

Day 2 – Annette Lawson – Thought Leaders’ Meeting – New York September 24 2015

Part 1

I woke up to the most glorious sunny day with the beautiful 1930s buildings and of course great skyscrapers viewed from this river-side apartment bathed in sunlight.

News was all of the Pope and his immanent arrival in New York. I imagine if you lived on the Upper West Side you might not know, but around the UN the police presence is huge and it must be wildly irritating to people who live here not to be able to take their kids to the local park nor to jog their usual paths - I saw two young women prevented from both of these. However he is doing a great job on his chosen topics. It would be better if he actually mentioned the Sustainable Development Goals and the Summit and perhaps he did in the UN speech but so far there has been no inkling on the broadcast news of the clear links to the SDGs with poverty, climate change, and homelessness – all topics on which he speaks. [NB *Of course he did!*]

On women’s rights – let’s not go there.

The Pope moves people. He has a charisma and a presence that is genuine. Let’s hope his messages – especially to and about migrants - will lead to a greater tolerance and some progressive action.

I was at the UN Women offices early after having stood in line for an hour waiting for someone to simply re-issue my lost UN Annual Grounds Pass. Finally with a clerk; she took about 5 minutes so to do. There is a fluttering change around those nearby streets when the police glance and see the badge. And I feel as if I may be a person.

At UN Women’s Offices, everyone was welcoming despite the fact they were still setting up. One guest was already there, a woman from Guatemala from the Indigenous Women’s group. Typing away. Lunch was set out.

The Meeting

Eventually the room became crowded – there were two cameras because it was being filmed and apparently 700 students were watching on cso.net. I can’t find the web cast but I am sure those with more sense and maybe accustomed to web-casts, ‘on demand’ and all that out of hours material can find this meeting. Let me know when you do.

Maybe 80 people in the room – it felt as if the whole of UN Women staff were filling the three lines or so of seats at the back of the room and then there were us thought leaders – a wonderful mix of colours, ages, and abilities in the room at tables.

Part 2

At the top table – **Lopa Banerjee**, Chief, Civil Society Section, who welcomed us.
Phumzile Mlambo-Ngouka, Under Secretary General and Executive Director, UN Women who made opening and summarizing remarks
Lakshmi Puri ASG and Deputy Executive Director, made final remarks

Lopa Banerjee - welcome

Planet 50:50 by 2030 – focus must be all on implementation. Ambitious but possible.

She asked, what are the absolute crucial things we must achieve that will tell us we are on the path to **irreversible gender equality**?

- Must get knowledge of the programme out there – need people to support everywhere: Agenda 2030 is not known at country/region area.
- We need to amplify normative power so that it does achieve for feminists and women and girls everywhere
- We know about the shrinking democratic space – what can we do?

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngouka – introductory remarks

Not everyone is celebrating the new 30:30 Agenda. But the end document would be worse if civil society had not been so involved and active and if we had not had UN Women always there. Pushing for what we wanted and needed for women and girls. She gave the example of a Minister who was opposed to the stand-alone goal. She was influential – it was not looking good. But UN Women was successful in persuading her otherwise and she became one of the gender goal's most committed advocates. This collaborative pattern should continue.

What steps should be taken in relation to the agenda?

List what is not there and have a strategy to address those gaps. For example, in the area of Women, Peace and Security something stronger was needed. We need protection for HR defenders, for women at the coal face – we did get sexual and reproductive rights but we have gaps.

Phumzile said, **today, here and now, we are starting the implementation. Even though the agenda has not yet been celebrated and formally adopted** – [this happened September 25th]. We want today to **start work on a new road map** to achieve real gender equality.

So that we are not sitting here in another 15 years with the same outcome. We want our children to ask, is that really true – it was so bad??

Leadership.

In many countries, the leadership never took it on – we need:

- Heads of State talking about it – dealing with our needs and us.
- Greater support for UN Women - looking at resources for strengthening country presence, programmes.

- UN Women has four strands: Normative, programmatic, administrative, plus advocacy. Flagship programmes will listen to the demand and will be need-responsive. In collaboration, we need to build on this. UN Women is 'pushing the needle' and developing very good relationships
 - In areas where do not have the capacity we need civil society to utilize the collaboration better.
 - Wherever you are, punch above your weight everywhere. 'They' cannot deny you the right to say what needs to be said. UN Women has brought women into the peace talks in Colombia.

Representation in leadership. No country has women in the right levels in the right numbers. Currently there is institutionalized mediocrity. – Men in power include the mediocre with the brilliant. But women cannot afford to be mediocre and need those places.

She made the important point **that support is needed for Women's Organisations** as opposed to **all** organisations. This means positioning the women's movement at the center. More need to own the agenda; however, this must not weaken but strengthen the women's movement. *[ARL: I think this is important because development organisations do not always take the same perspective nor policy approaches as women's organisations; the UN Women He for She programme has merits but when men are involved resources tend to flow in that direction and not to women's organisations.]*

Data– the absence of good data is a structural barrier to getting change - Must collect reliable data to be evidence-based in the work that we do.

