



TARGET
GENDER
EQUALITY



Target Gender Equality – When She Leads

“You are never too young to make meaningful impact and positive change. Find your voice and dare to use it.
This is your power.”



Quick facts: Bruna Elias – Senior Programs Manager – UN Global Compact Network Lebanon & #YouthPower MENA representative – Restless Development, Project Everyone and Action 4 Sustainable Development

Key Accomplishments:

- Worked as SDGs Expert with Project Everyone – featured in Amika George's book “Make It Happen”
- Led and organized a hackathon with YouthPower Panel and Unilever bringing together hundreds of young people to hack solutions to help deliver the Global Goals
- Successfully managed two UNGC Global Impact Initiatives: Young SDG Innovators Programme and Target Gender Equality

We have 10 years to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. What are you doing to champion the Global Goals in your organization?

I have been working with the Lebanese Network of the UN Global Compact since 2016. Our programs aim to mobilize a global movement of sustainable Lebanese companies and stakeholders and bring the full weight of the private sector to the SDGs to meet the 2030 deadline. Throughout my work, I had the chance to work on small-scale partnership projects, to long-term, transformational, multi-stakeholder projects. Some of the programs include the Young SDG Innovators Programme that aims to accelerate business innovation towards the SDGs. This ten-month accelerator programme helps to identify and nurture future business leaders and change makers to develop and drive innovative solutions through new technologies, initiatives, and business models and deliver on their company's sustainability objectives. Another initiative that I am proud to have managed is Target Gender Equality that aims to accelerate the pace of progress on gender equality within the private sector and helps businesses deepen implementation of the Women's Empowerment Principles. To support the nurturing and building of the necessary infrastructure around the SDGs in Lebanon, I also contributed to high-impact research and helped organize many roundtable discussions and events with major stakeholders such as the Lebanon Collaboration for the SDGs Event and Making Global Goals Local Business Middle East Forum.

Working with the Global Compact is very rewarding. I was able to connect both to the young generation, as well as to some of the most seasoned managers and CEOs, whether working at the local or global level.

My activism journey surpasses my work at the Global Compact. In January 2020, I was selected to join a group of 11 passionate young campaigners from around the world as part of the Youth Power Partnership that aims to design and lead a new global campaign to drive forward action on the Global Goals. The Youth Power Partnership - led by Restless Development, Project Everyone and Action 4 Sustainable Development (A4SD) – organized hackathons, webinars and events to make sure young people are heard and actively engaged.

This commitment was coupled with different activities with major organizations. During the 75th United Nations General Assembly, I was leading a wiki loves SDGs edit-a-thon organized by Project Everyone. More than 300 people took part in an intense week of editing, writing and bettering the information around the SDGs on Wikipedia. This experience exposed young people to hundreds of reports encapsulating a sense that the work on the SDGs needs an overhaul and trained a new cohort of activists.

Finally, I truly believe that impact starts in our small communities and that anyone can make a difference even with limited resources. This thinking led me to create a platform that targets school and university students in Lebanon, the state of distance education and the equity issue during the COVID-19 pandemic. The spread, use and availability of technology is key, as is the availability of online learning materials, as well as devices and the level of internet connectivity at homes. The platform, Lebanon learn, was dedicated to gathering unused laptops, computers and tablets from individuals and organizations and donating them to students in need.

What motivates you to keep fighting for the issues you care about?

Lebanon remains at the forefront of a protracted crisis with multi-dimensional and long lasting impact. There is no doubt that these challenges have had a negative spillover impact on the country and its citizens and have halted the development of the country overall. The cost of insuring Lebanon's sovereign debt has soared since protests against a widening economic and political crisis began in October 2019. The only way to fight this deficit is by establishing partnerships and building on the strength of the businesses rather than the government. Witnessing the power of partnership and the responsibility that we as the younger generation have towards the next generations is what keeps me fighting for issues like poverty reduction, unemployment and inequalities. Young people are always keen on finding new ways to induce positive social change in our community. Witnessing their perseverance and resilience is definitely what keeps me motivated.

Can you share one obstacle that you had to overcome to achieve a successful career?

In Lebanon, women are often discouraged from challenging the traditional structure in society. I grew up in a family that cherished and empowered girls but this does not mean that I was not constantly challenged to succeed just like my male siblings. Later on, the notion of gender disparity was materialized when I started my architecture studies through my first internship and visit to a construction site. As soon as I stepped in, I truly felt like an intruder entering a man's world. The way they treat you and look at you, as if you can never be at the same level of your male colleague. This is when I knew that my journey will not be easy and that I will need to gear up properly to succeed in a society that undermines the power of women. It has been later on through my work that I discovered the power of my voice and actions and my journey as activist began.

Can you share one barrier to women's economic empowerment that you think is overlooked or not adequately prioritized? In your opinion, what needs to happen to accelerate the pace of change?

One major barrier to women's economic empowerment in Lebanon and the Middle East is the cultural perceptions of women's domestic role that eventually led to discriminatory labor laws and practices. These norms are rooted in culture, religion, and family structures and affect the way women are able to participate in their economy and public sphere. This is mainly attributed to the cultural stereotype that casts women in a domestic role, and men as the main wage earners. When women join the workforce, they also suffer discrimination because of such cultural norms. In a nutshell, structural barriers impede the transformation of women's educational gains into labour force participation. For women to be able to change the gender limitations and accelerate the pace of change, there must be a change through education reforms as well as gender laws.

What is one piece of advice you would like to share with fellow women that are aiming to shatter the glass ceiling in the business world?

Kofi Annan once said: You are never too young to lead and you should never doubt your capacity to triumph where others have not. Shattering the glass ceiling is a journey that starts at a young age. Find your voice and dare to use it. Educate yourself, as knowledge is power. Take part in discussion groups, volunteering activities and projects to broaden your horizon. It is your responsibility to then share this knowledge with those around you, give back to your society, and be an inspiration to the next generations.

What is one piece of advice that you would like to share with male leaders?

Listen to the women around you. Listen to the perspective of your mother, sister, wife, child, colleague, to construct a holistic and balanced opinion and approach to things. As much as women are encouraged to speak out and raise their voice, men should be reminded to be active listeners. Listening is the first step toward systemic change. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls shouldn't be a goal by 2030, it should be embedded and integrated in all aspects of our societies by default.