

When You Train a Woman, You Train a Nation

K. Connery
March 15, 2016



As thousands of women (and some men) from across the globe descended upon New York City and the United Nations this past week for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), WFP International hosted a parallel event on Tuesday, March 15 focusing on issues which are often overlooked in the CSW discussions: motherhood and the family. This event was entitled "Engaging Women in Sustainable Development: Family, Transformation and Co-Prosperity" and the four panelists of informative and powerful women each shared on this topic from their own perspective. As Ms. Alexa Ward, the moderator for the panel discussion, pointed out that besides being the 60th year of the CSW, this year is also the first CSW since the launching of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 goals aimed to ending poverty and inequality by 2030. While there is much hope for women's empowerment moving forward, there is also concern that women's critical role as mothers is not overlooked.



Dr. Amalle Daou and Ms. Annie Franklin

Ms. Annie Franklin from Family Watch International began her presentation by showing a video in which women from around the world were interviewed on the topic of celebrating motherhood. One woman in particular from Nigeria had a profound and audible impact on the audience when she stated, "When you train a man, you train one person. When you train a woman, you train a nation." Women have a unique

and invaluable role as mothers who guide and nurture children. Thus, when women are strong, families are strong, and when families are strong, society is strong. However, in the quest for empowerment, Ms. Franklin said, the gender equality movement hasn't sought to empower women to have families, rather to seek to have what men have.

As Dr. Amalle Daou, a medical doctor and founder of Active Intervention for Mothers, pointed out, true gender equality is a 50-50 partnership between men and women. It's not about seeking to supplant men, but working together on goals such as the SDGs and recognizing the unique roles women play-for instance as mothers.

Ms. Carolyn Handschin, from WFP International, brought the discussion a step further by pointing out the gaps in the SDGs. For example, in the goals regarding education, the focus is on primary education, with nothing said on higher levels of education or on the quality of education. Furthermore, while the SDGs are certainly laudable goals, they will not be accomplished by relying on laws for enforcement. An example of this came from Ms. Sharon Pedrosa, from Montage Initiative, who shared about her experience working with widows in India. Despite the existence of numerous laws supporting gender equality in India, these women are still treated as second-class citizens.



Ms. Carolyn Handschin

Ms. Handschin went on to say that the SDGs merely provide a framework to build global empathy and for the world to start thinking and acting like a global family. It is in our own families where we

learn to live for others. The thing that truly transforms one's heart to live for someone else's sake is love and we learn about serving in the family. For example, when there is respect between husband and wife, children can grow up learning to respect women. Ms. Handschin concluded by giving the moving example of Dr. Denis Mukwege who is known as "the man who mends women" for his work in the DRC healing victims of sexual violence. Dr. Mukwege said that he learned to treat every woman as his mother, sister, or daughter from his father. Truly, celebrating and empowering women's role as mothers will be key to making the SDGs a reality.

The discussion was concluded by several thought-provoking and insightful questions from a group of middle school students who attended the event as a school trip. These bright young minds will certainly be the ones who will find solutions to make the Sustainable Development Goals and resolutions made at CSW 60 a reality.