1. Gender responsive budgeting is essential. Closing the gender funding gap is critical.
2. Take the issues in goal 5: action/campaigns/unpaid work – all need our best efforts. From what would women gain most? – Paid parental leave, equal pay, and child care. Ending VAW – not for poor countries only. Addressing sexual and reproductive rights. Numbers in conflict countries are so high. Laws against women. We need law reform to support gender equality.
3. Girls education and life-long learning – global agenda still

Gender stereotypes are always hovering sometimes at the edges, often at the obvious center – the sugar cane worker in Brazil, the woman on Wall St – share a universal agenda: for equal pay, child care, parental leave, health care, decent education and so on.

The democratic deficit

- **97 member states** have methods and laws to inhibit and prevent the free working of NGOs, including women's groups. That's right – **half of the members of the UN.**
- **Access for NGOs to the UN – and Civil Society in general – is harder every year it seems.** *[Yet Eleanor Roosevelt made it our right, ARL].*

Phumzile ended by acknowledging that UN Women needs to do more on certain categories of women: Disability, LGBT, older women. (ARL: *significance to older women coming last in this list? Where are women caught up in justice systems; imprisoned; tortured? Widows?*)

Meeting open to the floor. Alas, with only about 75 minutes, it was clear not all could contribute. Are 'thought leaders' meant to think and not speak?

Another time, maybe good to divide into smaller groups – perhaps list 6 or so structural barriers to gender equality and each group given the task to come up with initial solutions/next steps?

List of participants and contacts.

It was a real problem that we had no list. Although we had networking time over lunch and met a good many, cards don't do it and half the time people don't have them. A list would have helped us work out who was speaking about what. And if we are thought leaders, let's share our thoughts not just for two hours but over time. I asked again at the end and was promised we would have the list – not so far. However, the UN is busy; incredibly busy right now.

Disability

Following on from Phumzile's last comments, the first to speak from the floor was a deaf woman. There were two interpreters using sign language. She spoke about their absence from many of the fora and about the specificity of women's needs that should be addressed. *At the end she had further long conversations with Lakshmi Puri.*

Accountability:

Much of the conversation, not only at this thought leaders' meeting but throughout my four days, focused on accountability. How can the work to implement Beijing and the SDGs be monitored and governments be held to account?

Kate Lappin had argued in an article published that morning in The Guardian that the Beijing Platform and Declaration was more progressive (albeit published 20 years ago) than the present Sustainable Development Goals. That document sets out detailed instructions for the achievement of its goals and plans, including what should be done to ensure the main actors were held accountable. At the meeting, Kate argued that in the SDGs, there is a lack of capacity to hold people to account i.e. governments that have the main responsibility to carry out what they have agreed to.

Yet the private /corporate sector has investor rights to hold governments to account. The Rights agenda is undermined by the economic model that we have. We have growing inequalities driven by over consumption. The proposed indicators are further reducing the agenda. We need to watch the commercial partnerships that UN Women has.

Red lines – Charlotte Bunch continued on the theme of accountability and looked at existing international instruments that could be useful in such processes. CEDAW, and a whole raft of rights covenants and other mechanisms in different fields such as health – WHO -, or industry/workers' rights – ILO –

need to be used in any monitoring process and should be from a human rights perspective. But that language is not popular.

We have learned that half the countries have placed restrictions to the roles of NGOs. But it is among and from civil society that solutions originate.

In thinking about language, and worrying about the choices made that are too often not the best – not those that reach people’s minds and hearts, Charlotte proposed the term “unacceptability”: Let’s make sexism ‘unacceptable’. Make violence ‘unacceptable’.

Yasmin - Equality NOW points to sex discriminatory laws – this is always very clear – they exist or do not. Does not cost much to change it. Can measure progress easily.

AWID – Uruguay – reminded us that we came into the process to challenge it. And Vanetta (?) – said accountability issues have to be taken at national/regional level. Ownership/leadership needed. Need strategy to monitor – we need to unravel what indicators there are at national/regional levels and use them. She agreed that NGOs have shown the way – but the change is not visible. The question is how to **accelerate** the good practices, including those undertaken by NGOs. It is really useful to use score-carding. Has real impact.

Ala – suggested again there were useful international mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review which might be applied to the SDGs. She moved to the issue of **Women in Faith** – working mechanisms with faith leaders is necessary – they have political leverage. And she argued that research indicates social **media** does not have much of an impact – ‘old-fashioned methods - billboards, surveys, door to door contact ‘ was found to be much more significance.

Anisha from Connecticut - 17 years old – did not agree. There are important generational differences - use social media.

Bani Dugal, Baha’i International Community (BIC), returned to faith groups. She agreed about mind sets, and also thought language was central, Discrimination against women is ‘unacceptable’ – should be made ‘not cool’. BIC was starting a working group with faith groups, to deconstruct patriarchal norms everywhere.

Pakistan community leader/advisor continued on the media topic and said there were horrible things happening to women including what the media itself was doing. Women’s experience was not being covered the way it should be covered. She wanted to see a dedicated women’s channel.

Disaggregated data.

