



Contribution of United Nations for Empowering Women and Their Human Rights: A Big Change

¹*Adeel Siddquie*, ²*Dr. Ravi Tyagi*

¹Research Scholar of OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan

²Associate Professor, OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the women's empowerment work of the apparel firm Athleta in relation to the United Nations' work on human rights by combining UN human rights theories, corporate social responsibility studies, and feminist viewpoints. I discovered that Athleta and the UN rely on a neoliberal feminist model of development that asserts that women are the primary actors for societal improvement and advancing the goal of gender equality through mixed methods – causal layered analysis as well as social media, content, textual, archival, and rhetorical analysis. While the women's empowerment narrative addresses important aspects of gender inequality, corporate social responsibility efforts for women's empowerment entrench corporate power, burden women with social development, and fail to critically assess the causes and conditions of inequality rooted in capitalist and patriarchal structures.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Athleta, United Nations, Human Rights

1.INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is central to both human rights and United Nations principles. "Equal rights of men and women" is a key concept of the United Nations Charter, which was ratified by global leaders in 1945, and it is the obligation of all States to defend and promote women's human rights. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has promised to be a Geneva Gender Champion, pledging to promote gender equality in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and in international fora.

Despite this, millions of women continue to face prejudice across the world:

- Women are denied equal access to land, property, and housing due to laws and policies.
- Women face fewer and poorer life choices as a result of economic and social discrimination, making them vulnerable to human trafficking.
- Gender-based violence affects at least 30% of women around the world.
- Women are denied their reproductive and sexual health rights.
- Women who defend human rights are shunned by their communities, who see them as a threat to religion, honor, or culture.
- Women's vital role in peace and security, as well as the unique risks they face in conflict situations, are frequently overlooked.

In addition to their gender, certain women endure compounded kinds of discrimination owing to variables such as their age, ethnicity, handicap, or socioeconomic situation.

To effectively protect women's human rights, first and foremost, a thorough grasp of the social structures and power dynamics that shape not just legislation and politics, but also the economy, social dynamics, and family and community life is required.

Gender stereotypes must be removed so that women are recognized for who they are: distinct people with their own wants and goals, rather than what they "should" do.

Companies have a unique level of influence over our lives. Our ability to purchase goods and accumulate wealth is often a determining factor in our existence. We are compelled to spend money on food, clothes, and other necessities in order to exist, as well as other goods we want. The creation of these things results in the world's lived effects of corporate action: just 100 firms are responsible for roughly 71 percent of greenhouse gas

emissions (Griffin 2017).

This suggests that a small number of strong firms are disproportionately to blame for climate change, a shaping factor that disproportionately and adversely affects women (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2019). As the environment changes, women face more dangers and responsibilities. These effects are exacerbated by social and cultural behaviors that result in women's near universal lack of access to representation and leadership roles, preventing them from participating equally in decision-making and having equal rights in society.

The urgency of climate change, and consequently gender inequity, is exacerbated by an increasingly globalized world. The United Nations (UN) adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 to assist minimize and improve the negative consequences of globalization. The Sustainable Development Objectives (SDGs) are a collection of seventeen time-bound goals with 169 targets aiming at eliminating poverty in all of its manifestations by concentrating on sustainable economies, a healthy environment, and gender equality. Companies are always critical to the achievement of the Global Goals, as defined by Goal 17 - partnerships for the goals.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities commit corporations to assisting in the achievement of the SDGs. The UN Global Compact, the world's biggest corporate social responsibility project that adopts a principles-based approach to corporate responsibility participation, has committed 80 percent of the world's firms to the SDGs (Kingo 2019). Corporations are in a unique position to create change because of their unique position and function in society. Corporate social responsibility is both a way to better the world and a way to enhance a company's image among important stakeholders, such as customers. Companies from a variety of industries participate in corporate social responsibility initiatives. We have undoubtedly seen a couple of these if we have been scrolling through Instagram. There are large names like Nike's Girl Effect and Coca-Cola's Program, as well as lesser-known brands like GrubHub's RestaurantHer and Kate Spade's On Purpose handbag line.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) seemed to be everywhere, and my increased exposure to CSR activities led me to the subject. There is presently no comprehensive database that records and tracks all corporate social actions, and there is no singular phrase or definition for corporate social responsibility. From charity gifts and propaganda to collaborations and significant efforts, responsibility takes many forms. Corporate social responsibility is defined in this project as a company's voluntary commitment to social change by intentional and practical attention to specific concerns with the goal of creating a more sustainable society.

