



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

PERSPECTIVES ON OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Women and Leadership in Open and Distance Learning and Development

Asha Kanwar, Frances Ferreira and Colin Latchem
Editors



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

PERSPECTIVES ON OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Women and Leadership in Open and Distance Learning and Development

Asha Kanwar, Frances Ferreira and Colin Latchem, Editors

COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.



Commonwealth of Learning, 2013

© 2013 by the Commonwealth of Learning. PERSPECTIVES ON OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: Women and Leadership in Open and Distance Learning and Development is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Licence (international): <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>.

For the avoidance of doubt, by applying this licence the Commonwealth of Learning does not waive any privileges or immunities from claims that they may be entitled to assert, nor does the Commonwealth of Learning submit itself to the jurisdiction, courts, legal processes or laws of any jurisdiction.

PERSPECTIVES ON OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: Women and Leadership in Open and Distance Learning and Development

Asha Kanwar, Frances Ferreira and Colin Latchem, Editors

ISBN 978-1-894975-63-6

Published by:



COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING

1055 West Hastings, Suite 1200

Vancouver, British Columbia

Canada V6E 2E9

Telephone: +1 604 775 8200

Fax: +1 604 775 8210

Web: www.col.org

E-mail: info@col.org

Contents

Foreword	iii
Preface	vii
Acknowledgements	xi
Contributors	xiii
List of Acronyms.....	xix
Introduction: Unlocking the Leadership Potential in Every Woman	1
<i>Colin Latchem, Asha Kanwar and Frances Ferreira</i>	
 PART I: Women and Leadership in Open and Distance Higher Education	
Chapter 1	
Being a Leader in Open and Distance Higher Education	21
<i>Caroline Seelig</i>	
Chapter 2	
Becoming a Leader in Instructional Design in an Open University.....	33
<i>Abtar Kaur</i>	
Chapter 3	
Helping Other Women to Become Leaders in Open and Distance Higher Education	47
<i>Brenda Gourley</i>	
Chapter 4	
Grasping the Opportunities: Women Leaders in Higher Education.....	59
<i>Denise Bradley</i>	
 PART II: Women and Leadership in Open Schooling	
Chapter 5	
Being a Leader in Open Schooling	65
<i>Lystra Sampson-Ovid</i>	
Chapter 6	
Becoming a Leader in Open Schooling	77
<i>Sushmita Mitra</i>	
Chapter 7	
Helping Other Women to Become Leaders in Open Schooling	89
<i>Lambertha Mahai</i>	
Chapter 8	
Through the Looking Glass: Women Leaders in Open Schooling	103
<i>Cindy Gauthier</i>	

PART III: Women and Leadership in Open and Distance Non-Formal Education and Development

Chapter 9	
Being a Leader in Non-Formal Education in Mongolia.....	111
<i>Batchuluun Yembuu</i>	
Chapter 10	
Becoming a Leader in Non-Formal Education.....	123
<i>Nodumo Dhlamini</i>	
Chapter 11	
Helping Other Women through Non-Formal Education and Community Development	137
<i>Chetna Gala Sinha</i>	
Chapter 12	
Women and Leadership in Non-Formal Education and Community Development	149
<i>Carol Kidu, DBE</i>	
Conclusion: Women Are Making a Difference	157
<i>Colin Latchem, Asha Kanwar and Frances Ferreira</i>	

Foreword

As the first female prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, I understand only too well the challenges women face in trying to make their way in the world and have their voices heard. Like many of the women who share their experiences with us in this book, I grew up in a rural community at a time when the pervading cultural norms relegated women and girls to the home. Fortunately, also like many of the contributors to this book, I was blessed with a mother who went against tradition and encouraged me in my schooling. Then, when I was 16 years old and wanted to go to London to study, my uncle told my father, “Don’t send Kamla to England to study. She’s a girl; she has to get married and have children.” I thank God for my mother, who insisted I go first to the University of the West Indies and then on to further study in England. As a student in London and a part-time social worker, I became acutely aware of racial discrimination and the social inequity of minority women. This, together with the black power movement that was then raging throughout the Caribbean, made me determined to return to Trinidad and Tobago to study law, and to make social justice and equality for all my lifelong mission.

After graduating with a law degree back in my own country, I lectured for six years before becoming a full-time attorney-at-law. I then embarked on my political career, starting in local government as an alderwoman. I subsequently contested and lost my first parliamentary elections, at a time when the parliamentary benches were dominated by men. I was acutely disappointed but did not let this outcome deter me. I knew that I had to be persistent and eventually my fortunes would turn — as they did in 1995, when I was elected to parliament and appointed Trinidad and Tobago’s first woman Attorney General. I was often the lone woman’s voice in a huge sea of men who argued and fought with each other. But as one of the few female representatives of the country, I knew I was in a rare position and that it was my duty to assume the natural role of mother when it came to national issues.

I later became Minister of Legal Affairs, Minister of Education and the first woman to be the Acting Prime Minister, the leader of a political party (the United National Congress) and the Leader of the Opposition. My experience in these roles broadened my understanding of how political leadership should and could be used to help build a society that respects diversity, redresses inequalities and improves the lives of girls and women. I strongly believe and continue to advocate that women must be viewed as equal partners in the private and public sectors and in democratic governance.

From the moment I assumed office as Prime Minister in 2010, I put the issue of women’s empowerment on the front burner, both nationally and internationally. I appointed two extremely capable and dedicated women as Special Envoys on

Women and Gender Equality. I established a Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, which I tasked with advancing the national agenda on gender equality, sensitising public officers on gender issues and ensuring that our children were nurtured and protected. I proposed that our National Awards include a new category, the Medal for the Development of Women. And I made it clear that I would do everything within my power to end violence towards women and bring to justice the perpetrators of such acts against the human rights and dignity of women.

As Prime Minister, I simultaneously became the first female Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, a role that gave me further opportunities to highlight the importance of gender equality, women's rights and women's political participation. Reflecting on the recognition I've received for my contributions to politics, social restructuring and gender equality in the world, I could easily say, "My cup is full and runneth over." But the fact is that throughout my life, people have given me their hands in trust, and I have been humbled by their trust and have accepted it with deep gratitude.

Within the Commonwealth community there is widespread recognition that to accelerate social, economic and political progress, we must invest in our one billion girls and women. None of our fellow citizens in the Commonwealth should be relegated to the background, denied education, healthcare and opportunities for personal advancement, or routinely humiliated and abused. We are all responsible for ensuring that they have the same opportunities and protection as boys and men.

The theme of Commonwealth Day 2011 was "Women as Agents of Change". This resonated with my vision of women as transformational leaders. An old Chinese proverb says, "Women hold up half the sky." It is my hope and belief that women will come to comprise half of our legislatures, half of our local governments, half of our state boards and private-sector boards, half of our civil and community leaders and half of our decision makers in all other spheres. Then we can all rise together, and every creed, race and gender will find an equal space and place.

Enabling girls and women to overcome cultural barriers and thereby access educational opportunities whilst fulfilling other responsibilities calls for radical solutions. The Commonwealth is fortunate in having the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to pioneer the open and distance learning policies, organisational processes and programmes needed to promote gender equality. This work calls for far more than empty rhetoric or adding women's or gender equality components into existing initiatives, activities and organisational processes. It demands multi-site, multi-perspective action research into innovative ways of encouraging and supporting girls' participation in schooling or "second-chance schooling", of empowering and developing women's capacity through non-formal education and participation in higher education, and of enabling more girls and women to be contributors to and leaders of such initiatives.

I found this book a fascinating read. It provides a unique set of insights into the aspirations, visions, setbacks, disappointments, breakthroughs and successes of 12 remarkable women who are, or have been, engaged in open and distance education and in helping other women to become leaders. It is not weighed down with "academic speak". It lets us hear the voices of women who have led, or aspire

to lead, open and distance innovations in a variety of socio-economic contexts — and how, in so doing, they have broken the mould of what was expected of and allowed within their particular societies. I hope these honest accounts will inspire many other women to find their own pathways to leadership.

As I said in my 2013 Mother’s Day Message to the nation, “Mothers play the leading role in giving birth to other souls, and then with loving hands and gentle hearts, moulding and shaping our future, with an unfathomable understanding.” As a mother and grandmother, I know only too well how challenging this can be in today’s fast-paced environment, where mothers are a vital part of the workplace. But I also believe these are the very attributes that women as leaders can bring to community development and nation building.

I congratulate COL on publishing this book and making it freely available online so that women the world over can learn from it.



The Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar, SC, MP,
Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago

Preface

The Commonwealth of Learning recognises that women’s empowerment and gender equality are central to its agenda of “learning for development”. COL has adopted gender mainstreaming as an organisational strategy to ensure that gender equality is considered an integral part of all COL’s policies and programmes. For COL, gender means both men and women, and the focus is on promoting equality, wherever either gender is disadvantaged. However, the focus of this book will be on women’s leadership, a critical step in promoting gender equality.

The World Bank (2002) states: “Gender equality is an issue of development effectiveness, not just a matter of political correctness or kindness to women. New evidence demonstrates that when women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster, the poor move more quickly out of poverty, and the well-being of men, women, and children is enhanced.” Another World Bank report (2005) points out that gender inequality in education and employment is estimated to have reduced the per capita growth of Sub-Saharan Africa during 1960–92 by 0.8 per cent per year.

We have evidence that proactive equality measures in various Commonwealth countries yield enormous socio-economic benefits. For example, in India, reserving one-third of the *panchayat* (local government) seats for women has led to improved provision of water, better sanitation in schools and less corruption, as well as to teenage girls marrying later, having fewer children and aspiring to higher education (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004).

The link between women’s empowerment and development effectiveness has been clearly established. An increasing number of governments are realising the value of investing in women’s empowerment and thereby accelerating national development. But more needs to be done. Women represent more than 40 per cent of the global labour force, 43 per cent of the agricultural workforce and more than half of the world’s university students, yet we find fewer women at higher levels. For instance, today, women hold only 21 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013). The figures are not dissimilar in the 53 Member States of the Commonwealth, where only six heads of state are women and just four are heads of government (Wikipedia, 2013).

In October 2011, the three women prime ministers in the Commonwealth at the time — Julia Gillard of Australia, Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh and Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Trinidad and Tobago — organised a special session on “Empowering Women to Lead”, prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth, Western Australia. They spoke of how they had been empowered by education. It is worth noting that a significant shift is taking place here — from women’s equality to women’s empowerment.

We are fortunate to have the Foreword of this book written by the Honourable Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Trinidad and Tobago, who is a powerful role model for both women and men across the Commonwealth. Her views on education and empowerment are a fitting prelude to the reflections of 12 very distinguished women from the Commonwealth and beyond on how they negotiated the processes of “being leaders”, “becoming leaders” and “helping others to become leaders” in tertiary, secondary and non-formal open and distance learning. It has also been a distinct privilege to work with my co-editors, Colin Latchem and Frances Ferreira — outstanding leaders in their own fields — whose diversity of experience has brought fresh perspectives and insights that will make this book relevant to a range of different readers.

There are great opportunities for women to create and lead open and distance learning enterprises, in formal education but also in informal and non-formal learning, all of which call for empathy, communication skills, vision, multi-tasking and working smarter — abilities that women can offer.

Plenty of evidence supports the view that women make good leaders and can bring new insights into leadership. However, enabling women to become good leaders requires a deep appreciation of how gender- and status-related beliefs, ideas, behaviours and practices are transmitted from one individual to another, from one community to another and from one generation to another in all cultures. It also demands the development of strategies to counter bias, stereotyping and discrimination.

Women have valuable ideas, experiences and stories to tell about leadership and change, and there is a great need for more opportunities, and in some cases more encouragement, for these women to share their insights with wider audiences.

From their earliest years, girls should be encouraged to adopt strong leadership roles and develop their confidence and personal abilities; they need to seek out opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities and to act as role models in the family, at school and in the wider community, helping others to unlock their potential. Throughout this book, certain themes recur: the importance of role models, both men and women, who inspired and supported the women leaders to find their “form”; and the need to develop networks for sustenance and support.

While educational opportunity and natural ability can help determine success in life, Gladwell (2008) concludes that if you want to excel and reach the top, you have to work — not just hard, but much harder than everyone else. Women have nothing to fear on this account. One has only to go to any developing country to see women doing hard physical work on par with men, and studies show that in some corporate jobs, women work more industriously and conscientiously than men. Combining a family with a career is not easy for women in any country, as they try to juggle child care, housework and the demands of their jobs. Anna Thorburn from Global Women’s Strike, a body campaigning for greater recognition of the work women do, says it is important to recognise what she calls “emotional housework”, the organising, planning and maintaining of relationships that women do. As she observes, “When men stop working they switch off. Women are constantly on the go, juggling things to keep things going” (Sillito, 2007). But these are the very strengths that women can bring to their leadership roles.

This book could not have come at a better time. Many women in Commonwealth Member States continue to face great challenges of severe discrimination and violence. Education is one means of equipping women to deal with this ongoing struggle, one step at a time. Each and every woman who steps up to take a lead in these matters makes a difference and clears the way for those who follow. It is our hope that this book, a compendium of personal experiences and insights, will serve to inspire and illuminate the way for many women leaders, eager to be born!

Professor Asha S. Kanwar,
President & Chief Executive Officer, Commonwealth of Learning

References

- Agarwal, B. (2009). Gender and forest conservation: The impact of women in community forest governance. *Ecological Economics*, 68(11), 2785–2799.
- Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India. *Econometrica*, 72(5), 1409–1443.
- Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The story of success*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (September 1, 2013). Women in national parliaments. Retrieved from www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm
- Sillito, D. (2007, April 19). Do men or women work harder? *BBC News*. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6571375.stm
- Wikipedia. (2013, October 9). List of current heads of state and government. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_current_heads_of_state_and_government
- World Bank. (2002). The business case for mainstreaming gender. In *Integrating gender into the World Bank's work: A strategy for action*. pp. 1–13. Washington, DC: World Bank. Retrieved from www4.worldbank.org/afr/ssatp/Resources/HTML/Gender-RG/Source%20%20documents/donor%20strategy%20documents/DON3%20World%20Bank%20Gender%20Strategy.pdf
- World Bank. (2005). Gender and “shared growth” in Sub-Saharan Africa: Briefing notes on critical gender issues in Sub-Saharan Africa. Washington, DC: World Bank. Retrieved from: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTABOUTUS/Resources/GenderGrowth.pdf>

Acknowledgements

Many individuals have made this publication possible, and the Commonwealth of Learning is grateful to each and every one of them.

COL would like to thank all of the chapter authors for opening their hearts and minds and sharing their stories with readers. Special thanks should be given to the three reviewers — Professor Denise Bradley, Ms Cindy Gauthier and Dame Carol Kidu — who took the time to reflect on the various chapters, covering three sectors of education: higher education, open schooling and non-formal education. Their thoughtful summaries and rich responses, infused with their own experiences, give additional valuable perspectives on “Women and Leadership”.

In addition to all of these contributors, COL sincerely appreciates and acknowledges the efforts of the editors: Professor Asha Kanwar, President and CEO of COL; Professor Colin Latchem; and Ms Frances Ferreira. COL would like to give special acknowledgement to Professor Latchem, who went the extra mile to make this book a reality. Ms Carol Walker also provided indispensable administrative support to the editorial team and contributors.

Finally, thank you to those who worked behind the scenes, for their beautiful craftsmanship and patience in finalising the publication: Dr Dania Sheldon, Copy Editor; Ms Denise Tremblay, Designer and Production Co-ordinator; and Mr Dave Wilson, Communications Manager.

Contributors

Editors

Asha S. Kanwar



Professor Asha S. Kanwar is one of the world's leading advocates of learning for development. In 2012, she became the first female President and Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth of Learning.

Professor Kanwar received her undergraduate, master's and MPhil degrees from the Panjab University in India. She was awarded a scholarship for a DPhil programme at the University of Sussex, which she completed in 1986.

Her engagement with distance education began when she joined Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) as a Reader in 1988. In 1992, she was appointed Professor, and in 1996 was designated Director of the School of Humanities. In 1999, she became Pro Vice Chancellor of IGNOU.

Professor Kanwar was also a consultant in open and distance learning (ODL) at UNESCO's Regional Office for Education in Africa, in Dakar, Senegal. During this assignment, she was instrumental in placing ODL at the centre of ministerial deliberations and the development of education in Africa.

Professor Kanwar has over 30 years of experience in teaching, research and administration. In addition to the several books, research papers and articles to her credit, she has made significant contributions to gender studies, especially regarding the impact of distance education on the lives of Asian women. In 2009, she received the International Council for Open and Distance Education Prize of Excellence.

Frances Ferreira



Frances Ferreira joined the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) as Education Specialist, Open Schooling, on 22 January 2007. Before joining COL, she had a long and successful career in the Namibian education sector, where she was a teacher, then became a head of department, a school principal and Director of the state-owned Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). As the institution's first chief executive, she facilitated the strategic positioning of NAMCOL, both nationally and internationally. During her ten-year tenure as NAMCOL's Director, she held various leadership positions, including: Chair of

the Namibian Open Learning Network Trust; Chair of the Adult Learning Policy Committee; and Chair of the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa.

Mrs Ferreira capitalises on the power of partnerships and collaboration and therefore initiated the establishment of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA), which provides a powerful platform to accelerate her work in open schooling across the Commonwealth. Her contributions to open and distance learning in Namibia were rewarded in 2002, when she received the Distance Learning Experience Award from COL.

Outside the education sector, Mrs Ferreira has followed the political aspirations that emerged during her student years, when she was a student leader in the “1976 student generation”. In 1993, she was elected as the first female Mayor of Grootfontein, and in 1995, she was elected as Vice President of the Association of Local Authorities, in Namibia. During the same year, in Beijing, she joined the Namibian delegation who attended the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Colin Latchem



Prior to retirement, Professor Colin Latchem held a professorial position as the Head of the Teaching Learning Group at Curtin University of Technology, in Perth, Western Australia, a position in which he was responsible for academic staff development, open and distance education and educational technology. He also served on the Academic Programs Board of the Open Learning Australia consortium and as the President of the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia. Since retiring, he has consulted in Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean and has been a visiting professor at a number of open and distance universities across the globe. He has co-authored and co-edited several books, including *Leadership for 21st Century Learning* — which received the 2002 Charles Wedemeyer Award for the best book of the year on distance education in the USA — and *Distance and Blended Learning in Asia*, which examines developments in education and training from Japan to Turkey. He has also written numerous chapters and papers and presented many keynote and plenary addresses on open and distance learning. He is an associate editor of a number of international journals, including the Commonwealth of Learning’s *Journal of Learning for Development*.

Authors

Denise Bradley



Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley, AC, is a noted Australian higher education administrator, with specialist interests in educational excellence, open and distance learning and equity. She is a former Vice Chancellor of the University of South Australia (UniSA) and has wide experience in higher education administration, including leading the team responsible for the 2009 report *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (the Bradley Review). In 2005, she was named South Australian of the Year for her significant contributions to the state. She holds honorary doctorates from Korea's Pukyong National University, UniSA and RMIT University. The honorary title of Emeritus Professor was conferred following her retirement from UniSA. In 2008, she was made a Companion of the Order of Australia in recognition of her service to higher education through leadership and sector-wide governance, the promotion of information-based distance learning and the advancement of Australian educational facilities internationally.

Nodumo Dhlamini



Nodumo Dhlamini has worked in secondary education, finance, a railway company and higher education. She is currently based at Makerere University, in Uganda, where she is Programme Manager (ICT and Knowledge Management) for the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM). RUFORUM is a consortium of 32 universities in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa mandated to oversee graduate training and networks in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and contribute to the well-being of small-scale farmers and the economic development of Sub-Saharan countries. Nodumo is passionate about harnessing ICT opportunities for women and girls.

Cindy Gauthier



Cindy Gauthier is an eLearning consultant and a writer. She is the former principal of the Vancouver Learning Network, one of British Columbia's largest urban distributed learning secondary programmes. She held this leadership position for 12 years, until the spring of 2013. For the decade prior to this, she worked as a programme co-ordinator, counsellor and online teacher for online learning and correspondence delivery in distance education. She has over 30 years of experience in secondary education with the Vancouver Board of Education and 20 years of experience in open and distance learning. She has a keen interest in global education and how collaboration and technology can provide new learning opportunities for students of all ages and origins.

Brenda Gourley



Professor Brenda Gourley is a former Vice Chancellor and President (Chief Executive Officer) of The Open University, in the United Kingdom. She occupied that post for nearly eight years (until 2009). For the nine years prior to that she was the Vice Chancellor of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa. She serves on several boards and trusts, in both the public and the private sectors, and she chaired the Association of Commonwealth Universities for two terms of office. In recognition of her achievements, institutions on four continents have awarded Professor Gourley several honorary degrees, fellowships, medals and prizes.

Abtar Kaur



Professor Abtar Kaur is in the Faculty of Education and Languages at Open University Malaysia (OUM). As well as teaching and conducting research, Abtar oversees two major programmes: the fully online and global Master of Instructional Design and Technology and the blended learning Bachelor of Education (Science Majors) for Malaysian teachers. Abtar was previously the Director of the OUM Open and Distance Learning Pedagogy Centre and, before that, the Centre for Instructional Design and Technology.

Carol Kidu, DBE



Dame Carol Kidu, DBE, a teacher by profession, retired from Papua New Guinea (PNG) Parliament in 2012 after 15 years in politics. She was the Minister for Community Development for nine years and finished her political career as Leader of the Opposition. She focused on legislative and policy reform for social development in PNG, with a human rights-based approach to development for marginalised and/or vulnerable populations. Dame Carol has been awarded three honorary doctorates and was made a Dame of the British Empire in 2005. Her other honours include the PNG International Woman of Courage Award, from the U.S. Secretary of State (2007), Pacific Person of the Year (2007), the Regional Rights Resource Team Pacific Human Rights Award for promoting the rights of Pacific Islanders (2008) and the Order of Knight in France's Légion d'honneur (2009). Dame Carol is on the Board of the Commonwealth of Learning, the International Advisory Board of the Cairns Institute and the Board of the Pacific Institute of Public Policy, and is a non-resident Fellow of the Lowy Institute. She is a member of the High-Level Task Force for the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014 and is a patron to many organisations, including Australian Volunteers International, as well as being the principal of CK Consulting Ltd.

Lambertha Mahai



Lambertha Mahai was the Director of the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) in Tanzania. The IAE's mission is to design, develop and implement quality training and adult continuing education programmes to equip people with enabling knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable development and dealing with global challenges. Its core activities are providing mass education at the grassroots level through a network of 21 regional centres, basic certificate, diploma and bachelor degrees in adult and continuing education and community development programmes with a special focus on helping women and girls.

Sushmita Mitra



Sushmita Mitra holds a PhD in Educational Technology from the India Institute of Technology, New Delhi. She has been associated with India's National Institute of Open Schooling from its inception in 1980, so she has witnessed its unfolding from concept to reality. Until her voluntary retirement in 2011, she was the Director of the Department of Student Support Services. She has also held seconded positions at Indira Gandhi National Open University, where she was engaged in the Distance Education Programme of the District Primary Education Programme, and with the Indian Society for Technical Education, in a Swiss Development Agency project on developing learning materials in Computer Science/Engineering and Electronics and Electrical Engineering. She is a consultant for the Commonwealth of Learning, has undertaken consultancy work in Bangladesh and has acted as a resource person on various aspects of national and international open and distance learning projects. She has a number of publications to her credit.

Lystra Sampson-Ovid



Lystra Sampson-Ovid was the founding Director of the National Open School of Trinidad and Tobago (NOSTT). She had previously been the Director of the Distance Learning Secretariat within the Ministry of Training and Distance Learning and, before that, a teacher, teacher educator and agriculture training officer. Lystra was responsible for developing the concept of NOSTT and overseeing its progress for its first eight years. She is now a technical and vocational teacher training consultant to the Metal Industries Company of Trinidad and Tobago.

Caroline Seelig



Dr Caroline Seelig became the Chief Executive of New Zealand's leading distance learning provider, the Open Polytechnic, in January 2009, having previously held senior management positions at Tai Poutini Polytechnic, in Christchurch, Eastern Institute of Technology, in Hawke's Bay, and Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology. She has provided leadership in institutional strategic and investment planning, distance and flexible teaching and delivery, academic portfolio development, quality management and student support. She has also been involved in a wide range of successful collaborative initiatives and projects to drive change and innovation. She is currently the Chair of the Board of New Zealand Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics and an honorary advisor to the Commonwealth of Learning. A Woolf Fisher Scholar in 2004, Caroline holds a PhD in Biology from University College of Swansea and a Master of Educational Administration from Massey University.

Chetna Gala Sinha



Chetna Sinha is an economist, farmer and activist, and the founder and President of the Mann Deshi Mahila Bank Ltd., a micro-enterprise co-operative development bank with six branches whose clients are women earning an average of 40 Indian rupees (one U.S. dollar) a day. Chetna also founded the Mann Deshi Foundation to empower and train women and self-help groups in business, entrepreneurship, property rights and technology. The foundation currently operates in Maharashtra and Karanatak but has regulatory approval to operate throughout India. It also partners with global organisations, including the Commonwealth of Learning. Chetna received the 2005 Jankidevi Bajaj Puraskar Award for rural entrepreneurship, has lifetime membership with Ashoka: Innovators for the Public and was selected for the 2002–2003 Yale University World Fellows Programme.

Batchuluun Yembuu



Batchuluun Yembuu is the Director of the National Centre for Lifelong Education (formerly the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education) within the Ministry of Education and Science of Mongolia. She is responsible for providing advocacy and developing policies, courses and methodologies for literacy, post-literacy, equivalence and life-skills programmes for a range of learners in poor, remote, rural, nomadic and marginalised communities.

List of Acronyms

ACCU	Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO
AU	Africa University
AUITTC	Africa University Information Technology Training Centre
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education (India)
CEO	chief executive officer
CHOG	Commonwealth Heads of Government
CIDT	Centre for Instructional Design and Technology (at OUM)
CLDC	Community Learning and Development Centre (PNG)
CODE	College for Distance Education
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
EFA	Education for All
EIT	Eastern Institute of Technology (New Zealand)
EP	equivalency programme
FODE	flexible, open and distance education
FOSS	free and open-source software
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDP	gross domestic product
HD	high-definition
IAE	Institute of Adult Education (Tanzania)
ICD	integrated community development
ICDL	International Computer Driving License
ICT	information and communication technology(ies)
IDD&E	instructional design, development and evaluation
IGNOU	Indira Gandhi National Open University
IIEP	International Institute of Educational Planning
INR	Indian rupee
ISS	Institute of Social Studies (Netherlands)
IT	information technology
KPI	key performance indicator
L3F	Lifelong Learning for Farmers
LMS	learning management system
MDC	Multimedia Development Centre (at UM)
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MIDT	Master of Instructional Design and Technology
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NIOS	National Institute of Open Schooling (India)
NMIT	Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (New Zealand)
NOSTT	National Open School of Trinidad and Tobago

ODL	open and distance learning
ODLPC	Open and Distance Learning Pedagogy Centre (at OUM)
OSISA	Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa
OUM	Open University Malaysia
PCP	personal contact programme
PNG	Papua New Guinea
RUFORUM	Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture
SME	small-to-medium enterprise
TALON	Teaching and Learning Oriented Network
TTTC	Technical Teachers Training College (Malaysia)
UC Davis	University of California, Davis Campus
UM	University of Malaya
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UniSA	University of South Australia
USD	United States dollar
UWI	University of the West Indies
VUSSC	Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth
ZPD	zone of proximal development

Introduction: Unlocking the Leadership Potential in Every Woman

Colin Latchem, Asha Kanwar and Frances Ferreira

In this book, we tap into women's thoughts, feelings, experiences and ideas about becoming leaders, being leaders and helping other women to become leaders in open and distance higher education, open schooling and non-formal education.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOG) Harare Declaration of 1991 states:

We believe in the liberty of the individual under the law, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed or political belief, and in the individual's inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in framing the society in which he or she lives . . . We pledge the Commonwealth and our countries to work with renewed vigour, concentrating especially in . . . equality for women, so that they may exercise their full and equal rights . . . (Commonwealth, 1991)

As a Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) subscribes to these values and commits itself to striving for the attainment of these goals and the valuing of women's knowledge, wisdom and experience through its policies, organisational processes and programmes. For COL, gender equality is a cross-cutting corporate goal requiring that both women's and men's views, interests and needs shape its programmes and organisational policies and processes. These goals of gender equality and women's empowerment are central to COL's agenda of learning for development. COL aims to encourage and support (i) more girls' and women's participation in open, distance and community-based education and (ii) women as leaders in promoting equitable and sustainable human development across all of the Commonwealth nations. It is part of COL's credo that developing leadership opportunities for women is not simply a question of achieving gender equality but is essential to maximising the skills and talents of almost half the world's people, to benefit all humankind.

Open and distance learning (ODL) offers advantages to both learners and educational and training providers. It can overcome problems of access, equity, distance and time. It can compensate for a shortage of appropriately qualified and experienced teachers and trainers. Using a variety of innovative methods, ODL can enable not only individuals but entire communities to engage in new learning experiences, access sources of knowledge and community services, connect with the wider world and share their learning with others. In all of these regards, it can widen women's opportunities to learn and to improve their lives. In its various programmes, COL partners with many women who are providing leadership, becoming leaders or helping other women to assume leadership roles in providing education, training and community development.

COL also works within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG),¹ the Education for All (EFA) goals² and the Commonwealth priorities of peace, equality, good governance and rule of law. Many developing countries will not achieve the MDG and EFA goals by the target date of 2015, but COL is harnessing the potential of ODL to help accelerate progress towards the achievement of these internationally agreed development objectives.

Of the 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty across the globe, more than 70 per cent are women. The harsh realities are that many of the world's exploitative markets depend upon low-status and low-paid or unpaid work by women, and that women can be the victims of gendercide, sexual violence and sex trafficking. The benefits that education can bring to individuals and communities are widely acknowledged, and yet there are still many barriers to girls and women becoming educated or better educated: traditional, cultural or religious beliefs, gender stereotyping, gender-differentiated child-rearing practices, lack of knowledge on the benefits of education, and the direct and indirect costs of schooling. Thus, in most developing countries, a boy's birth is a cause for congratulation. He will inherit his father's property, get a job and support the family. A girl's birth can be a cause for tears. She is seen as worthless and simply another expense. She is less likely to go to school, stay in school or be able to take advantage of non-formal education, and she is more likely to be illiterate. This prejudice against females keeps many girls and women in developing countries from realising their potential and results in millions of personal tragedies.

Burmese opposition politician Aung San Suu Kyi has said, "It cannot be doubted that in most countries today, women, in comparison to men, still remain underprivileged." Archbishop Desmond Tutu regards the empowerment of women as essential to development, stating, "Without women we will miss six of the eight Millennium Development Goals"; asked what would happen if women ruled the world instead of men, he responded, "Men have tried to rule the world for centuries, and they have made a mess. Let's let the other half try" (Monck, 2012).

There is Nothing New in Gender Discrimination

From earliest times, various cultures have subjugated women to men's domination, considering them to be the weaker sex, intellectually inferior and suited only to the private, domestic world. Aristotle regarded the male as the

¹ www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview

² www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/efa-goals

ultimate realisation of humanity and the female as necessarily inferior. Plato believed that women were required for society to run smoothly but did not look upon them as men's equals. Jean-Jacques Rousseau thought that women's natural role was to obey and please men, and help them discover and apply their particular strengths. Even Darwin believed that men's mental powers were above those of women. Throughout history, and in some cases to the present day, organised religion and educational systems have also helped to shape and perpetuate such attitudes.

In England, until the late 18th century, prescribed forms of behaviour were set out in "conduct books" designed to reinforce social and political norms and expectations. These were mainly written by churchmen. For example, two Puritan ministers, John Dod and Robert Cleaver, wrote an often republished manual, *A Godly Form of Household Government: For the Ordering of Private Families, According to the Direction of God's Word*. This not only emphasised the patriarchal nature of the family but drew clear parallels between the order of the family and the order of the state. The writers asserted that the husband's duty was to love his wife and to govern her in all respects, whilst the wife's duty was to subject herself to her husband. The division of labour was clear: the husband was to make a living, get money and acquire goods, whilst the wife was to save, spend prudently and keep the house. The husband's role was to deal with many men and the wife's to talk with few. Dod and Cleaver concluded, "The house wherein these are neglected, we may term it a hell."

Not until the mid-19th century did courageous women begin to defy such conventions, speak out and raise public consciousness on issues of equality for women, suffrage, universal education, religious freedom and all forms of slavery (Phillips, 2009). However, this was occurring in the western world and in cultures capable of adjusting to constant change. In other cultures, continuity and order were the priority. For example, Confucian theory stressed the need for civilised behaviour, harmonious families and social cohesiveness to achieve universal tranquility. There were to be no fracture lines due to class, gender or age. Respect for superiors and respect from inferiors was expected. It became common to conceive of the differences between men and women in terms of yin and yang. Women were yin — soft, yielding, receptive, passive, reflective and tranquil — whereas men, yang, were hard, active, assertive and dominating. It was believed that these differences were part of the natural order of the universe, and the reason for men leading and women following. Thus, in Japan, women were expected to cultivate self-denying obedience rather than seek economic, social or political power. Even Matsudaira Sadanobu, the reforming Daimyo (government minister) of the mid-Edo period in the 18th century, believed, "When women are learned and clever in their speech, it is a sign that civil disturbance is not far off" (Man, 2011, p. 27).

It would seem that Japan still has a long way to go in narrowing its gender gap. Brinton argues that the country's education system, labour market and institutions all contribute to "a high level of gender differentiation and stratification in the economy" and thus across Japanese society (1993, p. 3). The 2012 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2012), which measures social and political gender equality across 135 countries, places Japan 101st in the global ranking. In terms of political

and social equality in society, this puts Japanese women alongside those in such countries as Tajikistan or The Gambia and 15 points lower than women in Bangladesh. The Nordic countries occupy five of the seven top spots; Ireland ranks fifth, New Zealand sixth, the UK 18th, Canada 21st and the USA 22nd. The lowest-ranking countries in terms of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment are Morocco, Côte d'Ivoire, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Chad, Pakistan and Yemen. Whilst governments in the Commonwealth continue to make efforts to integrate a gender perspective into the key areas that impact on development and democracy, gender inequality still presents a major challenge in some developing countries of the Commonwealth. By the World Economic Forum measures, the four worst developing nations to be born a girl in the Commonwealth are India (105th), Nigeria (110th), Zambia (114th) and Pakistan (134th). The four best are Lesotho (14th), South Africa (16th), Barbados (27th) and Uganda (28th).

Gender Identity

Gender identity refers to a person's private sense of being a man or a woman and his or her acceptance of membership in a category of people: male or female. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) hold that gender is not a matter of two homogeneous social categories, one associated with being female and the other with being male, but that gender constructs are embedded in other aspects of social life and in the construction of other socially significant categories, such as class, race or ethnicity. They suggest that no simple attributes of a person, however complex a combination is considered, can completely determine how that person is socially categorised, by themselves or by others, or how they engage in social practice. As Amartya Sen (2006) points out, every human being has plural identities: "the same person can be, without contradiction, an American citizen of Caribbean origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a long-distance runner, a historian, schoolteacher . . . none of them can be taken to be the person's only identity or singular membership category" (p. xii). To reduce identity to one signifier, such as gender, leads to reduction, stereotyping and a misunderstanding of the complexity of identity.

Hitchings (2011) observes that male-female physiological differences are supplemented from birth by rituals, commentary and received wisdom that cause boys and girls to grow up in different ways and that perpetuate social patterns in which the female is expected to be passive, co-operative and nurturing, whilst "the opposite sex" is expected to be active, competitive and aggressive. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) say that "[gender] is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural" (p. 9). So, gender identities are a consequence not of nature but of nurture. As Simone de Beauvoir wrote, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1997).

All of the women who have contributed to this book are acutely aware of their identities as women. By reading through their stories, one gains insights into the complexities of this construct.

Gender and Communication

Some linguists record differences in the communication styles of males and females. Tingley (1994) finds that women “express to understand”, “support conversation” and “talk to connect”, whilst men “express to fix”, “believe conversation is a competition” and “talk to resolve problems”. Tannen (2003) suggests that girls barter intimacy whilst boys barter status. Of course, in different communities and cultures — most notably those where men relentlessly dominate women — there are different conventions of male-female, male-male and female-female interaction.

Lieberman (n.d.) suggests ways that women and men can differ in their communications in organisations, decision-making and leadership. According to her, women tend to build relationships first so they know who to ask to get things done. Men tend to be more task-oriented and build their relationships once engaged in the task. When making decisions, women will often think out loud, whereas men tend to process their thoughts internally until they arrive at a solution. In leadership situations, women are more relationship and consensus oriented, whilst men are more hierarchical and involve only those people closest to them. In conversations, women will nod their heads to show that they are listening. Men take up more time at meetings, talk more than women, and interrupt and talk over women much more than women interrupt men. All of these factors can lead to miscommunication, wrong assumptions, social breakdown, people not listening to each other and the loss of good ideas. These generalisations may or may not be true. However, writing about the careers of seven female national leaders, Genovese (1993) observes that such perceptions as “men tell, women talk” and “men do monologues, women have discussions” can be firmly entrenched and influential in interviewing or otherwise assessing females, without any conscious intent or awareness of bias on the part of the interviewers. There can also be a tendency for middle-class male executives to observe that a candidate “reminds me of myself as a young man”, immediately suggesting that an equally or even better qualified female candidate lacks the necessary commitment or capabilities.

Such unconscious bias perpetuates gender imbalance at individual and social levels. However, as Rosin (2012) explains, a shift in power dynamics between men and women is now having profound implications for the ways in which men and women become educated, earn money and conduct relationships. She suggests that the economy now requires people with the ability to sit still and focus, to draw on intellectual ability, to empathise, to communicate openly and to listen — all of which women do extremely well. However, there is a complex interplay between cultural dimensions, gender, communications and self-concept. How these factors play out in the different contexts is illustrated in the chapters that follow.

Gender and Leadership

When it comes to the question of gender and leadership, there are many challengeable myths. One is that men are natural leaders, whereas women do not aspire to leadership positions. Another is that men say women are too emotional to be leaders, whilst women complain that men are too authoritarian. However, women can internalise authoritarian leadership styles, as witnessed in

Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, both of whom inherited weak and troubled economies and became well known for their political ruthlessness. Then again, it is said that men are more competitive than women. However, research shows that men and women are equally competitive overall, but differ in what they compete over, whom they compete with and their competitive tactics (Cashdan 1998). It is also said that women who lead are sometimes afraid of resting on their laurels and constantly work harder to prove themselves. But then Zenger and Folkman (2012) suggest these are fundamental emotions and behaviours that drive the success of every leader, male or female.

Sandberg (2010) stresses that one of the overriding problems for women is that they all too often underestimate their abilities: “If you ask men why they did a good job, they’ll say, ‘I’m awesome. Obviously. Why are you even asking?’ If you ask women why they did a good job, what they’ll say is someone helped them, they got lucky, they worked really hard. I wish I could just go tell [them], ‘Believe in yourself and negotiate for yourself. Own your own success.’” But as Sandberg concedes, it is not that simple, because women’s attitudes towards leadership issues are determined by socio-cultural circumstances and institutionalised through educational, political and economic systems.

The times are changing, and certain advances have been made in the journey towards more equality between the sexes. But in many countries and cultures it unfortunately can still be the case that men’s opinions are never doubted, whereas women’s are neither asked for nor heeded. Thus, many leadership hiring decisions are still gender- rather than merit-based, and many employees are simply neither accustomed to nor expecting to have females in charge of them, as some of the stories in this book illustrate.

So entrenched are the notions of gender and power in many workplaces that recruitment and human resources services provider Randstad (2011) found that only 40 per cent of males reported that when recruiting new managers, employers took account of the number of men and women currently in management positions within their organisations, and only 25 per cent of women reported that their bosses made any effort to address gender imbalances. Almost 40 per cent of the employees interviewed in this survey said that they preferred men to be their managers, whereas only 20 per cent said that they preferred having women in charge. Surprisingly, 44 per cent of the women interviewed said they preferred their supervisors and managers to be male, compared with only 23 per cent preferring to have women as managers.

The Randstad study also revealed variations in gender imbalance between different countries and cultures. For example, in Japan, 83 per cent of managers are male, in Turkey, 80 per cent, and in China, India, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Argentina, 75 per cent or more. Countries with more gender-balanced managements include Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the UK and the USA.

One of the prime concerns of UN Women (the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women)³ is the under-representation of women in political and economic decision-making. The World Bank (2011) argues that empowering women as political and social actors makes institutions more

³ www.unwomen.org

representative of a range of voices. Yet the higher up the ladder we look in political organisations, the fewer women we find in positions of influence. At the time of writing, in the 54 countries of the Commonwealth, women held only 20.3 per cent of all parliamentary seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012); according to the Wikipedia List of Current Heads of State and Government,⁴ only five of the 54 heads of state were women, and only five were heads of government. In 1902, Australia became the first country to give women the right to both vote and stand for election in the federal parliament. Conservatively minded men argued that women were too emotional to make sensible political decisions, and that giving women the right to vote would mean the end of the family unit and went against the “natural order of things”. However, the suffragette movement, feminism, non-conformism, unionism and the willingness of Australian men to fight for the women’s cause put Australia ahead of other countries. But despite all this, and despite Australia ranking first in educational attainment amongst women in a study by Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi (2012), it is still 42nd on the political empowerment scale, with less than 30 per cent of its elected representatives being women. In 2013, the newly elected Conservative Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, appointed only one woman to his 19-strong front bench and placed responsibility for women’s issues in his own hands. In terms of the number of women in cabinet positions, Australia now ranks behind Zimbabwe with five, Britain with four, Afghanistan with three and PR China with two.

Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi (2011) observed that women played frontline roles in the uprisings of the so-called Arab Spring, in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and were now seeking political participation in these countries. In Tunisia, the first Arab state to abolish polygamy, grant women professional rights and establish progressive family laws, women played an active role in administering the October 2011 election and won around 25 per cent of the seats in the new Constituent Assembly. However, a year later, Fisher (2012) showed that with a couple of exceptions, gender equality in the Arab world appeared little changed since the revolutionary movements began in early 2011. And di Giovanni (2012) reports that whilst the Arab Spring gave Yemen’s women a public voice and a visible face, the revolution faded without changing anything for the millions who were married off too young and then shut away in mud huts for the rest of their lives. So change can never be taken for granted, and vigilance is always needed.

The UK may rate 18th in the 2012 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, but it comes 45th in terms of the number of female elected representatives, behind Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. It has been estimated that without some radical changes, it will take 14 more general elections before women equal men in the British House of Commons. The situation is little better in UK higher education. According to Wikipedia,⁵ of the 92 vice chancellors in British universities, only 16 (17.4 per cent) are women. Some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar, Oman and Belize, have no women parliamentarians. Dozens of countries, including Spain and Sweden, have never had a female head of government. On the other hand, women leaders have run Sri Lanka for 23 years, whilst Rwanda is the only nation in which females make up the majority of parliamentarians: they hold 45 out of the 80 seats.

⁴ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_current_heads_of_state_and_government

⁵ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_British_university_chancellors_and_vice-chancellors

When it comes to women in senior management, Thailand has the greatest proportion (45 per cent) and Japan the smallest, with only 8 per cent. Jamaica has the highest ratio of women as legislators, senior officials and managers, and other highly skilled professionals: almost 60 per cent of these roles are filled by women. By contrast, women in Yemen hold only 2 per cent of the highly skilled jobs. Iceland has the greatest equality between men and women, taking into account politics, education, employment and health indicators. The worst countries are Yemen and Afghanistan (Morrison, 2012).

But it is not only in the highest levels of countries and organisations that women leaders are needed. Women represent more than 40 per cent of the global labour force, 43 per cent of the agricultural workforce and more than half of the world's university students. However, Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi (2011) conclude that whilst the education gaps are closing in many parts of the world, the gap between women and men in terms of social and economic participation remains wide. They argue that as the world population surpasses the seven billion mark and we enter history's most rapid demographic transformations, we must consider how equitably and how efficiently the female half of the world's population is being leveraged at all levels of society.

Allowing the Best Talent, Both Male and Female, to Flourish

There is a great deal of evidence to show the social and educational benefits that can ensue if women are educated, engaged as fundamental pillars of society and given a greater role to play in the management of affairs. Diverse leadership is most likely to result in innovative solutions to tackle current challenges and create equitable and sustainable development.

