescheduled for later in the week)	
Wednesday 15 March 2017		
8.30am – 9.30am	Civil Society Morning Briefing by Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women	
10.30am – 12pm	<i>“Opening the door to economic empowerment for women and girls.”</i>	Parallel event (SI)
12.30pm – 2pm	NGO Advocacy Training	
2pm – 2.30pm	Artisan Fair	

3pm – 4.15pm	<i>“Gender equality in the labour market and equal pay: What works? The Icelandic approach.”</i>	Side event (Iceland)
5pm – 6pm	Australian Government briefing	
6.15pm – 7.45pm	NGO Asia Pacific regional caucus	
Thursday 16 March 2017		
8.30am – 9.30am	Civil Society morning briefing	
10am - 11.15am	<i>“The Barbershop Toolbox: Changing the Discourse among Men & Boys on Gender Equality.”</i>	Side event (Iceland / UN Women)
11.30am – 12.45pm	<i>“Work - Life (Im)balance.”</i>	Side event (Hungary)
1.15pm – 2.30pm	<i>“Workforce Participation: the future of work and the promotion of flexibility to help working families.”</i>	Side event (Australia)
3pm - 4.15pm	<i>“Violence, Crises, Adversity, and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs): Implications for Global Health and Well-Being of Women and Children.”</i>	Side event (WHO and other countries)
5pm – 6pm	Australian Government briefing	
Friday 17 March 2017		
9am – 10am	Civil Society morning briefing - Town Hall meeting with Secretary General of the United Nations, H.E. Antonio Guterres.	
10.30am – 11.30am	SI delegation briefing	
1.30pm – 3.30pm	<i>“Girls’ and Women’s’ economic empowerment: Addressing gender norms and stereotypes.”</i>	Parallel event (WAGGGS)
Dinner	Informal meeting with SIGBI delegates	