Gender equality is one of the issues that corporate social responsibility addresses, and it is one that must be implemented swiftly and universally in order to accomplish the SDGs. "It's time for all enterprises to become genuinely serious about women's empowerment," says UN Global Compact Executive Director Lise Kingo. Gender equality has the potential to boost economic development, financial performance, and business sustainability, yet we are still 202 years away from gender equality in the workplace. All parties must take immediate action" (United Nations Global Compact 2019b).

According to the United Nations, the world has reached a critical juncture in terms of gender equality. Gender equality is achieved via women's empowerment, often known as Goal 5 - gender equality and women's empowerment. Women's empowerment as a cornerstone to global development was pioneered by the World Bank, which saw equal rights for women as not just the moral thing to do, but also a prudent economic investment. This school of thought, known as neoliberal feminism, has gained traction in the UN and CSR, arguing that investing in women via economic opportunity has ramifications in business, society, and the globe. Corporations are particularly positioned to take up the job of empowering women because of their significance in the private sector. Athleta is an example of a corporation that uses corporate social responsibility to help women gain economic independence. This paper compares Athleta's corporate social responsibility initiatives for women's empowerment to the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

2. Review of Literature

The United Nations is the world's biggest conglomeration of nation states together for the cause of peace, having been founded in 1945 amid the ashes of World War II. The United Nations is the only organization that combines the value of national sovereignty with the truth that all members of the human family are mutually reliant. Positive outcomes result from this "mutual dependency" (Kennedy 2007: 5). The United Nations' strength comes in its capacity to carry out its peacekeeping role via negotiation, agenda and norm formulation, monitoring, legitimization, and advocacy (Simmons and Oudraat 2001; Stares 2000; Barnett and Finnemore) (1999).

The efforts to establish a universal human identity are representations of the United Nations' unique authority. The UN is empowered to operate as the impartial community representative by serving as the major source of interactions via the standardization (Nye 1990) of human identity, i.e. humanity (Abbott and Snidal 1998). This capacity gives the international organization (IO) a platform to legitimize ideas and practices while also lowering the obstacles to cross-national cooperation. As a result, in the joint quest of peace, the Unified Nations may be both united and national (Peters 2015).

The United Nations Charter (Chapter III, Article 8) defined human rights in general terms in 1945, while the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights did so formally in 1948. As both founding texts indicate, "reaffirming trust in basic human rights" is a primary UN mandate and, as such, a vital aim for each country and entity in the world as member states, subjects of humanity, or linked organizations. The Declaration, in particular, fills in the Charter's gaps by detailing global society's obligations to each individual's social, political, economic, cultural, and civic rights, regardless of race, language, beliefs, age, sex, country, religion, or 'other status.' According to the Declaration and UN Charter, the preservation and grant of human rights entails national responsibility for the accomplishment of the UN's three pillars: peace, human rights, and development (Birenbaum 2007, 4).

As the effects of globalization unfolded, however, the fulfillment of these pillars expanded beyond national boundaries to include intergovernmental and nonprofit organizations, as well as the commercial sector. The expanding role of the private sector in development may be traced back to altering discourses on gender, human rights, and long-term sustainability.

The following is a quick rundown of the UN's efforts to create a gender and development discourse, which includes discussion of the rise of sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals and the UN's dependence on the private sector to fulfill human rights are based on these two evolutions in discourse.

3. Work Plan & Methodology

This research analyzes Athleta's Power of She campaign using a triangulation of UN human rights doctrine, corporate social responsibility research, and feminist perspectives.

In this paper, I argue that Athleta's corporate social responsibility initiatives are representative of the United Nations' gender and development ideology, which is used to achieve gender equality. I investigate the origins and rationale for the UN's reliance on the private sector to achieve gender equality by questioning the use of feminist discourse for development. I accomplish this by posing the following research questions:

Q1: How do Athleta's efforts in corporate social responsibility align with those of the United Nations?