In the USA in the 19th century, a direct consequence of the introduction of suffrage was an increase in state expenditures and local spending on public health, and a large decline in child mortality (Lott & Kenny, 1999; Miller, 2008). Consistent with many international studies, the AMP Foundation (2012) reports that Aboriginal women in Australia often play a leading role in improving the health and well-being of their families and communities and acting as catalysts for social change. The foundation concludes that investing in Aboriginal women and girls provides a high investment value for philanthropic funding. In India, it has been shown that randomly reserving one-third of village council head positions for women can lead to improved provision of water, sanitation, irrigation and schools and reduced corruption. This change of policy has also resulted in teenage girls challenging the traditional norms by aspiring to marry later, have fewer children and seek a better education and better jobs. The implementation of this policy has also revealed that whilst the male village council heads may be better versed in politics, the women can be more energetic and inclined to initiate new projects (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). In India and Nepal, granting women a bigger say in forest management has significantly improved conservation outcomes (Agarwal, 2009). In Senegal, after participating in a human rights and health programme, a group of village women declared their resolution to end the centuries-old practice of female circumcision. Not only did this lead to over 90 per cent of the Senegalese communities abandoning this tradition, together with

child/forced marriage, but thousands of communities in Guinea, The Gambia, Burkina Faso, Somalia and Mauritania also joined this movement (Kasdon, 2005).

International agencies such as UNESCO seek to tighten the link between gender and the internationally agreed development goals and to develop women's leadership capabilities. In the Caribbean, the Women and Development Unit (WAND) of The University of the West Indies Open Campus encourages self-transformation and social change by helping women who are unemployed, disabled and/or on low incomes to understand their rights, develop advocacy skills, take control of their lives and become more self-reliant within a socio-economic system that WAND regards as largely based upon race, class and gender discrimination. Many more such initiatives are needed to develop a cadre of women leaders who can help to achieve human rights and gender equality, peace building, conflict resolution, self-sufficiency, sustainable development, and healthcare and education for girls. And many more narratives and reflections by women are needed along the lines of the oral histories of women activists in Atlantic Canada,⁶ women who persevered, sometimes in the face of great opposition, using networks and relationships that became a large part of how they worked for change.

Women can bring collaboration, team-building and inclusiveness to institutions and organisations. They can also be great reconcilers within and between communities, as shown by the fact that 15 of the 100 recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize between 1901 and 2012 have been women.⁷ These include the two founders of The Peace People, in Northern Ireland, Betty Williams and Mairéad Corrigan, who received the 1977 Prize for leading a mass movement petitioning for peace between the republican and loyalist factions; Aung San Suu Kyi, who received the 1991 Prize for her struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma, despite being under house arrest for almost 15 years; and, in 2011, three female champions of women's rights and democracy. Tawakkul Karman, a journalist, had led anti-government protests in Yemen, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, of Liberia, was the first woman to win a free presidential election in Africa after braving prison and exile during her 30-year political career, and Leymah Gbowee, also of Liberia, the leader of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, had campaigned against the use of rape as a weapon during her country's civil war. At the award ceremony for these three women, Nobel Committee Chairman Thorbjørn Jagland said, "It may be that some still are saying that women should be at home . . . But this is not being on the right side of history."

As UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova observes (2011), it seems the common fate of women is to be both the pillars and the victims of society. So, what limits the opportunities for women to act as leaders? This may be understandable in traditional communities where social norms consider leadership to be the preserve of men, and the elders, religious leaders and councils have always been male. But even in developed nations and cultures where women are on par with men, both educationally and socially, relatively few women become leaders. Part of the problem is that women must interrupt their careers, take more days off and work part-time because of their family responsibilities, and so have less experience and fewer opportunities than men to share in what goes on at the

⁶ etc.lib.unb.ca/womenactivists/home

⁷ www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace

higher levels. Male networks in politics and other professional settings also limit women's leadership prospects. Plus, low representation means that women have fewer opportunities to evidence their leadership capacities, meaning that other women cannot model themselves upon such women's leadership styles and outcomes. And as observed earlier, women may also be limited by societal beliefs that females make less effective leaders than males. Such beliefs will be hard to dismantle until a critical mass of women achieves leadership roles.

Speaking on the panel Women as the Way Forward, in Davos in 2012, UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet⁸ said that investing in girls' primary, secondary and tertiary education brings about health benefits, a reduction in maternal mortality, a reduction in the incidence of early marriage, and increased productivity and earning capacity, so this is not only the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do: "We need men and women working together to advance women's empowerment and equality. Women and men have to lead together."

Referring to the political field, although the observation applies equally in all other contexts, Sidhva (2011) states that "[u]nlike their male counterparts, female leaders . . . are compelled to navigate deeply entrenched public prejudices, and are judged more harshly than men." Arnold (2011) claims that sex role stereotypes are deeply engrained. It is commonly held that women's leadership style is communal, collegial, influential and empathetic, whilst that of men is instrumental, controlling, decisive and concerned with getting things done. Arnold's study suggests that leadership behaviours in men and women are neither accurately identified nor appropriately rewarded. Both male and female leaders are expected to be considerate, but when it comes to competency ratings, only male managers seem to benefit from demonstrating this behaviour. Even more disturbing was this finding: that not only was there a substantial difference between what male and female leaders actually did, what the organisational decision makers perceive them to be doing, and the subsequent evaluation of their leadership attributes, but the gender of those making the ratings made no difference. A study into leadership training of middle-level officers in the US Air Force (Gedney, 1999) revealed that feminine traits did not contribute to women thinking of themselves as leaders. Only females with strong masculine attributes considered themselves leaders with any degree of frequency.

Pfeffer (2010) suggests that women are under-represented in leadership positions because they are less motivated to dominate others, may believe that they deserve less than similarly qualified men, rely too much on being liked and simply reach a point in their lives and careers where they drop out of the quest for power. These are but some of the obstacles that may hold women back from achieving leadership positions. Sidhva (2011) observes that most women who achieve the higher political, managerial or academic ranks bring formidable educational and professional qualifications to their positions. Many are lawyers, writers or other professionals. But significantly, the majority also claim that, besides education, their advancement was due to having a strong role model in childhood, a father or mother who made them believe that girls were as capable as boys when it came to achievement.

⁸ www.unwomen.org/2012/01/women-as-the-way-forward

Nor are the “glass ceiling”, “sticky floor” or “locked door” anywhere near the top of organisations. Middle-management positions also tend to be dominated by men because age 25–35 is when many women leave the workforce to raise their families, and even if they do return after maternity, they tend to leave again within a year or two. Rather than using such terms as “glass ceiling”, Eagly and Carli (2007) prefer the metaphor of “the career labyrinth”. Finding a way through this cunningly laid pathway is not simple or direct. It requires persistence, awareness of one’s progress, and careful analysis of the challenges that lie ahead. But the use of this metaphor is encouraging because whilst it acknowledges obstacles and unknowns, somewhere there is a centre, a goal that can be reached. Some of the contributors to this book hold middle-management positions, whilst others have broken the glass ceiling and gone to the top in their particular fields. Each in her own way has managed to cope with the twists and turns, both expected and unexpected, and achieved her goals.

Leadership

Many have attempted to define leadership. Northouse (2004, p. 3) describes it as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”. However, leadership can also be collective, as shown above in the case of the Senegalese village women and The Peace People. This form of leadership, which acknowledges that no single person makes an ideal leader in all circumstances, can be defined as “informal”, “emergent”, “dispersed” or “distributed”. Northouse’s definition also fails to explain how leaders achieve the kinds of social influence, working relationships and activities needed for leading — for example, in open and distance learning and community development. Plus, there are so many theories and findings about “leadership traits”. For example, Stogdill (1974) lists the following:

- Strong drive for responsibility
- Focus on completing the task
- Vigour and persistence in pursuit of goals
- Venturesomeness and originality in problem-solving
- Drive to exercise initiative in social settings
- Self-confidence
- Sense of personal identity
- Willingness to accept consequences of decisions and actions
- Readiness to absorb interpersonal stress
- Willingness to tolerate frustration and delay
- Ability to influence the behaviour of others
- Capacity to structure social systems to the purpose in hand

As you read the stories of the women leaders in this book, it may be useful to continually ask, "Which are the particular leadership traits they are displaying? In what circumstances? Where did these appear to be succeeding? Why?"

Lewin, Lippit and White (1939) identify three different “leadership styles”:

- Authoritarian (autocratic) — leaders tell others what they want done and how, without eliciting their advice
- Participative (democratic) — leaders involve others in determining what to do and how
- Delegative (free reign) — leaders allow others to make the decisions but are still responsible for those decisions

Like Fiedler (1967), he suggests that there is no single best way to lead and that the good leader uses all of these approaches, depending upon the circumstances. Some leadership styles are predicated upon human nature. For example, Burns (1978) proposes that “transformative leaders” consider that assuming a higher moral position is motivating and that working collaboratively achieves more than working individually. So, they appeal to the higher ideals and values of their colleagues by modelling these behaviours, use symbols and coaching to focus efforts, instill pride, gain respect and trust, and promote teamwork and intrinsic motivation.

“Transactional leaders”, by comparison, appeal to more selfish concerns. Their assumption is that people are individualistic and competitive, so they offer extrinsic rewards for achievement, impose rules and standards and take corrective actions wherever deviations occur. This is similar to McGregor’s (1960) Theory X managers, who believe that since most people have an inherent dislike of work and try to avoid it wherever possible, coercion and control are necessary, whereas Theory Y managers believe that most people are self-motivated and so seek to bring out the best in their employees.

Again, it could be useful to consider the leadership styles adopted by the various contributors to this book, in what situations you feel these were or were not appropriate tactics, and what you might have done given the same circumstances.

The demands for knowledge about leadership and how to achieve it are endless. As Bolden (2004) points out, the business shelves of airport bookshops are stacked with books on the benefits of particular forms of leadership. But leadership is not always “a good thing”. Not all leaders are well intentioned, honest and people of high integrity. Political, corporate and religious leaders can also have their “dark side”. They can be selfish, deluded and narcissistic, and can encourage their followers to pursue goals that are in neither their own nor society’s interests. There have been some “gurus” whose holiness, lack of personal ambition and integrity were beyond question. There have also been some who were deluded, elitist and anti-democratic and exploited their followers (Storr, 1996). And as Gemmill and Oakley (1992) observe, even good leaders, if they are over-worked and stressed, can become destructive forces and, if their followers over-idealise them, lose touch with their own personal visions, emotions, critical thinking and careful judgements.

It is clear from the following chapters that leadership is not a constant state of being. It depends on context and situation and must be modulated for each purpose. Even when an individual changes jobs within the same organisation, her leadership style needs to be recalibrated based on the new reality.

Women as Leaders

The previous sections of this chapter have provided a number of pointers towards why women can make good leaders. For example, they are more inclined to demonstrate communal characteristics, nurturance, and concern for others and relational and interpersonal issues. So, they would appear to have exactly the qualities required for leading in areas such as non-formal and community education, where there may be no pre-existing hierarchies or traditions of leadership and where the aim is social mobilisation through awareness building, empowerment, capacity building and creating participatory environments.

Writers such as Bourgeois (2005) argue that 21st-century organisations need a combination of the more task-oriented, “masculine” leadership style and the more interpersonal, “feminine” leadership style (biology does not entirely determine leadership styles, as some women have very masculine styles and some men adopt more feminine styles). On this basis, it might be argued that universities could gain much from having more women as leaders. However, despite the moves to address equity issues and cultivate women leaders in this sector, there is ample evidence that women are still significantly under-represented, absolutely and relative to the eligible pool of tenured women. Even in the open universities, which have access and equity as central to their missions, the number of women in leadership positions falls off dramatically at the most senior levels. All of the founding vice chancellors of the open universities were men: Walter Perry at The Open University (UK), Wichit Srisa-An at Thailand’s Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Ram Reddy at India’s Andhra Pradesh Open University and later Indira Gandhi National Open University, Yılmaz Büyükerşen at Turkey’s Anadolu University and Gajaraj Dhanarajan at the Open University of Hong Kong. Progress in women’s leadership in the university world is still slow, although there are success stories, such as Brenda Gourley, former Vice Chancellor of the Open University (UK), Denise Bradley, former Vice Chancellor of the University of South Australia, and Tian Belawati, Rector of the Open University of Indonesia

A study by Dominici, Fried and Zeger (2009) at one U.S. university reveals why so few women reach the highest pinnacles in academe, and their findings are probably representative of most institutions. Part of the problem stems from the fact that progression through the hierarchy follows a well-defined pathway, from chair to dean and ultimately to president or vice chancellor. More women are being appointed in universities. However, because these women are typically appointed at lower levels and on lower salaries, because there are more female staff “in the pipeline” and because they have family or domestic responsibilities, they are typically slower to receive promotion and other forms of recognition and less likely to be tenured than their male counterparts. It is also found that leadership positions, as currently defined and enacted, and particularly where resources are constrained and responsibilities cannot be delegated, are less attractive to women, again because of family obligations. It is still also the case that male, transactional and hierarchical models of leadership often prevail, and these are antithetical to the kinds of environments in which women leaders would prefer to work. Even when women do provide leadership in universities or are recognised nationally or internationally as leaders in their fields, they often receive less reward or resource support than their male counterparts. And whilst no gender bias may be intended, male faculty members are more likely

to build informal networks with other men, leaving the women intellectually marginalised. Not surprisingly, then, younger women see little reason for seeking leadership roles. Even though most of the research on women and leadership comes from higher education, the insights and findings can probably be extrapolated to cover the school and non-formal sectors as well.

This Book

We are living in a world where the unprecedented need for growth, equity and transformation in education and training calls for change, innovation and leadership in educational and training provision. We need to constantly evaluate existing models and processes and create new methods, products and services to find better ways of helping more people to learn. This calls for envisioning and devising new collaborative and technology-based means of delivery to improve outcomes and impacts within and beyond the classroom walls. We also believe that this calls for more women to have the confidence to step forward, take calculated risks and be leaders in educational change. As Llopis (2011) observes, women see opportunity in everything and everyone, have the ability to see what others don't and do what others won't, are excellent networkers, are good at cultivating relationships, like giving to others and keep pushing their ideas and ideals when prudence says "quit" — exactly the attributes needed in those who pioneer and lead in ODL.

In the following chapters, nine exceptional women share their ideas, experiences, setbacks and triumphs in providing, encouraging and supporting leadership in ODL in higher education, open schooling and non-formal education. They address the issues of being a leader, becoming a leader and helping other women to become leaders. We also invited three other outstanding women leaders to review the three chapters in each section and offer their comments on what the material reveals and how it resonates with their own views, experiences and knowledge of the literature on gender and leadership.

In the women and leadership in higher education section, Caroline Seelig, the Chief Executive of New Zealand's leading distance learning provider, the Open Polytechnic, writes about being a leader; Abtar Kaur, a professor in the Faculty of Education and Languages at Open University Malaysia, describes her experience of becoming a leader in instructional design at an open university; and Brenda Gourley, a former Vice Chancellor of The Open University, in the UK, and prior to that of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa, writes about helping other women to become leaders. The review chapter is written by Denise Bradley, a former Vice Chancellor and President of the University of South Australia and author of the 2008 *Review of Australian Higher Education*, or "Bradley Report".

In the section on women and leadership in open schooling, the former Director of the Ministry of Education's National Open School, in Trinidad and Tobago, Lystra Sampson-Ovid, describes what she found out about being a leader in open schooling; Sushmita Mitra, who has been associated with India's National Institute of Open Schooling from its inception, writes about becoming a leader; and Lambertha Mahai, the former Director of the Institute of Adult Education, in Tanzania, describes helping other women become leaders. The review chapter is by Cindy Gauthier, Principal of the Vancouver Learning Network, a

distributed learning school with the Vancouver Board of Education, in British Columbia, Canada.

In the section on women and leadership in non-formal and community education, Batchuluun Yembuu, the Director of the National Centre for Lifelong Education, in the Mongolian Ministry of Education and Science, describes her leadership role in non-formal education; Nodumo Dhlamini writes about becoming a leader in non-formal education in African contexts; and Chetna Gala Sinha, economist, farmer, activist as well as founder and President of the Mann Deshi Mahila Bank, in India, tells about her experiences in helping other women through non-formal education. The review chapter is by Dame Carol Kidu, an Australian-born Papua New Guinean politician who served as Minister for Community Development from 2002 to 2011 and then as Leader of the Opposition until her retirement from politics a year later.

Our concluding chapter draws together the many lessons learned during the course of developing this book and proposes concrete steps to help promote leadership amongst the many talented women around the world. We hope that this book will inspire and enable more women to become leaders in ODL.

References

- Agarwal, B. (2009). Gender and forest conservation: The impact of women's participation in community forest governance. *Ecological Economics*, 68(11), 2785–2799.
- AMP Foundation. (2012). *The best of every woman: An overview of approaches for philanthropic investment in Aboriginal women and girls*. Sydney: AMP. Retrieved from <https://www.amp.com.au/wps/amp/au/FileProxy?vigurl=/vgn-ext-templating/fileMetadataInterface?ids=e092922f869aa310VgnVCM1000001903400aRCRD>
- Arnold, K. (2011, June 8). Female leaders and the double bind: Why leadership styles that work for men might not work for women [Blog post]. Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Retrieved from www.congress2013.ca/blog/female-leaders-and-double-bind-why-leadership-styles-work-men-might-not-work-womenx
- Bokova, I. (2011). Editorial. *The UNESCO Courier* (April–June), 5–6. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001922/192261e.pdf>
- Bolden, R. (2004). *What is leadership?* University of Exeter Centre for Leadership Studies. Retrieved from https://eric.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10036/17493/what_is_leadership.pdf?sequence=1
- Bourgeois, T. (2005). *The hybrid leader: Blending the best of the male and female leadership styles*. Bath, UK: Oakhill Publishing.
- Brinton M. (1993). *Women and the economic miracle: Gender and work in postwar Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Cashdan E. (1998). Are men more competitive than women? *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 37(2), 213–229.

- Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomised policy experiment in India. *Econometrica*, 72(5), 1409–1443. Retrieved from <http://economics.mit.edu/files/792>
- Commonwealth, The. (1991). *Harare Commonwealth Declaration*. Retrieved from www.thecommonwealth.org/document/34293/35468/35773/harare.htm
- de Beauvoir, S. (1997). *The second sex*. Book 2. Translated and edited by H. M. Parshely. London: Vintage Classics. First published in French in 1949 as *Le deuxième sexe*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- di Giovanni, J. (2012). After the Arab Spring, Yemen's women are left behind. *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved from www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/12/09/after-the-arab-spring-yemen-s-women-are-left-behind.html
- Dominici, F., Fried, L. P., & Zeger, S. L. (2009). So few women leaders: It's no longer a pipeline problem, so what are the root causes? *AcademeOnline*, 95(4). Retrieved from www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2009/JA/Feat/domi.htm
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Boston: Harvard Business Press Books.
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (1995). Constructing meaning, constructing selves: Snapshots of language, gender and class from Belten High. In K. Hall & M. Buchholtz (Eds.), *Gender articulated: Arrangements of language and the socially constructed self* (pp. 469–507). London and New York: Routledge. Retrieved from www.stanford.edu/~eckert/PDF/ConstructingMeaning.pdf
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fiedler, F. E. (1967). *A theory of leadership effectiveness*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Fisher, M. (2012, October 25). What the Arab Spring has done for women's equity, in one chart. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/10/25/what-the-arab-spring-has-done-for-womens-equality-in-one-chart/
- Franklin, M. (2011, October 28). Aim for top, Julia Gillard tells girls of Commonwealth. *The Australian*. Retrieved from www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/aim-for-top-pm-tells-girls/story-fnapmixa-1226178883465
- Gedney, C. R. (1999). *Leadership effectiveness and gender: A research report submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements*. Montgomery, AL: Air Command and Staff College, USAF Air University.
- Gemmill, G., & Oakley, J. (1992). Leadership: An alienating social myth? *Human Relations*, 45(2), 113–129.
- Genovese, M. A. (Ed.). (1993). *Women as national leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Hausmann, R., Tyson, L. D., & Zahidi, S. (2011). *The global gender gap report 2011*. Cologny/Geneva: World Economic Forum. Retrieved from www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2011.pdf
- Hausmann, R., Tyson, L. D., & Zahidi, S. (2012). *The global gender gap report 2012*. Cologny/Geneva: World Economic Forum. Retrieved from www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf
- Hitchings, H. (2011). *The language wars: A history of proper English*. London: John Murray.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2012). *Women in national parliaments*. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union. Retrieved from www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm
- Kasdon, L. (2005). A tradition no longer: Rethinking female circumcision in Africa. *World & I: Innovative Approaches to Peace* (Nov.-Dec.), 66–73.
- Lewin, K., Lippit, R., & White, R. K. (1939). Patterns of aggressive behavior in experimentally created social climates. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 10, 271–301.
- Lieberman, S. (n.d.). *Gender communication differences and strategies*. Albany, CA: Simma Lieberman Associates. Retrieved from www.simmalieberman.com/articles/genderstrategies.html
- Llopis, G. (2011, August 22). 4 skills that give women a sustainable advantage over men. *Leadership*. Forbes.com. Retrieved from www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2011/08/22/4-skills-that-give-women-a-sustainable-advantage-over-men/
- Lott, J. R., & Kenny, L. W. (1999). Did women's suffrage change the size and scope of government? *Journal of Political Economy*, 107, 1163–1198.
- Man, J. (2011). *Samurai: The last warrior*. London: Transworld Publishers.
- McGregor, D. (1960). *The human side of enterprise*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Miller, G. (2008). Women's suffrage, political responsiveness, and child survival in American history. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123, 1287–1327.
- Monck, A. (2012, January 27). *World economic forum calls for more women leaders*. Retrieved from: www.weforum.org/news/world-economic-forum-calls-more-women-leaders
- Morrison, S. (2012, March 4). Revealed: The best and worst places to be a woman. *The Independent*. Retrieved from www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/revealed-the-best-and-worst-places-to-be-a-woman-7534794.html
- Northouse, P. G. (2004). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (3rd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Pfeffer, J. (2010, August 4). Women and the uneasy embrace of power [Blog post]. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2010/08/women_and_the_uneasy_embrace_o.html
- Phillips, L. (2009). *Social conditions inspired women to speak up – in speaking up women changed history*. Retrieved from <http://pre.docdat.com/docs/index-28871.html?page=4>

- Randstad. (2011). Employee outlook for 2012: A mixed picture. *Randstad Workmonitor Global Press Report Q4 2011*.
- Rosin, H. (2012). *The end of men: And the rise of women*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Sandberg, S. (2010, December 21). Why we have too few women leaders [Video]. Retrieved from <http://blog.ted.com/2010/12/21/why-we-have-too-few-women-leaders-sheryl-sandberg-on-ted-com/>
- Sen, A. (2006). *Identity and violence: The illusion of destiny*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Sidhva, S. (2011). Women political leaders. *The UNESCO Courier* (April–June), 9–12. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001922/192261e.pdf>
- Stogdill, R. M. (1974). *Handbook of leadership: A survey of the literature*. New York: Free Press.
- Storr, A. (1996). *Feet of clay: A study of gurus*. London: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Summers, A. (2012, August 31). *Her rights at work: The political persecution of Australia's first female prime minister*. Video of Dr. Anne Summers' Human Rights and Social Justice Lecture at the University of Newcastle. Retrieved from <http://annesummers.com.au/2012/09/my-speech-her-rights-at-work-the-political-persecution-of-australias-first-female-prime-minister/>
- Tannen, D. (2003). The relativity of linguistic strategies: Rethinking power and solidarity in gender dominance. In C. B. Paulston & G. R. Tucker (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics: The essential readings* (pp. 208–228). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Tingley, J. C. (1994). *Genderflex: Men & women speaking each other's language at work*. New York: Amacom.
- World Bank, The. (2011). *World development report 2012: Gender equality and development*. Washington, DC: The World Bank. Retrieved from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf>
- Zenger, J., & Folkman, J. (2012, March 15). Are women better leaders than men? *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2012/03/a_study_in_leadership_women_do.html#.T2jYDqIqxWk. email

PART

I

Women and Leadership in Open and Distance Higher Education

Being a Leader in Open and Distance Higher Education

Caroline Seelig

Kua tāwhiti kē
to
haerenga mai
kia kore e haere tonu

We have come too far not to go further

He tino nui rawa
ōu mahi kia
kore e mahi nui tonu

We have done too much not to do more

– Sir James Henare

In the Beginnings

“So, if you were successful in your application for this position, would there be any reasons why you couldn’t commence within three months?” he said with an encouraging smile.

I was thirty-two years old, desperate to score the job of Dean of Science and Technology at the Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) — the main regional higher education centre for the Hawke’s Bay and Gisborne areas on New Zealand’s North Island — dressed in a brand new, large, biscuit-coloured suit, well prepared, vaguely nervous ... and seven and a half months pregnant.

But let me go back ten years before that to the beginning of my journey in tertiary education leadership. I’d arrived in New Zealand educational administration from the other side of the world, where I’d been engaged in biology research and secondary teaching after graduating with a degree in plant sciences and then pursuing a PhD at University College of Swansea, in Wales.

I realised within six months of embarking on post-graduate study that I didn't have the mindset to become a career researcher or academic. I was spending long, antisocial hours studying grasses on a South Wales salt marsh and analysing the effect of seawater inundation. During that time, my only claim to fame was the accidental damage I caused during ion analysis of plant materials when I was evaporating off nitric acid in flasks. The exit flue of my flow cabinet was immediately above the professorial car park — causing mysterious and extensive corrosion problems in the suite of BMWs and Mercedes below.

My recollections of that period of my life have distilled into a sense of limited money and prospects, but with the seeds of some important formative influences. After accidentally setting fire to her calendar, which hung close to my Bunsen burner, I became firm friends with Betty, the senior laboratory technician. She lived close to my salt marsh, and after field days she'd feed me. Chips, beans and eggs. They remain the best foods in my life. For me, the quality of food is about the place you're in, and I was in a "porridge and frozen pizza place" at that time. But the "pulls and pushes" in my life were crystallising. I was being drawn by opportunities to travel and a potential career in education and academia, and was being repelled by limited opportunities and the political climate of the UK at the time of the 1990 poll tax riots. So, when I spotted a career opportunity in educational management on the other side of the world, in New Zealand, I sent off my curriculum vitae — crafted to highlight my strengths in picking up new skills and my new goal of educational leadership — and felt elated when I was offered the role.

Moving Down Under

New Zealand was the perfect destination: exciting opportunities in educational leadership, and a stunning natural history for a biologist. I undertook a "polytechnic apprenticeship" at Tai Poutini Polytechnic, a small tertiary institute on the West Coast of the South Island. I was officially the Academic Manager, but with only 300 students and three senior managers, I was called upon to undertake all aspects of administration, including occasional stints as receptionist, librarian and caretaker. I even recall lifting flooring from a proposed carving workshop in preparation for the new lino. This job certainly gave me "hands-on experience" of all facets of polytechnic operations, and appreciation of the tertiary education lifecycle, from student recruitment to graduation and everything in between.

I found the West Coast just so beautiful, natural and rugged. Growing up in London, I could never have imagined that one day I'd have a garden big enough to grow a tree in. Yet here I was with acres of native bush. And the job was fun. The polytechnic's culture encouraged the staff to be dynamic, creative and spontaneous — in a way that only small and nimble institutes can; and it had a growing reputation for innovative programmes and community engagement.

For me, this amazing career experience ended abruptly following what is known by Kiwis as the "Cave Creek disaster". In a freak accident, 13 of our students on an environmental field trip to the Paparoa National Park fell to their deaths when a public viewing platform they were standing on collapsed. Whilst I remained composed and professional through the immediate tragedy, six months later, in the middle of the night, I sat bolt upright in bed and sobbed. I realised then

that if I didn't make a big change, this tragedy would continue to eat away at my confidence. It was time to leave.

Around that time, I saw an advert for the dean's job at EIT in Hawke's Bay, on the east coast of the North Island. The role was a step up, but I was ready for the challenge and knew if I didn't make the leap then, a role at a similar level could be a long way off in a country the size of New Zealand.

So, I arrived at EIT for my job interview, with four years of multitasking polytechnic management under my belt — a belt that was sitting awkwardly over a very pregnant abdomen. Bruce, the Chief Executive, had the perception and understanding to appoint me to the dean's position at EIT. The day I flew up to start the job, he met me at the airport and bounced my newborn baby in his arms as he waited for me to collect luggage. It's a memory that always reminds me how important those first days and first impressions of a new job are.

Bruce still remains a role model. When I became pregnant with my second son, he clustered my annual leave, professional development time and flexible-working-from-home time to give me and my partner the time together to enjoy my new baby, Jack. These are the kinds of actions that allow women to function happily and effectively in the workplace within the context of their wider lives. Bruce had many well-worn sayings that I often remember and repeat. My favourite is: "Doing the right thing for the right reason, and not confusing that with the right thing for the wrong reason, or the wrong thing for the right reason". It seems simple, but it's not. It's always worth testing major decisions with that simple ethical overlay.

I spent three great years at EIT. The institute offered around 100 programmes at post-graduate, degree, diploma and certificate level, so I gained more experience across a larger portfolio of qualifications, helping to build my academic leadership skills for the future.

Whilst I loved my time at EIT, I knew that if I wanted to pursue my career as far as it could go, I needed to keep taking the next step up — and in New Zealand, that meant another change of cities. The next exciting career step for me saw my return to the South Island to a slightly larger institution, after I'd successfully applied for the position of Academic Manager and Deputy Chief Executive at the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT).

With two small children, I knew the move wouldn't be without its challenges. Whilst I had all the support I needed to balance work and family, I also knew I was moving from an organisation that felt safe and comfortable to one that was struggling to find its place in the sun.

EIT had taught me lots about curriculum, pedagogy, academic rigour and quality. Now I found myself majoring in reviews, restructures, procedural fairness, natural justice and good-faith employment. I'd taken the fascinating, albeit challenging, step from a financially secure to a financially vulnerable organisation, from continuous quality improvement to continual efficiency reviews as the institution sought ways to thrive in a tough funding climate. It proved a rich learning environment for me, and taken together, the experiences at these two organisations taught me the breadth of the most critical and fundamental considerations to lead a polytechnic.

I stayed at NMIT for four years, and during my last few years became driven towards gaining a chief executive position. I'd applied for a number of such positions but hadn't quite succeeded. It was easy to become disenchanted and disappointed by unsuccessful applications and interviews. I was in that catch-22 position where you need the experience to gain the job but can't get the experience without getting the job. Colleagues would tell me that a chief executive appointment is always a lottery and appointment boards can be so unpredictable. For example, what some see as a sense of humour and excitement in candidates, others see as a lack of gravitas. But I still held to the view that at some point "the stars would align", and the timing, relationships, consultants and boards would come right. At a post-secondary conference in Edinburgh in 2008, I listened to a brilliant presentation by a woman who regaled the audience with tales of her leadership career path, subsequent success, and joy at leading a Scottish educational organisation. It was truly inspirational. I was sitting next to a close friend from New Zealand — Neil, a successful polytechnic chief executive who had mentored and encouraged me in my career.

"So Neil, what has she got that I haven't?" I whispered. After an extensive period of consideration, he managed an answer that gave me the confidence in my ability, the encouragement to continue the pursuit of CEO positions and an added tip that didn't seem to require too much preparation: "Earrings!"

In his own wry way, Neil was saying I already had what it took to be a chief executive. It was an important moment of self-recognition, one I decided to mark in an appropriately symbolic way. Within a week of returning to New Zealand, I'd had my ears pierced (at the age of 45) and bought myself a rather splendid array of turquoise dangly earrings!

Shortly after that, I achieved what I had been striving for. (I think it was the self-belief rather than the earrings that did it!) I was appointed to the position of Chief Executive at the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand. It was (and remains) an incredibly exciting prospect.

Becoming a Chief Executive

Located in Lower Hutt near New Zealand's capital city, Wellington, the Open Polytechnic is one of the largest polytechnics in New Zealand and the country's only specialist provider of distance learning at a tertiary level. Over 40,000 mainly adult learners enrol each year to gain vocational skills to help them in their current or future careers.

Working at a purely distance learning institution was a big change for me after being at institutions which had a mainly younger student body who attended campus each day. Whilst I no longer get to see students on a daily basis and have the opportunity for impromptu chats, the times I do get to meet our distance learners — such as at graduation — I have a tremendous feeling of pride when I hear how tertiary education with the Open Polytechnic has helped change their lives.

The Open Polytechnic offers qualifications from certificate to degree level across a huge range of vocational disciplines — "everything from drain-laying to degrees", as Ormond Simpson, an internationally renowned scholar in the field of open and distance learning, so memorably put it. Study is based on learning resources

that have been custom-designed for the distance learner, with freephone and email access to lecturer, library and other support services, as well as to the Online Campus, which provides a “virtual campus” environment for our students.

At the time I took over, the Open Polytechnic was facing a whole set of transformational challenges as it sought, like its sister institutions around the world, to redefine and realign its traditional print-based open and distance services in an increasingly online world.

At the time of writing, I’ve been Chief Executive for three years. It’s been a privilege and a learning experience, not only from the perspective of strategic leadership and management, but also through seeing the development of our eLearning capability and how technology can change the playing field so quickly for learners, teachers, administrators and managers.

A big part of my learning experience in those early months was coming to grips, very quickly, with a new mode of education and its management. Like most of my colleagues in the face-to-face tertiary sector, I knew the Open Polytechnic was different. But I hadn’t realised just how deep that difference went. I’d managed distance programmes, but this was very different to the distinctive learning design, support and online delivery system of a dedicated open and distance learning (ODL) institution.

It’s fair to say I’ve become an ODL convert. It’s an exciting, empowering form of education. Throughout its history, it has had a close relationship with the transformational changes in technology, and that relationship is probably more intense now than ever. I’ve also developed a huge admiration for our distance learners, as they commit to ongoing learning on top of an amazing and often inspiring variety of life situations.

The chief executive position at the Open Polytechnic had another particular resonance for me. Shona Butterfield, who resigned from the position in 2003 after 14 years at the helm, was an inspiring role model for me. She carved out an impressive career as one of the first women leaders in New Zealand’s tertiary system. Shona was also deeply connected to the international ODL community, including her contribution as a long-serving Governor of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and later recognition as an Honorary Fellow. I feel privileged to now serve as a COL Special Education Advisor, and it’s been a special pleasure for me to support a renewed relationship between our two organisations over the last three years.

On Leadership

If there were one main truism for leadership, it would be, “It’s all about the people.” Everybody tells you that about leadership, and it’s true. But my own slant on this is, “And make sure you appoint the right people in the first place.” Jim Collins, author of the management book *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don’t*, says that in fact, leaders who go from good to great start with not “where” but “who”. Jim writes: “If we get the right people on the bus, the right people in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus, then we’ll figure out how to take it someplace great” (Collins, 2001, p. 41).

Steve Jobs also reckoned that to be a great leader you needed to be a “great talent scout”, because as a leader you need great people around you. He stressed the importance of being able to size people up, make decisions about them and know who to trust. It also helps if you can like them, and you must have confidence in them and invest in them.

Leadership is also about giving back. When I became a chief executive, I fulfilled a personal and covert key performance indicator (KPI, a professional goal) for a previous boss who’d set himself the goal of encouraging and mentoring a talented manager into a CEO position. I am thrilled that I have helped him achieve that goal! I’ve set myself a similar KPI, and I believe that several members of my current management team will achieve this within five years.

Thinking back on my various leadership roles, it makes me smile to think that perhaps my studies in the plant sciences weren’t entirely wasted. When you get the water, soils, nutrients, light levels, temperature and atmosphere right, the plant will thrive. But each plant is different. Some like intense sun, some like dry soils and some like alpine habitats or wetlands. Your staff and colleagues are the same. When the combination of motivation, support, freedom, exposure, challenge and intensity hits that sweet spot — they too will thrive. Some will be climbers, and some will want to strike out in different directions, and they’ll all need support and something to cling to on their journeys. But watch out for the insectivorous ones!

High-achieving individuals and teams often set themselves up to achieve unrealistic or overly ambitious goals and portray perfectly controlled personas. When I think about the great leaders I’ve had, they haven’t always tried to be perfect in every respect. They’ve been refreshingly human and honest. My advice to anyone aspiring to a leadership position would be that you don’t have to be invincible; it’s ok to vacillate and even be vulnerable, but never be a victim. If you want to class different types of leaders, then I think that reflective leaders are often good leaders. But having said that, I also observe that reflective people frequently dwell on criticism and negative experiences to draw out learnings. In a leadership position, this can be deadly, so it’s important to be positive and optimistic.

As you get older, you realise the truth in the old adage: “It’s important to take time out to smell the roses.” It’s exciting to achieve and occupy a top management position, but the role of chief executive can be totally absorbing, and issues can captivate your brain to the detriment of a balanced lifestyle or perception. I’ve always found the use of a professional mentor (someone who has been where you are and knows the pitfalls and keys to success) extremely important for achieving an independent and external perspective.

A good mentor has the wisdom that only experience can provide, and finding a good mentor is one of the best strategic moves you can make to ensure professional and personal achievement. At different times in my life, whether it was Betty, Bruce, Neil or Judith, my mentors have had a profound influence.

As a new chief executive at Open Polytechnic, I worked with my mentor, Judith, for a year. We established goals and objectives for our mentoring relationship, reviewed the personal and professional development issues and discussed how I might cope with circumstances and situations as they arose. On the basis of this experience, I strongly recommend the use of a wise and trusted guide to anybody taking up a new management position; and whilst you obviously need to feel

comfortable with your mentor, you can derive most benefit from mentors who force you to address the uncomfortable sides of your character or the less-than-desirable implications of your decisions.

For many women, the road to a top leadership or management position may be arduous. You may feel at times that you are getting further and further away from your goals as life throws up barriers for you. Persevere through disappointments, and if all else fails, do the “earring thing” — it might just help!

Research shows that women leaders don’t always get the opportunities, support or investment they need. So, if you come across a brilliant woman, hire her. Or, if you can’t offer her a job, find a way to support her in her career journey.

Looking back over my career, I think I’ve learnt much from the good leaders I’ve had, but learnt much more from the bad ones. I was forever cured of the “office size and place hierarchy” when, as a junior manager, I had a disgruntled boss move me and my office from the front of the building to a tiny L-shaped room next door to the men’s toilets. After a day or two of feeling totally belittled, I realised what a valuable lesson in the psychology of management this was — the boss’s motives, my response, my colleagues’ perception — what the gesture really said and meant. Since then, I’ve never cared about the size or placement of an office, and I would certainly never use “office entitlement” as a management technique.

It’s important to be passionate about whatever field you work in and to enjoy the people you have around you. Dwight Eisenhower once said, “A sense of humour is part of the act of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done.” Leading an education organisation involves getting along with all sorts of people — students, staff, external stakeholders, central agencies, industry groups and representatives.

For me, working at the Open Polytechnic is fun, and I think it is important to cultivate the enjoyment and the “humour assets” in any team. There are so many opportunities to laugh, celebrate and engage in entertaining activities. A visiting education specialist from COL recently spent a few days with us. She said, “I can tell that this place has a good culture — there is so much laughter all the time.” It was a lovely compliment.

Thomas Sergiovanni, professor of education at Trinity University, San Antonio, rejects simple models or theories of leadership, arguing that they take no account of the messy world of education. His view of leadership is the one I always quote at interviews when asked that tricky question about “personal leadership style”: “Leadership that is tough enough to demand a great deal from everyone, and leadership that is tender enough to encourage the heart, these are the images of leadership we need for schools as communities” (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 184–185).

On occasion, our senior management team needs to scrutinise a strategy from a variety of viewpoints, or predict responses and reactions to decisions, or we are just in need of entertainment. So, we get theatrical. This isn’t just about having fun. It forces us to adopt alternative perspectives. Recently we looked at sector reactions to a new strategy. We each adopted a different persona and perspective — minister of education, vice chancellor, learner and so on. We had props and accents, and even went as far as reciting poems. Each of us expressed views on institutional strategy from the point of view of our character, whether

competitive, supportive or curious. We find that such role playing generates new and different insights, is usually quite funny and is often quite memorable. I still recall what our version of the “Iron Lady” — Margaret Thatcher — thought of our bargaining strategy! And when a brand new senior appointee came to our management retreat in the guise of Yoda from Star Wars and said, “Masterful have we become. Strong and clever, look as good other polytechnics will not. Hmm? Yes, forever invincible. Earned it, we have. Hmmm. That is the way of things ... the way of the Force,” I knew I’d made the right appointment!

At one of my first “all staff meetings” at the Open Polytechnic, I made a comment about frogs, which later became a regular meeting routine for amphibian tales and anecdotes. “There are three frogs on a log. Two decide to jump off, so how many are left?” The answer was three, because those two frogs had only decided to jump, they didn’t actually do the jumping. This was my attempt to stress to staff that we urgently needed to move on from the analyses, the mandates, the charters, the business cases and the impact reports, to the critical, actual implementation. At the next meeting, I told the story of a science researcher who was investigating the behaviour of frogs:

He first keeps the frog on a table and asks it to jump. It jumps. Next, he cuts off one of its legs, and again he asks it to jump. Again the frog jumps. Getting boosted by this development, now he cuts off another leg and asks the frog to jump. Now the frog jumps again. He then gets really wondrous about it, so now he cuts off the third leg and again asks it to jump. The frog jumps. Now he cannot control the suspense and cuts off the fourth leg and asks the frog to jump. It doesn’t. Immediately he writes in his thesis, “If you cut all four legs off a frog, it will become deaf.”

My point this time was that ODL providers’ performance can be totally misinterpreted by ministries and education funding agencies. In ODL organisations, the student constituency, business model, pedagogy and mission are so different to a conventional face-to-face scenario that we often suffer the effects of central decisions that have been based upon skewed assumptions. Sometimes we’re expected to jump when our legs have been cut off, and that’s an impossible task.

I referred earlier to the valuable experience I gained in driving cost-effectiveness initiatives and involvement in organisational and structural reviews at NMIT. For the last two years at the Open Polytechnic, I have been able to draw on this as we’ve worked to ensure that we deliver a 21st-century learning experience for our students, and one that our key stakeholder, the New Zealand taxpayer, can afford. But our transformation pathway at the polytechnic hasn’t just been about cost-effectiveness and providing “better, smarter public services for less” (one of our government’s main priorities in getting New Zealand back on track after the effects of the global financial crisis). It has also been about ensuring we stay on the front foot as a leader in the delivery of vocational open and distance learning.

Cost-efficiency and accountability are important but certainly shouldn’t be the primary focus for educational leadership. As Judith Yero, author of *Teaching in Mind: How Teacher Thinking Shapes Education*, states: “. . . of course schools should be accountable — but accountable for what? . . . I would like to see schools accountable for developing students who have a love of learning — who are

continually growing in wisdom and in their ability to function effectively (and happily) in the world” (Yero, 2002, p. 224).

Our institutions of higher education, whether conventional or ODL, or in developed or developing countries, are operating in increasingly complex and demanding environments, and have had (and continue) to adjust to the technological, pedagogical and organisational changes implicit with the shifts from postal and audiovisual communication to Web 2.0 modalities. Providing — and supporting — transformational leadership under such circumstances is continuous and challenging.

It isn’t just about grappling with the new affordances for teaching and learning offered by changing technology. It’s also about management systems, administrative and supporting structures and their reliance, connectedness and interoperability, the changing needs and wants of increasingly demanding, mobile-connected learners, and managing staff, resources and relentlessly increasing financial pressures.

Organisational change sometimes reminds me of home DIY projects. You start by removing the old curtain rail, only to discover the window frame is rotten. So you take that out, and then you find the surrounding brickwork is loose, so you remove the wobbly bits and before you know it the whole front of the house is missing (honestly — I’ve been there!). Organisational functions can turn out to be held together by a thin facade of individuals’ goodwill, perseverance and organisational knowledge, and as you review, disestablish and restructure the system, you find all sorts of activities and timeframes collapsing around you. It’s important to have confidence in the long-term fix, to believe that it will be better, more robust and sustainable. And to be confident that you will get through the current turmoil.

This chapter has been about me, as a woman, and my leadership journey and management experiences. It hasn’t specifically considered these matters in a gender-specific way. However, I do think women face different challenges and that women can make real inroads in traditionally male-dominated roles in an age when technology is changing how we work. For example, the web-based technology available to us now means that we can video conference, access files, answer emails and respond to queries not only at our desks but also from smartphones, laptops and tablets. No longer being chained to a traditional workspace offers a lot of opportunities for women who are balancing careers and family.

There are certainly challenges for working women in New Zealand to overcome, not just at the senior leadership level but at all levels and in all contexts. New Zealand has a high level of educational achievement; women are now matching men in terms of post-secondary qualifications, and yet this achievement is not reflected in leadership roles or salaries.

