

Cross Party Group on Women in Enterprise

Minutes of meeting held 11 March 2020 13.00 – 14.00

Attendees: Tayo Lasisi; Helene Rodger; ; Charlene Tait; Asma Abdalla; Caroline Penman; Susan Love; Pauline Reay; Susan Harkins; Hermine Kinkela; Martha Walsh; Allison Harrison; Nathalie Agnew; Julie Ashworth; Laura Birrell;; Lyn Batchelor; Laura Galloway; Shona Blakeley; Morag Malloy; Elaine Jackson; Mandy Bailey; Wendy Crawford;; Criona Courtney; Evelyn McDonald; Anne Meikle; Carolyn Currie. Gillian Martin MSP; Jackie Baillie MSP (part of meeting); Bill Bowman MSP.

Apologies: Pheona Matovu; Lynne Cadenhead; Christina Mackay; Miriam Smith; Lisa Wardlaw; Ann-Maree Morrison.

Welcome and Introductions

Gillian Martin MSP opened the meeting. Unfortunately, as a result of heightened security at the Parliament, it was taking a while for members to get to the room, but a start on the meeting had to be made as we only had one hour.

Presentations

1. Hermine of Mbikudi spoke of her business journey and the work delivered in partnership with organisations including Strathclyde University. Hermine became a WES ambassador as could not see the change that was needed was actually developing anywhere for BME women. Hermine spoke of the reasons she started her own business and highlighted many of the difficulties faced which had been very challenging. Hermine noted that new research in Scotland had shown that businesses led by migrants contribute £13bn to the economy. This is a huge contribution to be celebrated -and supported – but appropriate business support for BME businesses appears to be lacking.
2. Helene moved to Scotland 14 years ago and stayed due to marriage. Having felt isolation living in Scotland, Helene and her friend decided to hold a party to connect with other BME women – almost 300 women wanted to attend – showing the need for support for women. Helene was surprised at the credit economy in the UK as in her native Uganda a cash economy operated. Helene found that many BME women lacked some understanding of how some UK financial products and services operated, and it was clear that these different financial experiences were causing problems for many families. For example, children were often translating contracts for parents. As a result of support from the Saltire fellowship, Helene started Moneymatixx – for people to come together and learn more about money.
3. Reham came to Scotland from the US having qualified in cross cultural conflict resolution. Her background is in mentoring, coaching and entrepreneurship. Having had difficulty in finding work, Reham turned to business start-up. At the beginning, Reham struggled to acquire clients while many of her Scottish counterparts did not. When Reham removed her picture from her website, she found that she got more interest. However, when people went to her LinkedIn profile and saw her photo, then their interest seemed to drop off. Diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusivity is having a voice, belonging is having that voice heard. We are asking that our voice is heard. We are asking the Scottish economy to co-create a shared future with us together one in which we truly belong.

Discussion

After the presentations, a number of highlighted points were discussed -

- Issues experienced with business support when starting up in business. Experience of women passed around different offices within the eco system. The issue is that people are asked to fit in to the service and not that the service addresses needs.
- Issues of access to finance are many.
- BAME women are asked to join many meetings with other businesses but no results come from those meetings. It can make you feel that you are taking part in a 'box ticking' exercise!
- The language of business can be tricky, and many women don't know how best to engage with investors.
- There is a lack of cultural understanding amongst some business support agencies.
- The FSB report highlighted the amount immigrants were contributing to the economy. If these businesses were well funded and supported how much more would they contribute to the economy?
- Diversity dramatically increases effective team decision making (research shows by 87%) and increases productivity and innovation. Imagine what BAME businesses could do to enhance the Scottish economy and our local communities and schools.
- Together we can generate new innovative ideas and enable meaningful contributions.
- 44% of BAME people have a family entrepreneurship background vs 24% of white counterparts.
- Susan Love reported that the Scottish Govt is setting up group on migrant entrepreneurship. However, this will need resources to engage BME grassroots organisations. Summing Up

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Participants agreed with the convenor that the session had been really thought provoking and inspirational. Gillian stated that it was really important for BME women to have the opportunity to engage with other committees and CPGs in the Parliament and asked that we try and make this happen through support of this CPG.

DONM: 12 May 2020