Q2: Is Athleta's Power of She campaign feminist in nature? If so, what? Is there a form of feminism at the United Nations? If that's the case, what should you do?

Q3: Does collaboration between the UN and the private sector help or hinder the realization of gender-based human rights?

In order to better understand these issues, I propose the following hypotheses.

H1: The UN relies on private sector commitments to make universal human rights a reality.

H2: Women's empowerment efforts through corporate social responsibility are viewed as positive mechanisms for equality.

H3: Athleta's Power of She campaign encapsulates UN development discourse that draws on aspects of feminist ideology framed in a capitalist-oriented iteration known as neoliberal feminism.

Methodology

I employ causal layered analysis (CLA) to strategically integrate numerous methodologies, including social media analysis, content analysis, textual analysis, archive analysis, and rhetorical analysis, to achieve this goal. Dr. Sohail Inayatullah, a political scientist, invented CLA, a post-structural critical qualitative foresight approach that includes dissecting an object, trend, or belief into four layers: litany, social structures, worldview, and myth. Through particular pieces of evidence, these four levels give venues for interrogating modalities of knowing.

Moving into a more abstract and sophisticated layer of study by diffusing an issue into the litany, social structure, worldview, and mythological levels. Because litany is the top layer and frequently the only one that can be seen right once, these four levels are referred to as layers. Myth is the deepest layer. "We can understand how the present litany (of the world's key trends and crises) is, in and of itself, the top of the iceberg, an expression of a specific worldview" and the underlying myths "using...CLA" (Inayatullah 2004, 19). Another comparison is that causal layered analysis is like a field tree. The leaves and branches belong to the litany layer; the trunk and bark belong to the social structure layer; the roots, both beneath and above ground, belong to the worldview layer; and the soil, land, and air belong to the mythological layer. Additional methodologies are used at each tier to give both the facts and the analytical tools needed to understand the causes and circumstances of corporate social responsibility for women's empowerment.

CONCLUSION

My critical analysis of Athleta and the UN's relationship to corporate social responsibility for women's empowerment reveals a major flaw in the gender equality narrative. Can capitalism values ever create equality, no matter how feminist they become? Due to the deep and fundamentally basic character of capitalism for human rights and inter/national relational constructs, this is likely an unanswerable issue. The United Nations and firms like Athleta, on the other hand, may learn about the often covert and subtle constructs and outcomes of capitalist patriarchy from this study. Building women's human rights on economic criteria and methodologies overlooks the fact that capitalism is a gendered/gendering process that lives on inequity.

Furthermore, given the difficulties of corporate social responsibility in terms of efficacy, measurement, and transparency, a more nuanced and clear understanding of the ideological and power constructions of capitalism as a social system would benefit the various actors involved in responsibility projects. Furthermore, the United Nations may profit from my identification of women's empowerment as a fiction of equality by shifting the empowerment narrative to one centered on human rights. Regardless of how well-intentioned or sponsored by the United Nations, corporate social responsibility will not erase or demolish capitalism.

As a result, the true problem isn't capitalism patriarchy, but rather corporate social responsibility's expression and implementation. Commitments of the private sector to social good have the ability to change economic patterns, making production and consumption more sustainable, ethical, and devoted to human and environmental rights. Women's empowerment must be recognized as a myth of gender equality in order to achieve this. Rather than serving as a comprehensive strategy for achieving gender equality, this study demonstrates that women's empowerment requires re-evaluation and implementation as a component of achieving equality. Improved reporting of corporate responsibility's influence on society and the corporation should be part of this approach, as should a more complex and varied form of rights that includes more genders than simply women.

Furthermore, corporations must adopt more aggressive, progressive, and transparent responsibility efforts while collaborating with other corporations and societal actors, such as the United Nations or the formation of a United Corporations, to develop effective and accountable implementation and measurement mechanisms. In the end, just because something is difficult does not mean it is incorrect. The UN's women's empowerment narrative, as well as corporate social responsibility activities, seek to promote equality and better lives for people and communities. The illusion of women's empowerment must be seen as a component of gender equality rather than a panacea.

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