A report put together by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, *Indicators for Change 2009: Tracking the Progress of New Zealand Women*, brought to light some sobering facts. In 2008, almost 49 per cent of women held a post-secondary qualification (compared to almost 53 per cent of men), and yet their median weekly income was 40 per cent lower than that of men. Looking specifically at Maori and Pasifika women, whilst they were more likely than their male counterparts to hold post-secondary qualifications, they still earned less than men within their ethnic groups.

Maori women, who were found to have the highest per capita participation in tertiary education, were still earning 15 per cent less than Maori men.

Of course, women's earnings are skewed by the fact that many seek part-time work whilst they raise their families, or re-enter the workforce at more junior positions after staying at home to look after young children. The New Zealand government is seeking to rectify this balance by offering services such as 20 hours of free child care, but there is a long way to go to find an inclusive way that enables women to raise their families and earn salaries equal to their male counterparts'.

In terms of leadership roles, the report pointed out that in sectors traditionally predominated by women, such as education and health, there was strong female representation on governance boards. Women also featured highly in the public sector, making up 42 per cent of state-sector board membership. In the private sector, however, the story was different, with women holding less than 9 per cent of directorships in the top 100 companies listed on the stock exchange.

There are always exceptions when talking in gender-based terms, but in general, I believe that women leaders can often be more persuasive than their male counterparts, and that they often demonstrate a more inclusive, team-building leadership style in solving problems and making decisions. And from experience, I would say that when a woman feels the humiliation of failure or sting of rejection, she learns from the experience and adversity, and develops resilience, in a different way from a man.

Management and leadership roles have undergone enormous and rapid change in recent years, and the professions are being reinvented by technological and social developments. The corporate distinctions of title, task and department are merging and eroding, along with the traditional sources of power and motivation that previously preserved gender inequality. Accordingly, in the future, women may find that they possess real advantages. The transformational leadership required in complex and inter-dependent education environments is consistent with the positive, empathic, encouraging, responsive and inspiring styles that so many women exemplify.

Lopez-Claros and Zahidi (2005, p. 2) observe that "no country in the world, no matter how advanced, has achieved true gender equality, as measured by comparable decision-making power, equal opportunities for education and advancement, and equal participation and status in all walks of human endeavour. Gender disparities exist, even in countries without glaring male domination." I am hopeful that, even from a purely commercial competitiveness perspective, more organisations and sectors will become committed to hiring women and promoting them to decision-making and leadership positions.

Final Reflections

Drawing from the experiences above, I have created a list of guiding statements that have informed my leadership in educational organisations. They are not particularly unique or sophisticated, and they won't necessarily be foremost considerations for all leaders and managers, but they are the reminders that mean most to me:

- As an education leader, “talent scouting” is arguably your most important role. You need to choose staff well and then look after them, giving them the time, technology and support they need to do their jobs really well.
- It’s important to be kind and fair, to recognise great performances, to give and share credit generously and to take time to understand. It is also important to remain humble. People enter the teaching profession because they believe in the good that education can do, both individually and collectively, so they value honesty, ethics, humanity and altruism.
- In the business of ODL, it’s important to remember that just as flexibility is good for learning, it is also good for leadership. When everything is in a constant state of change, a calm and flexible attitude is important.
- Have the vision and passion to achieve great things. Continually ask, “Why can’t we...?” especially of your information services/information technology departments!
- Keep an indomitable spirit and healthy optimism. Difficult situations will come and go and will provide you with immense experience, resilience and learning. It is often the experiences of humiliation and defeat that teach you most and let you guide others more wisely.
- Seek out those people who are able to help, guide and mentor you in your role, and become one of those people for others on their leadership journeys.
- Have fun! Technological advances promise to fundamentally transform the management and design of student-centric teaching and learning. Leading an educational organisation at such a time should be exciting, challenging and enjoyable.

References

- Collins, J. C. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap ... and others don't*. London: Arrow Books.
- Lopez-Claros, A., & Zahidi, S. (2005). *Women’s empowerment: Measuring the global gender gap*. Cologny/Geneva: World Economic Forum. Retrieved from www.weforum.org/pdf/Global_Competitiveness_Reports/Reports/gender_gap.pdf
- Ministry of Women’s Affairs. (2010). *Indicators for change 2009: Tracking the progress of New Zealand women*. Wellington: Ministry of Women’s Affairs. Retrieved from <http://mwa.govt.nz/sites/mwa.govt.nz/files/indicators-for-change-2009.pdf>
- Sergiovanni, T. (1992). *Moral leadership: Getting to the heart of school improvement*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Yero, J. L. (2002). *Teaching in mind: How teacher thinking shapes education*. Hamilton, MT: MindFlight Publishing.

Becoming a Leader in Instructional Design in an Open University

Abtar Kaur

In the Beginnings

I think that from my earliest years, I always had this thing about being a leader. I was always the one who was only too ready to come forward and voice an opinion on something, give a hand to someone needing help and organise games with the other children in the schoolyard and neighbourhood.

I remember a ten-year-old boy who needed guidance with everything Malaysian after returning from four years abroad. I was the one who volunteered to help him with his studies and adjusting to the Malaysian way of life. In return, his mum made some very delicious food for me — something which taught me that there could be extrinsic as well as intrinsic rewards for helping others.

I grew up in a small town in Perlis State in northern Malaysia, one of the country's largest rice-producing regions. We were one of the few Punjabi families in the neighbourhood; most of our neighbours were Chinese. Back then, in the 1960s, English wasn't as widely taught or spoken as it is today. So, the only way I could communicate with most of our neighbours was by picking up a Chinese dialect. My siblings were the same, so there we all were, as teenagers, chatting away, juggling between Punjabi with our parents, English and Malay in our classrooms and Chinese when we played with the other kids in the street. I can still converse in the Hokkien dialect today — and get some surprised looks from Chinese people when I do so. Chinese culture had a great influence on me. In fact, it reached the point where my dad had to prevent me from learning Chinese script for fear that I might fall behind in learning about Punjabi ways. I was just so keen to learn as much as possible about the intriguing ways of the Chinese, in both a business and a streetwise sense, that make them the most financially successful people in Malaysia. Growing up amongst the different cultures made me receptive to human differences and similarities, sensitive to diverse people's needs and able to

see life's bigger picture. I believe this laid the ground for dealing fairly and frankly with the issues of gender and race later on in my life.

My father was the most hard-working, firm and focused person you could ever wish to meet. He had to hold down two jobs to provide for all 11 of us in my family. But he never came home at the end of the day complaining about the hard work, how hot it was working out in the sun, the people at work or how he'd been treated. To me, he was the true definition of determination and initiative. My mum was a caring, warm and friendly person. She approached all the daily challenges and chores with a calm mind, showing us that life's challenges are best approached in a relaxed and patient manner. Our mum and dad always made sure we were amply fed and well dressed.

My parents were strong believers of the Sikh faith. Ours was one of the few Punjabi homes that had a special prayer room, which meant that my eight siblings and I had to share bedrooms. We led a simple life, centred on learning, a sense of spirituality, wholeness, identity and well-being, and showing good manners and respect towards others. My eldest brother inherited these characteristics. Coming top in the state's O-level exams, he wanted to become a doctor, but our dad couldn't afford to pay for his studies, so he had to accept a scholarship to train as a teacher. He did very well in the end, going on to become a renowned professor of Borneo history.

Dad, like the other male elders in our community, held the view that girls shouldn't be too highly educated. The predominant belief at that time was that men should be responsible for putting food on the table whilst women should be the nurturers at home. So, my oldest sister, who was a very intelligent girl, received no encouragement or support for her studies. However, as time went on, my dad came to recognise the need for girls to be adequately schooled. I was also lucky in having older brothers as my heroes and supporters, so I was in a position to take up the learning challenge.

At school, my teachers and classmates were culturally diverse. But we didn't know the meaning of "different cultures" until the word multiculturalism surfaced! Ours was one big, happy family that didn't see much difference between the races. We practised each others' traditions and ate whatever everyone else ate. Halal and non-halal foods were never an issue. How things change — now in Malaysia, we are chastised for not exercising cultural sensitivity!

Something else I discovered at school was the value of books. I found they helped me occupy my free time and educate myself whenever the teachers couldn't teach me what I wanted to know, and gave me the tools for intellectual discourse. They were my best companions. Browsing in the school library, or in the state library after school hours and during weekends and school vacations, was something I dearly looked forward to.

We had a mixed bag of teachers, but most of them were dedicated, caring and concerned for our total development. I particularly recall my Form Six teacher, Ms Shanda. Fresh out of university, she brought an air of "big city" sophistication into our classroom. And she showed such interest in our development that she endeared herself to us all. Funnily enough, in later years, our roles reversed because she became one of my MEd students, and today we are firm friends. I really bloomed in Form Six. I found you could talk openly and honestly with

your teachers and the principal, and branch out into all kinds of extracurricular activities. I got my first taste of leadership when I became secretary of the Rangers Club, an organisation like the Scouts. This helped to increase my sense of self-esteem and teach me about handling leadership roles and responsibilities.

After leaving school, I went on to study at the University of Malaya. Fortunately, such were my grades that they gave me a state scholarship. My dad worked hard to support me at university — so much so that he gave me more than I actually needed. University opened up a whole new world for me, socially as well as academically. I engaged in many extracurricular activities, and I also became much more aware of gender issues. My fellow male students were pretty open-minded, but most of the presidents of the various societies were male, whilst most of us females acted as secretaries or in more minor roles. However, I did become a leader of several clubs and societies, which gave me experience in managing people and taught me the importance of self-management and time management.

So, looking back, I can see that I was moulded by a number of early influences. My dad taught me the importance of hard work, determination, focus, matters of the spirit and avoiding time wasters such as gossip and toxic people. My mum taught me to be caring, warm and friendly. My siblings taught me to be well-mannered and respectful of others, to excel in my studies and to be a well-rounded person of high principles. I also learned a lot about life skills and a sense of community from our Chinese neighbours. And school expanded my world view. All of these factors came to help me in my leadership roles later in life.

Embarking on My Career

There were really only two options for most women graduates in those days: join the civil service or become a teacher. The latter was by far the more popular option. The idea of my becoming a teacher appealed to my parents, siblings and other family members, but for all the wrong reasons: they felt it would make me a better wife and mother. Anyway, I got myself into a DipEd programme, learning to teach geography and English as a second language. During the course of my studies I began to be intrigued by the field of education itself — and something called “educational technology”. My first major project involved creating a synchronised tape-slide programme — a “cutting edge technology” at that time. I found myself being drawn to educational technology and media, perhaps because it was such a nascent field. I threw myself into this work. One of my professors was exceptionally helpful in teaching me all about the different technologies, media and pedagogical methods, and the technicians were happy to take over most of the technicalities, so I was able to concentrate on developing the best audiovisual products and educational outcomes that I could.

Immediately after graduating, I got married, and then for the next few years, I taught English, mathematics, geography, history, moral studies and physical education in various rural schools. I wasn't quite sure that I was doing what I really wanted to, but I maintained a positive outlook. Something in me said, “Do it first and learn to love it along the way.” But I was still finding that my main interest lay in developing learning materials and finding new and different ways of improving learning in those I taught. Thus began my journey into the world of instructional design.

In 1985, the Malaysian government offered my husband a scholarship to further his studies at Syracuse University in New York State. He planned to do his Master of Public Administration at the Maxwell School of Management, one of the world's best graduate schools of public affairs. I determined that I wasn't going to be left out of the picture. Syracuse also had, and indeed still has, a highly regarded Department of Instructional Design, Development and Evaluation (IDD&E). For over sixty years, the IDD&E has demonstrated excellence in research and development, consultation, service and education, consistently ranked amongst the top programmes in the country, and hosted students and graduates from over 50 countries. Seeing this opportunity to also upgrade my qualifications and in a field that really interested me — instructional systems and educational technology — I immediately applied to study for the IDD&E Master of Instructional Design.

Going to the USA and studying at the same university as my husband seemed a really great idea — at the time. However, arriving at Syracuse, I was totally overwhelmed by it all: the weather (much colder than I'd ever experienced), the different culture, the terrible emptiness of spirit, being away from family and friends, and being torn between caring for a six-month-old son and doing very demanding studies. For the first time in my life, I felt ready to give up and go home.

My husband was very understanding and encouraged me to have a word with my professors. So, before submitting my letter of withdrawal, I had a heart-to-heart chat with Professor Phil Doughty. After patiently listening to my concerns, he said, and I'll never forget this, "Abtar, there's a single mother in the apartment next to yours, and she's got *six kids* — and *she's working on her PhD.*" This remark changed my mind right away and for evermore it has shaped my views on facing up to any challenges that present themselves to me. I've never failed to share this story with students, staff and friends who are in need of motivation when they're feeling down about things.

I thus remained enrolled in the master's programme, and things soon started looking up for me. I found there were some fellow Malaysians at Syracuse who could help out by caring for my son whilst I attended lectures and worked in the labs. My husband also helped whenever he had no classes. So, I got down to my studies, and at the end of the first semester, I not only scored As in all my subjects but was offered a graduate assistant position, which enabled me to earn a daily allowance and entitled me to free tuition.

Looking back, I must say I thrived in Syracuse. I really had to compete in this "top league university", but I learned just what can be achieved through sheer hard work and adopting a "can do" attitude, even when the odds seem to be against you. I found I was quite good at multitasking, coping with studying, teaching and wifely and motherly duties all at the same time. Developing a competitive spirit was another attribute I picked up during this period. I was also fortunate in having many hardworking professors who delivered beyond my expectations. This has motivated me to do the same with my students. My advice for other women who find themselves in similar situations is to share your worries, and if you don't see the light or the way forward with the first sharing, move on to the next. Then, once you've made up your mind about where you want to go, put in the hard work, be focused and disciplined and try to establish a good support network. Find others who're in a similar position and who can support each other.

In my case, my support network consisted of my family, my fellow students and colleagues, the department secretaries and support staff, the Malaysian network at Slocum Heights where we stayed, the local Punjabi families and an American convert to Sikhism who provided for my spiritual needs.

On the work front, I learnt so much. I was exposed to the theories and findings of such leaders in the field of instructional technology and educational technology as Robert Gagné and Alex Romiszowski. I learned at first hand from such eminent persons as Donald P. Ely, Professor and Chair of the IDD&E, how to create effective multimedia materials, long before the advent of any “computer apps”. I came to learn that no medium is inherently superior to any other medium, but that each, or each combination, suits particular learning tasks and learning contexts. The learning culture at Syracuse was one of continual improvement, questioning, dedication, drive and caring. The most valuable lesson I took back to Malaysia was that learning is most effective when the teacher plans well, makes the teaching and learning logical and easy to follow and provides constant feedback. It was also an enriching, inspiring experience to find women commanding top academic and managerial positions at Syracuse. This helped change my perception of what we women are capable of.

Immediately after completing my master’s in 1987, I returned to Malaysia to teach in secondary schools, which I did up until 1990. I also started applying my newly acquired instructional design principles and practices to writing school textbooks and creating other materials for history courses, using Charles Reigeluth’s “elaboration theory”, a strategy for organising and presenting concepts in increasing order of complexity. The way I developed these teaching and learning resources was to first present the content using a few basic principles or ideas, and then progressively introduce further details and variations whilst at the same time summarising and reviewing earlier concepts, facts and skills. One example of this was when my husband, who also has a passion for teaching and learning, and I collaborated on developing a chart method for teaching history — enabling students to see a historical episode in one diagram. This work became well known and helped promote a new approach to learning in other schools. Many students later told us it really helped them master the new information.

I developed something of a reputation as an innovative teacher, and in 1991, I was invited to become a lecturer at the Technical Teacher’s Training College (TTTC), in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur. My next four years were spent training teachers in instructional design. My courses became very popular and encouraged many of these teachers to continue studying in this field.

Meanwhile, I was constantly pushing to further my experience and expertise in instructional technology. I applied for, and received, a World Bank Scholarship to take part in a five-week course in multimedia design and development at the University of Alberta, in Canada. I then applied the knowledge I gained there to introducing the principles of instructional design and technology to around 1,000 in-service teachers for the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE). A year later, I was selected by the Japan International Cooperation Agency to be one of a small number of teachers who toured various Japanese cities for a month, passing on these new ideas and methods of teaching and learning. This involved a rigorous selection procedure, including Japanese spoken language (basic), a group interaction test, a physical endurance test and a demanding interview.

These two experiences not only enriched me personally but had an impact on my motivation. I could see that I should constantly seek new opportunities and only needed to tap into my personal resources to attain my goals. The upshot was that after five years at the TTTC, I felt it was time to move on. I'd achieved all I wanted to achieve there. A lectureship position in instructional design was advertised by the University of Malaya (UM), the country's premier university, and a close lady friend encouraged me to apply for this position.

The interview panel appeared impressed by my 12 years of teaching experience, master's degree in instructional design, academic publications and membership in the Malaysian Council for Computers in Education. But then when I came to be offered the lectureship, I hesitated about whether to accept it. My family was keen for me to do so, but I could see it would entail working longer hours and sacrificing my pension scheme. In the Malaysian system, when you make a direct transfer from one government organisation or institution to another, this usually involves no break in continuity of service or obligation to resign. But in this case, I was told I wouldn't be allowed to make a direct transfer, even though I was only moving from one government institution to another. This had serious financial implications. There was only one thing to do — stand up for myself. I decided to go and see the then Minister of Education (our current Prime Minister) himself. Getting an appointment with him was a very tiring and tedious affair. I had to sit outside his office for nearly a month. And even after I'd seen him and after six months of effort on my part, the authorities still wouldn't agree to a direct transfer. But at least I knew that I'd tried my best. So, I resigned from the college, putting in the shortest required notice to quit, and joined the staff at UM in September 1996.

In this new job, I reported to the Dean of the Faculty of Education, who happened to be a woman. Right from the very start, she showed great faith in me. She immediately challenged me to plan and propose a totally new bachelor's programme in instructional design, multimedia technology, web-based learning and smart schools, which would enable UM to bid for a major Ministry of Education project to upgrade teachers from diploma to first degree level. The competition for this was really fierce, because ten other Malaysian universities were also tendering to provide this programme. So, here I was, new to the university world, faced with a major challenge by the Dean and forced to work on a large, totally new project with a terribly tight deadline. Somehow, I managed to develop the plan and proposal, present it to the Faculty of Education and get it accepted. And our bid succeeded. This was regarded as a significant achievement by the faculty and UM, because it raised our profile with the Ministry of Education.

In 1999, UM decided to establish a Multimedia Development Centre (MDC), and I was appointed to be an instructional designer in this centre whilst maintaining my post as lecturer in the Faculty of Education. There I was, a full-time faculty member and instructional designer in the MDC, developing online learning systems for the university and other higher education institutions — all on top of being a home-carer and mother and part-time PhD student. But I was still keen to move onto new and better things.

In 1997, I'd signed up for a PhD through the Faculty of Education at UM, researching web-based learning. My preference would have been full-time study, and I knew the faculty had a scholarship scheme that would enable me to do this.

But I guessed (correctly) that this would be reserved for the *Bumiputera*, the term used to describe the indigenous Malays and which can be translated literally as “prince(s) of the land”. So I didn’t waste time filling out reams of forms and trying to persuade lots of people to give me this scholarship, but accepted that if I wanted to achieve my dreams and complete my PhD by 2000, I would have to settle for part-time study at my own expense and put in a great deal of extra time.

I used to clock into my office at 06:30 and work until 21:30, after which time I attended to family and other matters. My mantra was, “If you start, you’ll see the end.” I learned to say “no” when necessary, delegate home duties to my housemaid and ask my husband to take on more responsibility for our four boys when they were unwell. I was lucky in that my dean granted me flexible working hours. But I still made myself responsible for our children’s education and their learning Punjabi with a private tutor. My husband made it quite clear that he would have no part in this, so I had to manage on my own, taking the children to school, bringing them home for a quick bath and lunch, and then driving them for a half hour to another township for more lessons. When I wasn’t free to do this, I had to arrange for the housemaid to take the four boys there by cab, stay with them and then bring them home again by cab.

I submitted my thesis in October 2000 and graduated in 2001. I’d managed to complete my PhD within the planned time frame. All this dedicated study and hard work for the faculty paid off. In 1999, the dean nominated me for an excellent service award, which the university senate duly granted. The support and encouragement of my dean meant a lot to me, and her skills in leadership had a major impact on my style of leadership. She had the experience, capability and instincts to be firm and lenient as necessary, and she was able to distinguish between those of her staff who were serious about their work, those who used flattery and tried to curry favour with her (we call these “apple polishers”) and those who simply couldn’t care less — and manage each of them accordingly.

In 1999, I successfully applied for a Fulbright Scholarship, which took me to Indiana University, Bloomington, for four months from October 2000 until February 2001. The great thing about this was that apart from our two older boys, who stayed at home to manage affairs, my family was able to accompany me on this trip, and I took particular pride in being the one who could give them this chance of a lifetime. My husband used this as an opportunity to do some more of his research and our two younger boys to gain some experience of U.S. schooling.

This experience really introduced me to open and distance learning (ODL) and implementing eLearning in schools. I had so many opportunities to discuss these matters with Professors Charles Reigeluth, Jeremy Dunning and Curtis J. Bonk, all great scholars and leaders in their particular fields. Professor Dunning, the Dean of the School of Continuing Education, was particularly generous with his time in helping me understand the design, development and application of multimedia materials for distance learners.

I returned to Malaysia with renewed energy and enthusiasm for eLearning. I decided to contact some former colleagues at the newly established Open University Malaysia (OUM) to share my new-found knowledge. Quite unexpectedly, this landed me a short-term consultancy in instructional design and ODL materials development for the Faculty of Business and Management

at OUM. Having five more months of my sabbatical to go, I accepted the job of project manager, established a small team — one graphic designer and three part-time instructional designers — and planned the timeline and model for our operations. We had to work to a tight time frame, and the greatest challenge we faced was reducing the content the faculty members gave us to work with. Being from traditional universities and unfamiliar with the kinds of distance students we had at OUM, they didn't understand why we had to reduce the amount of teaching material or why the instructional designers had to correct their pedagogical errors. Verbal abuse was common, and as project manager, I had to mediate between the teaching staff and instructional designers and make sure they all remained motivated and on task.

Within two months of the start of this project, the president of OUM was sufficiently impressed with our achievements and my qualifications and experience to offer me a full-time, permanent job with the university. Because of my commitments at UM, I initially declined this offer, but after a year back in my old job at UM, I decided to accept the offer and returned to become Director of the Centre for Instructional Design and Technology (CIDT). It's best to seize opportunities whenever they present themselves.

Working at Open University Malaysia

In 1999, the minister of education had invited Multimedia Technology Enhancement Operations Sdn. Bhd. (METEOR), a consortium of 11 Malaysian public universities, to establish an open university. Open University Malaysia (OUM) was then opened in August 2000 and had its official launch by the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Y.A.Bhg. Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in August 2002.

OUM was the seventh private Malaysian university, and its mission is: “To widen access to quality education and provide lifelong learning opportunities by leveraging technology, adopting flexible learning, and providing a conducive and engaging learning environment at competitive and affordable cost”. Its ODL delivery methods are specifically designed for adult learners who want to pursue a degree whilst caring for their families and managing their careers. OUM's initial intake was 753 students; enrolment now exceeds 130,000. And instead of the four original programmes, OUM now offers 70, ranging from diploma to post-graduate level. With such a constant supply of large numbers of students, OUM has been able to expand tremendously in terms of IT infrastructure. In addition to the main campus at Jalan Tun Ismail, Kuala Lumpur, it now operates a strong network of 12 OUM learning centres throughout the country, all fully equipped with tutorial rooms, libraries, computer laboratories and Internet facilities.

I soon realised I was the only person in the whole institution with experience, qualifications and expertise in the fields of eLearning and instructional design. The then president recognised this and realised that the ideas and material I'd put together for the accreditation of OUM by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency had been instrumental in gaining this recognition. In this, I defined three major and essential strategies for OUM to follow in regard to teaching and learning, instructional design for the development and delivery of content, and training instructors. The only problem was that these ideas were way ahead of the

technological capabilities we could call on that time — so it was a case of “fake it till you make it”, making it appear that what we were proposing was already uploaded in the learning management system!

The teaching and learning strategies were envisaged as being a blend of face-to-face, online and self-managed learning. In all of the courses, ten per cent of the overall study time was to be face-to-face, ten per cent online learning and 80 per cent self-managed learning.

The quality of the instructional design was of paramount importance, and a rigorous and well-tested template for print-based modules was developed, together with the evaluation and quality assurance systems. One of the modules I co-developed using this template subsequently received first prize in the Commonwealth of Learning awards for excellence in distance learning material at the 4th Pan-Commonwealth Conference.

We had limited budgets, human resources and time to create quality and engaging interactive multimedia learning material, so we made extensive use of the TALON (Teaching and Learning Oriented Network) Repurposeable Learning Object Templates developed collaboratively by OUM staff and myself and staff from Indiana University and the Ari Vidali’s Envisage Corporation. These 20 templates mimic specific teaching strategies and allow not only instructional and media designers but instructors with little or no programming experience to produce courseware without any need to write or change source codes. These Flash-based templates allow the design and creation of interactive learning objects in about ten per cent of the time that would be entailed to create them from scratch.

We trained the instructors in the templates’ use, and many of the subsequently developed items were created by the instructors directly from the templates with little or no assistance from programmers or instructional designers. Initially, the instructors were sceptical about being able to create simple learning objects in 20 minutes or less using the TALON templates. When they found that this was in fact possible, they reached their “aha! moment” and became more convinced and motivated. This collaboration on multimedia courseware development with Indiana University resulted in a number of co-authored research papers that received international awards.

In regard to training instructors, I hold that you can have the best learning packages in the world, but these are of absolutely no use if your faculty members aren’t properly trained in how to use them and how to encourage and support distance learners. In those early years, between 2001 and 2006, most of the OUM faculty were extremely knowledgeable and capable in their professional spheres but quite new to instructional design and eLearning. We were dealing with faculty who were very well-qualified engineers, scientists, economists and even IT experts but who had almost zero knowledge about what was involved in, and how to provide for, open, distance and online learning. So, training in the use of self-learning materials, online discussions and the facilitation of blended learning was absolutely essential. We developed some largely self-instructional modules to train the instructors, and this initiative gained us national and international recognition. In fact, so successful and well received were these staff training methods that OUM and the CIDT were commissioned to provide the consultancy for the establishment of and training wing for Saudi Arabia’s National

Center for e-Learning and Distance Learning, which is now spearheading eLearning in that country's higher education system. This further international experience encouraged me to submit my work for an award in teaching, learning and technology, and in 2007, I received the Innovative Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Technology Award at the 18th International Conference on College Teaching and Learning, in Florida, USA.

I spent three years as the Director of the CIDT. I confirmed the OUM senior management's confidence in me by showing that I was a team player and achieved results on time. I have to say, it seemed quite natural for me to be leading the centre. There was a positive culture and vision amongst the staff team, and I believe the organisation benefited from my time at the helm. But then I was invited to head up the Open and Distance Learning Pedagogy Centre (ODLPC).

At the ODLPC, my responsibility was to provide training for all of OUM's instructors, tutors and facilitators to ensure quality in the university's open, distance and blended teaching and learning. We developed an entire training resource repository, initiated online systems to capture tutor data and developed a sound, simple-to-use pedagogical model for the tutors.

In 2005, the Ministry of Education contracted OUM to assist faculty in all the various teacher training institutions in the development of print ODL materials. Again, I was asked to lead the team for this project, and we succeeded in assisting with the development of the required 200 modules within the very short time frame of six months. The MOE was extremely pleased with the outcomes, and this partly contributed to OUM receiving in the following academic year its first intake of teachers needing to upgrade their qualifications from diploma to first degree. Since that time, OUM has upgraded close to 40,000 teachers through intakes of around 4,000 teachers two or three times a year.

The years 1999 to 2009 were most fruitful, fulfilling and educational for me. I rose from being a lecturer to becoming a leader in instructional design. I took all the opportunities that came my way, some of which were very challenging. I took risks in accepting and initiating projects and contributing ideas. I held on to my sense of purpose and capitalised on team strengths. Perhaps I could have progressed on the promotional ladder had I concentrated more on relationship building, but I have no regrets, as I'm someone who likes blazing the ODL trail, who likes embarking on bold new ventures and who still loves teaching. This was why in 2009, I conceived and implemented OUM's first entirely online post-graduate programme: the Master of Instructional Design and Technology (MIDT).

The MIDT was intended to teach the theories, principles and practices of instructional design in ways that that could be applied in various contexts — particularly in eLearning and social media environments — and was planned to be task-based, student-centred and offered internationally. It wasn't that easy getting this programme off the ground. I asked for an assistant to help me, but this request was refused. I also encountered problems with some of the OUM support services, sometimes over the most mundane issues. Even in highly innovative institutions, it can sometimes be hard to achieve change. Had I received more assistance and support then, I'm sure we could have made the MIDT better, but I was determined to get it up and running, and I think it has been successful.

A noteworthy feature of the programme is the diversity of its instructors and students. Our instructors are based in Canada, the USA, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia. And after starting in 2009 with 21 students from 11 countries, today's students hail from at least seven different time zones and 14 different countries. We have about 50 students in the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. There is also a strong possibility that the MIDT will be taken up by Eszterházy Károly College, in Eger, Hungary, and Daffodil International University, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. MOUs have been signed with both institutions. The 40-credit programme takes students about two years to complete.

The MIDT has been endorsed by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). In 2008, OUM and COL signed an agreement that COL would provide five yearly scholarships for deserving students for a period of three years. To date, COL has sponsored 18 students, as it extended the award to cover three more students in 2012. The course is very affordable, being at least four times cheaper than those offered by comparable institutions in other parts of the world, without any compromise in the quality of the teaching and learning.

The programme was conceived for those seeking careers as instructional designers, teachers and trainers. It introduces the students to instructional systems design processes using a variety of media, including web-based applications, and is based primarily on the ADDIE Model. The ADDIE Model is the generic process traditionally used by instructional designers and training developers and comprises five phases: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation. We apply this model to the course provision as well. We also introduce the students to other models, such as the Dick and Carey and the Kemp instructional systems design (ISD) models. Underpinning our approach is the idea of continual formative feedback as instructional programmes or materials are being created, to save time and money by identifying and resolving problems whilst they are still easy to fix.

ISD is generating a wealth of useful research, and we expect the students to access, critique and synthesise published research reports and apply appropriate findings to their own work. We also deal with online assessment methods, using such approaches such as e-portfolios, and address the legal implications and challenges of online assessments. We draw upon Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory to introduce learners to the idea of collaborative and online learning networks. We also expose our learners to the idea of connecting the learning and performance objectives of organisations in the knowledge-based economy. In addition to these core studies, the learners can choose any three electives from the following: Design and Development of Interactive E-Content; Instructional Technology for Diverse Learners; Human Performance Technology; Managing Instructional Technology for Change; and Network Systems and Learning Management.

I'm really proud of the fact that the MIDT course is helping to open up OUM to the rest of the world. I am also delighted to receive the kinds of feedback we get from our students, not only because they are personally reassuring and gratifying, but because they confirm that our student-centred philosophy and use of the ADDIE Model are being applied and appreciated.

Shriram, a professor in a university in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, likes the way we assign tasks to the students, monitor their process, provide feedback and, when things go wrong, offer the necessary teaching and guidance. He also appreciates the way we allow them to freely express their doubts and concerns and address these without fear or favour.

Fathimath, an instructional designer at the Centre for Open Learning, Maldives National University, believes that we always try to understand the learner's individual potential and provide scaffolding for their ZPD (zone of proximal development).

Steve, a secondary school mathematics teacher in Trinidad, who is now working towards a PhD in Education, says that doing the MIDT course gave him the confidence to study for a doctorate (also with OUM), and that whilst distance learning can be impersonal at times, the courses have never felt this way because the collaboration and interactions were warm, hospitable, pleasant and academically stimulating.

Michael, the Inspector of Pedagogy in Charge of ICT in Cameroon's Ministry of Basic Education, who is also progressing from his MIDT to PhD at OUM, says that we appreciate the plight of the distance learner and that the regular Skype video chats give a sense of real-time learning.

Nokuthula, a university lecturer in Swaziland, says that as we connect through LinkedIn and Skype, she feels as if she's part of an evolving community of practice.

Final Reflections

So, after all this, what are my thoughts on becoming a leader? Well, for a start, you need to have the right knowledge, skills and attitudes and the ability to work hard. You must also be acutely aware of what is going on around you — the culture and climate of your department and your organisation as a whole.

Looking back, I reckon I've been a good problem-solver, instructional designer, teacher and teacher trainer, but I now realise that there were times when I could have managed the political climate better. Jealousies are likely to occur everywhere, so the best approach is to deal with these matters head on. As a woman, I've capitalised on my strengths as an empathetic, caring and communicative kind of person, whilst at the same time remaining focused and firm on issues crucial to the success of the job and the organisation. I have to say I have always felt very much at ease when cast in a leadership role. It has always seemed a very natural thing to do. But perhaps I also needed to adopt some more masculine attributes when leading projects and managing people. It is, after all, very often an essentially male culture in our institutions, especially in the upper echelons.

One of my regrets is that I wish I'd read more leadership books and gone on more courses to learn about types and styles of leadership. My advice would be, don't overlook this, thinking you'll just manage fine on your own. Seek out courses for self-improvement. Remember, too, that as well as developing the essential attributes of a leader, you must always be prepared for, and able to adapt your style of leadership to, the particular contexts. For myself, I hold to the ideals of shared

leadership: nurturing, doing good for others and giving them some responsibility for exercising leadership at whatever level they operate. The feminine way of leading includes helping the world to understand and be principled regarding the values that really matter.

Helping Other Women to Become Leaders in Open and Distance Higher Education

Brenda Gourley

Introduction

I was Vice Chancellor of the University of Natal (later to become the University of KwaZulu-Natal), in South Africa, for nine momentous years, after which I became Vice Chancellor of The Open University, in the United Kingdom, one of the world's mega-universities, a position I held for eight years. In each case, I was the first woman to occupy that post. So, let me tell my story and, based on my experience, offer my ideas about helping other women to become leaders.

The University of Natal was one of South Africa's largest universities, with 30,000 students over four campuses, and it was extraordinary in its own way, even in Apartheid South Africa. The year I took office was the year South Africa finally achieved its freedom, 1994. It was an historic time. It was incumbent on me, as Vice Chancellor, not only to provide the kind of leadership expected in all universities, but to help salve old wounds, to heed voices never heard before, to put in place new systems of governance, to foster a sense of community within the institution and to help build a new and democratic South Africa. Like all the other vice chancellors in my country, I was confronted with a need for change on a scale rarely encountered in the world of higher education.

On top of which, and not for the first time, the universities were the settings for violent struggle. This was especially the case with my university, which had opened up access very quickly and was located in a province where there were very complex demographics, as well as strong unions and student bodies unused to and not particularly well disposed towards any idea of compromise.

These were the years that made or broke aspirant leaders. The students and unions in particular took no prisoners in this painful process of democracy in the making. Protest marches, boycotts, strikes, riots and generally uncooperative

behaviour had to be dealt with somehow without losing teaching days or disrupting the institution.

Dealing with people in no mood for compromise was a major difficulty in establishing the new order. Knowing what to compromise on was critically important. Negotiating became a central feature of my office. Every rule, process and procedure had to be reinvented to ensure that the various stakeholders felt part of a democracy and happy with the university's codes of practice. People don't change long-practised traditions easily. Highly developed listening skills are always important, but in these times of dramatic change, they were absolutely essential, especially in dealing with people from different backgrounds and diverse language and social groups who'd never been listened to before. It was so important to pay attention to the words and intonation, observe the body language, and try to understand what lay behind these. Not all of the universities succeeded in this regard. I like to think we did quite well. It certainly put us all on a steep learning curve.

As Vice Chancellor (my first experience of being the CEO of an institution), not only was I having to exemplify all of the leadership qualities normally expected of someone in my position, but I was having these tested in extremely trying circumstances. Any serious error of judgement on my part could lead to dramatic consequences, even loss of life. This required a degree of steel.

After nine years at the University of Natal, I moved on to become Vice Chancellor of The Open University, in the United Kingdom (OU). This was an institution of 250,000 students, over eight times the number at my previous institution. It also had close to 8,000 part-time tutors, more than 1,200 full-time academic staff and more than 3,500 support and administrative staff. It was a mega-university, the biggest university in the UK, and not a traditional campus institution but an open and distance learning university. Most of its courses were available throughout Europe, and some were available worldwide, either directly from the OU or through partnerships and accredited institutions. It was internationally recognised as a leader in its field and was highly rated within the UK. So, I became responsible for very large-scale and complex operations, and fortunately, I found the lessons of leadership that I'd learnt over the years stood me in good stead. Change was again the main theme of my term of office, but in this case, changes in operations, faculty management, educational paradigms and pedagogy, technology applications and much more. I was essentially seeking culture change, and that takes a long time. I believe it was well underway when I left office in 2009.

My Learning Journey to the Vice Chancellor's Office

So, what had brought me to this point in my career? I grew up in an Apartheid world, where women's rights took second place to the larger struggle. Being a white woman, I was better educated than my black female contemporaries. But at that time, there were very few women of any kind in the professions and, indeed, very few going to university. I started work at the age of 18, the only female articled clerk in the only accountancy practice in South Africa that would accept a woman employee. I studied part-time, the only female in a university class of 500 students, most of whom were studying accountancy simply because it was the only profession that offered the chance of part-time work and part-time study.

Many people, women in particular, have had their life chances dramatically altered by part-time study. Mine certainly were.

My accountancy training and experience were key determinants of my career. If you're the only woman student in a large class, and if you're the only female clerk in an accounting practice, you quickly become inured to being "different" and used to dealing with petty discrimination. You toughen up. You learn that humour is a good defence weapon. You learn, too, that not all men are your enemies; in fact, most are your friends. They have mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and friends they wish well. They're your allies. You learn to pick your battles and not waste energy on those that dissipate your energies.

With 20/20 hindsight, I was fortunate in my choice of career — even though that choice was essentially based on what line of work would most quickly give me independence. The training was arduous. The hours were long, with lectures and seminars having to be fitted in before and after work and at weekends. But this was a good grounding for a career that would involve working long hours for the rest of my life. Later, when I had children, I had to ensure that my family was cared for, but all the work and study still had to go on, so midnight oil and I became good friends and have been ever since.

Accountancy gave me a firm grounding in financial management, something that's important, if not essential, for progressing up any management and leadership ladder. But I knew that accounting in itself was too narrow a base from which to progress. I therefore added an MBA to my portfolio, again studying part-time. Amongst the topics we studied, those dealing with strategic planning and people management were the most crucial to my career. I find that not everybody can think strategically and yet how important this is. The critical strategic question is not "What?" but "Why?" as well as "How?" An important part of getting the answers to "Why?" is what I call "evidence-based management". There's a saying in management texts that "what gets measured gets managed", and so one needs to be so careful about what gets measured. All too often, I've found managers paying scant attention to the evidence or to finding the right kind of evidence — which is really strange in the university world, where research is so highly prized. Performance management is important in determining the "How" — ensuring that goals are consistently met in an effective and efficient manner by everyone in all parts of the institution and through all of the processes. Paying attention to this is essential. But again, I find this is not well done in higher education.

Having completed my articles of clerkship, I had gone into a job where I was group accountant of a large retail company — a job for which I was really too young and inexperienced but under a dynamic new management who were themselves young and ready to give me responsibility. One had to learn fast, and I did. But I wanted a larger family, and the job gave me very little flexibility. I eventually decided to move into a university setting. Coming from the private sector into the university world as a senior lecturer, I found the differences between the two quite startling — not least the lack of real direction and "performance management". I worked hard on growing my CV, got my professorship and added to my skills portfolio. It wasn't too long before I was back in management, as Dean of a large faculty, then as Deputy Vice Chancellor and finally Vice Chancellor, each post representing a "first" for women. It is interesting that I didn't set out to get these

posts. Doing each successive job as well as I could resulted in being sought out by people who wanted me to take the next position. They were quite brave — and they trusted me.

I appreciate that I've been lucky. I don't underestimate the difficulties some women face in coping with children, partners, elderly parents, cultural constraints and other calls on their time, abilities and energies. Sometimes just holding down a job takes all the strength they can muster. Men can usually rely on their wives to support them in finding the extra time entailed in holding down leadership positions. Many women lack the support they need to climb the career ladder. And most women put family first. Who can argue with that?

Many people helped achieve what I've done in my life. I had parents who made my education a high priority at great sacrifice to themselves. I have had a very supportive husband — and every career-minded woman will know this is make-or-break in their professional lives. I've had healthy children and grandchildren. I've also been able to afford help in running my home — no trivial matter. I've been fortunate in possessing physical stamina and enjoying good health. At work, I've also been able to depend upon others — hardworking and committed managers and staff, people who've demanded far more of themselves than I could ever have asked of them.

Any leader who thinks they can achieve great things on their own is self-delusional. The ability to build teams and inspire loyalty and commitment to a common purpose is an all-important part of being an effective leader. So too is the willingness and ability to communicate, to muster arguments and deliver them in cogent and compelling ways and to inspire people both within the organisation and beyond. Marshalling the facts and doing your research is important. But good communication skills go far beyond that. Appealing to people, not assuming that they share your world view, being persuasive and even inspiring is an art and, like any other art, needs lots of practice and continuing improvement. Getting others to fully understand what you're saying and the implications, even if these are crystal clear in your own mind, is an ability you can always improve on.

I've been particularly influenced by Peter Senge and his ideas regarding the art and practice of the learning organisation. He has characterised leaders as designers, stewards and teachers, people in trust, individuals who try to build organisations within which people expand their capacity. This is the kind of leader I've always aspired to be and modelled myself on. We learnt in South Africa, as all over the world, that leadership doesn't reside in one person. Indeed, it's dangerous if it does. Leadership can and should be shared. It must be cultivated and nurtured and developed wherever and in whomever it is found. Building a culture of leadership, encouraging enterprise and being tolerant of mistakes are all necessary in environments where people need to be given opportunities to grow. Highly structured, hierarchical organisations don't encourage leadership, don't distribute decision-making and don't build a sense of common purpose.

The university world calls for high levels of leadership in all parts of the enterprise and at many levels, especially in teaching and learning. We live in times of unprecedented change, partly because of technology and what it enables us to do, but also because we're being faced with the need to achieve greater access

and equity and higher quality provision whilst at the same time experiencing pressures of demand and constrained budgets.

Considering the Attributes of Leadership

The fact is that many women in both formal and informal education, sometimes unheralded, are introducing exciting and worthwhile new ways of teaching using media and technology, and are attracting non-traditional learners. They're not taking the old paths. They're stepping into new and untried territory. They are leaders. They need to think of themselves as leaders, and they need to be encouraged by others to see themselves at the forefront of things. They have more skills than they know. It's becoming increasingly clear that women bring the "softer" skills and attributes of leadership into organisations much more so than men and that organisations need these.

I'm not going to list the oft-quoted attributes of leaders. These are easy enough to find out about in books on leadership. But I do want to emphasise "character". Some people say, "Either you have it or you don't." People used to say the same about leadership: either you were or you were not a leader. Further research, however, revealed that leadership could be nurtured, fostered and taught. I believe it's the same with character. People seeking to be leaders would do well to exercise and hone their casts of mind, attributes, traits and abilities and reflect on how closely they bring these to becoming the person and type of leader they really want to be.

The leadership attributes I see as important, based on my experience over many years and witnessing many failures in leadership, are these.

Integrity. Lack of integrity lies at the heart of many a leadership crisis. To inspire confidence, you must be trusted — and without integrity, there can be no trust. You must show integrity in the way you conduct your personal affairs, in your personal relationships and in how you manage.

Someone who worked for me for several years had this to say at my farewell: "What is unique, what for all of us will characterise our time in your company, is the moral dimension of your leadership. That old truism, that true leaders must walk their talk, has never been better exemplified. For you, there were no walls between the personal and the political. We have known at every point that the mission to which we were committed required of us as individuals and as a group the highest standards of conduct in ourselves, to each other and to those we in turn led. By this means we were trusted, and with that trust all was possible." That short valediction meant more to me than the speaker could ever have guessed, and it contained the basic truth about trust.

Orientation to service. If your agenda is fundamentally governed by personal motives, you may never become a successful leader. Embedded in good leadership is the idea of "serving others". The concept of "servant leadership" is a compelling one. We have only to think of Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Aung San Suu Kyi to appreciate this point.

Optimism. You can't lead others into uncharted territory if you've a pessimistic turn of mind. People need leaders to be cheerful, hopeful of positive outcomes, optimistic in the face of difficulties. The world can be seen as full of insoluble

problems or of challenges that are not beyond human ingenuity to address. You need to hold the latter view to be a leader.