Francoise set out the arguments for collection and analyzing data so that it actually illuminates women’s lives. She mentioned classic categories but not Marital status – widows etc. *I knew I would need to do so!*

Returning to the accountability issues, she thought there had to be a role for CSW plus the UPR but creative methods such as score-carding were also very important and she linked such methods to money:

'I'm thinking money'. She had understood that in Africa alone it would take \$34 trillion annually to implement the SDG goals.

"We need to look at what is being given to Goal 5."

Business has to give money. But we need to know where the money coming from. She thought **we can influence where it goes.**

Women's movement and organisations – majority at grass roots level are not at the table and do not bring their issues.

Orsa, **President, Hunger Project**

Obstacles are in mind-set. Drive gender-focused community level development – start with women and mobilise all. Local government partnerships; form organisations to learn about HR, access to services - hold people accountable when they do not deliver at this, local level.

Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda – YWCA, working on child marriage which we should call 'child abuse'.

Thanked for the space to have this conversation. There are barriers but we are out! Here. The question is how to expand space for quality experience.

She proposed we needed to echo key messages – need stronger intergenerational space. But we cannot just have scaling up of the status quo.

Have to have **different spaces.**

She raised other problems: **Illicit financial transfers. The SDG Goal on peace.** Weapons are not manufactured where the conflicts are but elsewhere!

The world is not poor. We need a prioritization of choices. Government must make choices for where it spends. We - women - can make choices ourselves – our own philanthropy.

King – ITUC. Too often the trades unions are left out of the civil society space. Transformative change means we cannot do business as we do it now – relies on labour of women - this is an exploitative model.

Women are in agriculture, the garment industry – but there is a shrinking space for democracy – especially for trades unions. Needed a goal on social protection. Work with ILO – universal social protection.

Indigenous women – Peru

Use advocacy at international and national levels. The voices of indigenous women are regularly ignored.

Marianna – wheel chair user from Moldova - raised the issue of women in institutions. Their voices are totally absent.

?Name, a woman who said she was lesbian – pointed to the absence of LGBT in the sustainable development goals. They came very late to discussions. The

SDGs are the product of compromise. But LGBT community should not be forgotten. And 'we must listen to sex workers'.

At this point, we were told no more speakers could be taken. We called out that not one speaker had been selected from our table. Lopa said we could have one and we gave the slot to Shantal.

Shantal Munro Knight – Caribbean Policy Development Centre, knew that some of us were concerned to say more about older women. She pointed out we all would hope to get old.

She also brought the meeting back to the call for missing voices – including older women, to be heard. And attended to.

Lopa then said that after Phumzile and Lakshmi had made closing remarks, we could take another round.

Many left but I was chosen for one more closing remark

Annette – NAWO (UK)

On age – 'I believe we are all part of the future until the day we die.' (*Cheers and applause!*)

Of course young women are important – but UN Women is right to say it could do more for particular communities and included the elderly.

Disaggregated statistics – I made a plea to add marital status - feminists had spoken out against it for a whole set of reasons but now it was important in order to tell us about widows, early and forced marriage (child abuse), the effects of divorce.

Support for women's organisations alone – I said I was very glad Phumzile had asked for the women's movement to be strengthened and not reduced or diluted or overtaken by men and their concerns.

The argument on prostitution

Finally, I had heard a woman call for us to 'listen to 'sex workers'. I said I thought we should listen to all women involved in prostitution and that while we of course wanted to see no criminalization of these women, we absolutely did want to see the buying of women's bodies criminalized. To decriminalize **both** selling and buying seemed in danger of creating another right – that of men to buy women's bodies for their pleasure and not for hers.

That was not on our agenda.

In **summing up** remarks, Phumzile said we had to decide now what to do, when to do it and how to do it. She wanted us to lead. But she thought groups should be organized - not necessarily to bring everyone to New York but perhaps by region.

Lakshmi Puri suggested there were many areas on which to focus for women's advancement in the SDGs – 11 goals had specific gender equality targets. And recommended the preamble to the 3030 Agenda which had clear statements on gender equality.

I was left feeling vital barriers to structural change had been omitted and because of the short time, not sufficiently elaborated, among them the need for

effective mechanisms that bring women together from local through to international levels – to develop policy and a collective voice and speak truth to power. There is much good practice in the world including the Asia-Pacific regional NGO network. And our own WNC offered a country-level example.

The funding remains a serious matter. Some bright lights: There was an SDG funder's organization and a women's philanthropy network (Action Aid, Washington)

There was more to say on the **democratic deficit** just here at the UN:

- Here at this session, accredited NGOs could go to just one event and then choose another half day from the two available. The process involved the organisers meeting those registered who could make a particular time at a point on the streets opposite the building and, like a tour group, follow the leader with the banner through security and once in, there was no freedom to move around the building. And we thought CSW was restrictive!
- Access does not just include getting in to the UN – it is more difficult to speak, to contribute, to be a real part of the decision-making. And it means not excluding voices that should be heard within the NGOs too

Finally, the whole business of monitoring and the influx of corporate funding which may well be essential, is at the center of civil society work. UN Women has published a Private Sector Accountability Framework tool.

Appropriately, UN Women gave us a leaving present of their publication, 'Monitoring Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' and I attended good workshops about it – more to follow.