

Speech: Baroness Sugg speech at Fair Fashion in Africa event

Gender inequality is one of the great human issues of our time. We simply cannot deliver the 17 Global Goals unless we have proper equality for women.

We know when it comes to work, women across the world face all sorts of issues – such as wage inequality and glass ceilings, and greater levels of sexual harassment.

As African countries pursue economic transformation, it is crucial we do all we can to help them apply lessons from around the world on women's dignity, rights, and freedom.

The Prime Minister went to Africa and she put job creation firmly at the heart of our new partnership with Africa. Africa is home to some of the fastest growing economies and some of the fastest growing populations and half of those people will be women. That creates an enormous opportunity, but only if there are jobs available to help lift people out of poverty.

Most countries have only transformed and achieved sustained poverty reduction through industrialisation development which enables countries to integrate into global markets, learn vital skills, and progress up the technological ladder, and create jobs.

At DFID we want to support our African partners and support African partner governments to take full advantage of this tool for growth.

Our flagship manufacturing programme, Invest Africa is helping to accelerate industrialisation on the continent. Over ten years, we will help African countries attract £1bn of new foreign manufacturing investment and strengthen sectors such as the garment industry. This will help create jobs and generate much wider economic and social benefit.

The Invest Africa programme has already made a good start, but we need to do more, and do it quicker – which is why I'm now announcing that the programme will expand operations into Senegal, Cote D'Ivoire and Nigeria this Autumn.

But jobs alone are not enough. We cannot forget the unique challenges women face in the workplace – and in particular in the garment industry. We need to make sure these are decent jobs and that they protect people's rights.

Historically the industry has suffered from low quality jobs – with excessive working hours and weak legal protections. We only need to reflect on the 2013 Rana Plaza tragedy in Bangladesh to know how badly things can go wrong.

I have seen first hand how things can change for the better. In 2017, I went to Bangladesh and visited Urmi Garments in Dhaka, with an organisation called Sudokkho, which means well skilled in Bangla, and that refers to a person who has received training, have developed skills and has earned a reputation for

being competent and knowledgeable. DFID funded them in developing in-factory training, ensuring women can gain quality skills in a safe environment leading to better job opportunities and increased income. I spoke to women there, who were proudly making knickers on their production line, they were proud to be Sudokkho and their skills led to a better quality product.

We know the fashion industry is vital to our economy, exports of garments for sub-Saharan Africa alone are worth \$1.7 Billion a year and the size of the sector means you really can be a powerful force for change. The garment sector which predominantly employs women will be a huge catalyst for women's economic empowerment that we all want to see.

That is where many of you in the room come in. It is ultimately you – the private sector – in partnership with both the public and the third sector that will deliver the Goal Goals. One part of our work to help address this is through the Great Partnerships initiative – using our role as Government to convene, connect, and join the dots to make change happen.

Through our Work and Opportunities for Women programme we have already launched our first partnership with Marks & Spencer, who will champion female leadership through its supply chain and aims to reach 85,000 women. Over 5 years we want to use these partnerships with business to reach hundreds of thousands women.

Our support to the United Nations Foundation is also encouraging businesses to make commitments to provide their female workforce with good wellbeing provisions.

Next month the UN Foundation will announce a raft of new pledges at Women Deliver, a global conference on gender equality and women's health, rights, and well-being.

And, as a prelude, I am pleased to say Hela Clothing, a global garment manufacturer – whose non-executive Director Dominic McVey joins us to tonight and helped shape today's event – has committed to providing health and empowerment services- such as STI screening and gender-based violence support – to at least 10,000 more of its female workers in Sri Lanka, Kenya, and Ethiopia by 2022.

Shahi, India's largest apparel manufacturer – also with us tonight – will extend to maternal and reproductive health services to 9,000 more of its female workers and 8,000 in the local community by 2020.

Ethical Apparel Africa, a sourcing agent in West Africa, will provide at least 1,500 female workers access to health and empowerment services by 2023.

These individual commitments are incredibly powerful and when you add them together that will really mean we see proper change to support women's economic empowerment.

I am also encouraged that these employers, and others, are recognising that women in their workforce have periods – every month – and that this can have an impact on their wellbeing.

I am proud that the government, including my department has decided to accelerate its work on stamping out period poverty and shame – in the UK and overseas. In Ethiopia we are already studying how access to sanitary products improves attendance and productivity in garment factories. And I am excited about what else we may be able to achieve this year.

We can't stop at securing jobs for women, we want to see women becoming job creators and entrepreneurs.

Our support to the International Trade Centre's Commonwealth SheTrades programme has helped over 1,000 female-owned textile companies and has generated £2.5 million worth of business leads, when converted to sales.

Finally, lest we forget, women's rights are human rights.

The Ethical Trade Initiative, which we support, helps improve labour standards for all workers – including through ensuring they benefit from fair wages, reasonable working hours and safe working conditions.

And I also am pleased to announce today Ethical Trading Initiative will deliver our Human Rights Business Integrity Service to help small and medium size businesses overseas to tackle complex ethical challenges overseas.

You've worked with ASOS and other companies in Bangladesh to protect and support migrant workers who are at the risk of being trapped in modern slavery.

The work Peter McAllister, Executive Director, and his team do is truly inspiring.

One of the things I'm reflecting on is how we can best deliver economic empowerment for women and all workers in Africa, that is through partnership, through events like this.

I know there are key fashion industry leaders and civil society people in the room discussing how to improve and implement better labour and environmental practices within the garment sector in Africa – including through development of an industry-led Fair Fashion Pact Initiative.

I'm looking forward to seeing this work develops over the next few months and helping it become an example of Great Partnerships in action.

Because that's the aim of our Great Partnerships initiative.

Through Great jobs in Africa.

Through Great women – and men.

Through Great progress together.

We can achieve the Global Goals

Thank you.