Decisiveness. It's a complex world, and you are unlikely to have complete information or ready answers for every decision you're called upon to make. And sometimes you'll have to make rapid decisions. If you agonise endlessly over finding the right answer, your followers are likely to lose confidence in you and fall away.

Courage. You'll always be confronted by issues that are difficult and fraught with uncertainty. There'll be times when you have to do or say something that's not universally popular. It can be lonely out there in front, on your own, being in the public eye or having to face up to the media. So you need to show personal courage.

Resilience. There will always be failures and setbacks in the discharge of your duties as a leader. It never works to take these too badly, too personally. You need to develop the ability to not only learn from but “bounce back” from failure.

Self-reflection. You need to be open to new experiences, to listen, to seek advice, to heed criticism. You need this to learn and grow. But you also need to discover more about your fundamental nature, purpose and essence. By understanding yourself, by moving beyond your ego and comfort zone, you will strengthen your abilities as a leader.

Discipline. I can't over-emphasise the need to discipline yourself to work long and hard when necessary, to control your tongue and temper despite provocation, to ensure that you not only have your act together, but look as though you do.

A sense of humour. Leadership and interactions with lots of different people impose strains. Without being able to see the funny side of situations, without a sense of the ridiculous, you're without a major source of tension release. Taking yourself too seriously is also likely to end in tears! The appropriate use of humour can also release tensions in others. So often, I have seen situations that could have been dealt with so much more easily if the “leader” had only been able to deploy humour.

Is it asking a lot to possess or develop these attributes? Yes! You might sometimes fail to live up to these expectations — but then, if *you* don't set your sights high, who else will?

Useful Advice Garnered over the Years

I've mentored innumerable women over the years. Here's the advice I've offered them.

Don't try to be like a man. I've seen so many women in effect trying to act more like men in the workplace. This is missing the point. The different world views women bring to the table, their different ways of dealing with people and their different ways of negotiating, bring balance to the workplace. You don't need to sacrifice your femininity in playing your leadership roles. In trying to be more like men, women run the real risk of failing to be “authentic” — an attribute that is vital in engendering confidence and trust in your leadership.

You have more skills than you acknowledge. When I was interviewed for the vice chancellorship at The Open University, one of the questions from one of the panel

members was, “What is it in your life of which you are most proud?” My answer was an easy and honest one. “My family,” I said, and I then elaborated on the things that gave me a particular sense of satisfaction. The panel clearly found this an unusual response. It’s interesting that in so many interviews over many, many years, I’ve never heard a man making any reference to his family in building his case for a job. I believe women should be unabashed in claiming the skills they have acquired in the process of child rearing and organising their households. The evidence may be a bit more difficult to put on the table, but surely it can’t be too hard to find. Many of the skills we need in good leadership are those to be found in good parenting: clarity of purpose, consistency of action, building confidence and trust, nurturing, teamwork, acting fairly and exercising accountability. And women’s capacity to discharge several responsibilities in the workplace and the home is no small management feat either. We have to be multitaskers.

Be at ease with your male colleagues, and don’t carry a chip on your shoulder. I’ve often encountered women who would be quite capable of achieving leadership positions if only they could be more at ease about being one woman amongst many men. Across the globe, higher education is still largely male dominated, as are academic and professional networks. Being the only female student in 500 and the only woman in the accounting practice where I first worked quickly taught me how to handle discrimination and inappropriate “advances” and be at ease in such a setting.

The first time I chaired Senate as Vice Chancellor, I announced that since for many years I had been one of those addressed as “gentlemen”, I felt sure the members would not mind if just for this one meeting, they were addressed as “ladies”! I conducted the rest of the meeting along these lines, trying not to be too heavy-handed, and found that this illustrious academic body was amused by my saying things like, “Come along, ladies. We have now debated this matter exhaustively and it is time to take a vote.” No further meetings were ever addressed as “gentlemen”.

It really doesn’t help to be seen as “having a chip on your shoulder”. Think of people like Nelson Mandela, who endured so much. When he finally emerged from the prison of Robben Island, he displayed no bitterness, and he went on to become an icon for reconciliation and forgiveness all over the world. I had the good fortune to meet him on several occasions, and I must say that whenever I was simmering over some unpleasant work situation, I used to think of Mandela and rebuke myself — and get over it.

Learn to listen more and talk less. An elderly African man once told me that his mother used to say, “God gave us two eyes, two ears and one mouth — and they should be used in the right proportion!” I’ve often had occasion to pass on this piece of advice to others. It brings out the importance of listening and of reading the body language of people who might not be talking or even good at talking, but nevertheless are saying something. It’s my experience that women are particularly good at interpreting facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, posture and tone of voice, so they should really make good use of this skill. Listening carefully and sensing true feelings and intentions are important skills in discerning ways forward in difficult situations.

Reflect and learn. I read once about the vice president of a company who'd made a mistake which had cost the company millions and felt obliged to resign as a result. When he tendered his resignation, the president asked him what he had learnt from the experience. After considering the vice president's answer, he said, "I have just spent millions on training you and now you want to resign! I won't accept your resignation!" It's my experience that women beat themselves up more than men over any mistakes they make along the way. I can tolerate mistakes made by others, provided I am confident that that the errors won't be repeated because the people learned from their errors, and, as a consequence, processes, procedures or decision-making systems will be changed.

Don't be risk averse. I've also found over the years that women seem to be more risk averse than men and also want to do so much more before putting themselves forward for leadership positions. I applaud people who recognise risk — but I've always tried to engender an orientation towards "risk management" rather than "risk aversion". There's a world of difference. Risk aversion is sticking with the status quo or going for the least risky option. Risk management is thinking systematically about all possible risks, problems or disasters before they happen, and setting up procedures that will avoid, minimise or cope with their impact. Uncertainty and risk are quintessential features of embarking on educational innovations such as open and distance learning. So, women should be more ready to seek advice on whether or not they are ready to put themselves forward. One is never wholly prepared for every leadership role, and one should never stop learning how to improve. Accept the challenge. Take a risk.

Be a team player. I often wonder whether it's because men play so many team sports that they're more disposed to being members of teams than women. Or is it because women think that offering to join teams suggests that they are being "forward" in some way or that their action could be misinterpreted by men? I'm not sure, but I've certainly observed reluctance on the part of women to accept or ask for help, as if this in some way reflects badly on their abilities. Women must overcome this attitude and work hard at being a team member or, better still, a team leader. There's much more coaching available on such matters now, and women should take advantage of it. I've seen team coaching involving on-the-job observation and feedback, and how instructive all the participants have found this.

The ability to hold a team together and inspire loyalty and commitment to a common purpose is a vital component of leadership. And some things are best achieved by example. I've never asked anything of my teams that I don't ask of myself. It's also important to be clear about one's expectations. I've seen some would-be leaders acting on the "divide and rule" principle. That's not acceptable.

Be brave. In my experience, women are much more diffident than men in putting themselves forward in the public arena. I admit it does take a certain degree of courage to stand up and brave the highly intelligent and argumentative kind of people one finds in academia. I well remember when I first became a member of Senate in my university; there were hardly any women in the chamber, and my heart used to pound and my stomach churn every time I stood up to speak. And whenever I had to make a speech at a large gathering or address large audiences at conferences, I used to feel physically ill. It took me decades to overcome these nerves. I did this by carefully preparing

what I wanted to say, getting feedback on drafts and testing my ideas with people whose opinions I trusted. This gave me confidence. I'm told lots of actors and musicians get desperately nervous before live performances. That doesn't prevent them from performing well. One has to persevere.

Encourage other women. I've often seen women achieve leadership positions and then do nothing at all to encourage other women in their sphere of influence. Margaret Thatcher was famously intolerant of doing anything special for women. It seems to me a terrible thing if women don't support women when they know the obstacles they face. In mentoring, I make a special point of probing this issue. I like the root of the word "encourage" — giving someone courage, inspiring courage. Doing this for other women is a gift beyond price.

Be accepting of delays born of family responsibilities. Many women fret over the "time lost" when they have babies and small children. By doing this, they risk not enjoying a very precious part of their children's lives — as well as their own. Most women don't have that many children. How many months or even years are there when those children demand their constant attention? Not many. I have had four children. That meant three years of pregnancy, for most of which time I was able to work. Maybe another four years, at most, when they took up a major part of my time. Out of a working life of 50 years, that's not much. My advice to women is to be accepting of these relatively short delays and remember your children are more important than any work could possibly be. Pay attention to how you raise them. The first few years of a child's life will determine much of what follows. Get this wrong and that child has the capacity to wreak more havoc in your career than you can imagine. So, for all your sakes, pay attention to this!

Care for people. I really care about social justice, and the people I have worked with have come to know and respect this. Social justice extends to the workplace and individuals in the workplace. And it's not only about them, but about caring about what it is you're jointly embarked upon. I read once that people will figure out how much you care long before they figure out how much you know. I like to think that women are naturally more nurturing than men — and they should not leave their nurturing abilities at home. Caring about the concerns of people you work with is part of being human. I once shared a secretary with another professor. He got very angry once, claiming that she gave priority to the work she had to do for me rather than the work he had given her. I asked him if he knew anything about this poor woman's background. He said he didn't. She had a disabled child, a terminally ill parent and a difficult husband. The fact that she got to work every day and discharged her responsibilities was some kind of miracle. I tried to accommodate her when things were especially rough at home. The other professor treated her very much like a piece of office furniture. He got what he deserved. The fact is, you will act differently if you care, and the people in your organisation will also respond differently if they know you care.

Build networks and relationships. I think women are far more aware than men of the importance of relationships and the building of alliances and collaborative endeavours, all of which are essential for making things happen. Women seem to instinctively know that relationships need maintenance if they are to survive and flourish. And where relationships are good, workplace and other difficulties are much more easily resolved.

Building relationships is not quite the same as networking — which is also important. The university world is still male dominated, if less so than it used to be. So, women can face all sorts of cultural prejudices when they try to network in the same ways as men. My advice is to persevere with this. But you can be greatly assisted by the new forms of networking enabled by technology and social media. I belong to all sorts of higher education networks that would have been impossible just a few years ago. I'm inclined to think these may be better networks than some of the more traditional ones, in that they usually are based upon common interests rather than who you know.

Respect others. It's my firm conviction that leadership should be conducted in such a way that everybody is made to see they are on the same side. Implying that “your side of the boat is leaking” is not at all helpful. Of course, there are times when choices have to be made and people will act like your opponents. “Opponents”, however, are not there to be humiliated. “Win-win” should always be the preferred outcome of negotiation. Too many people want to win in arguments and stand-offs. I don't set out to win; I want everyone to think that they have gained something and that the doors are not closed for the future. I'm inclined to think that women have less of a burning need to win than men and a greater capacity for compromise. This should stand you in good stead in a world where the answers are not always clear or ready-made.

How Can We Help More Women Become Leaders?

So much for my advice to women who are becoming or aspiring to be leaders. Now some advice for those who are in a position to help women become leaders.

Many women struggle on and achieve a great deal with little support. But many more fall by the wayside through no fault of their own. Women need formalised support in their various environments. The questions that I have always asked of myself as a leader seeking to encourage and support women are these.

Do we set ourselves targets for gender issues? Do we monitor staffing patterns in where and in what posts women are to be found? Do we demonstrate clearly the progress we want to achieve in bridging the gender divide?

What are we doing to redress the gender inequities in our policies and procedures?

At the University of Natal, we surveyed our female staff and found that they applied less for promotion, published less in academic journals and had circumscribed notions of career advancement. So, we instituted a process whereby selection committee decisions had to be overseen by a “transformation officer” elected by the staff, as well as be signed off by a member of the executive, who posed some awkward questions as to short-listing and choice.

Are we being careful enough about the composition of our selection and promotion committees? Even if women are not overtly subjected to male prejudice or discrimination, they feel it in subtle forms. A male-dominated selection or promotion committee may not be discriminatory per se, but the female candidates may feel that it is. We therefore have to be very careful in selecting and briefing the members of these committees.

Are we seeking out talented women to nominate as members of important and influential committees and boards — not only within an institution but

nationally and internationally? Our management groups and committees need to have a better balance of men and women, to ensure that they function well and are inclusive and that the views and needs of women are properly represented and considered.

What kinds of career guidance are we offering to our female staff? Ironically, one of the problems of the moment in South Africa and elsewhere is retaining black women academics within universities. Equity programmes and salaries in public and commercial sectors are luring many women from their academic careers. Although universities can't hope to compete with the kinds of salaries and perks on offer in the private sector, one can imagine a future in which greater support for and planning of women's career tracks will allow career prospects and prestige to outweigh the lure of commercial offers.

Can we do more to help women with their research and research funding? This is very important, given that research and publication are important to appointments, tenure and promotion. For example, one can imagine a specially prepared and maintained web-based database to alert women to funding bodies as well as research, scholarship and fellowship opportunities.

Are we providing mentoring programmes for women staff members? I've always attached great importance to being mentored and to mentoring — helping and supporting those women who are struggling to cope with conflicting demands and who need to develop the confidence, knowledge and skills to better themselves in their work and their lives generally.

What do we do to assist women with known difficulties? For example, do we need to provide a crèche and childcare facilities?

Do we need to organise “diversity workshops”? We know that women and men often work from different assumptions, usually unspoken in debate. So, how can we actively seek to change the quality of the debate and encourage the kind of dialogue that crosses the gender divide?

Do we have policies and procedures for dealing with sexual harassment? And if so, are they being widely publicised and applied? If not, what do we extrapolate from this — that there is no sexual harassment on the campus or that women deem the procedures tokenistic or ineffective?

Are we providing good role models? I have consistently impressed upon my female staff the importance to women of seeing other women in leadership roles. We can never underestimate the importance of role modelling and acting as exemplars. It is not so much what we say that counts; it is what we do. If we women don't support each other, how can we expect men to do so? I've often been shocked to find how few women actually nominate other women for posts and committee positions. They need to be challenged on this matter — as groups and individually.

Do we prematurely force women into roles they're not yet ready for? I've constantly sought out suitable women to fill leadership posts, but I've never knowingly put someone in a job I didn't think they were capable of doing (albeit with a bit of help). Nothing, in my view, undermines a person's confidence and self-esteem more than to find themselves trapped in a job they can't cope with.

Are we doing enough to nurture the female students, and in particular senior and post-graduate students? What would indicate to them that the university environment is sympathetic to and supportive of their aspirations and conducive to their becoming future leaders?

What counselling services are we offering to our female staff? Do we assist women to overcome their difficulties? Do we have rape crisis lines? Do we offer counselling and support to people from traumatised backgrounds? In my experience, the number of women who've been abused in some way is much larger than we think.

Are we doing enough to cultivate a culture of leadership across the institution? To achieve a lasting behavioural change within an institution — and especially one where you're breaking new ground in uses of open, distance and blended learning and the application of technology and more learner-centred methods — requires the right mix of organisational culture, motivation and leadership right across and down the institution.

I am not entirely convinced that women per se have unique characteristics that equip them better for leadership than men. Reflecting on the women I've worked with over the years, I've found that women seem to be less hierarchical, have more empathy with those who work for them and seem more caring in the process. I've also found them to be more ready to challenge the status quo. Maybe the ones who succeed have become inured to being in the minority! I've also found them to be more aware of the importance of building relationships and alliances and of collaborating in endeavours — both factors which facilitate making things happen.

It seems to me that never have the opportunities for women working in open and distance learning been greater. And they're no longer limited to certain types of institutions. The skills women have developed for teaching and learning online or at a distance are now being actively sought by traditional institutions as well as private-sector organisations. The opportunities are growing at a phenomenal rate as demand for more and better education and training rises — and they are also increasing for women. There's nothing like change to highlight the need for a scarce and valuable human resource: the knowledge and skills that women can bring to this work.

When I reflect on the substantial changes that have occurred over the many years I've been working in the university sector, I know that there has been a major shift in awareness of and attitudes towards women and their leadership potential — and I've every hope that even more change will follow.

Those of us working in higher education have an important mission, one that contains within it a high moral purpose. All the talent that can be brought to bear in this mission must be harnessed, but more than that, its operation should be conducted to the highest standards of equity. None of us should rest until it is.

Grasping the Opportunities: Women Leaders in Higher Education

Denise Bradley

For a feminist who has had a long career in higher education, women's rise to leadership positions has been agonisingly slow. Whichever country you examine, there are still few women in the most senior positions.

Whilst things are better than when I started my career in the mid 1970s, no one could argue we have cracked the code — found the solution to getting more women into the top jobs. This is despite the fact that for some decades now in most developed countries, there are more young women than young men graduating with degrees, and in many places their average attainment is better. So, we have many highly capable, well-qualified women who should be either on track to assume leadership roles in proportion to their participation in higher education or already exercising leadership. But we still have a problem.

The literature about the barriers to women's progress to leadership positions in higher education is extensive and covers much the same ground as that which explores other fields such as law or finance. There are two broad themes in this literature. The first examines the nature of the workplace — the organisation of work; the need to attain further qualifications and build the foundations of a career in one's late 20s or 30s; the culture of the workplace, which often rewards time served rather than outputs; the way the exercise of female authority is viewed by other workers; and the lack of relevant role models, mentors or sponsors for women. The second focuses on women themselves — strong evidence from all sides that they are still considered responsible and consider themselves responsible for managing the practical and emotional burdens of home and family, the disruption caused to their careers by time out of work for child bearing, and suggestions that they are less likely than men to take risks and generally don't apply for positions until they are 100 per cent sure that they have all the necessary skills and experience to do the job, thus slowing their career progression.

So, how do the stories told by our three very successful women leaders fit into this pattern? What do their experiences tell us about success as women in higher education and, in particular, in open and distance education?

The first thing that struck me when I read these accounts was that all three women have children and partners. They have not sacrificed the pleasures and pains of domestic life for a career. They have juggled both. They have taken every advantage of maternity leave, childcare provision, decent salaries which allow for others to be paid to do household work, and the inherent flexibility of the annual demands of higher education. To varying degrees they have also, it seems, been assisted by partners and family to have a career, not just a job. They have accepted that having both children and a career requires managing domestic life to remove the woman from total responsibility for every aspect of the domestic regime. Until we make this emotional and practical decision, we cannot manage a career. As the mother of four sons, I found that the decisions I made about work and family, and how to enjoy both, were critical for me.

Second, it seems all wanted a career rather than a job and saw themselves on a career path with the expectation that they would progress to more responsible positions. There is a strong theme in each story of taking opportunities and, indeed, risks. None of them seems to have been waiting for their light to be recognised. Instead, they have sought further and more challenging positions. This is crucial, I believe. My own experience as an academic manager is that quite often, you have to persuade women to apply for positions you know they can manage. They underrate themselves and overrate the difficulty of moving into the next career position.

Third, the role of others in their work and their career decisions is evident. Caroline pays tribute to Bruce, the boss early in her career who saw her as an asset rather than a problem when she applied, heavily pregnant, for her job, and explains how he assisted her to use all leave and other provisions to manage the impact of her second child's birth on her work. Abtar writes of a critical moment in her career when an understanding academic advisor took the time to explain to her how she could manage to undertake a master's degree — the foundation of her later career success. Brenda says that she has been fortunate to have had her achievements recognised and rewarded by others. All of them have very evidently used relationships and networks to help them understand the broader context of their work and to ensure they are part of the larger conversation. Brenda is explicit in her advice to women to ensure they are well networked professionally.

But what I find interesting is that none of them point to a strong female role model or mentor. They appear to have succeeded without such women. Brenda recommends this as an important requirement in any contemporary program to assist women to succeed but in her own story does not point to such a person. This was true also for me. Whilst one older woman, Jean Blackburn, was to me a shining example of leadership in policy advice, there was no senior female educational administrator who mentored me. This was not because I failed to make the connection. It was because there were no senior women to model myself upon. I spent most of my career as the only woman in the room — “the other”.

Fourth, they have each shown a number of important personal qualities which underpin success. Clearly, they are highly intelligent, hard-working, persistent,

focused and able to manage pressure. But other things are there too. Their stories show that they are tough. They have made hard personal decisions, dealt with failure and disappointment, managed extremely difficult situations and done things which were unpopular. Anyone who aspires to leadership must, as Brenda says, “toughen up”. She argues that resilience in the face of failure, and personal courage to do the right thing, no matter how unpopular or difficult, are both critical qualities for effective leaders. I emphasise this because it was hard for me to “toughen up”, and I found my early experiences of not getting a job I felt I deserved, and of dealing with the suspicion and resistance of others, very challenging.

Finally, I would like to make some comment upon context — the environments in which these women have built their careers. Whether the context has assisted or impeded their progress is an important issue and one of considerable importance to women seeking to advance, or to policy makers and change agents identifying the conditions in which they might improve women’s position in higher education.

For three decades, in every country, tertiary education has been in ferment as governments turn their attention to the implications for their economies and societies of a globalising world. It has been apparent that the skill levels of citizens are critical to a nation’s success in this post-industrial world; everywhere, growth in participation in tertiary education, particularly higher education, has been evident as governments come to grips with what is popularly called the knowledge economy. Along with this growth has come change to funding regimes, support for new modes of delivery, enrolment of a broader cross-section of the community and often, structural changes within the tertiary sector. Everywhere, tertiary education has become an economic issue because it is central to national productivity. The costs, coverage and outcomes of tertiary education, once seen as primarily of interest to educators, are now viewed as significant economic issues. The spotlight is on what the sector is delivering for the economy and whether what is delivered is worth what it costs the taxpayer.

For many working in the higher education sector, the effect of this public scrutiny of what they do and how they do it has been profoundly unsettling. The traditional path to leadership in higher education has privileged academic success above managerial competence. But as the demands on leaders have increased — to manage turbulent change; incorporate new methods of educational delivery; advocate publicly for their institution and their sector; interpret, respond to and influence government policy; raise funds from new sources; and manage much greater competition — it has become clear that traditional routes to leadership are not necessarily producing leaders who can succeed in this environment. Some countries, like Australia, New Zealand and England, which have experienced both great increases in participation and significant structural change, show evidence of openness to considering new models of leadership and new kinds of leaders. People with primarily a business background have been appointed to very senior roles in universities and, indeed, to the job of vice chancellor. Women, too, have been appointed to the role of vice chancellor, although the numbers are still low.

It seems then that this environment is calling for new forms of leadership, for leaders who are prepared to manage turbulent change. Everyone acknowledges that traditional forms no longer fit, and this acceptance of the need to do things differently

means that selection committees are looking for candidates who can demonstrate the capacity to manage change. This is of advantage to women; the long-standing ideal type of the senior higher education leader — a heterosexual male with a strong track record in research, preferably in the sciences, and a long career of steady progress up the ranks of the academic ladder — has been challenged by appointments of candidates who don't fit this mould and have been very successful.

Where the leadership sought is in open and distance education, the quest for relevant experience is even more wide-ranging. Appointment committees are looking for people who can lead in an area where technological change is extremely fast, staff expertise is thin, costs of committing to various forms of delivery are enormous and the consequences of making the wrong decisions are likely to be sudden and dramatic. I imagine their primary selection criterion is a track record of managing change successfully. This means that in an environment where there are no longer structural barriers to women's progress and the need for inspiring leaders is acute, women are well able to take their rightful place as leaders.

For policy makers and those concerned with gaining better access to the talents of women, what they should do at the institutional or sector level to assist in change is clear. Individual women's experience in the educational workplace has points of similarity which can be employed to assist all women to consider and organise a career path. Critically, there needs to be an acknowledgement at the start that there still is a strong gender difference in the way workplace policy and culture affects women and men. Flexibility of all kinds in working arrangements and an emphasis on rewarding outcomes rather than time spent in the office help to establish a supportive culture for women. Active monitoring of gender differences in applications for professional development opportunities or promotion, as well as of promotion and appointment patterns, is a vital source of management data which will help you uncover covert patterns of discrimination, whether it is practised by individuals or is a product of your own practices or policies. Professional development and oversight of the performance of supervisors to ensure they understand that getting the best from their female staff is a core management competency and requirement is very important, as they set the cultural norms in the local workplace. And finally, in dialogue with the women themselves, you must deal head on with the personal and professional challenges they face. It is madness if institutions and organisations don't have special programmes for women to allow them to understand, develop and hone the skills needed for effective leadership. We have well-educated cohorts of women eminently able to lead. Now we are responsible for ensuring they can.

These three stories are powerful messages that the world has changed. Where a competent woman is ready to embrace the personal challenges and the rewards of a career as an educational leader, there are no structural barriers to prevent her. Whilst there are many attitudinal and practical hurdles to overcome, it is clear that with persistence, a commitment to self-development and resilience, a woman can gain access to the most senior positions. It is likely that her career will progress more rapidly if she chooses to work in fast-moving areas like open and distance learning, because there, every aspect of the work is subject to constant and disruptive change. In such an environment, there is no ideal type of a leader — just a search for someone with a track record of managing change. It is an environment ripe for female leadership!

PART



Women and Leadership in Open Schooling

Being a Leader in Open Schooling

Lystra Sampson-Ovid

Background to My Story

Looking back on my journey to becoming the Director of the National Open School of Trinidad and Tobago (NOSTT), I see a number of things in my earlier years that prepared me for this leadership role. I was a Girl Guide, Sunday school teacher, leader of the church youth club and member of the local equivalent of the Young Farmers' Clubs. And I was always attracted to teaching and helping the less fortunate.

The republic of Trinidad and Tobago is in the southern Caribbean, covers 5,128 square kilometres (1,980 square miles) and comprises two main islands, Trinidad and Tobago, plus some smaller islands. Our capital, Port of Spain, and largest city, San Fernando, are on the larger, more populous island of Trinidad. There are only 1.3 million of us. Our main language is English, but you'll also hear Spanish, Hindi, English, Creole and French patois spoken. First colonised by the Spanish, the islands came under British control in the early 19th century. With the abolition of the African slave trade in 1834, indentured workers were brought over from India to work on the sugarcane plantations, and the descendants of these and the African labourers constitute 80 per cent of our population. We're the home of carnival, calypso, chutney and limbo, but we're also one of the region's wealthiest nations and the leading Caribbean producer of oil and gas. We gained independence in 1962, and in 2011, the OECD took us off its list of developing countries.

Our education system is based on the British system. Primary and secondary education is universal and free for all pupils, as are transport, books and school meals. Fee-paying private and religious schooling is also an option. Early childhood education isn't mandatory, but most parents like their children to start school at three because by the time they're five and start primary school,

they're already expected to have basic reading, writing, numeracy and social skills — which partly explains why our literacy rate is 98 per cent. In Year Seven of primary schooling, the children sit the Secondary Entrance Assessment, which determines which secondary school they will go to. They attend secondary school for a minimum of five years, take the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate exams (the equivalent of the British GCSE O levels) and, if they achieve satisfactory grades, stay on for another two years to take the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (the equivalent of GCE A levels).

Tertiary education is also free for all qualified nationals up to bachelor's degree level. Our major tertiary institutions are the University of the West Indies (UWI), the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the University of the Southern Caribbean and the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago. There are also some local accredited denominational and for-profit institutions.

Trinidad and Tobago is considered one of the most educated countries in the world, but there are still attainment inequalities linked to gender, socio-economic status and rurality. The government has developed a "Policy on Inclusive Education" which aims to provide education for all, regardless of physical, intellectual, social or economic circumstances, and it has plans for a "Seamless Education System" from early childhood to tertiary education. It is in this context that NOSTT was established. But before I expand upon this, let me tell you more about my background.

I was raised in a rural community in the south of Trinidad. My ancestors were former black slaves from the U.S. South who escaped to join the British during the American War of Independence, served in the Royal Marines and were rewarded for their service to the Crown by being granted land in Trinidad and Tobago. Successive generations have maintained their agrarian lifestyle and commitment to ensuring that their children are well educated.

As someone who was told from my earliest years that education was the only way to get on, and with teachers in the family, it was inevitable that after secondary schooling, I enrolled in a two-year teacher training course. Unusually for a girl, I specialised in agricultural science. I then studied for a further year, learning about upgrading primary school teachers to be subject teachers in the newly established junior secondary schools, and then taught for two years in secondary school. Deciding I needed to further advance my qualifications, I applied for a scholarship to take a two-year Diploma in Agriculture at the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry, then enrolled in a BSc in Agriculture programme at the University of the West Indies. I was later granted leave without salary to study for a BSc in Agricultural Education and a Master of Education at the University of California, Davis Campus.

Whilst I was at UC Davis, I married another student from Trinidad who was studying at a different institution, a hundred miles away. We had two children, whose births coincided with the awarding of my BSc and MEd degrees, and we found raising a family whilst studying a real challenge. We had to arrange schedules to minimise childcare costs. When I couldn't get a babysitter, I had to take my baby stroller into lectures. And many times, I studied with textbooks propped up behind the stove whilst a child rattled around in the playpen behind me. No wonder women are so good at multitasking.

My husband insisted I do a PhD. He returned to Trinidad and Tobago with our older child, and I took up a teaching job whilst trying to raise a baby on my own and study. However, finding it difficult to be a true wife and mother, I abandoned my studies and went home to be a teacher and, later, a lecturer in a teachers' college. I then moved on to become an agriculture training officer in the Ministry of Agriculture and, eventually, Assistant Director of the Agriculture Teacher Education Centre.

The training programme we offered for agricultural science teachers and extension officers through this centre was based upon the Michigan State Agricultural Education Diploma. I found this was not really meeting the local needs, particularly in remote rural areas, so I proposed to the ministry that we offer the course through distance and blended learning, using extension officers as tutors.

Recognising that I needed to learn more about open and distance learning, I enrolled in a part-time doctoral programme at UWI (which I've yet to complete). During this time, I was given a bursary to conduct a one-month study into the use of distance learning for farmers and foresters in Florida. This experience strengthened my resolve to see my ideas through. As I was now regarded as something of an expert in distance education, the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology invited me to chair a committee examining the potential of distance education for the nation's first community college, a multi-campus institution serving rural areas. In this capacity, I became a member of a study group sent to the USA to see how multi-campus, dual-mode community colleges operated. The ways in which they achieved access by using community resources such as public libraries and video clubs further heightened my interest in the possibilities.

I was heartened to find that women were leading the education and technology revolution in these institutions, but they did tend to be working in the "soft areas", like course design, whilst the men worked with the technology. I realised that if we women were to be change agents back in Trinidad and Tobago, we needed to be equally well versed in educational principles and educational technology, a point I pressed home with the authorities.

In December of that year, I was offered the directorship of the Distance Learning Secretariat in the Ministry of Training and Distance Education. This secretariat had been established with the aim of setting up a distance education system serving geographically and socially isolated communities. My remit was to get this under way, prepare the communities for new forms of technology-supported teaching and learning, form partnerships and establish community learning centres, and pilot blended learning programmes using radio, television, online and classroom methods.

I must confess to having qualms about taking this job on. I had the vision of empowering and improving the circumstances of those in geographically and socially disadvantaged areas, but I knew there was a lot of scepticism about the viability of distance education. Fortunately, I was not working on my own but with a visionary minister (a man) and permanent secretary (a woman), and with a far-sighted group of women in the ministry, all of whom provided me with role models any woman aspiring to be a leader would dream of.

With funding from the International Telecommunications Union and the Permanent Secretary, I went on a study tour to Canada. Visiting the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in Vancouver, Athabasca University in Alberta (Canada's only open university entirely dedicated to ODL), Contact Nord/Contact North (Ontario's distance education and training network) and Wired for Learning in New Brunswick confirmed that taking education and training to people by means of technology and community networks was no pipe dream. My time at COL helped me see "the big picture", and at Open School BC (in British Columbia) how to provide accredited courses and educational services to K-12 schools and the general public. I was impressed by how Contact Nord/Contact North and the New Brunswick networks leveraged existing infrastructure and local schools, community centres and post offices to facilitate access. All the people I met across Canada left an indelible impression upon me. Rory McGreal's zeal and foresight in developing online education and training services in New Brunswick whilst pursuing his doctorate was particularly inspiring. I owe so much to all the folks I met and the ongoing support they subsequently gave us in developing our own distance education system.

The Canadian experience confirmed we were on the right track and clarified my thoughts about what we needed to do and the standards we needed to aim for. I reported on our findings, impressing on our senior managers that not only were facilities and infrastructure important but so too were training in distance education development and delivery for all the personnel involved. Operating with limited resources and without total buy-in from the decision makers, I saw strategic networking as critical. So, we partnered with a local telecommunications provider and community college and ran workshops facilitated by Contact Nord/Contact North staff. By so doing, we aimed to generate the mindsets needed for the program's implementation.

I never experienced any overt gender discrimination in this job, but I was acutely aware of the fact that I was operating in a male-dominated environment, that in Trinidad and Tobago, as in all Caribbean countries, the advancement of women posed challenges to men, and that I had a very short period in which to show that distance education was feasible and I knew what I was doing. I was extremely lucky to be working with others on the same quest for new approaches. I maintained my links with COL and persuaded the ministry to request a consultancy by Professor Doug Shale of the University of Calgary, who helped us create the framework for our distance education system. The minister accepted our advice that distance education using existing infrastructure and facilities offered better prospects for expanding educational opportunities than expensive "bricks and mortar solutions". He also accepted our recommendation to enter into agreements with credible overseas distance education providers so that Trinidad and Tobago students could pursue studies of international standard without the expense and inconvenience of going overseas.

So far, so good, but it's not uncommon in the world of politics for election promises to be broken and incoming governments to cancel the programmes of outgoing administrations. This is what happened here. We'd just gotten to the point where Athabasca University had agreed to enroll some Trinidad and Tobago students, when a change of government brought a halt to everything we were planning. As Robert Burns wrote, "The best-laid schemes of mice and

men / Go often astray / And leave us nought but grief and pain / For promised joy!" This experience taught me that as a leader I had to learn to deal with such disappointments, uphold my vision, regard each setback as an opportunity and prepare for the next stage.

My two-year contract as Director ended, so it was back to teachers' college for me. But the notion of distance education and its promise of meeting the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary and secondary education never left me. My earlier efforts to spread the word about opening up learning opportunities through distance education and technology had helped to form a network of like-minded people interested in implementing these if and when circumstances permitted. As a lecturer in educational technology in the teachers' college, I continued to be an advocate for technology-enhanced teaching and learning both on campus and beyond. The principal recommended that I and another staff member enroll in an online course from Harvard University Graduate School of Education, called "Teaching for Understanding". The experience of learning online from a world-recognised institution added to my arsenal of knowledge for my future educational leadership roles.

During this time, the minister of education invited me to join her team at a UNESCO-convened meeting of education ministers in Cuba. One of its themes was distance education, and this event contributed to her decision to revisit the idea of an organisation responsible for planning and implementing a distance learning programme to complement the traditional education system. Upon our return, I was commissioned to develop a proposal for establishing a "Special Projects Unit" to explore the possibility of enhancing the Ministry of Education's distance education offerings, which at that time were limited to educational TV and radio. Once again, my hopes rose.

The National Open School of Trinidad and Tobago

A year later, the cabinet agreed to the establishment of a Distance Education Unit. I feared this was yet another political ploy that would end up being sidelined, but it became clear that the authorities were now in fact recognising the potential of open and distance learning. The national strategic plan, Vision 2020, to which I'd contributed as a member of the education sub-committee, had set priorities such as creating an innovative and competitive workforce, engendering a culture of lifelong learning, achieving a seamless and holistic education system and forming partnerships in education.

The post of Project Manager to head up the Distance Education Unit was advertised. Having a strong conviction that open and distance education was a viable option for Trinidad and Tobago, feeling confident that my knowledge and experience qualified me for the job and being someone who shies away from challenges, I put in for and got the job. This was the good news. The bad news was that whilst everyone felt that such a unit could be really beneficial, no one was sure what it was supposed to be or do.

I started with only two staff, both of whom were new to distance learning. But they were energetic and positive-minded, quick learners and trusted me. For the first six months, the three of us looked into all the possibilities and challenges in distance learning for K-12 schooling in countries around the world, held

face-to-face and virtual discussions with practitioners and other stakeholders and developed a proof of concept for the ministry. We emphasised that whilst distance learning may reside on an ICT platform, the essential concerns have to be with getting the curriculum and pedagogy right, reorienting the teachers to the new teaching and learning paradigms and building good working relationships with the various partners and stakeholders. I reviewed COL's three-year plans to identify programmes that could benefit the ministry, brought these to the attention of the policy makers and spearheaded the development of the ministry's first ICT in Education policy. I recognised that all of those who were going to participate in the distance education initiative had to be empowered and highly knowledgeable and skilled if they were going to "weather the storms" ahead. So, I took every opportunity for my staff to participate in seminars, workshops, webinars and conferences.

I had many sleepless nights thinking about what was to become of the National Open School of Trinidad and Tobago. I researched, consulted, collaborated online with colleagues overseas, brain-stormed with our team and others and drafted papers. But the real challenge lay in convincing those in the ministry and the primary and secondary schools that the ideas and practices of open and distance learning really worked. We continued to get great support from COL during this time. In his book *Mega-Schools, Technology and Teachers: Achieving Education for All* (2010), Sir John Daniel, the former President of COL, identifies three possible models for open schooling: complementary, alternative and integrative. It was this third model that we worked to, one in which the open schooling programme is interwoven with existing provision, extends the reach of traditional education and acts as a catalyst for innovation and quality improvement.

I attended a workshop at the National Institute of Open Schooling, in India, and this confirmed that the model I was proposing was feasible. I conceived of NOSTT as combining face-to-face, distance and technology-based education, complementing the existing school system and providing "second-chance" formal, vocational or enrichment education for anyone who'd failed at or dropped out of school; they thus could transition to better jobs or further study. In enrolling these students, we would take into account prior informal knowledge, skills and experience as formal qualifications and do our very upmost to help them succeed in the various state exams. I saw the secondary schools acting as NOSTT learning centres, with locally hired staff acting as tutors and NOSTT providing a model and acting as a resource centre for flexible practices in these regular schools.

I was well aware that involving partners would strengthen my efforts and add an important dimension to our work. So, I took every opportunity to keep the ministry's and other educational heads abreast of developments and involve them in the planning and consultative processes. For example, I encouraged and supported the Curriculum Division in incorporating COL-supplied lower secondary English, science and maths OER in schools. I also collaborated with the ministry's Information and Communications Technology, Education Services and Schools Supervision departments in organising SchoolNet projects examining various aspects of ICT in education; these included connectivity, curriculum and content development, and organising inter-school ICT contests such as the schools' annual Cyberfair and PhotoConnect. I also helped to define my

“leadership brand” by assisting with the launch of the Caribbean Association for Distance and Open Learning (CARADOL).

To make its relationship with each Commonwealth Member State more systematic and interactive, COL operates a network of “focal points”, persons who are COL’s primary contacts in the various countries. The Ministry of Education nominated me to be the Trinidad and Tobago Focal Point. This appointment was further recognition of my leadership role, heightened my visibility and provided me with the opportunity to become an interlocutor for the planning of COL’s Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). The VUSSC initiative was created by the ministers of education of the small states to build human resource capacity in small countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, stimulate an increase in the course offerings in those countries and create a mechanism to enable the transfer of credits and qualified people across country borders. Seeing this as an opportunity to raise the profile of NOSTT ahead of its launch and encourage the staff to broaden their horizons, I encouraged one of my staff to become a member of a team developing an open course on hospitality and tourism. Smart leadership doesn’t entail doing everything yourself. I have learned the importance of delegation and trusting others. As Myles Monroe wrote in *Becoming a Leader*, “The true leader measures his success and effectiveness by the diminishing degree of his followers’ dependency upon him” (Munroe, 1993, p. 144). I had the feeling that this time, our small but dedicated team was actually going to make a difference, that our vision was going to become a reality.

Recognising that we needed quality course content and material in preparation for the launch of NOSTT, I sought help from COL in training teachers, curriculum officers and lecturers from the University of Trinidad and Tobago, and from the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago. In 2006, I submitted my plans for NOSTT and gained cabinet approval for a pilot programme a year later. This was a major achievement for my small team, and it showed that hard work pays off. Sir John Daniel came to Trinidad and Tobago to officially launch NOSTT and welcome our first learners in Waterloo Secondary School, one of our first NOSTT centres.

We were naive enough at the start to think that getting NOSTT off the ground would be a straightforward process. We’d prepared partners for working with us who were already involved in adult education and transition courses; they had the necessary expertise and connections, and we’d involved them in drafting the plans for NOSTT and its operations. But when we tried to get things up and running, they all turned out to be too busy or had moved onto other things. Then there were grumbles that NOSTT was usurping the work of the other educational provider. This was all pretty disheartening for the NOSTT team, but as their leader, I kept my head high and helped to boost their morale.

I soldiered on, continuing to champion open schooling and endeavouring to get staff in ministry departments and schools to become involved in part-time teaching and other positions with us; hopefully, they would become advocates for NOSTT. We conducted pilot programmes in nine secondary schools, targeting some 1,250 students who’d previously received unsatisfactory grades in maths and English. We designed and delivered programmes to prepare candidates for the exams of the Caribbean Examinations Council, offered study-skills, life-skills and

ICT certification courses, and started to make freely available through the NOSTT website OER material that had been designed by our single multimedia specialist. When an opportunity arose for us to participate in an Open Educational Resources for Open Schools project co-funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, it was not difficult to convince the minister and permanent secretary that this would be a benefit to the entire school system. And COL and Open School BC helped us with workshops on instructional design, materials development and eLearning. All of this work was very demanding, but it helped put us on the map nationally and internationally.

COL had originally recommended that NOSTT should be a semi-autonomous institution, but it turned out the ministry wanted to keep us firmly under its control. It apparently saw the organisational freedom, structure and staffing requirements we'd hoped for as being overly ambitious, and so we were stuck with a skeleton staff. This severely limited our capacity to implement all we'd planned for, but nevertheless, 2008 became a really big year for us.

It turned out to be not too difficult to encourage school principals to establish the NOSTT centres. I visited the schools, meeting and negotiating with the principals and explaining the added value that NOSTT would bring to these schools, and arranged for NOSTT staff to create interest by displaying some of our materials and carrying out some training. In the event, we managed to establish NOSTT community learning centres in 22 secondary schools across the island, selected on the basis of location, technology provision and principals' willingness to participate. We strengthened links with the schools' curriculum, supervision and information technology divisions, established links with parent and community associations and ran workshops to enlist the support of these groups in providing encouragement for open and distance learners. We were greatly heartened to find our ideas meeting with overwhelming support. In fact, we received many requests to offer a broader selection of subjects and serve a wider range of learners. This reinforced my conviction that NOSTT should be demand-driven. It also provided me with a morale booster, which every leader needs at times.

We ended the year with 3,500 learners registered in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate examinations in Mathematics, English A, Social Studies, Human and Social Biology, and Spanish courses, as well as the Cisco IT Essentials, International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL), eCitizen and Webmaster certificate programmes. NOSTT was fully funded by the government, so, as in conventional schooling, cost was no barrier to the learners. All they needed was a desire to succeed. We provided them with study guides and multimedia learning resources, helped them become self-directed learners, guaranteed them four hours a week of face-to-face tuition by well-qualified secondary teachers and provided our "Tutor in Print" service for those unable to attend the face-to-face sessions.

Our Course Development and Learner Support departments (which sound very grand but in fact had only one person in each) worked with the various tutors to deconstruct the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate syllabus and develop open resources in print, on CDs and on the NOSTT WikiEducator site, all of which were created in conjunction with our one ICT expert. Our decision to involve classroom teachers in developing the course materials gave them a sense of ownership and enabled us to get the limited staffing without the lengthy process of cabinet approvals. One of the challenges that you face as a leader is maximising

your operations and services within existing financial and legislative restrictions. The work has to be done and you have to find ways of making it happen.

It was still very much a matter of winning over hearts and minds. I managed to heighten the profile of NOSTT by allowing the University of Trinidad and Tobago to use our NOSTT materials in its Pre-University Programme (PUP) in Mathematics and English in the PUP Centres across the islands. We originally thought that we had firm agreements with the principals that the secondary schools' computer labs would be available to NOSTT learners, but it turned out that they were not at all happy about letting members of the public into these labs. I overcame this resistance by negotiating with the regional Cisco body for NOSTT to become a Cisco academy. Cisco academies exist in high schools, technical schools, two-year and four-year colleges, universities and community-based organisations in over 160 countries around the world. The online curriculum, interactive tools, hands-on lab activities and online assessments help students prepare for career opportunities, continuing education and industry-recognised certifications. We were also the sole local organisation offering the International Computer Driving License, an ICT and digital literacy qualification recognised and supported by national governments, computer societies, international organisations and private corporations. This put us in the unique position of being able to provide ICT certification courses for the schools and their staff, not simply the NOSTT students. In another move to gain the principals' and community groups' support, in schools where the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate classes were over-subscribed, we allowed the in-school students to register as NOSTT learners so they could study and sit for exams in subject areas they'd otherwise not have access to.

I was determined that whenever opportunities arose, the NOSTT staff should be recognised for their expertise, responsiveness and willingness to demonstrate how open schooling can enrich the entire system. So, for example, I made sure that the staff provided support and advice for eCAL, the Ministry of Education's eConnect and Learn initiative, which provided laptops for all students entering secondary school. They helped distribute the eCAL laptops and the CD-based OER provided by COL for these laptops, developed links to online resource repositories for all of the subject areas offered at the Form 1 level and provided eCitizen courseware for posting on school servers and eContent for Forms 1 to 3. I also ensured that the NOSTT staff had opportunities to serve on or liaise with the ministry committees overseeing ICT integration in schools. I may have been the head of NOSTT, but I wanted all the staff to be recognised by the ministry as innovators and "go-getters".

Given our very limited number of headquarters staff, I introduced the idea of recruiting and training retired secondary school principals, curriculum officers and school supervisors to act as Learner Support Officers. We made them responsible for managing clusters of schools, providing training for the tutors in these clusters, liaising between head office and the learning centres, dealing with any local issues or concerns that might arise, monitoring progress and submitting monthly reports. I was also very much aware of the need to adopt an inclusive leadership style, so I encouraged everyone to have a say, seeking out diverse perspectives to ensure that insights were acknowledged and decisions were shared, acknowledging people's frustrations and successes and leading by example. These moves worked well and helped NOSTT go from strength to strength.

They also kept me very busy. The multitasking skills developed in my early years as mother and student certainly served me well when it came to managing many tasks and people at the same time. I also felt it was important to be a hands-on type of leader. So, during the OER project as well as whilst leading the unit, I managed the production of ten sets of self-instructional materials in five subject areas for classes ranging from Forms 1 to 5, for use in both open and conventional schooling. Engaging in these activities served to show that NOSTT was not only providing out-of-school learning opportunities but also spearheading the adoption of open, technology-based teaching and learning in the country's classrooms. This was in line with my overall goal to improve the plight of all those who were left behind or overlooked due to a shortage of resources, understanding or compassion.

By 2012, we had provided thousands of learners with opportunities to study. In 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 alone, around 5,800 students took Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate courses in Mathematics, English, Social Studies, Business, Biology, Accounting and Spanish, and Primary School Leaving Certificate courses. We had our Moodle learning management system and open multimedia resources. Several tutors were creating their own websites and online resources, and many teachers and retired teachers trained in instructional design and collaborative courseware development for distance and online learning were providing learner support, managing NOSTT centres and integrating ICT in the classroom. And we had a School for Parents, offering training in ICT and certificated primary and secondary education.

Unfortunately, whilst all of this was going on, a cloud of uncertainty was gathering over NOSTT. We had survived three ministers of education and all the conjectures and anxieties that such shifts bring, but now it was becoming clear that change was in the air. All NOSTT staff contracts, including mine, were coming to an end, and there was no talk of their being renewed. My original contract as Director had expired in 2010, and throughout 2011, I had been getting by on a series of monthly contracts. These came to an end in 2012. Sadly, this is where the story of my time with NOSTT ends. None of the existing NOSTT staff were kept on, and no replacement staff were appointed. The Curriculum Division took over the management of NOSTT, which still operates as before but in only 14 centres and with the help of part-time learner support officers. It was time for me to move on. But I like to think I left a legacy, a foundation, an idea that the ministry could still build on.

Final Reflections

If you were to ask me to what it's been like being a leader in open schooling, I'd answer you as follows.

To gain the confidence and respect of my senior managers, staff and others I worked with, I had to be seen as a visionary and as someone who leads by example, empowering and training others to become leaders now and in the future.

When you step out of the mainstream in education, you can expect to encounter all kinds of barriers and setbacks, including “stop-go” or “all-change” policy making. Even when politicians and policy makers engage in the rhetoric that distance education and technology can meet national challenges and increase

access and equity, the operations you lead may be treated as “bolt-ons” rather than integral parts of the education system, and so you may have to operate in a climate of uncertainty and with temporary and contract staff. Such lack of security and continuity has been one of the most frustrating aspects of my work. As I’ve shown in my story, over the years we’ve had several changes of government policy, and periods when staff were unsure of their future and understandably tempted to seek more secure jobs.

Some people say that women are incapable of making decisions. So, as a leader, you need to disprove this by sticking to your colours, capitalising on any perceptions of educational needs and shortcomings, seizing on any political interest in distance learning, technology and change, and communicating your vision, your confidence that distance education has an important role to play in development.

Change is unsettling. So, as a leader, you have to become a skilled change manager. It was certainly important for me to assure our staff that we had to stick to our guns, maintain our beliefs and continue to be advocates for open and distance education during the periods of uncertainty about government support for our work.

Everyone involved in innovation and transformation has to contend with setbacks. In the case of NOSTT, converting the unconverted was never a problem with the teachers and learners “out in the field”. But it was a challenge in terms of the administrators and others we worked with who were sceptical about the value and viability of our ideas and practices. So, another thing you have to be good at is helping your opponents and critics to become better informed, more enlightened. This is never easy, but in this regard, I believe we can claim success. In the earlier years, we were caught in a cleft stick between those in power who lacked faith in us and — perhaps unintentionally — under-resourced our work, and those who stood to benefit from our services and had high expectations of us.

It’s often thought that we women are ignorant of technology. It is therefore always important to keep abreast of, and update your staff on, technological developments. Some staff readily embrace new technology. Others resist or fear it. But if you don’t keep introducing new methods, procedures and technology, you won’t be able to improve the ways and extent of serving your learners. And a more technically confident and competent staff will be a happier staff. So, I always made sure that all of my staff were well trained in ICT and conversant with technological change. We’d never have been able to get into things like Moodle and WikiEducator if everyone hadn’t come up to speed with the technology and the mindset that goes with it. The late Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, once said he wanted to “put a ding in the universe”. That’s what you should aim to do.

It’s funny how early experiences shape your later life. To make sure my long school holidays weren’t wasted on play, my parents made me learn typing on an old-fashioned typewriter. And long before being taught about uses of media in the classroom at teachers’ college, or computers at UC Davis, or how to motivate and teach learners, I was learning from the visiting missionaries’ skilful use of teaching aids that opened our minds and touched our hearts in Sunday school. Yes, my education and earlier work experiences prepared me for my leadership role, but so too did marriage, parenting and homemaking. They helped me

develop a caring, positive outlook on life and the ability to remain focused and persevere, even when things looked bleak or uncertain.

Having a supportive family, a husband who is also an educator and children who've shown me the "real needs" of the younger generation have always helped me. I've been blessed with a small network of professionals who've been my mentors. And my work has been underpinned by my faith in God and reliance on His guidance.

What would I say to any women wishing to do the kinds of things I've done? Follow your dreams; prepare and advance yourself through lifelong learning; remain abreast of developments in your areas of interest; build a support network of other women who are leaders or can mentor you; and in these days of the Internet and social networking, use technology to build this circle of support. It's impossible to give 100 per cent to both your job and your family, but your passion for your long-term goals will sustain you. It's critical to balance your personal and professional lives. Don't put your career ahead of your family. Your family provides a stabilising influence. Long after your career ends, you'll still need your family support. And support your own staff as they fulfill their family responsibilities — for example, by providing flexible hours of work.

Those you work with are critical to your personal success and the success of your cause. Keep them motivated, give them credit for their achievements, however small, provide them with opportunities for training and support their subsequent efforts in applying what they've learned. Time spent on team-building will create a bond amongst your staff that can weather any storm. For organisations to grow, the individuals in the organisations must also grow. This calls for training, collaborating, team building and helping staff to monitor their own performance. Everyone must know not only how others can benefit from what they are doing but what's in it for them. And in contexts like open schooling, try to involve the learners' families. Our orientation sessions at NOSTT always involved families. One of the most rewarding sights for me was seeing whole families participating in the tutorial sessions, thereby creating empowered "learning families".

Have a vision, a long-term view of the outcomes and impact of what you are planning for, and clearly defined pathways. But at the same time, be flexible. Be prepared for the vagaries of politically charged environments. Ensure that the policies and procedures that you've developed and that have been approved provide some measure of security for the longevity of the programmes you believe in. But always have a Plan B. As a leader, you can take nothing for granted.

References

- Daniel, John S. *Mega-schools, technology and teachers: Achieving education for all*. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Munroe, Myles. *Becoming a leader*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1993.

Becoming a Leader in Open Schooling

Sushmita Mitra

My Early Life, Education and Career

A short stroll down memory lane helps me realise the early influences that have enabled me to become a leader. I was born into a Bengali family in Kolkata (Calcutta). Kolkata is a city with a heart that exudes warmth, leaving few visitors unmoved. It has also been the source of innumerable inspirational events and movements, including the 19th- and early 20th-century social reform movement known as the “Bengal Renaissance”. With its questioning of orthodoxies, particularly regarding the status of women, marriage, the dowry system, the caste system and religion, this movement deeply affected me.

This intellectual awakening came about partly as a consequence of Europeanisation, partly because Western-educated Bengali men wanted wives who would be supportive life companions with whom they could have intellectual discourse, and partly because the women themselves decided to set themselves free of purdah, study for degrees and lead professional lives. These women included Chandramukhi Basu, one of the British Empire’s first female graduates, Fozilatunnessa, the first Muslim woman to enter university, and Nawab Faizunnessa Choudhurani, who established schools for girls and whom Queen Victoria awarded the honorific title Nawab for her philanthropic activities.

The stories I learned about the religious scholars, literary giants, journalists, patriotic orators and scientists who contributed to this revolution in thoughts and ideas had a considerable impact on my upbringing and left a permanent mark on my life. When I was about 13 years old, my parents introduced me to the works of the great Bengali writers, poets and journalists, such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, whose novels reveal the plight of contemporary female victims of a distressed society, and Rabindranath Tagore, whose novel *Ghare-Baire (The Home and the World)* tells of a woman granted the freedom to grow and choose as she

wishes. These all contributed to my sense of identity and my awareness of the need for women to have personal freedom.

Someone else who inspired me was Mahatma Gandhi. He managed to bring Great Britain, at that time one of the world's most powerful nations, to its knees by using peace, love and integrity as tools for change. His leadership skills were based upon the following tenets:

- **Definite purpose:** His main goal was to set India free and to fight for the rights of the repressed through the use of non-violent means.
- **Self-discipline:** He believed that real freedom, including freedom from fear, comes through self-discipline. Self-discipline heightened his commitment to achieving his goals, and he would do extraordinary things to improve his discipline and commitment, such as engaging in days of silence, total celibacy and other challenges.
- **Self-realisation:** He felt that to develop the spirit is to build character, that this should be an essential part of training the young and that the ideal of self-realisation combines both the development of individuality and social progress.
- **Belief systems:** Such was his sense of self-belief that he could inspire the Indian people to believe in themselves and their goal of freedom, in spite of all the hardships that they faced.

My father frequently quoted Gandhi. One of his favourite quotes was: “The history of the world is full of men who rose to leadership, by sheer force of self-confidence, bravery and tenacity.” Then he used to look at me and say, “Men’ means both man and woman... OK?” At the time, I didn’t realise the importance of what he was saying to me.

My parents had had the opportunity for higher education during the period of British rule. They’d seen the transition of India from colony to independent state. For them, educating girls was as important as educating boys. They decided to place me in an English medium missionary school, confident that it would develop me physically, spiritually, intellectually, culturally and socially and thereby help me become a well-integrated person, a complete human being. So, I was brought up with the understanding that women and men have equal value and should be accorded equal treatment. This raising of my awareness of gender equality instilled in me the ambition to achieve the most senior role in whatever workplace I chose, and to challenge the assumption that there aren’t more women in the top jobs because they lack ambition and simply don’t want to be there.

My school experiences were also very formative. I was impressed by the principal, a very fair, upright, poised nun in a sparkling white habit who led and managed a thousand five- to 17-year-old girl pupils and 80 subject teachers in setting the goals for, and achieving quality in, education. One day, some students came late to morning assembly. Red in the face with anger, the principal said, “Why are you coming in late? If you don’t listen to the bell, you don’t listen to me, because the bell rings as per my orders.” She helped me recognise the importance of punctuality — completing a required task or fulfilling an obligation by or before a designated time — and self-discipline, motivating oneself, exercising willpower and persisting even when one doesn’t want to do something.

Our school comprised a number of houses of around 50 students from the different standards. Sports days, debates and charity drives were often organised along inter-house lines, and merit points for behaviour and academic achievement were totalled up for comparison between houses. The aim was to encourage group work and group loyalty. Each house had a captain and vice captain. One year, my house captain, Amita Singh, was organising the teams for the annual sports day. She placed me in a team for physical exercises with batons. One day, in drill practice, noticing I was off beat, she made me stand aside. After the drill practice, she said, “I know you’re upset I did that, and that’s a good thing. It means you care. You just need to keep giving your best effort. I’d like you to stay back after school and practise with me.” I realised then why she’d been selected as house captain. Not only was she intelligent, but despite her young age, she had all the traits needed in a good leader: the ability to empower and inspire others, to gain their trust and draw superior performance out of them and, at the same time, to remain calm, composed and steadfast. Amita certainly left her mark on me.

I’m grateful to my parents for not diminishing my lifelong aspirations by the transmitted definitions of appropriate gender behaviour for girls. I enjoyed equal status with my brothers, and after I completed my secondary schooling, my parents ensured that I received a higher level professional education. They believed I should be qualified to compete for jobs in “a man’s world” while at the same time developing the traits considered desirable in females: gentleness, empathy, sensitivity, compassion, tolerance, nurturance and deference.

Immediately after completing my master’s degree, I married into a well-educated, liberal-minded family. My father-in-law was director of a national institution responsible for school education policy, research and training, but it was my mother-in-law who encouraged me to become a physics teacher. My parents-in-law were pleased that I chose this as my career, because they believed that having well-qualified people like me become teachers was necessary to help India advance educationally, socially and economically.

I’d had no special training as a teacher, but I chose this career because I was curious about how you develop abstract concepts in young adolescents. At first, teaching was not without its challenges, but I found my students respected my subject expertise, candour and zeal, and that I had the capacity to earn their trust and help them achieve their goals. Another insight I gained was that when the students challenged me about some tricky problem, it paid off to say, “I don’t know. Can we solve it together?” or “Let’s read up on it a bit more at home and come back with possible solutions tomorrow.” I found we could solve most problems in this collaborative manner and that my classes were performing well academically, so my self-confidence grew.

This first job helped me realise that special skills and techniques are required for successful working relationships, like building rapport and trust, listening actively, being co-operative and respectful, communicating openly and honestly, confronting any differences with others directly and knowing when and how to negotiate. I also began to develop an understanding of what leadership entails from my principal and vice principal. They both had a vision of academic success for all students, cultivated formal and informal leadership attributes in the staff, created a collaborative and co-operative climate, enabled the teachers to teach at their best and the students to learn at their utmost, and generally fostered a

climate of continuous improvement. I saw they were not simply managing things but leading people and helping them achieve what needed to be done.

During this period, I also had opportunities to get to know many well-reputed educationalists who came to my father-in-law's house to discuss educational matters. One of these was the female Chair of the University Grants Commission, in Delhi. I was so impressed by her modesty, knowledge and ingenuity. In India at that time, as in other countries, few women achieved senior leadership positions, and I couldn't help wondering how she'd achieved this. But at the same time, I was inspired by the fact that India had its first woman Prime Minister in Indira Gandhi, and Sri Lanka the world's first female Prime Minister in Sirimavo Bandaranaike. So, I was convinced that women could become leaders in any and all walks of life.

Becoming a Leader at the National Institute of Open Schooling

The pathway to life's chosen work is always a labyrinth, with twists and turns, surprises, failures and achievements. One morning, I saw an advert in a local paper for tutors in science, mathematics, social science, English and Hindi at something called the "Open School", a project set up by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in 1979. I wasn't sure what this job entailed, but the specifications for science tutor intrigued me. I felt I had the right qualifications and experience, and so I applied for the job and was duly called for interview. I suspect there weren't that many female candidates for the position, and the interview panel I faced were all men. However, I was one of the five tutors they recruited on that day — two women and three men, a fair gender balance at this entry-level academic position.

The Open School was at the developmental stage. It was vested with the authority to register students for secondary education courses, develop learning materials to cater to the needs of a heterogeneous group of learners who were unable to attend conventional schools, and deliver by means of open and distance learning. But the examinations and certification of the registered students were still carried out by the CBSE.

The Open School at that time was led by a male director. He was an able academic and administrator who passionately believed in "education for all". Every day was a learning experience for me, and I never failed to showcase my ideas. I felt it was important to demonstrate that as a woman, I was an independent, reliable and creative thinker. What I did encouraged my director to assign me special tasks that demanded "out-of-the-box thinking" — for example, developing exemplary learning materials in different styles and formats, mapping information and creating concept maps. I get bored doing the same thing day in and day out, so I was always ready to take on new challenges, to show I was a self-starter — and to find opportunities to shine. I was continually saying to my colleagues, "Tomorrow shouldn't be the same as yesterday or today." But at that point in my life, I was more interested in "moving on" than in "moving up". It was the concept of open schooling that inspired me. I felt that open and distance learning could provide an effective alternative educational system for India.

My work as a tutor also involved me in personal contact programmes (PCPs). These involved providing face-to-face tuition in the resource or study centres and accredited partner institutions for our distance education students, who were studying right across the country. The PCPs in my subject area were on Sundays, and, despite family demands, I didn't hesitate to take up this challenge. Fortunately, my family was fully supportive of me in this matter. I'm really not sure what I would have done had my spouse and parents-in-law been unwilling to share the home and childcare responsibilities; undoubtedly, this would have affected my performance at work.

The Open School students were heterogeneous in terms of age, academic ability, experience, personality and circumstances. Working directly with them as a tutor taught me the importance of always listening very carefully to learners to understand their needs and circumstances, help them in their learning and at the same time build up their self-confidence and self-esteem. The success of this initial Open School project convinced the Government of India to establish the National Open School in 1989. Later renamed the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), it was mandated to provide open basic, secondary, senior secondary and vocational education, and to examine and certify its registered learners up to pre-degree level.

NIOS at that time was organised hierarchically, with a male head in charge of each of the three departments (academic, administrative and evaluation). A promotional career path based upon competencies and qualifications had been put in place, but in practice, unless individuals performed brilliantly, vertical or cross-functional moves were restricted beyond a certain level. Departmental head positions were always filled by external candidates — and were always held by men. In fact, I don't recall any women ever applying for these positions. But this situation never really troubled me, and I was certainly under no pressure from my family to gain a more senior position.

My initial appointment in the new NIOS was as Tutor/Academic Officer in the Academic Department. I had excellent performance appraisals, so there were no impediments to my promotion to the next level — Deputy Academic Officer, or Deputy Director (Academic), as it was later called.

But then the post of Director (Academic) fell vacant, and I suddenly realised that for all my experience, I would get nowhere in this or indeed any other comparable job without a doctorate. So, I was determined to get a PhD. Fortunately for me, at this very time Professor Marmar Mukhopadhaya joined NIOS as Chairman. One day, he said to all of us on the staff, "I'm surprised to see that in spite of your capabilities and intelligence, some of you don't have doctorates. I must say with all conviction that PhDs will help you not only academically but in the career labyrinth. I'd love to see some of you act in this regard, and I'll give you all the help and support you need." Professor Mukhopadhaya was a great mentor as well as a great leader. I realised just how valuable it was to have someone who encouraged and supported you in drawing up your personal plan of action and acted as an appropriate role model.

So, I enrolled in part-time PhD study at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi — one of the country's premier institutes. It wasn't easy, studying in this very demanding programme whilst still holding down my NIOS job and fulfilling

my family commitments. Daytime was for NIOS office work, evenings at home were spent meeting family demands, late night was set aside for serious work on my PhD and weekends were also mainly spent on my studies and research. My husband and son showed great understanding and gave me their full support. This experience certainly helped me develop the multitasking skills I needed later in my career.

My next job at NIOS was Project Head in Human Resource Development. I retained my substantive post, and there was no increased pay or other immediate benefit in taking on this added responsibility. But the job gave me an opportunity to lead a small team in providing training and training materials for NIOS personnel and organising national and international conferences/seminars. One project I was asked to take on was organising a study visit and international conference on the planning and management of open schooling, for delegates from Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan. Working in collaboration with UNESCO in New Delhi, I had to deal with all the various national ministries of education and Indian state governments, which involved understanding and responding to different cultural norms and standards and delegating tasks across organisations and departments. The event proved a success, and UNESCO subsequently asked NIOS to organise an international conference on information technology for distance education. This presented a further set of challenges, as I then had to organise demonstrations of a number of innovative technology interventions for distance education — and make sure they all worked properly!

Being Project Head enabled me to learn about managing a project, diagnosing stakeholders' needs, planning what had to be done, when, by whom and to what standards, and mentoring, monitoring and coordinating the work of teams and individuals. The successes I met with suggested that I might be developing the requisite organisational and people skills to become a leader. But was I yet a leader? Did I have what it would take? I still wasn't sure.

When I finally returned to my substantive post of Deputy Director (Academic), I started feeling restless. I could see no further career opportunities for me at NIOS, so I started looking elsewhere. The Government of India had just initiated a flagship programme, the District Primary Education Programme. This was launched in 1994 with the objective of universalising primary education. Its stated aims were “Universal Access, Universal Retention and Universal Achievement”, and these were to be achieved by the creation of new schools, classrooms and non-formal learning centres. In support of this venture, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) had developed the Distance Education Programme for the District Primary Education Programme (DEP-DPEP). Its purpose was to build a body of primary school headmasters and teachers, district co-ordinators and other professionals who could help implement the DPEP and create training modules so this professional development could be done by means of distance education. I applied for a Project Fellow position with the DEP-DPEP, which was being advertised at one level higher than my current job at NIOS. In the event, they didn't offer me a position at this level, because I didn't have a PhD; however, because of my experience at NIOS and expertise in educational technology, they did offer me Junior Project Fellow at the highest salary rate available. I decided to make this lateral move and joined the DEP-DPEP on secondment from NIOS. I was put in

charge of operations in two states, Gujarat and West Bengal. At the same time, I was pressing on with my PhD and finally submitted my thesis.

Another Project Fellow position became vacant in the DEP-DPEP project, and once again I applied, only to lose out to someone who had a doctorate but far less experience than I in open and distance learning. Two days later, I received notification that I'd been awarded my PhD. I felt humiliated and that the selection committee had been unfair. To this day, I don't know whether they were aware of just how close I was to having my thesis accepted. I didn't even challenge the decision. At any rate, whatever ideas I had about academia recognising, rewarding and promoting high achievement were dispelled. I was learning the hard way that for women to advance in the academic world, it's important for them to gain admission to the network of senior professors/administrators, learn the unwritten rules and adapt to male norms if they are to have any hope of reaping the benefits available to men. I was totally demoralised and realised it was time to move on again.

I could have then returned to NIOS, but instead I applied for, and was appointed to, a two-year seconded instructional designer position with the Indian Society for Technical Education, in a Swiss development agency's project, where I was responsible for training authors and developing learning materials in computer science, engineering and electronics, and electrical engineering. I was the only woman in a senior position in this project, and I found myself dealing with senior academics in engineering and technical institutions right across the nation. With my scientific qualifications and experience in educational technology, I could more than hold my own in this work, and my sense of self-esteem increased when my achievements were acknowledged. I came to realise that there's nothing like setbacks for making you re-evaluate your life and move on to new challenges. I was also still attending conferences/seminars organised by NIOS and IGNOU, writing papers and building up my contacts, and these activities made me want to get back to open schooling. So, after a gap of five years, I returned to NIOS.

NIOS was growing in terms of student numbers, staff numbers and study centres. After an initial focus on quantity, issues of quality were now coming to fore, and the government had authorised the establishment of two new departments, the Department of Student Support Services and the Department of Vocational Education. Being able now to prove my worth through good performance reviews from my two previous organisations and holding a PhD, I was promoted at the Joint Director (Academic) level as Regional Director of one of the two NIOS regional offices in Delhi. The regional offices are responsible for the study centres' operations, and with over 80,000 NIOS students in the city, Delhi needed two such offices. The one I was asked to manage had been run by a temporary appointee. On first visiting this building, I was shocked and depressed by the untidiness, broken furniture, lethargic and rude staff, inadequate female toilet facilities and absence of any catering facilities. There'd been many complaints about this office and its malpractices, so I was determined to take matters in hand.

I introduced myself to the staff, one by one, asking each person what their responsibilities were. I found that no one had ever spoken with some of the more junior staff, some of whom were at a loss to speak out. But others were more confident and clearly understood what the system needed. So, I set out to improve staff morale, motivation and performance, set a good example through my work and restore the reputation of this office. However, fate intervened, because

no sooner had I embarked on this task than the position of Director of Student Support Services at NIOS was advertised, and I really felt I should apply. I got to the interview stage, only to find that I was the only female candidate, and the selection committee was all male. It was a gruelling experience, and I was not at all confident about the outcome, knowing only too well by now that the career labyrinth is socially constructed and frustrates career advancement for women. So, following the interview and convinced I wouldn't be appointed, I took off for a family holiday to Agra to see the Taj Mahal. Imagine my surprise when I learned that I had been appointed Director of Student Support Services, a departmental head in the world's largest open schooling system and the first woman ever to hold such a senior position in NIOS.

The Department of Student Support Services was responsible for policy, planning and implementation in regard to student enrolment and registration; academic support systems for learners; the network of study centres and partner institutions; continuous learner assessment through the Tutor Marked Assignments system; and dealing with all queries and grievances raised by learners and the public at large.

I set out to build up a strong team and instill commitment to a common vision and the achievement of a set of goals and outcomes. I fostered the staff's self-motivation, provided ample feedback and gave them opportunities to develop. In some of the staff, years of hierarchy, authority and control had led to unquestioned assumptions and unacceptable behaviours that were totally at odds with our stated goals and strategic directions. I also discovered a folklore about the strengths and weaknesses of previous leaders and how people had dealt with these. I saw that if I was to bring about any meaningful change, these undercurrents would need to be exposed and addressed — for example, such malpractices as claiming extra travel and per diem expenses by adding extra mileage or additional dates, not informing the office about leave taken, and being absent from duty without official approval. I showed that I did not like the current “What does it matter?” attitude among the staff. I made very clear that it mattered to follow the rules and set norms.

The nature of the work at NIOS also required the various departments to co-operate closely. Being the only female head of department put me at a distinct disadvantage. Minority status tends to elicit gender stereotypical behaviour. People assume that men are more competent and knowledgeable than women, that men have more right to act as authorities than women and that men are generally more open to the influence of other men than women. I was alert to the socio-cultural barriers and gender stereotyping and the expectations of the other departmental heads and their staff. They thought I'd be malleable, bending to any demand or pressure. Maybe, at the start, I gave an impression of being docile, un-leader-like in my manner. I also found that gender was a factor in allocating resources. Initially, this didn't bother me, as I operated on the premise that my accomplishments were on record and what I achieved would be recognised. But as time went on and I found my male counterparts were still receiving resources and benefits that were not being accorded to me, I became more aggressive and assertive. Sometimes this approach worked and sometimes it didn't. I had to accept that I was working in an inherently male-dominated culture that wasn't going to change overnight, and should just persevere with the job in hand. I

believe I managed to show that even if I acted emotionally at times and showed sensitivity and concern for others, I was still assertive, independent and rational in my leadership and capable of getting the best out of men as well as women.

Something else I had to get used to was the organisation's bureaucracy. There were so many administrative obstacles and resistances to contend with: delayed decisions, denial of — or refusal to accept — essential information, and assumptions and communications that distorted or misrepresented realities. I often had to make decisions without all the necessary information to hand, which was highly frustrating. What I experienced was the typical, traditional, hierarchical “power over” style of management, usually associated with masculinity, whereas what I felt was needed and was anxious to achieve was “power with” leadership, which is far more in accord with the way we women go about things. This inevitably led to some tensions and misunderstandings because while I was busily applying collaborative methods, my male counterparts were continually applying dominating methods. So again, I had to show that I could also be assertive and persuasive in getting things done without too much of an “I’ll show you” attitude.

I’ve always found that people are willing to be guided by those whom they see as having integrity, being ethical, conveying a strong sense of vision and inspiring respect. I’ve also found that people judge you by your actions and not simply your words. As Mahatma Gandhi said, “We must become the change we want to see.” I found that men could be prepared to overlook their concerns about threats to their male authority by having a competent woman as boss, if they saw resulting tangible or intangible benefits. So, sometimes there had to be trade-offs. But I never compromised on my ethics and integrity.

To break down any sense of “leadership awe” in my department, I made sure I gave time for my staff to get to know me and each other better, share their concerns and aspirations and learn to respect each other. I found that many of the female staff started coming to me with their personal as well as work problems, something they’d never felt they could do while there was a man in charge. But I was always at pains to show that I was concerned for all the staff’s well-being and welfare, and in favour of democratic and participative styles of leadership. I set about encouraging the staff to learn and to take on as much as they wanted at a pace they could handle. For example, I always involved my managers and staff in developing the annual departmental plans of action, even though the ultimate decisions had to be mine.

I was acutely aware that some in the institution predicted that because I’d inherited some poorly educated, unskilled and ineffective staff, I would fail to deliver. I proved them wrong by coaching each and every staff member of the department to work to the best of their ability, building up their confidence, and getting them to recognise that when everyone has such different abilities, teamwork is the key to success. Working together, we achieved numerous new targets and engaged in many new activities. For example, when video conferencing was new to the country and no one had explored its possibilities, we used this medium to pioneer training and applications for open schooling functionaries and other governmental organisations.

When I took over the department, one of the strongest criticisms I heard was in regard to the staff’s unfriendly, unhelpful attitude towards our distance learners

when, in person, by phone or by email, they tried to track down someone with their concerns about administrative matters, registration materials, transcripts and so on. The students were justifiably angry, and this tarnished the public image of NIOS. I well remember a day when a distressed student suddenly barged into my office, saying, “Madam, can you please help me? I’ve been running from pillar to post for a week to get my Senior Secondary Examination certificate. Without this, my registration in the engineering college will not be considered. I will lose the opportunity to continue my professional course in engineering because of this.” I calmed him down, gave him a glass of cold water, for it was a very hot day, asked for his name and registration number and called my personal secretary into my office, telling her to resolve the matter within half an hour. Thirty minutes later, the student was back in my office, thanking me profusely and saying with a smile, “Madam, why are there not more officers like you in NIOS? My problem is solved.” I was touched by his gratitude but realised I was the person responsible for ensuring that all of the systems were in place to guarantee that the staff immediately attended to learners’ queries.

Time management was another major issue. All too often, leaders are out of their offices on other business. They’re never there when they’re needed, and their time isn’t being accounted for. So, I set out to show that I wasn’t someone who wasted time with outsiders or even with others inside the organisation. For example, when I took over, the prevailing practice was to bring all the study centre co-ordinators from all over the country to some designated location for meetings or training. I replaced this time-wasting and costly procedure by organising teleconferencing sessions between headquarters and the co-ordinators out in their study centres. This gave us greater coverage in less time and at considerably lower cost.

Unlike the other heads of department, who liked to dictate their letters because this made them feel like they were “being the boss”, I would usually type my own correspondence. This was because I not only wanted my letters and emails to have a personal touch but also felt that dictating wasted time, and the inevitable mistakes made in the process delayed matters. Unfortunately, most of my office assistants had poor writing and other communication skills, but to better manage my time and the office procedures, I coached them in maintaining my appointments diary as well as organising, storing and retrieving documentation and responding to all routine queries.

Dealing with the huge amount of correspondence was another challenge. Every day, we received well over 200 letters and 100 emails. Firstly, there was all the correspondence that came in from the regional offices, study centres and accredited institutions, our students, intending students and the general public. Secondly, there was all the mail from such VIPs as members of parliament and ministry officials. All of these messages were important in their own way, and I made a point of never having any pending files/papers on my desk at the end of the working day, even if this meant working late. I quickly examined all of the letters and emails coming into the department, underlined the key words and forwarded the correspondence to the relevant managers and staff, with directions or suggestions for action. I did this to demonstrate to the staff the need for punctuality in dealing with others’ problems and to keep in touch with the functioning of the various operational units — another case of leading by example.

Like all leadership positions, the job demanded multitasking. I prepared a list of priorities for each day, focused on the most important tasks first and addressed these early on so as not to run out of time. I shut off my cell phone and isolated myself from anyone who might unnecessarily interrupt or distract me. I came to realise that multitasking and frequent interruptions are sources of stress that can have a notable impact on your health and well-being. I know this because I developed hypertension. I learned the hard way the importance of delegation. Nevertheless, I found the work deeply satisfying and enjoyed seeing my staff performing with spirit and enthusiasm to achieve the agreed targets and objectives.

I like to be challenged. But at one point, I was asked to look after both the Department of Student Support Services and the Department of Academics. Leading two departments was far from easy. I took over at a particularly critical time: all of the senior secondary curriculum subjects offered by NIOS had to be revised. Having had experience with the Department of Academics earlier in my career, I was aware of its functions and the strengths and weaknesses of its staff, and knew I had to do something to get the best out of its personnel. So, I listed all the tasks needing to be accomplished and categorised them by degree of complexity. I then gauged the skills and commitment of the staff I had to hand. Finding that they fell into four categories, I then matched my leadership style to each.

Firstly, there were staff who were new to the tasks, didn't know how to do them, but were excited by the challenges. For these, I gave instructions on how the goals were to be achieved, guided them through the curriculum development process, suggested useful reference materials and supervised and checked their work with care.

Secondly, there were those with some level of competence but a low level of commitment. These too needed some coaching but also much more encouragement to "own" the processes and results.

Thirdly, there were those with moderate to high competence but low commitment. Here I asked for their input, listened to their ideas, allowed them to make decisions on a day-to-day basis, monitored their work and provided them with praise and other feedback.

Fourthly, there were those with high competence and high commitment. They needed less task input and social support. I knew I could trust them to get the job done without too much intervention by me, so I was able to give them additional tasks, like organising a conference on the curriculum changes.

As head of department, my central role was to help achieve the objectives and well-being of NIOS and win the trust of my staff, my bosses and all the other stakeholders — the students, their parents, potential employers, all of those functionaries associated with open schooling, other educational providers and the public at large. Showing concern for the issues and expectations of this wider community, and gaining their support, were critically important for the future of NIOS. The key to all of this was effective communication. I always tried to help my staff appreciate just how much they contributed to achieving the NIOS and departmental objectives and how well they were performing. I always accentuated the positive, saying "Do it like this" rather than "Don't do it like that." Attempting to create shared vision and values and a transparent and harmonious work environment, I developed various manuals and guidelines and constantly strove for improved products and processes. My bosses were very supportive and didn't

always insist upon me seeking their approval or accounting for what I was doing. They, too, came to trust me.

Final Reflections

So here ends my stroll down memory lane. With 20/20 hindsight, I can recognise the people, influences and experiences that over the years helped me on my way to becoming a leader. I've had my disappointments and setbacks, and I've had to learn many lessons on my way up.

One piece of advice I'd give to any woman starting out on their career is this: even if the route to leadership is convoluted or constricted, word travels quickly, people have long memories, good deeds are rewarded and slights are never forgotten. There's no need to burn bridges or make enemies. You never know where or when people will show up again in your life. It's a small world. And in terms of leadership, don't feel there's a single best way of providing this. To me, the workplace culture is the most critical factor in determining the level of effectiveness and comfort women experience as leaders.

Working at NIOS, I came to appreciate the essential differences between being a manager and being a leader. Management is all about efficiency and effectiveness, systems, structures and procedures. Getting these right is critically important in an enterprise as large and complex as NIOS, the biggest open schooling system in the world, with its five departments, fifteen regional centres, two sub-regional centres, more than 3,500 study centres and accredited institutions in India and abroad, and a cumulative enrolment of about 1.8 million students.

But as a leader, I had to do more than just be a manager. I had to help generate a vision for NIOS and then a strategy to help bring about this vision. I had to be continually asking questions to know what was working and what wasn't. And I had to have my eyes on the horizon, not just what was immediately under my feet. In the NIOS context, with the major emphasis on efficiency, control and routines, I found three leadership strategies that worked well for me and that I could inculcate in others: transformational leadership (enhancing the staff's motivation, morale and performance), facilitative leadership (encouraging and trusting staff to come up with creative ideas and new solutions to problems) and situational leadership (adapting to different people and different circumstances).

People have a wide variety of values, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, cultural values, work habits, goals, ambitions and dreams. And organisational cultures vary. Because of this diversity, it's essential for leaders to enable individuals to form high-performing teams. Above all, I feel that good leadership (i) requires attitudes and behaviours which characterise and relate to humanity and (ii) relies most strongly on less tangible and less measurable factors, such as trust, inspiration, personal character and attitude.

Helping Other Women to Become Leaders in Open Schooling

Lambertha Mahai

My Beginnings

I grew up in Langiro village, Mbinga district, in the south-west of the United Republic of Tanzania, some 1,100 kilometres from Dar es Salaam. Originally, there were seven of us children in my family, five sisters — two of whom sadly died at an early age — and two brothers. My brothers went on to get master's degrees. One became a senior human resource manager with the Tanzania Harbours Authority and the other a policy and finance manager with the Tanzania Revenue Authority. My sisters completed primary education and then got married. I was lucky to receive eight years of primary schooling, since priority was given to boys' education and most girls only studied up to Grade 4, after which they were prepared for marriage and motherhood. My mother had only been able to study up to Grade 3 because in her day, the only option for continuing education was boarding school, and girls were not allowed to leave home. So, she was determined that I would have better education opportunities. Thanks to her and my Grade 4 school teacher, who did a really good job of persuading my father on this matter, I went on to very good secondary schools, took my A levels and then entered the University of Dar es Salaam.

I'll always be grateful for the encouragement and support that enabled me to be one of the few girls in my district to reach university. Our former President Mwl. Julius Kambarage Nyerere was also a great source of inspiration. Known as *Mwalimu* (teacher), he proved to our nation that a teacher could do great things and that the sky was the limit when it came to educational opportunities.

After completing a BEd degree, I taught at Zanaki Girls Secondary School in Dar es Salaam for seven and a half years, rising to become head of the Kiswahili Language Department. I was very diligent, but I didn't really enjoy secondary school teaching, so I began to think about a job at the Institute of Adult Education

(IAE). At that time, positions were largely filled by word of mouth, and a friend at the institute encouraged me to apply for a tutorship position. Much to my surprise, I was invited to join the staff, on one condition: that I processed my own service transfer through the Ministry of Education. This was a pretty tough condition because it meant dealing with many levels of bureaucracy. But after nine frustrating months, I eventually succeeded in achieving the transfer and entered the world of adult education. However, before I talk more about the IAE and my work there, I should say something about education in Tanzania and, in particular, the educational opportunities for women.

Background

With an area of 943,000 square kilometres, a population of around 44 million, 120 ethnic groups with diverse cultures, notable income differentials and over 35 per cent of the people living below the poverty line, it's extremely difficult for Tanzania to achieve educational access and equity. The limited number of schools, boarding accommodation for older children, teaching resources and qualified teaching staff means that about 50 per cent of the children, the majority of them girls or those living in rural areas, will never get more than basic primary education. Unfortunately too, education has been at the mercy of changing political and administrative systems, with successive governments constantly altering the curriculum. Since the 1980s, the literacy rate has dropped from over 90 per cent to around 70 per cent, far lower than in Kenya and Uganda. One of the reasons for this has been that the government gives low priority to rural libraries and community information centres — hence, individuals completing primary education relapse into illiteracy because they have no means of keeping up their reading and writing skills.

With the exception of those who come from the ruling tribal families or are successful in business or politics, women have a lower standard of living than men. Most of the traditional communities are patriarchal. In the rural communities, men are responsible for cultivating crops, caring for the livestock and handling financial and political matters, whilst the women and girls are relegated to doing household chores and planting and weeding the land. If their menfolk are forced by economic circumstances to go elsewhere for work, the women are left to cope with everything.

Illiteracy is particularly prevalent amongst women, and girls' pass rates at secondary school tend to be low, so relatively few females go on to college or university. With the exception of courses in the sciences and education, government support for tertiary study is merit-based rather than gender-based, and few female students have sufficiently high grades to qualify for grants or loans. Fewer still dare apply for bank loans because of the high interest rates. So, generally, women are poorly placed when it comes to being qualified or encouraged to take on leadership roles at any level of our society. Most of them have low ambitions and expectations, and, due to their domestic and social obligations, they're not prepared to seize job opportunities when these arise or invest enough time and effort in their jobs to discover their hidden abilities and develop new knowledge and skills.

In 50 years of Tanzanian independence, according to the Ministry of Education, we've only had two (out of 17) female ministers of education and three deputy ministers (out of 15), three women as permanent secretaries (out of 21) and one woman as acting commissioner of education (out of 16). We've never had a female vice chancellor in any of the public universities.

The constitution states that Tanzania should be a nation of equal and free individuals, that all of its agencies must provide equal opportunities to all citizens, regardless of gender, colour, tribe, religion or social position. It also states that every citizen is entitled to hold any office or discharge any function under the state authority, and everyone has the right to pursue education to the highest level in their chosen field. The government has put in place a system of special seats to enable more women to participate in government at the parliamentary and ward levels, the *Public Service Commission Act* of 2002 requires all employers to give a woman a job, particularly at the more senior levels, if her score at interview is similar to that of a male applicant. And increasing numbers of women are gaining senior positions within the Ministry of Education and other ministries and institutions as a consequence of special pre-entry courses and more scholarships for girls.

*The Report on the Fifty Years of Independence of Tanzania Mainland 1961–2011*¹ reveals that there have been more male leaders (64 per cent) than female leaders (35.9 per cent) in the public and private sectors and that only 8.8 per cent of the elected representatives in parliament and 14.4 per cent of those in wards were women. This was a direct consequence of the relatively small number of girls completing higher education. However, there are some encouraging signs. The number of women holding decision-making positions at national, regional and ward levels has increased from 1,495 (30.6 per cent) in 2004–2005 to 2,340 (35.9 per cent) in 2010–2011. The national target is 50 per cent, as per the Southern African Development Community and African Union targets. In 2010, the Honourable Anne Semamba Makinda became the first woman Speaker of the National Assembly of Tanzania, and there are eight female ministers and three deputy ministers in our parliament.

Tanzanian women are also beginning to make their presence felt at the international level. In 2004, the Honourable Gertrude Mongla, an educationist and a strong supporter of women's advancement, was elected President of the African Union Parliament, Africa's first pan-continental parliament. In 2007, the Honourable Amina Salum Ally became the permanent representative of the African Union to the United Nations. The Honourable Dr Asha-Rose Mtengeti Migiro, a lawyer and lecturer, served as the UN Deputy Secretary-General from 2006–2012 and is now the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa. And the Honourable Professor Anna Tibaijuka, now Minister of Lands and Housing, was formerly the UN Under-Secretary-General and the Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) in Nairobi. Tanzanian women are also playing key roles in regional organisations, such as the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community, all of which have conventions on human rights and women's rights to which Tanzania is a signatory.

¹ The executive summary of the report is available at www.tanzania.go.tz/pdf/EXECUTIVE%20SUMMARY%20-%20REPORT%20OF%20THE%20FIFTY%20YEARS%20OF%20INDEPENDENCE%20OF%20MAINLAND%20TANZANIA%20-%2028%20NOVEMBER,%202011.pdf.

So, we can say that girls and women are increasingly being enabled to gain access to formal education, and the customary division of labour and status along gender lines is being progressively challenged. But at the same time, as in many countries and walks of life, there are hidden agendas that prevent women from realising their potential. For example, if a woman does become successful, this can lead to conflict with her husband, and he or other male relatives may try to take control of her activities or the money she earns; in addition, other women may criticise her, saying she is neglecting her family or social responsibilities.

Thus, much more needs to be done to help women take their rightful roles as leaders at every level of Tanzanian society, and this is where the IAE plays an important role. Let's now go back to my early years at the institute.

My Early Years at the IAE

The IAE had its origins in 1960 as part of the extramural studies department at Uganda's Makerere University College. In 1963, it became the Adult Education Unit within the Education Department of the University College of Dar es Salaam. In 1975, it gained its own charter and became a parastatal organisation responsible for adult learning and continuing education, with a special focus on rural communities.

Officially, my job with the IAE was as a tutor for adult education diploma courses. But I also became the co-ordinator of studies in the training department, the desk officer for the chief administrative officer, the secretary for the examinations secretariat and the alternate secretary to management and council meetings — these in addition to supervising teaching, developing course materials and compiling quarterly and annual reports. On top of this, I was the mother of three children. Fortunately, I had relatives and a housemaid to help with domestic matters.

I soon realised I needed a post-graduate qualification if I was to advance in my career. I successfully applied for a place in a master's programme in development studies at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, obtained funding from the Netherlands government and was granted 16 months' study leave by the IAE. The ISS is a post-graduate school of policy-oriented, critical social science, dealing with issues of equity, poverty, human rights, governance, post-conflict management, gender studies and economic development in an age of globalisation, and most of its students are from developing countries or countries in transition. It was indeed heartbreaking to have to leave my family behind and difficult to cope with the new way of life and cultural differences. But it was also a wonderful opportunity to travel overseas for the first time and learn lots of new things, so I persevered and gained my master's.

I then became the head of the Mass Education and Women's Development Department at the IAE. This enabled me to apply my newly acquired knowledge and skills, become a member of the senior management team and start to gain experience in leadership. The department was responsible for promoting gender equity and equality in development. As head, my job was to assess needs by conducting baseline and feasibility studies, manage various projects to help women learn, and identify and initiate income-generating projects for them to gain greater social and economic independence.

The job was not without its challenges. Training, mentoring and working with diverse and marginalised groups challenged by poverty, ignorance and disease required very special attributes in the staff. It was hard to find and retain committed and appropriately qualified people for this work. However, over time we managed to hire and train the right individuals, outsource some of the work to part-time experts and develop a team approach to build on each other's strengths.

We developed simple post-literacy readers designed to build girls' and women's basic literacy, numeracy and problem-solving abilities so that they had the reading and writing skills necessary to function in society and derive benefits from continuing education.

We also initiated awareness creation campaigns, such as *Health is Life*, promoting hygienic habits like washing hands and fruits before eating, *The Choice is Yours*, which encouraged people to register, contest and vote in elections, and *Forests Are Wealth*, an environmental conservation campaign. We produced a series of books under the generic title *The Voice of Women*, which were designed to inform and train community workers, trainers of trainers (sometimes referred to as "caretakers") and those spearheading women's rights and gender issues at the grassroots level to enable them to improve their lives and circumstances. The titles in this series included *Women and Development*, *Women and Water* and *Women and Forests*. These last two were designed to help women appreciate that when collecting water from streams or firewood from forests, sometimes far from their villages, it was important for them to use these valuable resources sparingly to conserve the environment on which they so heavily depended. The books were also designed to empower these women to make their voices heard within their communities and wards so that their needs and expectations would become recognised. We also developed a special UNICEF-funded *Voice of Women* publication on the issue of HIV/AIDS.

In 2002, we collaborated with the Tanzania Commission for AIDS in developing a five-year HIV/AIDS campaign designed to mobilise people of all ages to fight against the pandemic. We established a forum for all the key players, created awareness programmes and trained trainers to take the message out to districts and villages across the nation.

We developed special courses for women to help them establish their own small enterprises in seven regions: Ruvuma (growing vegetables and fruits for home consumption and sale), Arusha (starting and running co-operative shops), Kilimanjaro (tailoring), Dar es Salaam (poultry rearing), Mara (dairy farming), Mwanza (gardening) and Rukwa (breeding and raising dairy cattle). The new knowledge, skills and small enterprises helped these women to supplement their family incomes or pay for their children's schooling and benefited the communities by improving their diets and economies.

Whilst head of this department, I also led several national campaigns. For example, in 1995, when the country was changing from the 20-year-old one-party system, I was in charge of a campaign orienting the people to multiparty democracy. Our campaign motto was: "Multiparty is not about being enemies, but about enhancing democracy." This had a major and lasting impact.

It was time for me to move on again, now to become Deputy Director for Academic Affairs, Research and Consultancy. Again, this role took me into new territory.

I was responsible for four academic departments, support units and many more staff. I had to learn, and help others learn, how to conduct and improve our mass and distance education programmes, examinations system, library services, regional centres and research and consultancy activities.

Three years later, the position of CEO became vacant and I applied for the job. I was up against male and female applicants, some of whom were my former bosses, but I was fortunate and got the job, a position I then held for eight years.

Bringing Change to the IAE

When I became the CEO, the IAE was not performing well. It was only offering a limited number of programmes and services, had inadequate funding and resources and was marginal in the government's plans for education. So, I had to do a lot of lobbying to raise the institute's profile and introduce a greater range of programmes to justify its existence. These ranged from post-primary to diploma level, and in 2009 we upgraded our advanced diploma in adult education to a bachelor's degree.

I also had to transform the IAE's concept, scale and scope of open and distance learning. The beauty of our programmes lies in the flexibility of time, place and curriculum. For example, young mothers can benefit from these because they can combine study with caring for their children and/or work. From 1972 until 2003, our open learning courses were simply delivered through the time-honoured correspondence and print modes. In 2004, we began offering programmes through blended learning — a combination of distance learning, self-study and face-to-face teaching.

With the support of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the IAE began developing its expertise in producing multimedia materials, videos and radio programmes, and in using mobile phones, computers and the Internet. The Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology and Tanzania Education Authority supplied us with computers and enabled our 21 regional centres to be fitted out with ICT facilities. COL and UNESCO have continued to provide technical assistance and funding to help us improve the infrastructure and facilities, our tutors to develop new competencies and outlooks and our students to access and use the technology to acquire and apply new knowledge and information.

Since I took over the institute, we've had also to cope with growth. Until 2004, our annual intake was 4,000. We now have an annual enrolment of up to 10,000 learners. In line with the government's Secondary Education Development Plan, we've been required to develop and deliver secondary education modules. Through the Commonwealth Open School Association, we've also been involved in developing multimedia video and radio materials in maths, history, English, geography and biology for open schooling. We also make these materials freely available to the public. In addition, we've been required to initiate an Integrated Post-Primary Education programme, which embeds pre-vocational and generic skills development in the academic areas, and the Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania programme (cohort 2), which gives a second chance to orphans and children of single parents, especially girls, who for one reason or another have not been able to continue with their formal studies. The plans are

now to increase the open schooling annual enrolment to over 100,000. There are also plans for the private sector to run open schools under IAE supervision, using the institute's teaching and learning modules to ensure quality and equity in their centres. To this end, IAE has collaborated with COL in developing *Guidelines for the Establishment and Registration of Open Schools in Tanzania*.

Helping Women to Become Leaders

In his opening address as the Founding Honorary President of the International Council for Adult Education, at the 1976 International Conference on Adult Education and Development, held in Nairobi, our late President, Julius Nyerere, said:

We must accept that education and working are both parts of living and should continue from birth until we die . . . [B]y drawing out the things the learner already knows, and showing their relevance to the new things which have to be learnt, the teacher has done three things. He has built up the self-confidence of the man . . . by showing him that he is capable of contributing. He has demonstrated the relevance of experience and observation as a method of learning when combined with thought and analysis. And he has shown what I might call the “mutuality” of learning . . . That by sharing our knowledge we extend the totality of our understanding and control over our lives.

Setting aside the sexist language of the time, I feel this illustrates the significant contribution that adult education can make to mobilising people for development and, in particular, meeting the need and opportunity for women's empowerment, education and leadership development. One of the prime aims of the IAE is to increase opportunities for women to become leaders at the grassroots level. This is why, when organising seminars and workshops, our selection of participants is gender based.

We work closely with the Ministry of Education and other government agencies to help young mothers and women upgrade their education and get qualifications that will enable them to compete in a world traditionally dominated by men. We organise awareness forums, distribute educational and information materials and provide courses, workshops and advice for women on their rights and obligations. Our programmes include such topics as gender equity, cultural influences, combating stereotypes and prejudice, women as change agents, building interpersonal relationships, positive thinking, empowerment, self-assessment and helping women to plan their own learning and development pathways and start their own small businesses.

Our outreach programmes extend down as far as the district level. Beyond that, we partner with other adult education and community development providers by training the supervisors and trainers who work at these levels.

Through open and flexible schooling, we help girls who had to leave school because of early pregnancies to complete their education at home whilst nursing their children. We offer a basic certificate in adult education to help women with low grades to qualify for the IAE diploma courses or courses at other institutions. Those who are awarded IAE diplomas work at village, ward, district or regional levels. This is in accord with the government's “decentralisation by devolution”

policy. Some of them establish and organise literacy classes for adults and adolescents. Others become ward education officers co-ordinating, monitoring and preparing progress reports for the district education officers. Some rise to become heads of primary and secondary schools, whilst others initiate and supervise community education programmes, sensitising and mobilising communities to participate in censuses, elections and self-help projects, and to combat corruption and HIV/AIDS. Some of them serve as education and training advisors to the local authorities.

Up until 2011, we had upgraded over 900 women teachers from certificate to diploma level. Most of these went on to become heads of primary schools, ward education officers, district education officers, school inspectors or extension officers. Others went on to study for degrees. Degree holders and women graduates of the IAE Advanced Diploma in Adult Education and Community Development are appointed to managerial positions in the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Community Development or other ministries, and become leaders in women's organisations or teachers at folk development and teacher training colleges. Some of them upgrade and become members of parliament. All of them make an impact in their respective areas.

Officiating at an IAE workshop, a female Deputy Minister of Education told the assembled trainers, "I stand before you as a product of the IAE's open and distance adult learning programme. I first attended the institute's evening classes and then upgraded my qualifications to become what I am today."

Speaking at one of our graduation ceremonies, the Commissioner for Education — former Dean of Education at the University of Dar es Salaam and an IAE council member — told the audience, "I graduated with the institute's adult education diploma and never stopped until I became a professor of adult education. You should go and serve as IAE ambassadors in your workplaces and help others to continue learning to the highest level."

Another alumna, a female primary school teacher with an IAE Diploma in Adult Education, and Advanced Diploma in Adult Education and Community Development, reported, "The IAE studies benefited me in many ways. I upgraded my education to a degree equivalent, was promoted to education officer and then became a head teacher, managing a school of over 2,000 pupils. My income has increased and my lifestyle has improved."

Helping Female Staff Become Leaders at the IAE

I often encouraged the women joining the institute to see themselves as future leaders and change agents and open the doors of opportunity for themselves and others. Because more women apply for jobs and stay on at the IAE, female staff are in the majority. This gives them an advantage, both financially and in terms of gaining experience. They've mostly been trained as secondary school teachers or adult educators, and many of them have more than one qualification. I encouraged the staff to study for higher degrees, preferably doctorates, as this is likely to be the requirement for all future directorships at the IAE and other educational institutions. Half of the departmental heads were female, and the majority of them gained their positions during my term of office. And I could see many more women in the institute showing leadership potential.

Most IAE appointments by then happened to be all women: two heads, two assistants of regional centres and a headquarters librarian. But it simply doesn't matter whether it's a woman or man who helps the wheels turn. There are no gender-specific roles at the IAE. The majority of the female staff at the IAE are engaged in teaching — training literacy teachers, adult educators, open and distance learning facilitators and community development and extension service officers. They are also developing curricula and materials in print and multimedia formats, as well as producing radio programmes for the rural areas and television programmes and videos. The IAE also has female administrative personnel running the day-to-day affairs of the institute.

The institute's project and programme leaders can be male or female. I always encouraged a collaborative work environment because this helps to build good relationships between the sexes, does away with negative stereotyping and overcomes any fears of taking risks or making errors. I always indicated to the staff that leadership opportunities are open to all and should be seized before they are snatched away by others. And the women have certainly demonstrated their willingness to take the initiative and lead projects. For example, the Integrated Post-Primary Education programme I mentioned earlier is co-ordinated by a woman, the training department's change from knowledge- to competency-based learning was led by a woman, it was a female in the personnel department who introduced the new staff appraisal system, the ICT training project for female academic staff (later extended to include male staff) — initiated by the Mass Education and Women's Development Department with the support of COL and the Tanzanian UNESCO office — was led by a woman and it was a women's team that produced a UNESCO-supported video in Kiswahili on the importance of literacy and numeracy.

Culture, tradition and stereotyping hold women back. Observing IAE female staff at work, I found them displaying exactly those attributes that help women to manage their homes and families so well. Isn't it strange that women who can do great things at the family and community levels hold back when someone wants them to take on leadership positions in more formal settings? Women must stop seeing themselves as "followers" and "helpers of men".

I strongly encouraged women at the institute and out in the wider world to come out of their hiding places, and we supported them when they did. In my opinion, men and women need exactly the same qualities to excel in their lives. But I find that men are much more willing than women to take risks and grasp opportunities, even when they know they're not the best ones for the job. They don't sit back and say to themselves, "I can't do this," like so many of the women I've met.

I encouraged open and free expression, whether in one-on-one discussions or management and staff meetings. I felt gratified when I saw departmental heads emulating this approach. I've always found that women and men work harder when they feel trusted and are left to do their best. This helps to build a healthy working environment and minimise the chances of conflict and suspicion, or of staff undermining the work of others. And it certainly reduces a leader's workload because you don't have to worry about every detail or follow up on every matter.

In some ways, the female staff at the IAE have been specially favoured because the institute has always endeavoured to give them every opportunity to improve their

knowledge and skills and take on leadership roles. Through a mixture of internal and external courses and with the assistance of the Ministry of Education, the Southern African Development Community, COL, UNESCO and UNICEF, we've provided staff with training in good governance, customer care, quality assurance, project planning and management, gender mainstreaming and awareness creation, communication skills, writing and presentation skills, as well as the latest approaches in curriculum and materials development and in educational and teacher training applications of ICT. Regarding the latter, with COL's technical and financial assistance, we've organised ICT training for 25 of our female educators/trainers and later, with the support of the UNESCO Tanzania office, similar training for another ten of our female staff. These in-service courses have certainly made an impact on these women's motivation and performance.

I say our staff have been "especially favoured" because few educational institutions or government agencies run such tailored courses to help their female employees. The colleges and universities offer long certificated and general leadership and management courses rather than short skills programmes intended for immediate application in specific contexts. Leaders and aspirant leaders are usually constrained by time and thus need competency-based, sharply focused training in the form of short courses, workshops, seminars and conferences. But these are rare in my country. The IAE could use open and distance learning to provide such training — a job for my successor.

Final Reflections

So, looking back, to what do I attribute my career — apart from some good luck on the way? Firstly, whatever task I was given to do, I always did this as well as I could, put in the necessary hours, avoided making unnecessary demands upon my superiors, respected other peoples' opinions and ideas, trusted my colleagues and subordinates — and saw myself as the equal of any man in the institute.

Secondly, I aimed for excellent outcomes. I got really upset with myself if I failed to meet my expectations. This helped me gain the trust of my managers.

Thirdly, having worked in different capacities under different supervisors, male and female, I was able to identify the strengths we needed to build on and weaknesses we had to overcome to make the institute a better workplace and a better service provider.

Fourthly, my former director had shown me exactly what not to do. He was totally indifferent to the IAE or what the staff were achieving, and I could see that his lack of recognition and support frustrated many staff and failed to elicit the best from them. By the time I took over, a number of excellent staff had left the IAE because they found the work unrewarding, and such were the poor pay and working conditions that it was difficult to fill the vacancies resulting from this exodus. This spurred me to influence the climate, culture and operations in the institute.

What's been the upside of my career? I'm not afraid to say I'm proud of what I've achieved. Retiring after 28 years with the IAE, I can see the institute has helped many women improve their lives, and I meet lots of former IAE students who've gone on to further improve their qualifications and become doctors, professors and board members.

What about the downside? Being the leader can sometimes be lonely. And with so many things to do and so many people to deal with, I've had to get used to leaving home early and returning home very late, which makes it difficult to keep track of family and friends. There are still a lot of challenges in the education system, too. With the high demand for education, many Tanzanians have been forced to seek education through the non-formal system, and many providers, including "fake" ones, have been capitalising on this demand. I've been quoted in the media as saying that there's a crisis in the provision of adult education and a need to invest far more in non-formal education because the formal system hasn't been able to meet everyone's requirements.

And, of course, things haven't always gone smoothly. Government funding has sometimes been either not forthcoming or late in arriving. At times, the students have been late paying their fees. Once, they even went on strike and marched to the prime minister's office in protest. On such occasions, I got blamed for matters beyond my control.

Earlier in my career, most of the senior managers at the IAE were men, and this continued to be the case at the Ministry of Education. The social and professional networks were male-dominated, and it was very much a question of "who you knew rather than what you knew". Being the first female African CEO of the IAE, I felt initially like the proverbial fish out of water and compelled to work twice as hard as my predecessors to impress my managers and staff. I sometimes sensed that my departmental heads and staff didn't like my "results-oriented" style of leadership. I insisted on quality, timely delivery and cost-effectiveness in practice, and if they failed, I let them know. Some of the managers and staff resented what they saw as my authoritarian and unsupportive manner, but I never weakened in my resolve or lost my sense of direction. I invited them to meetings to share their experiences and ideas, listened to their complaints and tried to resolve issues to everyone's satisfaction.

This didn't always work, but again, I stood my ground, realising that people put their trust in me and my capacity, as CEO, to provide solutions to problems beyond their reach. Sometimes I took risks and lost. But I didn't dwell on this. I looked upon these as learning experiences that helped me summon up further leadership capacities. I learned to stop thinking of myself as "just a woman", and the fear of failure melted away.

As CEO, my job was to plan and develop new strategies and ways of doing things, lead the way, achieve positive change, ensure that the institute's performance met the stakeholders' expectations — and accept blame when things didn't go well. I found that to make a difference, you have to do things differently. Also, no one knows everything, so you have to recognise when to hand over responsibility to others with greater experience or knowledge and only intervene when matters get out of hand.

It's been my experience that women can become anything they want. I'm proud to belong to a generation of women who made it in a man's world at a time when there were very few female role models, to have been the first girl in my community to go to university and to have become the first female African CEO of the IAE. I took over the institute when it was performing poorly and a burden to the government, and I helped it grow and succeed.

Yes, I've received national and international recognition for my efforts. I've received national awards and been invited to lead or participate in projects with the Secretariat of the Southern African Development Community, the Distance Education Association for Southern Africa and COL. I've been enabled to participate in many regional and international forums, and I've really enjoyed all these experiences and the feeling that I'm at the forefront of exploring and promoting new modes of delivery in my country and regionally. But my greatest reward has been the intrinsic satisfaction of knowing that I've helped others.

I never had any formal training in adult education, distance education or gender issues to prepare me for my work at the IAE, nor in leadership theory or practice. So, everything I've learned has come from short courses and seminars and learning on the job. When I first joined the institute, the then head of the training department, a brilliant woman, orientated me in my new job. She had unique leadership qualities, gave me a memorable "kick-start" and helped me appreciate that women too can be great leaders and achieve great results.

The further I worked my way up through the institute, the more I learned about its failings. I well remember being deputy to one male manager who was never impressed by anything I did but could never suggest better ways of doing things. I told myself, "If *he* can be appointed to that position, so can I." I found that the "I can't manage" attitude that, sadly, so many women possess is a myth — and this did wonders for my self-confidence.

Looking back, I regret having waited so long to take on a senior leadership role, wasting time doing mundane tasks and working under not particularly competent or enlightened managers. By the time I finally achieved the position of CEO, I'd only a few years to go to retirement. I feel I could have done so much more for the IAE and the nation had I been a woman of ambition with big dreams and a greater trust in my abilities.

One of the oft-cited barriers to women advancing in their careers is the need to juggle work and family demands. In this regard, I recognise that I had an advantage. My family was always supportive of my career, and by the time I became Deputy Director, my children were in college. Nowadays, there are more childcare facilities in Tanzania, mothers have maternity leave and husbands are expected to do more around the home. Such factors, plus open-market recruitment, enable young women to entertain more ambitious career aspirations.

But so many women still seem much more reluctant than men to push themselves forward. Too many of them have been brought up to feel that they're "just not good enough" to fight for positions like men do. They need to develop greater self-confidence, set higher goals for themselves and pursue their dreams and ambitions. More needs to be done to encourage girls and women to get out of the cultural cage that entraps them, that makes them settle for ordinary things and think they are no good for leadership. A passion for leadership needs to be instilled in them so that they set themselves higher goals and work for these. Greater efforts are required to improve girls' pass rates and transitional rates at secondary and higher education levels. Special scholarship schemes are needed for more girls and women to study market-demand-driven courses such as languages, ICT, journalism, the medical sciences, environmental science and various forms of manufacturing and trade.

I feel that gender equity is all about women learning to overcome shyness, fear and intimidation, and men learning to appreciate the ways in which women can contribute to and lead in the world. If they would only join hands in this, the world would be a far better place.

Through the Looking Glass: Women Leaders in Open Schooling

Cindy Gauthier

Reading the stories of these three accomplished and determined women involved in open schooling prompted me to ask myself, “Are women leaders different?” Reflecting upon their journeys as well as my own experiences in the field, I believe the answer is “yes and no”. By the end of this review, I hope to demonstrate why the question can be answered in this way.

These three women spent a good portion of their childhood, education and early careers in the latter part of the 20th century. My own journey followed a similar timeline. In many countries, this was a period of unprecedented change for gender equity. When I entered distance education administration in British Columbia, Canada, no more than 20 per cent of the leaders in this field were female. A decade later, gender balance no longer seems to be an issue. Women are equally drawn to the work and equally chosen for open schooling leadership positions. It would be wonderful to report that gender equity has been similarly achieved globally. But women are still outnumbered by men in leadership roles in many places and in many traditionally male-dominated fields.

The first theme that emerges in the writings of these women leaders is the importance of family support. This is fundamental to whether women will pursue further education, enter into leadership roles and continue to rise through hierarchies. Family support has two parts: encouragement during the girl’s upbringing and the family support she receives in her adult career. With teachers in her family, Lystra Sampson-Ovid repeatedly heard the message that education was “the only way to get on”. Sushmita Mitra was fortunate to grow up in a period of “intellectual awakening”, to have educated parents, to be surrounded by learned people and to be encouraged to learn and become the best she could be. But in the case of Lambertha Mahai, she grew up in an environment where girls typically did not get past or even complete primary education. Nonetheless, her mother was determined that her daughter would

have access to education and, with the help of a teacher, was able to persuade her husband of their child's potential.

As a young girl growing up in British Columbia, I had opportunities for continuing education. Yet the social norms still suggested that the path for girls was to eventually marry and have children, and female-dominated fields were encouraged as options for further study: secretarial work, teaching and nursing were the three most common suggestions. Frequently, women would leave their jobs to raise a family, then never return to the workforce. Those of us who chose to continue with advanced education were known as “career women”, which typically meant that we had made some personal sacrifice around family to become professionals.

The second theme that comes through for me is the constant juggling of work and family demands, which is common in the lives of aspiring female leaders. I found it remarkable that all of these women were married and had children whilst continuing to advance their education. In my case, I made a conscious decision not to go this route, as it didn't seem desirable and/or necessary. Although this choice went against the social norm, it was one I could make as a young woman in Canada. Reading the stories of Lystra, Lambertha and Sushmita, I couldn't help wondering how they managed. With married life and the addition of children, women are traditionally expected to take responsibility for most household tasks and, in particular, child care. Combining these responsibilities with furthering one's education and entering into positions of responsibility and leadership presents many demands and requires dedication. But with the support of their husbands and families, these three women were able to keep going and succeed. It can't have been easy for them. Two were separated from their families for significant periods of time. This points to just one of the great sacrifices that some women have to make to become leaders in countries where access to specialised education is limited. Sushmita describes the relentless demands of working long hours, tending to her family after work, and studying for her PhD late into the night and on weekends. All three women acknowledge that they could never have become leaders without family support.

The experiences of many of my female colleagues are similar to Sushmita's. Without supportive partners or extended families, their rising into leadership roles would have been impossible. In North America, the term “sandwich generation” refers to those who are raising children and dealing with elderly care. Many women who move into leadership roles later in their careers find themselves in this position just at a time when their work responsibilities are also greatly increasing. In my own case, children were not a factor, but caring for my ageing parents had a significant impact for many years. I recall that time as very demanding and stressful, but again, fortunately, I had a family who could share in this caregiving.

Another theme coming through is the importance of positive role models — male or female — who create possibility and provide encouragement along the way. Sometimes these role models are in the family; sometimes they are in the community; sometimes they are the great leaders of the world. Around the same time that Lambertha's mother was on her personal campaign to school her daughter, my own mother held a similar vision for me. She wished to see me continue in education and then a career in teaching when she had not been

able to do so herself. She'd been a teacher but had been forced to leave her job in the days when women were not allowed to be married and teach at school. If I were asked why I became a teacher, most certainly I would answer that my mother's influence had much to do with my decision. But more importantly, I was encouraged by both parents and other role models in my community to set my sights on whatever I wanted to do. Later in my career, these early votes of confidence in my abilities and this notion of possibility led me to consider pursuing a leadership role.

This raises yet another theme. Women in education are frequently reluctant to step forward into positions of greater authority or responsibility unless they are helped to believe that they are capable. For women to succeed, they must have role models and mentors they can turn to whenever the journey seems exhausting, hopeless or impossible to continue. In my years as an educational leader, I was able to rely on two key mentors to help me navigate bureaucracy, politics and the organisational culture. One was a woman and the other a man. Interestingly, they had completely different perspectives on leadership and education, but both were instrumental in my success and my ability to endure periods of great challenge and change. Judy Dallas was the first woman leader in open schooling in British Columbia. She was bold, visionary and a pioneer in the field. Laurie Anderson was an educational leader in continuing and international education. He was a coach, a sage and a great humanitarian. Role models and mentors are not restricted to gender or to the field in which one might be working.

This brings me to a related theme that does not so obviously emerge in these three accounts — the importance of a professional network. In my leadership journey, I have been able to rely on close friends and colleagues to help me mull over key decisions, to seek input and ideas, to discuss strategies and approaches and to stay the course in difficult circumstances. Without a network of professional support, the uphill climb that will inevitably appear may be too great for many women to handle, particularly since many of them will have to continue to multitask in dealing with the demands of family life and an educational climate of austerity and diminishing resources. Leadership can be lonely for both men and women because one cannot always share experiences and struggles with others who work within other organisations. But for women, without trusted support from those who are walking in the same shoes and those in their families who may not fully understand the challenges, it can be doubly isolating.

However, the presence of role models, understanding and support does not mean that the journey for women is suddenly clear and easy, or that the success of the journey is assured. As we see in these three chapters, all of these women leaders had to deal with many issues that lurked beneath the surface of what looked to be an inviting pool. I am reminded of a former student of mine, who opted to pursue a career in the electrical trades at a time when girls in Canada rarely did so. She had to endure a full class of boys who didn't accept her presence in the male-dominated shop wing. Her male teacher encouraged her and would not allow her male classmates to treat her differently. Whilst this was honourable on his part and was a necessary step in the pursuit of equal opportunity, many of the obvious discriminations were simply pushed below the surface, out of clear view of the supportive adults. This girl knew only too well that she was still in a boys' world and would have to play by their rules to get through.

So, how does this apply to the stories of these women? The three women describe entering into leadership in male-dominated, hierarchical environments. They did not encounter any overt discrimination, but the common experience they describe is one of challenges and disappointments. This is consistent with my experience as a female leader. My greatest challenges and disappointments came from acts of omission rather than of commission — in other words, what was not done rather than what was done.

For equal opportunity to be achieved, the existing culture often needs to initiate a change in its gender policy. Whilst this shift is occurring, women will frequently find themselves gaining entry but working in an environment that is covertly unsupportive. The lack of support is not only due to men who feel threatened by the presence of strong, intelligent women, but also stems from women who buy into the notion that whilst education is good for women, they do not belong in positions of great responsibility. Changing such thinking, achieving this cultural shift, takes time. In the past decade, I have seen discrimination against women in regards to leadership diminish and inclusion of women in leadership positions gain considerable ground. However, the world is still far from gender perfect. In developed countries, the media still evaluates women, in general, on appearance over ability. And worldwide, the broader social context remains a powerful influence.

All obstacles and challenges aside, Lystra, Lambertha and Sushmita demonstrated incredible tenacity and commitment in their work to become and remain leaders. They knew that if they showed anything less, they would be passed over or dismissed. They stayed late until the work was finished and relied heavily on the support and understanding of their families. They quickly came to understand that they had to “play the game in order to stay in it”. An insidious aspect of organisational culture is that women who show great industry and competence are given increasingly more work due to their willingness to do whatever it takes to get the job done. I’ve experienced this personally and have seen this occur with colleagues. It’s not that women want to take on extra work. On the contrary, they strongly desire and strive for a balance of work and family. But the reality they soon discover is that they must do the work, whenever it is given to them. They are acutely aware that failure has a short leash and is always biting at their heels. The pressure can be immense when one is being scrutinised at every turn. These women clearly felt that any error on their part would be used to perpetuate myths and stereotypes — that women can’t make decisions, that they are weak, that that can’t manage organisations and, in the case of open schooling, that they are not inclined to handle technology. They could not risk failure, for reasons much greater than personal pride.

On the specific issue of open schooling and technology, Lystra observed that in the early years, women often opted for the “soft areas” of educational technology, and that course design was of greater interest to women and hardware was of more interest to men. When information and community technology applications were first applied in our open schooling system in British Columbia, we saw the same kinds of “gender-role alignments”. However, with professional development and cultural change within the organisation, these associations became less common. In my view, we have reached the point in our society where preferences for certain technological tasks cease to be gender specific, largely because in many societies, girls and women now have the same early access to, and opportunity to learn

about and with, technology. In countries and cultures where this is not so, it is important to ensure that not only the younger generation of girls, but also older women who have been prevented from joining the technology revolution that their counterparts enjoy elsewhere, are given the training, support and equal opportunities to apply technology in the new forms of educational provision.

Another theme that comes through, and which I have observed in my experience, is that an “old boys’ club” is still operative in the culture of many organisations, even though it is now more of an exclusive network of power players operating behind closed doors and allowing select entry to women. When gender divisions are tolerated, either overtly or covertly, a woman will frequently find herself in a no-win situation when it comes to leadership. If she takes a more collaborative, consultative, soft-spoken approach or adopts what are typically considered feminine values, she may be deemed weak, her opinion may not be valued and she may be passed over for promotion. Conversely, if she joins “the boys’ club” and adopts what Sushmita calls a “power over” style, which is commonly found with traditional male leaders, she may not be considered a success like her male counterparts. Instead, she may be referred to as a “queen bee” and subjected to harsh criticism for taking charge, being a power broker and behaving like a man.

Is there a solution to this dilemma? I believe so. I think it comes from embracing authentic leadership and creating new, blended leadership styles that are not defined by gender. The result is better leadership all around.

As women, we must be careful what we wish for. To be treated the same is not the answer. To behave the same is not the answer. As leaders, we need to combine the best of what both genders have to offer in terms of leadership traits. Gender differences do exist, but they are not confined to gender as such, and the desirable traits can be acquired by both sexes. In other words, women can adopt the successful skills of good leadership that men have employed, and men would do well to adopt the skills frequently described as more feminine: compassion, empathy, nurturing, collaboration and communication. At the same time, dividing leadership qualities along gender lines is shortsighted and subject to stereotyping. Therefore, women leaders must seek to establish their own personal brand, drawing on their traits, their influences and their acquired abilities to create new leadership styles.

Which brings me back to my initial question, “Are women leaders different?” I would argue, “Yes, they are.” But I would also argue that the difference is circumstantial, behavioural and largely the result of inequities of opportunity and origin. Women are different in many environments where the only way to keep pace with male peers is to work twice as hard. They are different because in many places in the world, the primary care and work of the family and home are still largely the responsibility of women, whether they are working full-time or not. Women are different because their vulnerability in the workplace (i.e., job security, chance of promotion) will drive them to overachieve and at the same time expose them to exploitation. Women are also different because they choose to be different and almost always bear the empathy that accompanies those who have struggled to break through false barriers and oppression.

At the same time, I would argue that women leaders are not different from male leaders. If one is willing to entertain the notion that the qualities of good

leadership are not gender specific, then it follows that both men and women leaders should be able to work side by side, for equal pay and with equal treatment. Whilst it holds true that the preferences or behaviours of men and women in terms of leadership style suggest that the qualities might be aligned according to gender, these are learned behaviours that come from social and cultural norms. These behaviours will evolve and change over time. Sushmita sums it up perfectly: “Good leadership requires attitudes and behaviours which characterise and relate to humanity.”

Despite all the obstacles they encountered on their journeys through open schooling, Lystra, Lambertha and Sushmita never lost their vision of what it meant to be a strong woman and a good leader. The leadership style they aspired to was inclusive, participatory, democratic, collaborative, considerate and fair. These qualities arise from the elimination of stereotypes and inequities in all instances, not exclusive to gender. Leadership is a path that more women need to be encouraged and willing to take. Whilst we seek to develop new leadership styles, a gender balance allows us to begin to realise a greater humanity and build a better blueprint for generations to follow.

PART



Women and Leadership in Open and Distance Non-Formal Education and Development

Being a Leader in Non-Formal Education in Mongolia

Batchuluun Yembuu

Introduction

Before telling you about my job as Director of the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education, in Mongolia, and how I rose to this position from humble beginnings, I should tell you about the issues that give rise to the need for non-formal and lifelong education in my country.

Mongolia is a landlocked country in central Asia. It is the 18th largest country in the world, covering over 1,566,000 square kilometres. It has a harsh climate and is divided into 21 provinces or *aimags*. These *aimags* are divided into 329 *soums*, each, on average, administering a territory of 4,200 square kilometres with about 5,000 inhabitants, primarily nomadic herders.

With the fall of communism in the 1990s, Mongolia became a parliamentary republic and more open to the world. Our government embraces free-market economics, and the economy continues to grow. In terms of life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling and gross national income per capita, the 2011 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index ranked Mongolia 11th amongst the 187 countries surveyed. Traditionally, our economy relied on agriculture and livestock breeding. A third of our people are nomads, moving camp two or three times a year to drive their herds of horses, yaks, sheep, goats, Bactrian camels or reindeer to fresh pastures. Mongolia also has extensive mineral deposits.

We have a population of about 2.7 million, of whom around 27 per cent are 14 years old or younger and 65 per cent are in the 15–54 age range. The last 20 years or so have seen mass migration from the countryside. In 1990, Ulaanbaatar had 700,000 inhabitants. Today, its population is 1.2 million. There are a number of reasons for this.

Soviet assistance, which at its height represented one-third of Mongolia's GDP, disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1985–1991. The cessation of state ownership of industry and manufacturing, centralised planning and state subsidies led to a deep recession. The collapse of collective farming meant that the rural economy could no longer support the herders. Then, between 1999 and 2002, Mongolia was hit by three particularly harsh winters. Tens of thousands of families lost all or most of their herds and were forced to relocate to the urban areas. Another reason for rural migration has been parents' desire to seek better educational opportunities for their children. There is an old Mongolian saying: "The most important form of wealth is knowledge and education. The second is children. And the least is money."

Which brings me to the reasons for our non-formal education programmes. As long as Mongolia followed the Soviet political ideology, the state guaranteed jobs for men and women. But the transition from a national command economy to a more uncertain, globally oriented, market economy led to an erosion of real earnings. Many households dropped below the poverty line, and the collapse of the socialist safety nets and lack of state funding led to a decline in educational provision. This resulted in falling levels of numeracy, literacy and other basic cognitive skills amongst children and young adults, particularly in the rural areas.

In 1992–1993, the dropout rate in schools was 8.8 per cent. This has now declined to 0.7 per cent, but we still need to help the 36,500 illiterate and semi-literate individuals from those times, plus the current generation of dropouts and out-of-school children. As the economy forges ahead, there are many job vacancies but too few well-educated applicants. The majority of the unemployed and a good proportion of those already in work need to gain new knowledge and skills, and so non-formal and lifelong learning are essential to bring our people out of ignorance and poverty and achieve economic transformation.

There are also gender issues to address. In general, Mongolian parents feel that schooling is not so important for their sons because they are capable of hard physical work. Girls, on the other hand, they consider incapable of exerting themselves physically, so it's important they become educated to earn a living. This is why 80 per cent of our medical students, 90 per cent of our secondary school teachers and all of our primary school teachers are female.

In the early years, equal numbers of boys and girls attend school, but later, 68 per cent of dropout children are boys, most of them leaving school due to lack of parental support. Up to 80 per cent of the students in the senior classes are girls, many of whom then go on to university. The problem is that these well-educated girls have no interest in marrying poorly educated or unemployed young men. This state of affairs — plus the fact that tens of thousands of these men go on to seek better-paid jobs in other countries — is leading to a decline in marriage and birth rates.

The Role and Status of Women

Traditionally, Mongolian women have enjoyed higher status and greater autonomy than women in many of the other Asian countries. They were always subservient to men, but they had rights and privileges unknown to most Asian women — for example, the right to own property and to get divorced. During the Middle Ages, some women served as members of the *Khuriltai*, the governmental

council, and were commanders in military campaigns. One of the most powerful and able women in the 13th-century Mongol Empire was Kublai Khan's mother, Sorghaghtani Beki. During the 15th and 16th centuries, Mongolia was ruled by Empress Mandukhai Khatun (Khatun is the female equivalent of Khan). She reunified the empire and fought in battles herself, even when pregnant, and all of the later khans and nobles of Mongolia were her descendants.

In more recent times, the 1921 revolution and the establishment of a socialist society gave women increased access to education and healthcare and equal rights within the law. In 1981, the government was a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and this and the 2009 Law on Promotion of Gender Equality ensures gender equality in employment, education and health much more than in many Asian countries. According to the 2011 UNDP Human Development Report, *Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All*, Mongolia ranks 70th out of 145 countries in terms of women's rights, 83 per cent of females over 25 have at least secondary education and women represent around 68 per cent of the workforce. Half of our lawyers, half of our judges and 40 per cent of our media personnel are females. However, there are currently only 11 women members out of 76 in our parliament, which falls far short of the international benchmark of 30 per cent.

In the traditional home, the wife shows respect towards her husband, for example, by serving him first at mealtimes. But whilst the husband is typically the prime earner, he will always consult with his wife on the household finances, and it's the wife who manages these. With young couples, wives have the right to help their parents, whilst the husbands generally have to ask their wives' permission if they want to help theirs. On the whole, I would say that Mongolian housewives have greater freedom than in some other countries.

My Childhood and Education

I was born in 1958 in Uvs, a *soum* of around 1,000 people in an *aimag* some 1,300 kilometres from Ulaanbaatar. I was raised in a simple family and within a traditional culture. My father was a truck driver, and my mother died when I was 11, so life was not easy for me and my three brothers. I was fortunate in having parents who wanted me to receive the best possible education. My father had a very limited education, but he always said to me, "If you learn well, a good future will open in front of you." The usual entry age into school was eight, but my father wanted to see his firstborn learning to read and write as soon as possible, so he put me in school when I was six. He also always encouraged me to read at home and tried to find good books for me.

After completing lower secondary schooling in 1973, I left home and went to boarding school at the *aimag* centre (all country schools have dormitories to accommodate children from surrounding districts and nomadic families). Aware of my father's faith in me and the importance of study, I worked hard, got good grades and earned a place in the National University of Mongolia. As a parent, I can now appreciate how thrilled my father was about my achievements. It's largely due to him that I was able to move up from small village life to become a university lecturer and, later, a senior manager in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

I must admit that I was also helped by external circumstances. Whatever else one might say about the previous socialist regime, it achieved universal primary education and created a positive educational environment that encouraged everyone to study. And its push to eradicate illiteracy led to the Language and Literature Institute of the Academy of Sciences receiving the 1970 UNESCO Nadezhda K. Krupskaya Prize for literacy. As a consequence, the standards in schools and requirements for university entry were much higher than they are today.

At the time I went to university, the competition for places was very high, and only the very best students could gain admission. There was certainly no discrimination in terms of ethnicity, religion, gender, social origin or class. However, the very best students were sent to study at universities in the former Soviet Union or Eastern European countries. As a result, most of those in the upper echelons of today's society, for example, all our presidents, were educated abroad — and all but one of the presidents were born into nomadic families. I make this point because when I meet senior managers in some other Asian countries, I often find they come from upper-class families, and it's almost as though they inherited these key positions. I can honestly say that I never experienced any discrimination in my career on account of my gender or rural upbringing.

Not so long ago, I went on a study tour to another Asian country with four of my staff. We travelled together, chatted away like equals, and because one of the women was older than me, I carried her luggage. Our female hosts were most surprised to see us acting like old friends. They said to me, "You're their director. You should be above them." I replied, "Why should there be any inequality between me and my staff? My salary's a bit higher than theirs, but there's not really a great difference in our pay. Some of my staff have their own cars. I don't. We are a one-car family... That's all I need." I've never been someone who wanted to be a leader to gain power, material possessions or social advantage. I've always been interested in providing better opportunities for people. The desire to *serve* comes first.

Becoming Director of the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education

I graduated from university with high grades and, despite my young age, got a job as a lecturer at the Pedagogical University (now Khovd University), 1,300 kilometres from Ulaanbaatar. This was the first university to be established outside the capital, so it attracted a lot of attention from the government and was a well-resourced working environment. I worked hard at my job, studied for a PhD in the Geography Department of the State Pedagogical University (now State University of Education), in Ulaanbaatar, then moved on to become a lecturer in the Pedagogical University, rose to professor and head of department and wrote a number of textbooks and teachers' guides. In 1996, I worked with the Danish International Development Assistance Support for Primary/Secondary School Sector in its Mongolia project team, and this experience taught me many things about learner-centred and competency-based learning. Around this time, I also did my pre-doctoral research at the Geography Teaching Department of Würzburg University, in Germany. I loved teaching, and I think I was good at it, but I felt I needed a new challenge.

Then in 2002, completely out of the blue, the Minister of Education offered me the job of Director of the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education. My first question was, “What happened to the previous director?” because if they’d forced him out of the position, I didn’t want it. The minister told me he’d been appointed to the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, in Paris and then said, “You’re exactly the kind of person we need: highly experienced in teaching, language skills and dealing with women!” At that time — ten years ago — the ministries were interested in finding the best people for senior positions. Nowadays, I’m sad to say, appointments owe more to political considerations.

Taking on this job in a different sector was a real challenge for me. I was still driven by socialist ideals, but for 20 years I’d been working in academe, so I was quite out of touch with the kinds of teachers and learners I’d be working with. I’ll never forget my first day in the job. When the outgoing director introduced me to the staff, I could sense that they weren’t at all pleased to see me. There were smiles on their faces but after two decades or so of teaching, I could tell when people were covering up their true feelings. The staff were very attached to their director. Now what they saw before them was a young female professor with no experience in non-formal education or leading a large national organisation.

And to be honest, at the start, I knew very little about the needs or possibilities in non-formal education. I had a mass of catching up to do. The newness of the field meant there was little information available on these issues within Mongolia. But from early childhood, I’ve always been keen to find things out for myself and so, even though the Internet services at that time were pretty limited, I started hunting down online sources, particularly UNESCO material. I well remember one International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) book, *The Planning of Non-Formal Education* by David R. Evans,¹ being particularly helpful to me at that stage. Two months later, I was nominated by the Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO and funded by the Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) to attend the 20th Regional Workshop on Capacity Building for Trainers of Non-Formal Education Facilitators in Asia and the Pacific. This event was held in Yangon, Myanmar, and organised by the ACCU, the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education and the Myanmar Ministry of Education. Whilst at this workshop, I took every opportunity to gather up any books, conference papers, official reports, etc. that would enable me to learn what was going on in this field and start to stock a staff library back in the centre. Later on, in 2003, I took a four-month IIEP certificated online course in education sector planning and management,² which also helped me broaden my knowledge and understanding of what was needed.

Once back from Myanmar, I began to plan for the National Centre’s future operations. This involved not only applying my new knowledge but familiarising myself with the working environment and trying to get on side with those staff who were clearly ill-disposed towards me and unsettled by the change. Staff members kept coming to me saying they were putting projects on hold because they didn’t know what the new priorities were. This made me realise that I had to quickly clarify my vision and goals — and theirs. I organised a seminar for all of the centre’s staff and all of those responsible for our educational services

¹ Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0007/000767/076764eo.pdf>.

² See www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Cap_Dev_Training/Virtual_Institute/pdf/2012/Virtual_Campus_Brochure_2012_2013.pdf.

in Ulaanbaatar and out in the participating *aimags*. I used this event to outline my plans for the centre and how we might collaborate with UNESCO and other international agencies. I also sought the staff members' opinions on these matters. After the seminar, some of the staff told me they had never been to staff meetings that contained so much new and interesting information. This was a start, but there were still serious problems for me to deal with.

The need for non-formal education was initially officially recognised in the Education Law of 1991. It took a few years for things to get under way, but in 1997, the ministry established what was then known as the Non-Formal Education Centre. Between 1992 and 1996, the ministry and UNESCO had collaborated in the Non-Formal Education for Gobi Women Project, which was run in six *aimags* in the Gobi desert. Encouraged by the success of this project, between 1997 and 2001 UNESCO then embarked on a national Learning for Life project, and the newly established centre collaborated in evaluating this. But the problem was that in 2002 — the year I took over — all the funding for this project had ceased, and the staff at our learning centres, which we call “enlightenment centres”, were asking me, “Where’s the money going to come from now?” Another of their concerns was, “We don’t have proper job descriptions.”

This gave me some idea of where to start. I developed rules and procedures for all the operations, and job descriptions for all of the staff in the centre and the enlightenment centres. I had to do this single-handedly, but I pressed on, drafting a plan, discussing it with my staff and the enlightenment centre facilitators and then taking it up through the ministry’s system. This wasn’t at all smooth going, especially dealing with the financial aspects. Even though non-formal education was a recognised part of the national education system, it was still pretty marginal in the scheme of things. Whilst some countries might allocate three to four per cent of their education budgets to non-formal education, Mongolia grants only 0.5 per cent. So, for example, arguing that the pay and conditions of the facilitators in the enlightenment centres should be similar to those of teachers in the formal sector was like banging my head against a brick wall. However, the ministry broadly approved of my plans.

But I still had staff issues to deal with. Over the years, I’d developed the knack of knowing when people were only pretending to work hard or know what they were doing. For all the impressions of confidence and competence they’d shown, I found that the majority of the staff still needed to be far more committed, competent and willing to work in teams. So, I set out to organise and motivate them and give them more training in curriculum and courseware development. To help me train materials developers, I called in some of my former colleagues at the Pedagogical University. I collaborated with the staff in revising our *Handbook for Adult Learning Materials Development*. I managed to persuade the staff that working in teams was an easier and better way of developing quality materials, and some of the teams subsequently accepted having university professors, doctors, lawyers, ecological and environmental educators and other subject specialists contribute content and ideas. I also encouraged staff collaboration by adopting a train-the-trainers approach. For example, I sent one of my staff on a five-day course on Adobe InDesign desktop publishing software. She in turn trained all the other staff in the centre. This not only brought all the staff up to date but provided her with a greater sense of personal worth.

I recognised, too, that it was important to improve the teaching and learning methods in those who were out in the field teaching face-to-face daytime or evening classes, tutoring in distance education or providing peripatetic classes in community and home settings. So, I organised short courses, workshops and seminars for the facilitators, local teachers, agricultural extension workers and voluntary staff in the enlightenment centres in Ulaanbaatar and the *aimag* centres. There was limited funding for this, but because of facilitator turnover, this training had to be ongoing. We also collaborated in revising the *Handbook for Non-Formal Adult Education Facilitators*.

When it came to managing staff, I had to learn to treat people in different ways. For example, despite all my encouragement, one junior member of staff was constantly under-performing. Finally, I asked him, “When are you planning to retire?” He answered, “Well, I’m only 34 now, so in 30 years or so, I hope.” Then I said, “Well, it’s going to be very difficult to fool yourself and me for all that time. So, you’d be better putting your heart and mind into your job from now on. It’ll be more helpful to you.” I was pleased to see that he did improve from that time on. At other times, I found it best to lead from the front and adopt a hands-on approach to managing affairs. For example, at first I found I had to personally review every book prior to its publication, to ensure that the content and instructional design were easily understandable to our learners and weren’t simply concerned with learning for learning’s sake, but were relevant and benefited the readers and their families. So, for instance, a herdsman learns about the characteristics and vocabulary of circles by being asked to think about a tethered horse circling around a stake, a youth learns about estimating and costing by being asked to work out how much timber he’d need to construct a floor for a *ger* (traditional house), and young housewives are taught about healthy eating, economical and hygienic ways of preparing food and how to preserve vegetables, which are always in limited supply.

I always impressed on my staff the need to relate the courses and material to the learners’ everyday lives and circumstances. I remember looking through the first draft of some educational material on reproductive health and finding anatomical illustrations that would confuse medical students, let alone semi-literate would-be mothers out in the steppe. I said to the authors, “Look. I’ve had three children, and I managed without all these complicated diagrams.” The authors gave me a smile and took my point.

It helped that the staff recognised my previous experience in, and reputation for, textbook writing and materials design. But of course, I couldn’t go on managing all the projects directly. My role was to analyse the needs of staff and learners and then develop the ideas, systems and methodologies for the staff to learn about and follow. So, as they showed they were capable of developing the courses and training materials on their own, I gradually lessened my interventions.

When it came to leadership, not being a confrontational kind of person, I was initially very uncertain about what style to adopt. A friend of mine, a professor of psychology, told me I had a “phlegmatic personality”, that I was the kind of person who is unassuming, agreeable, intuitive and capable of “reading between the lines”. She also told me that most phlegmatics are female and, over time, become effective leaders. I found her remarks reassuring, and they proved true.

I've now been in the job for ten years and like to think that we have an open and caring culture in our education system — and that I've helped to create this. I've always been keen to help our younger members of staff develop the communication skills they need for dealing with different kinds of people, ranging from our students to university professors and those in international organisations. And I've also encouraged them to go on learning. One thing I insist on is my staff learning English. This is important, for example, for translating articles from English for our newsletter, *Enlightenment*, putting information in English on our website, appealing to international donors, collaborating in international projects and reporting to international stakeholders. Three of our staff have gone on to graduate in English from the University of the Humanities, here in Ulaanbaatar, one of my former staff is now a professor at this university and four of our younger members have graduated from her evening class, two going on to study for master's degrees in Japan. I'm constantly encouraging staff to take further degrees. Since I took over, two have graduated with master's degrees from U.S. universities, and one studied for a master's degree in Japan then, after working with us for a couple of years, went on to work with the UNESCO office in Bangkok. She always says that I opened the door of opportunity for her. My staff now almost feels like a family. I believe it's essential to create a warm, loving, open and generally comfortable work environment, one in which people can grow.

As Director, I have been responsible for formulating policies for non-formal and distance learning provisions, curriculum and materials development and delivery systems, in the National Centre and the enlightenment centres. The job has certainly not been without its setbacks. For example, quite early on, aided by the World Bank, I conducted a study into the need for a distance education programme in literacy for out-of-school children and submitted a proposal to the ministry. Unfortunately, my proposal coincided with a national election, and the incoming government decided that the money would be better spent on upgrading school libraries. Their view, mistakenly, was that illiteracy had been eradicated. In fact, I gained the impression that the people in power at that time weren't interested in non-formal education or the work of our centre. Perhaps if I had been more effective as a lobbyist, or had friends in high places, I could have changed their thinking, but I'm too simple a person — I'm a teacher at heart. Still, I didn't give up.

I realised that to persuade politicians and senior administrators, I had to find convincing evidence from international sources. I therefore approached the Mongolia National Commission for UNESCO for advice and began seeking out others who might support the idea of such a programme. Finally, in 2004, Mongolia's parliament approved a National Literacy Education Programme and put me in charge. Luck also played its part: the United Nations had just declared this "The Literacy Decade". Sometimes, things come together for you. For example, when the 2006–2015 Education Master Plan was published, it contained an entire chapter on the need to provide (i) non-formal programmes to eradicate adult illiteracy, (ii) post-literacy programmes linked to life skills, health and environmental education and (iii) primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education equivalency programmes for out-of-school children and youths. And the Education Law of 2006 stated that these programmes were to be state funded. This meant that from now on, the teachers' and facilitators' salaries would be

paid from the central budget rather than relying on international donors. And when the Education Law was further revised, in 2012, it recommended improved working conditions for our teachers, something I'd long been seeking — for example, that they should receive a performance bonus every five years, just like the teachers in the regular schools. It's gratifying to know that over time, I've managed to change and develop policies that have helped to advance the sector.

I've also had to establish and maintain links with international agencies to undertake collaborative projects, access sources of additional funding and benefit from international knowledge and experience. This has involved dealing with and gaining the trust of different bureaucracies. I've co-ordinated more than 20 donor-supported projects in which the centre has developed, translated, adopted and adapted methods and materials in co-operation with, for example, UNICEF (Basic Education Programme),³ UNESCO (Literacy through Distance Learning Programme)⁴ and the International Labour Organisation/International Organisation for the Elimination of Child Labour (improving the quality and delivery of non-formal training for the prevention of child labour). We offer three sets of programmes: literacy and post-literacy; primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education equivalency; and life skills.

Every year, approximately 3,500 adults enroll in our literacy programmes. We'd like to see more, but many grown-ups are too embarrassed to be seen coming to our classes. Some ten- to 12-year-old out-of-school children and dropouts also attend these programmes. Some then go on to attend regular schools, but the majority don't. They either don't see any point in schooling, or have memories from their earlier schooling or feel ashamed turning up to classes where the other children are better dressed and cared for.

Our post-literacy programme helps neo-literates continue with their reading, either on their own or with the help of family members. As with the literacy course, we ensure that the content relates to their interests, and, where possible, we employ an inter-generational approach. We like to encourage family-based literacy training because this helps to develop positive social relationships and communication between parents and their children, and it also motivates parents to ensure that their children attend and stay in school.

Our primary, junior secondary and senior secondary equivalency programme (EP) enables school dropouts and out-of-school youths to study for exams that are the equivalent of those taken in the regular schools. By 2012, 12,000 children and youths had enrolled in the EP, about a third of whom passed their exams and went on to study at other institutions, get jobs or move to better jobs. It's really rewarding to see such students succeeding.

Our life-skills programmes include business skills for herdsmen and farmers; computing and IT; local crafts; civics and civil law; finance; environmental education; public health, healthcare and child rearing; HIV/AIDS prevention; education for sustainable development; and education for natural disaster preparedness. Most of the students on these courses are female. We encourage them to go on and form learning groups or help other women to establish small local enterprises. To date, about 150,000 people have taken these programmes.

³ See www.unicef.org/mongolia/activities_2191.html and www.unicef.org/mongolia/activities_6712.html.

⁴ See www.artcinfo.net/practices/mongolia/literacy_distance_learning.html and www.unesco.org/ui/litbase/?menu=4&programme=51.

We provide all of these programmes through our nationwide network of 355 enlightenment centres. Most of these are in schools, but several *soums* operate their own community learning centres. We employ a variety of teaching and learning methods — regular classes in the cities, less frequent classroom sessions and meetings in the local centres, summer training programmes for herders, as well as self-learning and distance learning. Before their deployment, the facilitators in these centres receive training in literacy teaching, adult learning methodologies and dealing with a range of individuals and groups with varying ability levels. These facilitators are then made responsible for learning groups ranging in size from 20 to 30.

When it comes to course and materials development, this is carried out in the National Centre. We start by conducting baseline/needs assessment surveys. We then develop the learning materials (books, audiovisuals) using a team approach. To date, we've developed: 45 literacy and post-literacy learning packages, which are also being widely used by other literacy programme providers in Mongolia; 127 EP training modules and nine EP textbooks; five sets of health education resources and 50 sets of life-skills training materials, which include 18 series of audio lessons and 12 sets of video lessons; and training videos for facilitators. We also produce CD materials for nomadic families; computer-based resources for use in the local centres; community radio and TV programmes; and web-based materials that are freely available to anyone able and willing to download and learn from them. We prepare the facilitators on how to make best use of these multimedia materials, and we rely heavily upon these personnel to distribute the materials and provide face-to-face instruction out in the enlightenment centres. We also call upon specialist staff, such as agricultural extension trainers and health workers, to help with programme development and delivery. Plus, we have university staff and post-graduate students working with us, researching what learners require and the best ways of meeting these various educational needs, and monitoring the programmes on a regular basis to determine the achievements, challenges and outcomes.

I'm responsible for a relatively small number of staff — 14 — in the centre itself, but I'm also responsible for around 500 staff out in the enlightenment centres and elsewhere in the system, about a quarter of whom are female. We're all acutely aware that we're responsible for the learning and welfare of the poor, the poorly educated, the unemployed or underemployed and the otherwise marginalised, whose only salvation is non-formal education. We always encourage them to believe, "I can do it." This is why I think that our staff are quite different from, and more humanitarian than, the teachers in the formal system.

We face a number of challenges. In general, we receive insufficient support from official sources. We try to show that distance education is a cost-effective means of providing lifelong learning, but the limited resources, lack of vehicles to travel to remote nomadic villages and poor salaries for the facilitators limit what we can achieve in terms of outreach. Furthermore, the learners' and potential learners' nomadic lifestyle, with its seasonal migratory systems, makes scheduling and maintaining programmes problematic. And there's always the danger of donor fatigue.

We also have to take careful account of the different cultural and ethnic groups when designing and delivering our courses and materials. Our official language

is Mongolian, which is spoken by 95 per cent of the population. Over 80 per cent of Mongolians are Khalkha. But we also have linguistic minorities, such as the Durvud, Bayaad, Buriad, Dariganga, Zahchin and Urianhai, whose dialects are a bit different from those of the Khalkha. We also have one totally different ethnic group: the Kazakh, a Turkic people, about 100,000 of whom live in the western part of Bayan-Ulgii *aimag*. They are Muslims and have different traditions from the majority of Mongolians. Whilst educated Kazakhs can be fluent in Mongolian, the poorly educated and women have no knowledge of our language, and until recently, all attempts to improve the education of women, girls and out-of-school children has been limited by the lack of teaching materials in their mother tongue. It's not easy to find people with both subject expertise and knowledge of the Kazakh language, but we've started to contract university lecturers to translate all our courses and materials into Kazakh, and we're already seeing the benefits for learners.

Now we are embarking on the next step, providing lifelong learning for all — not just for the illiterates, the school dropouts and so on. There's always been much talk about the need for lifelong learning provision in Mongolia, to achieve competitiveness and employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but until recently, no one did anything about it. Then in July 2012, a new government came to power in my country, and one of the first steps they took was to establish a Lifelong Learning Unit within the Ministry of Education and Science. Drawing on my experience and that of our centre, I set out to help this new unit get under way and develop its plans for lifelong learning. More recently, the ministry decided that from the start of 2013, our centre's name should be changed to the National Centre for Lifelong Education. I was very pleased about this, on three counts. Firstly, it showed that the bureaucracy was aware of the need to change and to embrace the new global paradigm of education; secondly, it was an acknowledgement of the value of the non-formal education sector in Mongolia, which I have led for the past ten years; and thirdly, it was an acceptance of my arguments that our rapidly changing society and circumstances demanded new responses from educators.

What we now need is to undertake a review of our structure and activities to help achieve a “knowledge-based society”. To start the ball rolling, in December 2012, I submitted a new strategy paper to the ministry. In this, I showed that people needed to be encouraged and enabled to learn through very different learning environments and learning methods, that they were already using new learning tools, such as mobile devices and tablets, and so our future activities should be more focused on mobile learning and eLearning. I stressed that if we are to achieve this, we shall need at least seven additional qualified and experienced staff to take charge of online learning and eLearning, family education and citizenship education. Finding such persons will be a major challenge in Mongolia, where human resources are so limited. We shall also need an increased budget for our operations, to upgrade our video production facilities to HD (which is to be the Mongolian standard by 2014) and to bring our printing system up to modern standards. I don't expect all of this to go smoothly, but we are currently waiting for the ministry's approval.

So, there is always more to do. I feel we are making quite good progress, but there are still quality assurance issues to address in our system, and I have many challenges yet to meet.

Final Reflections

Through my story, I've tried to show that I've had to put a lot of thought and effort into being an advocate and developing policies and practices for non-formal and lifelong education. This hasn't been easy. Such ideas are relatively new in our educational system. After 70 years of a socialist regime and a focus on formal schooling and conventional classroom teaching, it's hardly surprising that today's policymakers, administrators and parents — the products of the old system, with little experience of what goes on beyond the country's borders — are always asking me, "What's non-formal education?", "What's distance education?", "What's lifelong learning?", "Do these new ideas really work?" I was no different when I was appointed to lead the Non-Formal and Distance Education Centre. Like me, they'll just have to go on learning.

Looking back on those early years, I don't know how I managed, between lecturing at university, learning English, raising three boys and having a husband who was an anaesthesiologist on night shift several times a week. My generation had never heard of babysitters or childcare centres; when I tell my children how we lived and worked, they think I'm spinning fairy tales. But if I hadn't done all this, I wouldn't now have this great job, and I wouldn't have been able to help others to such an extent.

Becoming a Leader in Non-Formal Education

Nodumo Dhlamini

My Early Life and Education

Most of my professional career has been spent in higher education. However, some of what I see as my most important work and closest to my heart has been developing and providing ICT-based non-formal education programmes. Much of this work has been undertaken to benefit women. In this account, I describe my experiences, thoughts and feelings in regards to becoming a leader in this area.

I was born in Matopo Mission, a hospital, primary school and high school in semi-rural south Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, that was established by Brethren in Christ Church missionaries in 1898. My parents first met there. I am the second of four children — which is considered a small family by African standards. Both of my parents had been born into polygamous families and had grown up in traditional communities where opportunities for education were limited. My mother and my father had a strong influence on me during my childhood. They had envisioned a better life for themselves, sacrificed a great deal to complete their secondary schooling and gone on to qualify as teachers. My mother was particularly inspiring, as she had persevered despite all the prejudices against women in a community where schooling was not considered a high priority for girls. With hindsight I realise that she also instilled in me the idea of becoming a leader for change. She always used to say, “He who sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” She also contributed generously towards uplifting our extended family, saying that “a home with many footsteps is a blessed home.” However, thoughts about becoming a leader didn’t come to me until much later in life. If I ever did think about being a leader, I imagined it involved having a big, important title and being in a big, prestigious position. Later, I came to realise that leading is really about making a difference and helping to make other people’s lives better, and that anyone, in any walk of life, can be a leader.

Being the daughter of two teachers, I was expected to meet very high standards, and I knew that I had to concentrate on securing a future for myself by ensuring I got the best possible education. When it was time for me to attend university, places were very limited in Zimbabwe. Perhaps because my paternal grandfather was a Swazi and going to university in Swaziland was a way of discovering my roots, I applied for a BSc course in Mathematics and Computer Science at the University of Swaziland. I wasn't eligible for any kind of scholarship, so my parents had to help me through my studies by generating extra income through their farming activities. Information and communications technology (ICT) didn't feature in my plans at that time and didn't have a high profile in Zimbabwe, so I'd no idea of the world of opportunities that this combination of subjects would come to offer me in the future.

Starting Out on My Career

After I graduated in 1994, my first job was teaching. At that time, the Swaziland Ministry of Education was eager to recruit teachers, so it was easy to get a job as a mathematics and science teacher in a high school in Manzini, where I taught for 18 months. As a beginning teacher, I was pleased to find that the boys and girls in my classes looked up to me, mainly because they were fascinated by having such a young woman teaching them. I enjoyed counselling them outside school hours, encouraging them to tell me all about themselves, their backgrounds, their thoughts and feelings and whatever they felt was hindering their progress. I found the girls were far less confident than the boys in mathematics and science; the general assumption was that girls were more suited to the “easier” subjects — i.e., arts and humanities — and only the cleverest girls could excel in these “harder” subjects. I began to see how schools and other educational institutions reinforce gender stereotyping and apply constraints on girls that prevent them from realising their full potential and thus limit their career options.

Teaching might have seemed a natural career choice for me, having been raised in a family of teachers, but I never saw myself being a teacher for the rest of my life. I looked upon it as a stepping stone, a means to earn my way whilst keeping my eyes open for opportunities in the then nascent ICT industry. I was strongly motivated to join the ICT sector because it was new and growing, and I felt it would make better use of what I'd learned at university and offer me a wider range of career options. The opportunity to join the ICT industry eventually arose, and I was accepted into an 18-month graduate traineeship programme in the ICT division of Zimbabwe Financial Holdings Limited Information Services.

I was very excited. This was just the break I'd been hoping for. And the corporate world promised to be so very different from a humdrum teaching or public-sector job. I embarked on a steep learning curve, which at first was a bit intimidating, getting to grips with the full spectrum of specialisations in finance and ICT and the application of all the computer science theories I'd learnt at university. But I knew now that I'd been right in my ambitions and that I wanted to work hard and qualify as a computer programmer, rise to become a systems analyst and maybe, in time, lead an ICT division — something every ambitious ICT professional aspires to. So, I began to map out my career plan.

I then moved on to work for two years as a systems programmer in the ICT division of the National Railways of Zimbabwe. Here I learned all about the new management information systems being developed by this division and cut my teeth on the development of a new computer-based passenger booking management system. Doing this work, I came to realise that my strengths were in designing and coding systems based on business process analysis. But when an opportunity to move on to a systems analyst position eventually materialised, it happened to be in an institution of higher education, not the corporate sector.

So, it was back to academia for me, with a job in the recently founded Africa University (AU), a private, pan-African institution 17 kilometres north-west of Mutare, Zimbabwe's fourth largest city. From the outset, AU had been envisaged as "a university for all of Africa", admitting students from all across the continent regardless of race, class, ethnicity and political or religious affiliation. Its establishment owed much to the leadership of the African bishops of the United Methodist Church, who called on their church worldwide to invest in this institution. Their efforts met with a generous response, and in 1992, President Mugabe issued the Africa University Charter by official proclamation, making AU the first officially recognised private university in Zimbabwe. For the university's logo, AU's founders decided upon the flat-top acacia, or thorn tree, set against the backdrop of a rising sun. The tree symbolises the deep-rooted nature of the institution in the African soil and the indigenous wisdom and know-how of our people. The rising sun symbolises a new day dawning with new knowledge to improve the quality of life for the people of Africa.

With my mission background and parents who had a strong sense of Christian values and community service, the university's vision, like its logo, struck a chord in me. So, I made this jump from the corporate world to AU because I was excited by its philosophy and felt I could make a lasting contribution to the growth of this young institution, with its aim of becoming a world-class university for leadership development in Africa. The corporate world had taught me a great deal, but I felt something was missing in my life — a sense of connection between the work I was doing and helping others improve their lives.

The university's ICT department was just beginning. Its mandate was not only to develop the university's administrative and academic ICT systems but to enable the university to become a major teaching, learning and research centre in ICT. This gave me a wonderful opportunity to "get in on the ground floor", apply all I'd learnt and create all the necessary policies and systems from scratch. The department was to be responsible for the network infrastructure, hardware acquisition and maintenance systems, help desk and support services for eLearning and outreach training provision. Amongst the major ICT policies I helped bring about were making ICT literacy courses compulsory for all students in all programmes, a policy I persuaded the university's senate to endorse, and integrating the ICT budget within the university's overall annual budget to ensure continuity and upgrading, a move supported by the university's cabinet. For the very first time in my career, I became aware that I was on a leadership journey. I dared to dream, I started to explore and I began to find out what motivated me most.

I was very fortunate in having a university leadership that entrusted me with these not inconsiderable responsibilities. The Vice Chancellor at that time was Professor Rukudzo Murapa, someone who'd worked with UNESCO and the

World Bank and was an expert in political science, democracy, peace and conflict resolution, leadership and governance, economic development and capacity building in Africa. He'd say to me: "Keep coming up with these ideas. Don't worry about the funding. Money follows good ideas." I was also extremely fortunate in having Professor Fanuel Tagwira, the then Chairperson of the University ICT Committee, as my mentor. He'd joined AU in 1992 as the first full-time academic member of staff in the new Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources, where he rose to professorial rank. He later succeeded Professor Murapa as Vice Chancellor. Having grown up in rural Zimbabwe, he identified with the many people in Africa who have to survive on a dollar a day. He is an inspiring teacher, an accomplished researcher, community worker and environmentalist and a devoted Christian. Sometimes you have the good fortune to meet mentors who help you see the world in different ways. But I believe we help bring about that good fortune by being positive ourselves!

From its small beginnings, the department's staff grew to 21, 17 of whom were technical and four non-technical, and ten of whom were male and 11 female. We also annually hosted four interns as part of their degree programme requirements. In many respects, much of Africa is still "a man's world", and I'm saddened to find that ICT is very much looked upon as a male activity. There is a perception that men have more positive attitudes towards and are more capable of working with this technology than women. However, I firmly believe that exploiting ICT to benefit society and workplaces calls for the special attributes of both men and women. A study by the London Business School (2007) has shown that where innovation is crucial, organisations should seek to create teams of both sexes to ensure they can benefit from the most diverse talent pool. In both the corporate and the academic worlds, I've found that given the encouragement and support, women are just as good at applying creative solutions to technical problems. So, I worked really hard to help male and female staff in the ICT department sharpen their technical skills, lobbied for more women to be appointed and promoted to higher positions in the department, formed a special women's network and organised a number of events to encourage more women to make greater and better use of ICT. For example, we held "Software Freedom Days",¹ which are an annual worldwide celebration of free and open-source software (FOSS) and are designed to educate the public about FOSS's virtues and applications. We also organised events to help high school girls consider careers in ICT. Some of the girls who attended these events later chose to follow careers in ICT and kept in touch with us by email, saying how much they owed to our encouragement and advice.

The Africa University Information Technology Training Centre (AUITTC)

The more I worked in this field, the more convinced I became that the systems and tools we had at hand could be exploited to benefit not only individuals but whole communities. The African nations are becoming fully aware of the benefits of computers and the Internet, and most of them have established national ICT policies, ministries of ICT and strategies for making the most of digital media. According to 2012 world Internet users statistics (Internet World Stats, 2012), only 15.6 per cent of Africans currently have Internet access, compared to 78.6

¹ softwarefreedomday.org

per cent in North America and 63.2 per cent in Europe. However, Internet connectivity is becoming more widely available. By July 2012, an additional 36,165 kilometres of terrestrial fibre optic network had entered service across Africa, bringing dozens of towns and cities within reach of high-capacity national and international backbone networks. In a single year, this roll-out of terrestrial networks brought an additional 32 million people across Sub-Saharan Africa within reach of an operational fibre node. Once the networks currently under construction or at the planning or proposal stage are completed, 50.9 per cent of the population (438.8 million) will be within reach of an operational fibre node (Africa Bandwidth Maps, 2012). Despite bandwidth capacity not being accessible to all — especially the rural populations — and high access costs, I am convinced that the opportunities for Africa presented by the new technologies are numerous: in informal, non-formal and formal education; in community empowerment and development; in improving the lot of women, minorities and the marginalised; and in helping the people participate more fully in national decision-making processes and achieving a more enlightened civil society.

With these beliefs in mind, in 2001 I set up the Africa University Information Technology Training Centre (AUITTC).² My aim in doing this was to provide outreach programmes that would not only help to reduce the educational divide but alert our local communities to the possibilities in ICT and the vast range of online resources and services available to help them. I have always been very much taken by David Cooperrider's and Suresh Srivastava's appreciative inquiry (AI) method (Cooperrider & Whitney, n.d). This is a way of changing groups, organisations and communities through the processes of "discovery" (collective inquiry into the best of "what is"); "dream" (imagining what could be and then developing a clear outcomes-based vision); "design" (agreeing on the organisational requirements for the realisation of a future state that is so compelling that there's no need for incentives, coercion or persuasion); and "destiny" (strengthening the capability of everyone in the system in terms of learning, change and improvisation). I like this approach because it means that you are always open to new possibilities, recognising and bringing out the best in people, affirming past and present strengths and successes and building on everything that brings vitality and excellence to various endeavours.

This may all seem somewhat idealistic, but I have found that it works. At the discovery stage of establishing the AUITTC, we surveyed and met with in- and out-of-school children, school-leavers, parents, teachers, school managers, unemployed youths and adults, housewives, business people, small-scale entrepreneurs, doctors and other professionals, and community groups, getting them to tell us about their needs. At the dream stage, we joined with them in exploring the educational opportunities and technology services they were looking for. And at the design stage, we worked alongside them, finding the best ways of customising our training services. For example, we found the doctors were intrigued to know how they could improve their medical practices through the use of ICT. So, we organised a reflection session in which we invited them to tell us what they did, how they currently used the technology and how they felt ICT could help them improve their operations. We then worked with them to design a course that was appropriate for their particular needs and circumstances and

² www.africau.edu/Outreach_Activities/AUITTC/AUITTChome.htm

would help them achieve their desired future state. The outcomes of this approach were improved operations on their part and a strong ongoing partnership between these doctors and our outreach centre. We did the same kind of thing with “stay-at-home” mothers, helping them to work out how ICT might help them with household budgeting, getting in touch with the rest of the world, teaching their kids about the new technology and so on, then designing a training package that fit their needs, schedules and budgets. As we worked closely with these various user groups, I came to realise that we had not only to provide them with new tools, knowledge and skills but to change their cultures, help them raise their expectations and enable them to see a whole new world of opportunities.

Now, knowing our direction, we were able to plan and budget for the various training programmes, set up the right kind of website, blogging system and mailing lists, appoint a marketing officer and create evaluation systems, including weekly meetings to consider and, where necessary, change our ways of doing things in the light of the feedback. I also had to persuade all the university departments to (i) become more active in taking the university to the community in these ways, (ii) build up our training services to include courses in AutoCAD, Basic ICT Literacy, Internet and Web Design, Kids’ Computing, Linux Administration, and PC Servicing and Maintenance and (iii) make AUITTC an accredited International Computer Driving License (ICDL) Training Centre and an approved Cisco Systems Training Academy.

All was going well, but then we experienced an enormous setback, for reasons that were entirely out of our hands. In 2007–2008, Zimbabwe went through terribly difficult economic times. The country was faced with hyperinflation. The Zimbabwe Stock Exchange stopped trading, and there were virtually no non-cash Zimbabwean transactions taking place. This meant we had to pay for things in other currencies — USD, South African Rand and Botswana Pula. With inflation galloping ahead, we couldn’t forecast the costs of running AUITTC, and we had to readjust the prices of our courses and services every two weeks. Staff turnover became a terrible problem because the kinds of payments we were offering the young people we’d trained as local facilitators were no longer attractive to them. Nothing in my background had prepared me for this kind of crisis management. On the one hand, I was continually in dialogue with the vice chancellor and our staff to help keep the show on the road; on the other hand, I was constantly negotiating with our landlord for terms that took into consideration the hyperinflationary environment. Finally, I had no alternative but to relocate the centre from our “one-stop shop” down in Mutare back to the university’s campus. I did this reluctantly and only as a last resort, because the centre was far less accessible for the community, but at least we no longer had to pay rent. A year later, when financial conditions began to improve, AUITTC relocated to downtown Mutare, where it continued to thrive under new leadership and management after I’d moved on to other things.

LinuxChix Africa and Women’s Networking

In 2006, I attended an Africa-wide convening of 130 advocates of FOSS, in Kalangala, Uganda. At an event organised for women attendees, I met Anna Badimo from South Africa and Dorcas Muthoni from Kenya, the co-founders of

LinuxChix Africa, a chapter of LinuxChix³ worldwide. LinuxChix is a community for women who like Linux and free software, and for women and men who want to support women in computing. The membership ranges from novices to experienced users and includes professional and amateur programmers, system administrators and technical writers. I was intrigued by the fact that all chapter members were referred to as “Linux chicks”, regardless of gender, a nomenclature that had been adopted to differentiate this organisation from the “locker-room mentality” of other, male-dominated, Linux user groups. I also learned that LinuxChix Africa, which had been established two years earlier, was the brainchild of these two great African women. They saw the need to demystify and promote the use of FOSS by all of those women’s organisations that stood to benefit from using ICT applications in addressing gender inequities, the digital divide, the challenges of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, the aftermath of wars and civil unrest and the impact of poverty, drought, floods and famine. Recognising the many social and economic opportunities and benefits of making free software available to such groups, and concerned that the technical capacities and potential of most of the women in these enterprises were being overlooked, they set about exploring how FOSS localisation tools could be applied to e-agriculture, e-government, e-business, e-health and small to medium-sized ICT business opportunities for women. They also saw great potential for Linux and other FOSS in such neglected areas as preserving the indigenous knowledge passed from one generation of women to another.

I was invited to be the board member responsible for Southern African countries, and in this capacity, I became responsible for establishing LinuxChix chapters in Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa, Namibia and Botswana. Sadly, LinuxChix Africa folded after three years. With 20/20 hindsight, I can see a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the operational structure was overly ambitious — we should have started small by building grassroots communities. Secondly, the movement’s founders had never taken the time to really get to know each other well and understand how they worked and what motivated them. Thirdly, there was more excitement and optimism than sober reflection on the issues of organisational and strategic planning. And fourthly, there were deep differences of opinion over the management of the secretariat and networking strategies. With the organisation in crisis, I took it upon myself to have meetings with each of the board members and try to bring all the players and issues back to the table to reconcile matters, but to no avail. There were just too many conflicts and misunderstandings.

One of our firmest supporters was the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA).⁴ When it became evident that the leaders of LinuxChix Africa wished to go their separate ways, OSISA’s ICT Programme Manager, Thandikile Chisala Mbvundula, who was a visionary, passionate and well-experienced advisor on ICT for development, pleaded with me to take over the management of the organisation. I turned down the offer. I guess we all felt that our true leaders were Dorcas and Anna — and I didn’t want it to look as if we’d mounted some kind of coup d’état! It took me a long time to come to terms with the fact that we (or I?) had failed to maintain LinuxChix Africa as originally conceived. In terms of appreciative inquiry, we had the dream and sense of destiny, but the design was flawed.

³ www.linuxchix.org

⁴ www.osisa.org

For all that, our efforts yielded a number of positive outcomes. We had managed to establish LinuxChix Africa chapters in 20 countries, all of which had mounted a number of successful events for mentoring women in ICT. We'd also organised several regional training events for women, on Linux systems administration, network infrastructure and services, and Internet-based education. By setting ourselves up as role models and profiling the successes of other women, we'd started encouraging more women to think of themselves as leaders and entrepreneurs. And these women were beginning to exert their influence across Africa. For example, Unity Chipunza, who'd led LinuxChix Zimbabwe, went on to lead the Bindura University of Science Education's Virtual and Open Distance Learning programme. And in Morocco, Houda Chakiri Assem, who had been the LinuxChix Africa Board Member for North Africa, continued with her passion for leading ICT innovation entrepreneurship. In 2007, as CEO and founder of Enhanced Technologies,⁵ she was selected as one of the 100 best young social entrepreneurs in the world. She was also one of the top ten finalists in the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation Sawaed 2008–2009 award for the most innovative ideas for using ICT to promote Arabic content in the Arab world.

I and the other board members and local chapter leaders kept the dream alive and stayed in touch, and eventually I resurrected LinuxChix Africa as the AfChix Africa for Women in Technology Group.⁶ This time, we developed toolkits and protocols for creating chapters, drawing on what had worked well in the past. We designed communication platforms using blogs, Twitter and Facebook to link with members, and we helped women develop their individual action plans. Today, whilst some of these groups may go under different names, we have chapters in Zimbabwe, Uganda, Lesotho, Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, Morocco and other countries, and the subscribers in the mailing list that I moderate weekly represent most countries across Africa. In 2013 alone, I recruited around 100 women onto this mailing list.

AfChix Africa currently has 500 female members and is training and mentoring a whole new generation of women to exploit ICT, advance their education and careers and mentor other women in changing the status quo. And we're seeing some good outcomes. Lillian Achom, an ICT freelancer in Uganda, used our careers guidance network to upgrade from a Diploma in Computer Science to a Bachelor in Computer Information Systems from Africa University. She now provides ICT careers guidance for other young Ugandan women. Evelyn Namara from Uganda won the Google Change Agent Award in 2012.⁷ Dorcas Muthoni from Kenya has received a number of honours for being a role model for African women and girls, most recently in the World Economic Forum's Young Global Leaders Class of 2013.⁸ I take some pride in knowing that I have helped these women to lift themselves up and become self-confident ICT professionals.

⁵ www.enhanced-tech.ma

⁶ <http://afchix.blogspot.com.au/2012/11/about-afchix-africa-women-in-technology.html>

⁷ <http://anitaborg.org/about/who-we-are/evelyn-namara>

⁸ www.weforum.org/news/world-economic-forum-announces-young-global-leaders-class-2013

The RUFORUM Network and Open Educational Resource Development

In 2004, a consortium of 30 university colleges and schools of agriculture in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa was established in recognition of the important and largely unfulfilled role that universities can play in contributing to the well-being of small-scale farmers and the economic development of the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Known as the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), this is seen as playing a critical role in developing collaborative networks and agricultural value chains around key crops and livestock. When the intellectual capital generated through this activity is released under open licences, it creates a sustainable platform for ongoing strengthening and development of these value chains by making knowledge publicly accessible and in forms that are easy to reversion and adapt, thus contributing to greater food security in African countries.

Africa University was one of the founding member universities of RUFORUM, and in 2008, I was sought to lead the implementation of a new ICT programme for the network. In fact, it was Professor Tagwira, my mentor, who introduced me to the concept of RUFORUM and got me thinking about how we could encourage and support colleges and schools of agriculture to use ICT more effectively in teaching, learning, research, outreach and collaboration. My role with RUFORUM has been to help these institutions develop multiple-media agricultural open educational resources (OER) to be shared, adapted, modified or augmented through learning networks, in pursuit of the RUFORUM goals.

The method I use in developing these OER is based on Agshare,⁹ an action research-based approach for co-creating and co-publishing agricultural knowledge within and across agricultural stakeholder groups. This places great emphasis on engaging a wide range of policy makers, academics, researchers, extension workers, NGOs, farmers and others in the agricultural value chains. To develop these OER, I and my colleagues organise five-day retreats at which carefully selected representatives of these groups work with course writers, subject-matter peer reviewers, instructional designers and language editors to co-develop e-courses and e-materials based upon agriculture-related case studies and existing extension courses. The OER are designed to fill critical gaps in knowledge and skills, and we take great care to ensure that the treatments are pedagogically, culturally and linguistically appropriate to the end-users and the various contexts. To date, we've developed 29 OER in agricultural research methods, agricultural information and communication management, and aquaculture and fisheries science. Agricultural OER are still limited in the global repositories, so these productions are making a significant contribution to banking and making available quality non-formal content and methods across the continent, as well as providing resources for MSc and other formal programmes.

It is a truism to say that technological innovation is occurring at an incredible pace. Web 2.0 tools, new apps and social media enable people to collaborate, create, share and publish information in ways and on a scale never before possible. Small-holding farmers, who constitute the major proportion of the African workforce, can reap enormous benefits from using mobile technology, if only

⁹ www.oerafrica.org/agshare/AgShareHome/tabid/1290/Default.aspx

we can provide the infrastructure and appropriately designed courseware. This can help them cheaply access information about improving farming, fishing and forestry practices, monitor market data and fluctuations, bargain for better deals, widen the pool of potential buyers and increase their incomes. Farmers in Africa are renowned for their sense of community, and they have already begun exploiting the possibilities of Web 2.0, not only to gain knowledge and information but to share their learning and experiences with the more geographically isolated. Together with petty trading in local markets, farming is also a means of subsistence for many rural women. These women play an extremely important role in their societies and potentially in poverty reduction, but they are the poorest and most marginalised group in Africa. Most are illiterate in their own languages, let alone English, the language of so much invaluable information on the Internet. So, there are still many challenges to face, but I'm excited by the prospects for raising productivity and eradicating poverty as Internet connectivity spreads to allow mobile connection to remote rural areas.

I was again very fortunate in having another mentor at this stage of my career. Professor Adipala Ekwamu, the RUFORUM Executive Secretary, encouraged me to believe in my dreams and to recognise that learning never stops. He is a great advocate for open and eLearning and participative leadership, and a great believer in the Confucian saying, "Our greatest glory is not in never failing but in rising every time we fall." My work with RUFORUM has helped me to become a leader in new ways. In 2008, I co-facilitated my first Web 2.0 tools workshop, an event funded by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, the Commonwealth of Learning and RUFORUM. In this, I taught the participants about advanced online searching, getting information served via alerts and RSS,¹⁰ collaborating remotely using wikis and Google Docs, using Voice over Internet Protocol, online mapping, online publishing (micro-blogging and blogging), professional and corporate social networking (using LinkedIn and Facebook), as well as planning for and adopting these innovations in various organisations and contexts. Since then, I've organised and run a number of such workshops for NGOs, community organisations, ministries of agriculture, agricultural colleges and post-graduate students. What I always stress in these workshops is that it is not simply a matter of developing competencies in the use of the tools. It is about educating and empowering people to collaborate in the generation and dissemination of the kinds of knowledge and information that are so important for Africa, and making sure that the teaching and learning methods and materials are aimed at the right people and in the right ways. I see this work as extremely important, because it directly links to the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality, empowering women and ensuring environmental sustainability.

From this work and through close contact with end-users, I have gained three valuable insights into the use of OER, Web 2.0 and ICT in general. First, applications such as these offer many opportunities for non-formal learning and the younger generation, but to derive real benefit from these technologies the users must be motivated to drive their own plans and strategies for learning and development. Innovation and change cannot be top-down or externally imposed. Second, training and development has to be conducted *with* and not *for*

¹⁰ RSS stands for "Rich Site Summary", sometimes also dubbed "Really Simple Syndication".

these communities. And third, OER must be available in the local languages and customised to suit local cultures and practices if it is to be in any way acceptable and influential.

Final Reflections

When I started out on my career, I felt like a lone sailor embarking on an uncharted ocean of a traditionally male-dominated ICT sector. Even after over 25 years of efforts to promote female participation, the sad fact is that the world of ICT remains a profoundly male-dominated field. So, everything I've been trying to do has run counter to tradition, culture, people's expectations and gender stereotyping. I've been supported by some outstanding male bosses and colleagues throughout my career, but on occasion I've also been subjected to some gender stereotyping. As Seko Tingitana — a young Tanzanian woman who founded her own TV production company and produces *The Team*, a TV series that promotes gender equality — observes about Africa, “In the midst of modernity, there are many things holding us back.” These are both familial and cultural.

A number of studies reveal that there is still a gap between the rhetoric and the reality of women's empowerment through technology. The main users of ICT in Africa are young males, whilst women tend to be marginal users. But I still hold to the belief that ICT has the power to reach and empower women who are outside the ambit of all other means of communication, and that it can enhance and mobilise their participation in economic and social development and informed decision-making. This is the ideal that drives me in this work.

In the process of becoming a leader, I've come to realise that if ICT for development is to be at all successful, it requires teamwork and the involvement of both men and women. I've read reports showing that many women in ICT are interested in both technical and non-technical aspects of the work, so they can provide a good fit in roles requiring this mix. I've also found that gender diversity in teams appears to yield benefits, such as better decision-making, increased creativity and enhanced, innovative performance.

Being a woman pioneer in ICT for development, I've constantly had to travel that extra mile to prove my capability. I've found comfort in sharing experiences with other women, such as those I've worked with in AfChix. I believe many women would become involved in ICT development and application if such networks and support groups were more visible. We have to believe in ourselves as women — and know that the barriers holding us back will eventually fall away.

Developing and delivering the LinuxChix Africa and AfChix Africa programmes made me recognise the great value of networking and collaboration. It also helped me realise that there is an enormous unmet demand for non-formal and community education in and by means of ICT. Ensuring that this demand is met requires a strong vision as well as more champions and mentors. This experience also taught me that we often learn more from our failures — in the case of LinuxChix Africa, inattention to the organisational process and details — than from our more successful ventures. But above all, I realised that if I was going to maximise my potential and achieve my innermost dreams and vision, I had to have the courage to step forward, take risks and “do my own thing”.

I can see that my work in Mutare and with AfChix has had substantial impact. During the time I was the leader at AUITTC, we helped over 1,200 people develop their basic or advanced basic skills in ICT, 57 per cent of whom were females. And a quarter of the Cisco certified networking associates were also women. All of these trainees went on to make better use of the available tools, and some got better jobs as a result of this training. I am particularly proud of the fact that we helped build the confidence, knowledge and skills of women and girls in this process. I was also gratified to find that creating AUITTC helped to bring the university and community closer. The community came to know the university, and its staff could help them with their uses of ICT; at the same time, the teaching and ICT staff gained better understanding of the community's needs, which helped them re-examine their ideas about ICT and its applications.

In terms of leadership development, I still look upon myself as “a work in progress”. I'd like to be the kind of leader who reaches and has an impact on thousands of people through the use of technology. I'm motivated by the desire to provide support and mentorship to those who need them. Finding out that this is my passion has been a long, winding road. But it has given direction to my leadership journey.

I have many ideas about things I'd still like to do and how ICT, OER and social networking can help individuals, communities and organisations. There is a yawning gap in knowledge production by African communities. Our continent is rich in information, knowledge, experiences and practices that, if recorded and shared, can benefit others within Africa and beyond. I would love to facilitate processes that document and share the indigenous knowledge and methods embodied in the continent's cultural and ecological diversities. Our people have used these for thousands of years, and they can help us explore the means of conserving biodiversity, stemming environmental degradation, increasing food production and combating disease.

My other plans for future development include developing online and face-to-face mentorship platforms for youth; acting as an advocate for improved policies and funding for innovative ICT projects in non-formal learning, particularly in the areas of Web 2.0, ICT literacy and grassroots e-content development; continuing to mentor younger women; and documenting my experiences to share with them. I am also working to complete my doctoral studies at the National University of Science and Technology, in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. So, there's still a long road ahead for me in becoming a leader.

My advice to any woman interested in becoming a leader in non-formal education and community development is: create your personal vision and start small; don't underestimate the importance of networking; focus on how you can be of help through leading rather than what you can get out of leading; and just keep learning and improving your skills. Some career women have husbands to share the responsibilities. I've been a single mother for the past 20 years. I owe so much to those who've supported me on my leadership journey — my parents, my son, my sister and brothers and other members of my family, the members of AfChix, my mentors and all of my work colleagues over the years. They've taught me many things about leading and strengthened my resolve. Two Zimbabwean sayings I take to heart are: “If you can *walk*, you can *dance*; if you can *talk*, you can *sing*,” and “If you can envision it, you can accomplish it; if you can *imagine* it, you can reach the heavens.”

References

- Africa Bandwidth Maps. (2012). *Africa's fibre reach increases by 32 million, to 40% of population*. Retrieved from www.africabandwidthmaps.com/?p=3144
- Cooperrider, David L., & Whitney, Diana. (n.d.). *A positive revolution in change: Appreciative inquiry*. Retrieved from www.tapin.in/Documents/2/Appreciative%20Inquiry%20-%20Positive%20Revolution%20in%20Change.pdf
- Internet World Stats. (2012). *Internet usage statistics for Africa*. Retrieved from www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm
- London Business School. (2007). *Innovative potential: Men and women in teams*. London: London Business School.

Helping Other Women through Non-Formal Education and Community Development

Chetna Gala Sinha

My Early Years

I was born in 1958 in Mumbai, the third child of six in an upper-class business family. At the time I became a student of economics at Mumbai University, India was experiencing serious social tensions. The opposition parties and social activists were staging regular demonstrations against the Indira Gandhi-led central government over rising inflation, the poor state of the economy and unchecked corruption. I decided to join a Gandhian socialist movement led by Jai Prakash Narayan, which had developed in response to a state of emergency proclaimed by Indira Gandhi in 1975. Jai Prakash Narayan and his supporters sought to unify students, peasants and labour organisations in a “total non-violent revolution” to transform Indian society. Many students were encouraged to participate, uphold and defend civil liberties and fight for the rights of the urban and rural poor. In 1977, fearing a military coup if the instability continued, Indira Gandhi called for elections. She was roundly defeated by the emerging Janata Dal, led by Morarji Desai and Jai Prakash Narayan.

I was a student leader in this movement. We decided that simply rebelling against the government wouldn't help anybody. Instead, we needed to help change society and carry out community work in the rural areas. I started working in Bihar, one of India's most backward states, helping to organise a movement to achieve land and property rights for landless labourers and women. We successfully petitioned the government, and as a result, for the very first time in India, women got property rights.

Through my work in this movement, I met Vijay Sinha, a farmer and activist from Mhaswad, a town of about 20,000 people in the district of Satara, south of Pune in Maharashtra. We got married in 1986, after which time I started working with the poor and marginalised farming communities in the surrounding areas. Living

amongst these people, I came to develop a deep understanding of their problems. The land was parched and unfertile, and the lack of employment opportunities forced many of the menfolk to seek work in the cities. The women left in charge of the farms or agriculture-related activities had no alternative but to seek loans from the local moneylenders, who demanded truly extortionate rates of interest. Talking to these women, I found that they wanted access to better and fairer banking services, but the regular banks refused to countenance this. Then I had the thought, “Well, why not to start your own bank for these people?”

Starting the Mann Deshi Foundation

I had heard about Ela Ramesh Bhatt, the founder of the Self-Employed Women’s Association of India (SEWA), in Ahmedabad. A lawyer by training, she was a part of the international labour, co-operative, women and micro-finance movement who had won several national and international awards for her work in helping unprotected and unorganised labour. Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has described Ela Bhatt as one of her heroines (“Hillary Clinton,” 2012).

SEWA is a trade union, an organisation of poor, self-employed women workers. These women make up 93 per cent of India’s unorganised labour force. They scrape together a living through their own labour or small businesses, and, unlike workers in the organised sector, they cannot depend upon regular incomes or welfare benefits. Their work is not counted and hence remains invisible. SEWA operates a co-operative bank to enable these women to access savings accounts and credit facilities and thus avoid the vicious cycle of eternal debt or dependence upon the high-interest loans of the traditional registered and unlicensed moneylenders. It also operates the SEWA Academy, responsible for basic membership education, capacity building, leadership training, communications and research.

I visited SEWA, and Ela Ramesh Bhatt gave me invaluable information about how to set up such a bank. After consulting with other such leaders, in 1997 I set up India’s first rural women’s micro-finance bank in Mhaswad. This bank, the Mann Deshi Mahila Bank, began its operations in the remote areas of Maharashtra and Karnataka. My vision was to combine access to financial services with financial, entrepreneurial and business training, thus giving these women the tools to manage their family finances. These women knew what they wanted; we just had to learn to trust them, help them identify their precise needs and allocate loans for items and livestock in accordance with these needs. These women may not have had the material collateral initially, but they certainly showed they had the capacity to build upon the bank’s loans after receiving them.

Remember, these are poor rural women — low-wage labourers and street or vegetable vendors, with little or no education and an average annual income of INR (Indian rupee) 18,000 (USD 360). Like many other women in rural India, they are also subject to all kinds of psychological, social, economic and physical abuse. As street vendors selling their goods in weekly markets and as casual labourers, they lead a hand-to-mouth existence, are unable to count on a regular income, typically receive all of their income on one day of the week and are in no position to make regular savings. Also, if they do have access to banking services, they aren’t always in a position to deposit their money as soon as it’s in their hands,

since this means taking time off work. We realised that if our clients couldn't come to the bank, we'd let the bank come to them. So, we tailored our banking services accordingly, providing what we call "doorstep banking" — a concept that is now being increasingly applied in India and other parts of the world. We formed a network of agents who literally went from door to door or stall to stall, helping these women open banking accounts, make regular savings and thus become eligible for loans. Today, the Mann Deshi Mahila Bank has six branches — in Masada, Vaduz, Gondavale, Dahiwadi, Satara and Lonand in Maharashtra and Karnataka states — has over 155,000 clients, women who earn an average of INR 40 (around USD 1) a day, and conducts 2,400 transactions daily.

The Mann Deshi Foundation

We also recognised that these women needed help in managing their money and some business and entrepreneurial training. So, we started the Mann Deshi Foundation. This NGO arm of the bank now has 11 offices in Maharashtra and Karnataka, and its programmes include the Rural Business School for Rural Women (the "B-School"), the 1000 Deshi Entrepreneurs Programme, and financial literacy, property rights, health education and farming programmes.

Founded in 2006, the B-School offers low-income women who lack formal education or have dropped out of school the opportunity to gain financial, business, management and ICT knowledge and skills that will enable them to initiate or expand their own small enterprises — street vending, goat deworming, bag making, weaving, screen printing, photo laminating, computer operating or whatever other ideas they might have. The B-School imposes no age or education limitations on enrolment, it operates on an "any-day admission" basis and its courses range from two days to three months and cost from INR 25 to INR 1,200. To date, around 46,000 women have taken these courses.

The 1000 Deshi Entrepreneurs Programme was designed to provide women entrepreneurs with business management training, mentoring and role models. The participants study modules in such areas as working capital management, supply chain management and marketing. They are assigned mentors, who work with them for 12 months, and they are also taken out to observe and learn from successful local enterprises. They are reimbursed for their transportation, food and lodging costs. Today, Mann Deshi can claim to have created 27,000 new and successful entrepreneurs within the local communities. We find that as they establish, or see others establishing, successful enterprises, many of these women show increased self-confidence and self-empowerment.

Our financial literacy courses are compulsory for every one of our clients seeking a loan. Conducting an impact study of our initial financial literacy programme, we found that out of the 54 women who studied in this programme, none of whom had ever saved before, 48 started saving monthly, 22 took out a bank loan and 24 invested in bank shares. These courses cover such topics as the importance of saving, timely loan repayment and consulting the bank whenever financial hardship arises. They range from three days to three months in duration. They're tailor-made to the various groups' requirements and they're delivered through a variety of means. For example, in conjunction with the Commonwealth of Learning, we've developed a system whereby we provide training through

voicemails. These are delivered in an informal, conversational style and are then converted for broadcast through our FM community radio station.

Technology Issues

Turning now to technology, in India, particularly in the rural and remote areas, the ICT infrastructure is extremely poor. More than half the villages lack telephone connectivity, let alone Internet access. As a consequence, enormous numbers of people waste a lot of time and money chasing down information and government officials, and the lack of information on commodity prices, suppliers and other relevant matters leads to loss of income and exploitation by middlemen. To address these problems, the foundation provides outreach services in the form of an FM community radio station, an information kiosk system and the Mobile Business School for Rural Women (two custom-designed buses that provide training in the remote areas). These services play a significant role in helping communities learn about, review and manage their agricultural and marketing activities.

The community radio station was formed in 2008 under the guidance of the Mann Deshi Foundation. However, it is owned by the Mhaswad village community and surrounding areas. Run by women volunteers on the basis of “by the people, for the people and of the people”, it is designed to educate and inform the illiterate and semi-literate who cannot be reached through print media, using instead the oral tradition of communication that is a crucial element of rural life. The station makes great use of drama and storytelling to appeal to people of all ages. It also provides an outlet for people to share their views, showcase their talents and give expression to local culture, such as folk and religious music. The topics covered include forming farmer co-operatives; micro-credit; land ownership rights; why women need equal access to land; women, property and inheritance; and health and safety issues. The station attracts a daily average of 15,000 listeners.

The information kiosks provide Internet access to up-to-date and reliable market information; they also enable online payment of electricity and other bills, account opening and loan applications, thus reducing the need to travel to the larger centres and personally attend the banks.

The Mobile Business School for Rural Women makes a range of courses available to women who, due to financial, cultural or geographic constraints, are unable to access training in a central location. The two buses have been converted and designed to operate as mobile classrooms that travel from village to village within Maharashtra and Karnataka, enabling thousands of women to learn about financial and business matters, receive vocational training and become versed in basic computer and mobile phone operations.

Coming from Mumbai, the most populous city in India and the fourth most populous city in the world, I was well used to being able to depend upon all the infrastructure and systems needed to run a business. Confronted with the realities of working in the rural areas, I soon realised that sitting around in the comforts of city life and hypothesising about what could be done to help rural women was very different from actually being there, working with them, hearing their stories and observing their everyday challenges — for example, having no electric power and/or ICT connections for 12 hours a day. But still the women came forward,

prepared to take risks in setting up small enterprises: creating photo frames or paper cups, running tea shops, selling *pav bhaji* (a vegetable take-away meal), hawking vegetables, rearing goats and sheep, selling cell phone recharge coupons, helping farmers increase the fat content in milk, selling milk and so on.

The Help We Give to Women

The courage of these women never fails to impress me because they have nothing to fall back on if they fail in these enterprises. At first, I felt like stepping in and helping them directly in dealing with their issues and fighting against all the restrictive conventions and role stereotyping. But then I realised direct intervention on my part wasn't the way to respond to these problems. What these women needed was greater understanding and support. So, we formed the Mann Deshi network to provide guidance and raise the women's profile — getting them, their circumstances and their ideas better known to other women, publishing their stories in the local press and giving them a platform from which to express themselves. This advocacy cast these women in the role of local leaders — and, lo and behold, their families and communities began accepting them in their newfound roles. This taught me that those who aspire to be grassroots leaders should listen to the people they are seeking to help and act accordingly; often, the people come up with the best ideas and solutions.

We also help these women acquire land and property. Property, combined with financial access and control, radically changes the women's standing and influence in their families and communities. Here are but a few stories about the women we have helped through Mann Deshi.

Chaya Kachare, a farm labourer who hails from a nomadic tribe, was widowed at the age of 19. She was left with a two-month-old son to care for and no money. With the help of Mann Deshi, she bought a flour-making machine and now earns a fair income for her efforts.

Nakusa, an illiterate girl who had been abandoned by her parents and was married to a landless labourer, today owns agricultural land and supports her family from the proceeds.

Hirabai Awgade was married to an alcoholic policeman who frittered away his savings post-retirement; today, she runs a successful toy-making unit in Mhaswad.

Balubai Jaggu Jadhav was a daily wage labourer in Shingnapur. Her husband took up with another woman, and she filed for divorce. Her husband transferred their farmland to someone else and refused to appear before the courts. Faced with ever-mounting debts and the need to support her children, she took out a loan from our bank to start her own small enterprise. She then enrolled in the 1000 Deshi Entrepreneurs Programme, learning about marketing and finance, and today she is self-sufficient and well able to look after her family.

Maya Khade was orphaned at a very young age and well used to poverty. Even after marriage, her situation didn't improve, because of her husband's drinking habits. She and other women in her community who were facing the same problem embarked on an

anti-liquor campaign and eventually succeeded in getting the local government to close down all the liquor shops. Her ambition was for her daughter to become a nurse and serve humanity and for her son to join the army and serve the nation. She applied for a loan from the bank to start a small tailoring business and enrolled with the B-School to learn how to run that venture. Today, she prospers.

Vanita Pise was already running a successful milk-vending enterprise when she approached us for a loan. She said that her business was now ready to be taken over by other members of her family, and she planned to create another new venture — paper cup making — which required some special machinery. This business also proved successful, and a year later, she received the Confederation of Indian Industry's Outstanding Woman Social Entrepreneur Award from the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. Vanita, the mother of three children, breaks into a broad grin as she recalls her years of doing odd jobs, like rearing goats and buffaloes and selling milk door-to-door, to support her 18-member extended family after avian flu had totally wiped out her husband's small poultry business. She recalls, "I wanted to start my own business to improve my family's living conditions, and I approached several banks for a small loan, but they refused to consider my request, saying I didn't have the necessary collateral, steady employment and verifiable credit history . . . Had it not been for [Mann Deshi Bank], my family and I would still be struggling to survive."

At Mann Deshi, we aim to create role models by promoting outstanding achievements like this. Vanita alone has inspired thousands of women all over India. When the women of Mhaswad saw her going to Mumbai and flying to New Delhi to receive an award from the Indian prime minister, they all wanted to start their own businesses. In fact, this was what prompted me to set up the Business School.

We also design and test new mobile-based applications to help women gain access to markets, market information and mentoring, and to address the specific needs of women entrepreneurs. We provide loans to enable women to acquire mobile phones so they can manage or expand their businesses, earn more money and spend less time travelling, thus helping them to better manage their work and personal commitments. Thus, an unlettered vegetable hawker like Aruna Gaikwad now uses a cellphone to source supplies from the wholesale market at Karad, 100 kilometres away, which makes her stall at the weekly market in Vaduj far more profitable. And Vandana Sazgane, a woman from a shepherd community, uses her phone to keep in touch with her children when she is away during the sheep-breeding season.

So, our story is one of shared success. Not only have we thrived, but so have the women we work with and serve. When I'm asked what has helped to shape my leadership style, I often say that the works of Mahatma Gandhi and Jai Prakash Narayan have greatly inspired my way of thinking and acting. I've been driven by the dream of making India a better place, showing those in positions of power and influence that there is a huge, untapped potential in the rural communities and the nation's women, proving that the poor can be bankable, and convincing

the decision makers that their attitudes and policies must change. I like to quote Mahatma Gandhi:

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself whether the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [home-rule] for hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.

But in fact, nobody has inspired me more than the women themselves. When I first applied for a banking licence with the share of capital owned by local women, I was denied by the relevant department of the Reserve Bank of India, which regulates, supervises and develops India's banks. The official who interviewed me asked, "How can a bank operate successfully with totally illiterate members?" Coming back by bus to Mhaswad, I confess I was in tears over the way I'd been treated. However, when I explained to the women what this man had said to me, their answer was clear: "Then we shall learn to read and write — and apply again!"

I soon found that these women were as good as their word. Despite their long days of working around the house or out in the fields, they came straightaway to class, quite prepared to spend the entire evening learning to read and write. I used to say to them, "Go home and cook first! Have your dinner and then come to class." But the women would reply, "If we eat, we'll fall asleep in class because of the long, hard working day. Once we've finished class, we'll go home and have our dinners." And whenever the women began to tire and lagged in their studies, they would take a break and dance, then continue with the lessons.

Three months later, we reapplied for the banking licence. Before we went to the Reserve Bank again, I had to explain to the women what this meeting would entail and how we needed to convince the banking official that we were dependable and should be granted a licence. So empowered and charged up were the women by the time they got to the bank, they were only too ready to show this important official just how much they knew about money matters. When we got into this poor man's office, they challenged him with, "Tell us to calculate any principal amount! If we fail, don't give us the licence. Calculate the interest of any principal of any amount without using your calculator. Let's see who can do it faster." Not surprisingly, we were granted the licence!

These are women who have found their own solutions to their problems with passion, innovation and commitment, and they've been a great source of inspiration to me. I find they bring all kinds of knowledge and skills to their leadership roles. They show that they are inherently managers, administrators and multitaskers. After all, their menfolk are either not there or only marginally involved in the home life, so they are left to manage everything on their own with little money or other support. I also find that the women tend to be more moderate and think twice before taking action. This can be a very useful characteristic. But it can also backfire on them — for example, when they give the impression of being overly modest and retiring, too apprehensive, too hesitant to say what they mean and reluctant to take risks. However, our approach is always to build on these women's particular strengths and natural attributes.

Our measures for empowerment are not just about creating awareness, confidence and opportunities for improving the women's livelihoods. We also set out to provide them with new knowledge and skills and to broaden their horizons and their understanding of what is possible. Even though many of the women are semi-literate or even illiterate, they still benefit from the kinds of training we provide through our B-School.

We also have to bear in mind our own staff's training needs. We organise quarterly internal training programmes for our staff. Last year, we ran a workshop on capacity building through open and distance learning and ICT. After this training, our staff converted existing course materials and created new programmes in financial literacy and enterprise management, using voice SMS (short message service) to make the information accessible to non-literate women. We now use these in our B-School, B-learning centres and mobile classrooms.

Some of our training uses multimedia tools, whilst some is face to face. In the case of our courses on starting a small business, we take the women to visit successful local enterprises, to let them see first-hand how these have been established and function. We also tell all would-be entrepreneurs to maintain a financial diary, to keep track of how much they save and spend. This is an invaluable means of helping these women understand how they will function in the world of business and finance. Since making financial literacy compulsory for all of our loan clients, loan default has decreased from four per cent to less than one per cent.

The women we assist may come from the lower classes of society and may be subject to all types of hardship and discrimination, but they know what they want. What they need from us is a roadmap and a vehicle to reach their goals. Let me give you an example.

One day, a woman came into the bank, saying she wanted to make some regular savings and insisting that we give her a savings plan that would reach maturity in June, at which time she would withdraw her savings, plus the interest. We asked her, "Why June?" She replied, "School starts in June, and we need money to buy books, bags and shoes for the kids. If the savings account reaches maturity in June, we'll be able to afford all those things." She knew exactly what she wanted — to invest in her children's education, to find the means of improving her family's quality of life. To the well-off, well-educated city dweller, this may seem like a small and even obvious step in understanding and managing household finances, but the difference this loan made to her family was enormous.

In countries like India, gender inequality manifests itself in virtually every aspect of social and economic life. Girls' careers are often inhibited by poor access to post-primary education and the high occurrence of early marriage. More than one-third of all child brides live in India; according to UNICEF, 47 per cent of girls are married by 18 years of age, and 18 per cent are married by 15 years of age, often without the girls' consent. As I mentioned earlier, we start out with the belief that one of the cornerstones of female independence and women as community leaders is property ownership. But it's very difficult for women to achieve or maintain this status when tradition dictates that they go to live with their husband's family immediately after marriage, where they often find themselves without any social or family network or support. Many of the women we try to help cannot rely on any support from their husbands or other family

members, so with no one to fall back on, they can be understandably fearful of failing or running into difficulties. With men, of course, it's different. They always seem to get family backing whenever things go wrong or off course. And they rarely involve themselves in managing the domestic responsibilities. Any woman striking out on her own and taking on responsibility for her small enterprise has to manage both this and her household, requiring her to essentially become a "superwoman".

But I've also noticed that once women start to receive respect in their communities, their families start supporting them more. In fact, this was my own experience. After establishing Mann Deshi Bank as a brand recognised for empowering and educating women on low incomes and for helping them become more financially independent and gain property rights, I began to be granted higher esteem, as did the other women involved in the bank.

Final Reflections

Creating India's first co-operative bank for rural women has certainly not been without its challenges. For a start, I had to prove to the world and myself that a woman could run a bank. My experience as a leader and advocate in the 1980s social movements was helpful in developing my communication skills and self-confidence. But I also had to master the complexities of the world of finance: stock market mechanisms, bank operations and financial dynamics in general.

You might ask, "How ever did you manage to balance your family life, career and public life?" I admit that I often struggled with this issue, asking myself, "Am I doing justice to my children and family?" But when I talked with my children about this, their response was, "We like you being in public life. We don't want a mother who is 'just a housewife'." This gave me the confidence and reassurance to go on. I've spent nearly all my adult life in public service. But I always make sure I make time for my family, occasions when we can share our thoughts and give each other advice. This family input inspires me, but I recognise it's often difficult to strike the right balance. Like most women, I often felt guilty when I was at work, felt I was missing out on family things — and then, when I was at home, I worried about all the things I needed to do at work.

When I moved from the big city of Mumbai to Mhaswad and married into a farming family, I became part of the traditional culture. My farmer husband and I may have been fully committed to the movement, but many were the times when I argued with him about sharing the housework, insisting that this too was part of our life together. But he was also adamant that I should be going out and working with the women in the surrounding villages rather than attending to the household duties. So yes, I was lucky to have a husband who shared my ideals and let me get on with my own work. Later on, when we had children, including twins, we asked ourselves, "Do we want our children to grow up in this place or should we move back to city life for their sakes?" But by that time, the work was progressing so well that really there was no question of us leaving Mhaswad, and so we decided to let our children go to the local school. But again I was lucky, because whilst I was travelling around the villages, my mother-in-law could take care of the children.

This is not to say that there weren't plenty of arguments with my husband and mother-in-law about how little time I spent with the family, but we were always frank with each

other, and somehow we always reached a compromise. We'd find ways of helping my mother-in-law, and she'd find ways of helping us. There were times, though, when I had to take a stand against my mother-in-law on the issue of women's rights. For example, after marriage, it is the Hindu custom for women to wear a black bead chain called the *mangalsutra*. It is believed that this protects the marriage from any evil. It contains three symbolic knots. The first represents the wife's obedience to her husband, the second her obedience to his parents and the third her respect for God. If the woman is widowed, the *mangalsutra* is forcibly broken in a special ceremony. This is a very longstanding tradition, so when I decided not to wear this chain, many people asked me why. This gave me the opportunity to explain my reasons and thoughts on women's rights, but initially these actions made my mother-in-law extremely uncomfortable. As a widow, she no longer wore the *mangalsutra*. I used to ask her whether she didn't feel this time-honoured tradition should be changed. "After all," I said, "society demands this of a woman but doesn't demand any sign of whether a man is married or not. And," I added, "this tradition of breaking the *mangalsutra* after the death of a husband is so cruel. This isn't done after a wife dies, as it's understood that the husband can marry again. But women aren't allowed to remarry." India has many such traditions that reveal bias against women. Our discussions helped us understand each other across the generational and cultural gaps and resolve our differences.

Another challenge facing us women as we try to make our presence felt in the world of business and politics is accessing their all-important networks, which are essentially male-dominated. A lot of time, effort and even aggression are needed if you're going to penetrate these networks as a woman. The social events and other activities that oil the wheels of business and politics typically occur at night, the time I usually reserve for my family. Many are the occasions when I've felt torn apart and guilty for choosing the one over the other. In 2011, as a partial answer to this problem, Mann Deshi formed a chamber of commerce for rural women entrepreneurs, a business network to officially represent their interests and provide them with an efficient information hub. We take pride in the fact that this has met with both quantitative and qualitative success.

The basis of our work at Mann Deshi is to gain an understanding of the reasons for the poor living conditions amongst rural communities, to reach out to these communities, to listen to them with utmost care and then to act in accordance with what we learn by providing them with appropriate, tailor-made services. I often regret that this way of working towards increased inclusion of the poor has not been more widely adopted by the Indian government and other authorities. Perhaps this is because, again, these are male-dominated organisations. I think many men lack or lose the skill of listening, because they are always striving to be heard, trying to be more forceful and self-assertive, and giving out advice rather than tuning in to what people are saying. And the older they become, the less they listen.

Leading Mann Deshi, I have come to recognise one quality as absolutely indispensable: listening without underestimating. The very creation of the bank and foundation started with listening. People usually have a fairly clear idea of what they want for themselves, but find it hard to define and identify the pathways they need to follow. So, it's important to assess their needs and wants. Let me tell you a couple of stories to illustrate this point.

At one time, we found that some of the street vendors were defaulting on their loans. Our recovery officers went out to ask them why this was happening, and

the women told them in no uncertain terms, “Look, we trade all day out here in the open market without any protection from the sun. In the summertime, this leads to dehydration and even heatstroke. We get sick, we lose a working day, and so we default on our loans.” The answer? The Mann Deshi Foundation started to distribute hundreds of umbrellas as interest-free loans to these vendors.

In another case, a 12-year-old girl, Asma Tamboli, came to us, asking for a job at the bank. When we asked her why someone so young wanted a job like this, she told us she’d just completed her elementary schooling and now wanted to go on to high school. But this was in a neighbouring town, there was no bus service and her parents were fearful of her travelling the long way to school on foot, so they were urging her to drop out. The only answer she could see was getting a bike, but the family could not afford one. This was why she’d come to us for a job. We agreed to employ her for the summer period, and this enabled her to buy a bike and continue with her education.

In fact, Asma became the inspiration behind another of our initiatives: the Mann Deshi Freedom Ride Bicycle Programme. We realised that one of the greatest obstacles to rural girls’ educational development is lack of transport. So, over the past few years, to get over this problem, we’ve been providing zero-interest loans for girls and their families to buy bicycles. We even donate the bicycles if the girls come from extremely poor families. So far, this programme has helped well over 2,400 girls to go on to high school.

We also set out to motivate young village girls to set their sights on becoming engineers, bankers, doctors and other professionals. As part of this effort, we conduct workshops for these girls, asking them to express their views on the issues that affect their lives, to tell us about their dreams so that we can help them think about and plan their further studies and careers.

I have to admit that I’ve found the work with Mann Deshi fascinating, absorbing and rewarding. I get great satisfaction from knowing we’ve helped transform the lives of so many women. It’s also been humbling but gratifying to receive recognition for my work from the outside world. In 1996, soon after creating the Mann Deshi Foundation, I was contacted to become part of the Ashoka network. Ashoka: Innovators for the Public is a non-profit organisation based in Arlington, Virginia, in the USA, supporting the field of social entrepreneurship. The organisation currently operates in more than 70 countries and supports the work of over 2,000 social entrepreneurs, elected as Ashoka Fellows. Six years after this, I was selected as a Yale World Fellow and given the opportunity to teach at that prestigious university for one year. In 2003, I received the Harvard University Bridge Builder Award, and in 2005, I was awarded the Janakidevi Bajaj Puruskar Award for rural entrepreneurs. Such recognition makes me feel I’ve achieved something, and that my country and the wider world acknowledge the work and energy I have put into improving the living conditions of the poor and underprivileged. Strangely enough, it was only after receiving such recognition from abroad that I earned recognition within India, and it was only after having run the Mann Deshi Bank successfully for ten years that banks such as the Federal Reserve Bank started to recognise me and our programmes and services.

Today, independent evaluations show that our work is having an impact, improving living conditions and widening perspectives and opportunities within

the local communities. And Mann Deshi has become a “global” institution. We’ve established many partnerships with major global players: with international banking systems, such as HSBC and Deutsche Bank; with renowned universities, including Yale, Harvard, Columbia, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, the University of Portland and the ICN Business School; and with foundations and organisations such as the British Asian Trust, Bonita Trust, Clinton Global Initiative, Commonwealth of Learning and HSBC Foundation.

Furthermore, I’ve been fortunate enough to meet some of the world’s great leaders, people like Bill and Melinda Gates, Warren Buffett, President Barack Obama and the former Indian President Dr A. P. G. Abdul Kalam. The Mann Deshi headquarters in Mhaswad has even been graced by a visit from Lael Brainard, the United States Treasury’s Under Secretary for International Affairs.

All these organisations and individuals help to make Mann Deshi what it is today by providing technical expertise, consultancy, funding, friendly advice, encouragement and other support. Moreover, these working relationships have helped raise awareness of the conditions of the poorest and most needy communities in remote and rural areas of India. It’s because of them that our achievements have had such valuable media exposure. Thus, the beneficiaries of the Mann Deshi programmes, some of the poorest people in our country, have gained from the local, national and international networks I’ve been able to create over the last 15 years.

Of course, there is only so much that we can do. Sadly, such ways of working towards increased inclusion of the poor are not always adopted by the central authorities, and the government’s efforts are limited. Also, I have to admit that our attempts to empower rural women are still undermined by the cultural attitudes towards them. A substantial shift in mindsets is still needed to achieve gender equality. However, I’m ever hopeful. It’s essential for those of us who provide grassroots leadership not to become discouraged, but to keep on working hard to achieve our goals and help women to achieve theirs.

References

Hillary Clinton identifies activist Ela Bhatt as one of her “heroines”. (2012, June 22). *The Times of India*. Retrieved from http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-06-22/us/32368182_1_ela-bhatt-sewa-state-hillary-clinton

Women and Leadership in Non-Formal Education and Community Development

Carol Kidu

What a privilege it is to share these accounts of the lives of three inspirational women leaders in non-formal and community education. To be honest, I am in awe of these three women.

Two of the contributors are from relatively humble village backgrounds but were born into families that fiercely valued education for girls. The third contributor is from an upper-class business family and during her university days became a student leader, involved in peaceful agitation to protest against corruption and advocate justice for the poor.

All three women display the personal attributes essential to working successfully and sustainably in non-formal and community education. These attributes include steadfast determination and strength of character, a burning passion for education for all, a strong sense of social justice, and the flexibility to be able to work outside the formal education structures and map new terrains in lifelong learning. Their stories illustrate their capacity to realign themselves to new circumstances, to work with and withstand negativity and to maintain a “never, ever give up” approach to their lives and careers.

It is uncanny that I have been asked to write this review soon after my retirement from politics — pleased with some of my achievements but frustrated that the journey in the field of lifelong learning and community development is incomplete. My journey in politics has finished by my own choice, but the knowledge that there is still so much vital work to be done to improve so many people’s lives both frustrates and haunts me. I have been grappling with the knowledge that my labours in this area will never be complete until the Government in Papua New Guinea (PNG) recognises the critical importance of lifelong learning and community development as a tool for poverty reduction and sustainable development. The stories told by these three remarkable women have inspired me and point to possible new directions for me in my passion for lifelong

learning for all. I thank them for that and trust that all of the readers of this book are similarly inspired by their leadership qualities.

In her chapter on being a leader in non-formal education in Mongolia, we read about Batchuluun Yembuu, who is the Director of the National Centre for Lifelong Education (formerly the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education) within the Ministry of Education and Science of Mongolia. She is responsible for providing advocacy and developing policies, courses and methodologies for literacy, post-literacy, equivalence and life-skills programmes, benefiting a range of learners in poor, remote, rural, nomadic and marginalised communities.

Batchuluun's family and the Mongolian culture valued education for women, and from a humble village upbringing she rapidly progressed to the highest levels of academia, becoming a young female professor who loved teaching. When the minister for education offered her the job of Director of the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education, she knew this was just the new challenge that she was looking for. The fact that she "knew very little about the needs or possibilities in non-formal education" did not deter her, and she focused immediately on "trying to get onside with staff who were clearly ill-disposed towards me and unsettled by the change". Her nurturing and egalitarian approach to leadership and respect for the older people on the staff resolved these initial leadership challenges.

Mongolia and PNG are so different, and yet in reality, the similarities and synergies astounded me. Batchuluun outlined the prevailing social environment that created a great need for alternate learning pathways. The collapse of the former Soviet Union and its socialist safety nets, Mongolia's entry into the global capitalist economy, combined with a series of bitter winters that killed livestock led to increased migration to urban areas and marginalisation in society. PNG's ongoing transition from a traditional, communal care economy based on reciprocity to a Western, cash-based economy, combined with the difficulties of isolation in mountainous terrain have had a similar impact — increasing economic disparity that marginalises the poor from formal education opportunities.

In addition, population increase in PNG has outstripped the capacity to cater to increased numbers of students in the formal system. So, a method of exclusion by examination has arisen (the failing students are often referred to as "dropouts", but "push-outs" would be more accurate). To further compound the situation, a "user pays" policy was introduced, preventing many children from entering school at all. It is important to note that PNG has now introduced a free education policy and is working towards a policy for compulsory education at the primary level. However, as a nation we are still grappling with the huge education gap created by these earlier policies.

At the personal level, as a secondary school teacher, I became increasingly concerned about the numbers of children in my husband's village (an urban village that has become surrounded by the capital city of Port Moresby) who were "dropping out" of school at the Grade 6 examinations in the early 1980s; these children could not compete with those of the educated elite from other parts of the country who were now urban people. I started a small College for Distance Education (CODE) Centre in the Pari village primary school three nights a week

to cater to interested “push-out students”. Whilst I was running the CODE Centre on a voluntary basis, I began negotiating with the Education Department to accelerate Pari Primary School into the “top-up” programme, which added two extra years of schooling to the primary level of education. Once this was achieved, I was able to gradually close the CODE Centre.

Much later, after 20 years as a secondary school teacher and part-time curriculum writer, I entered politics and made lifelong learning opportunities a key priority in my electorate, which had high levels of urban poverty and a large, frustrated, out-of-school youth population, plus high levels of illiteracy, particularly amongst women. With the assistance of Ausaid and the Chamber of Commerce, we established an NGO called Ginigoada (“Stand Strong”) Bisnis Development Foundation, which offered subsidised short courses on income-generation skills training to youths and women. Later, with the assistance of the Asia Foundation, Ginigoada introduced mobile learning units (buses staffed with trainers and equipped with educational materials) to take lifelong learning opportunities right out into the communities. The learning modules range from early childhood education to preventive health, from personal empowerment to financial literacy and business skills for youths. Thousands of learners participate in these short courses every year, but the programme is not recognised by the formal education system. The Mongolian equivalency programme (EP), which enables out-of-school youths to study for exams equivalent to those taken in regular schools, could be part of a solution to the non-recognition of informal learning activities in Papua New Guinea.

As the Minister for Community Development in PNG from 2002 to 2011, I was able to forge a new direction for community learning, through the Integrated Community Development (ICD) policy. The Department worked extremely hard to respond to the new vision by developing a set of community-based policies in social development — policies on early childhood, women, youths, disability, sports and the informal economy — to underpin the ICD policy. It was exciting work based on research and reality, but the implementation outcomes have been limited by the lack of budgetary support and of genuine government commitment to an area of education that has always been seen as outside the domain of government responsibility. Key components for the “delivery” of these new policies are Community Learning and Development Centres (CLDCs) — many of which already exist in PNG, driven by NGOs, churches and community-based organisations. The Mongolian equivalents of the CLDCs are the Enlightenment Centres, which come under the mandate of Batchuluun’s work in the National Centre for Lifelong Education and could provide comparative experiences and lessons learned to move PNG’s CLDCs forward.

In Mongolia, the name change from National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education to National Centre for Lifelong Education, in early 2013, heralded a new direction to provide lifelong learning for all — not just for marginalised groups. For me, this represents an exciting progression that I could only dream of at this stage in PNG — a progression that moves away from formalised constructs towards achieving a “knowledge-based society”. It is a dream, but I believe an important key to unlocking that dream is within the chapter by Nodumo Dhlamini, about becoming a leader in non-formal education in Uganda.

Nodumo Dhlamini previously worked in secondary education, finance, a railway company and higher education. She is currently based at Makerere University in Uganda, where she is Programme Manager (ICT and Knowledge Management) for the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM).

Nodumo was particularly inspired by her mother, “as she had persevered despite all the prejudices against women in a community where schooling was not considered a high priority for girls”. This inspiration undoubtedly influenced Nodumo to enter a field that had become stereotyped as a male domain, not only by the community but even by schools and other educational institutions, which were guilty of constraining girls from realising their full potential. Nodumo became a trailblazer for women specialising in ICT.

The university’s ICT department was just beginning, so Nodumo was able to “apply all I’d learned and create the necessary policies and systems from scratch”. Nodumo reflects that “amongst the major ICT policies I helped bring about were making ICT literacy courses compulsory for all students in all programmes”; she also succeeded in integrating the ICT policy into overall budget frameworks. It was during negotiating for these achievements that Nodumo first realised she was indeed on a leadership journey that could affect the lives of so many learners. Despite the bandwidth capacity not being universally accessible — especially in rural communities — and the high access costs, Nodumo is convinced that the learning opportunities for Africa presented by new technologies are numerous and can help develop a more enlightened civil society.

PNG faces similar problems of bandwidth capacity and ICT costs, but, like Nodumo, I am convinced that our country must use these new technologies to “leapfrog” our people into a new era of delivering learning opportunities for all. Donor-driven and corporate sector-driven small projects have been “testing the waters” for eLearning and e-medicine in PNG. However, government commitment to a comprehensive ICT development programme will be hard to achieve until (i) we have a large enough cadre of educators experienced in the preparation and delivery of ICT materials customised to suit local cultures and practices and (ii) we have developed a sense of ownership to make the new ICT educational and developmental applications acceptable and influential at the community level.

In spite of the challenges of integrating ICT into formal and non-formal education in PNG, it is critical to persevere. My dream still remains for CLDCs to become telecentres in remote, isolated communities in Papua New Guinea. The Commonwealth of Learning’s work with the Open University, with FODE (flexible, open and distance education) and now with the introduction of L3F (Lifelong Learning for Farmers) pilot projects in both rural and urban settings is helping to bridge the digital divide (at present a huge chasm!) in PNG. ICT can help our people overcome that chasm of disadvantage, and in this regard, much can be learned from the experiences of Nodumo in Uganda.

The use of modern technology, e-commerce and mobile banking underpins the chapter by Chetna Gala Sinha, in which she tells the story of helping other women in India through non-formal education and community development.

Chetna Sinha is an economist, farmer and activist, and the founder and President of the Mann Deshi Mahila Bank Ltd., a micro-enterprise co-operative

development bank with six branches, whose clients are women earning an average of INR 40 (USD 1) a day. Chetna also founded the Mann Deshi Foundation, to empower and train women and self-help groups in business, entrepreneurship, property rights and technology.

As a student activist, Chetna came to the conclusion that “simply rebelling against the government wouldn’t help anybody. Instead, we needed to help change society and carry out community work in rural areas.” Thus, she set about becoming an activist by action rather than words and by helping other women in her leadership journey. She was part of a movement that successfully petitioned government to achieve land and property rights for landless labourers and women. Through this movement, as well as living in and working with poor and marginalised farming communities, she came to develop a deep understanding of their problems. She found that quite often, the women had no alternative but to seek loans from the local moneylenders, who demanded extortionate rates of interest that trapped these women into a permanent cycle of debt. The women wanted access to better and fairer banking services, but the regular banks refused to take what were seen as the risks involved. Informed by the work of other movements seeking social justice for the poor, Chetna made it her personal mission to establish the Mann Deshi Mahila Bank and Mann Deshi Foundation.

The bank introduced a new concept of taking banking to the people rather than expecting people to come to the bank. It provided what they called “doorstep banking”. A network of agents literally went from door to door or stall to stall, helping women to open bank accounts, make regular savings and thus become eligible for loans. PNG is largely an unbanked society, but in recent years, similar concepts have been introduced to help the unbanked and the poor take their first steps on the road to sustainable entrepreneurship.

The Mann Deshi Foundation is the NGO arm of the bank. It has grown to have 11 offices that provide a variety of learning programmes, including financial literacy, property rights, health, education and farming. Financial literacy is compulsory for any client who seeks a loan.

In the rural and remote areas of India, just as in PNG, the ICT infrastructure is extremely poor, with no telephone connectivity, let alone Internet access. The explosion in mobile technology has the potential to expand learning and banking; but in PNG, high costs still prevent the comprehensive use of mobile technology to expand information and educational services from being financially viable in the immediate future. However, as with the Mann Deshi Foundation, we still have the more traditional communication modalities for learning, including community radio, drama, storytelling and the use of buses as mobile classrooms.

Chetna states, “The courage of these women never fails to impress me because they have nothing to fall back on if they fail in their enterprises. At first, I felt like stepping in and helping them directly in dealing with their issues and fighting against all the restrictive conventions and role stereotyping. But then I realised that direct intervention on my part wasn’t the way to respond to these problems.” This is a reality that I also faced on a regular basis as a politician interfacing with the social injustice and poverty experienced by many of my constituents. In addition, when I travelled as a government minister to remote,

isolated communities, I always felt inadequate and powerless as I marvelled at the resilience of these communities, and particularly of their women. The desire for direct intervention is always strong, but the knowledge that such intervention is unsustainable and thus becomes disempowering led to my passion for developing policies and laws that empower women and protect them from abuse.

Reading all that Batchuluun, Nodumo and Chetna have gone through and accomplished leads me to reflect upon the leadership qualities and styles called for in non-formal education and community development. First and foremost is clear that all of these women are driven by a deep concern for social justice and social inclusion, and a strong commitment to embracing the marginalised — and that they pursue these principles with vision and persistence. It is also evident that they develop capacity in individuals, groups and entire communities by working “with the people” rather than “for the people”, and recognise the importance of starting from where people are rather than where they assume them to be or wish them to be. They also show their ability to stand back and consider how actions, communications, learning and learning resources need to be customised to suit local cultures and practices.

They are all, in their own ways, advocates and catalysts for change in inflexible and conforming systems and institutions, such as ministries, formal education systems and banks. Providing leadership in non-conventional forms of community development and lifelong learning within, in partnership with or parallel to such highly structured and sometimes unyielding organisations requires the ability to inspire and work with those who may be unable or unwilling to countenance change. There is a long history of governments paying lip service to the importance of non-formal education and community development but being reluctant to provide the necessary funding, resources and support for programmes. NGOs, churches and other voluntary groups are often left to pick up the problems at the local level. So, for the ideal of “education for all” to become a reality, leaders in non-formal education and community development need to be capable of building bridges between governments and community providers, and between communities and the particularly marginalised. To do this, they must build trust and confidence, not only in their potential and abilities but in those of the learners; and they need to be skilful and respectful builders of strong and lasting networks and partnerships within which integrated development processes can flourish.

Something else that Batchuluun, Nodumo and Chetna show us is that whilst leaders must have clear visions and goals, they must also be willing and able to readjust in the face of the inevitable setbacks, disappointments and shifting circumstances. They need to accept that change is iterative rather than linear, and they must have the acute reflective capacity to appreciate (i) why seemingly worthwhile initiatives sometimes fail or fall short of expectations and (ii) how to avoid or circumvent the risks of failure. They also need to rejoice in their successes and those of others, no matter how small these may be, because celebration is part of the driving force for change.

From these three accounts, we can see that leaders in non-formal education and community development view themselves not simply as *providers* of knowledge and skills but also as *facilitators* in the mutually beneficial sharing of such knowledge and skills. All of these women leaders clearly recognise and value

their own roles as learners. They walk with people, they talk with people, they learn from people and they lead by example. Let me end with a quote from Albert Einstein: “Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others, it is the *only* means.”

Conclusion: Women Are Making a Difference

Colin Latchem, Asha Kanwar and Frances Ferreira

In this book, we have been privileged to gain some unique insights into how women are now taking on long-overdue leadership roles in different educational contexts, countries and cultures. In the university world, women are no longer content to sit on the decision-making sidelines. They are breaking through the so-called glass ceiling and introducing new ways of approaching the opportunities and challenges of 21st-century higher education. Their ranks and influence will continue to grow and spread. In the contexts of open schooling and non-formal education, they are taking on pioneering and path-breaking roles. And in all sectors of education, they are providing examples and encouragement for those who are following or wish to follow in their footsteps.

Some of these writers have received little public recognition or press coverage beyond their institutions, organisations or chosen fields. There must be many more who are working tirelessly behind the scenes, truly having an impact and making a difference. It should never be assumed that the men who are currently managing education institutions, organisations, projects and programmes have all the required leadership skills. If they look closely, they will often find things that are not happening as well as they should, needs that are unfulfilled, and performance and morale that can be improved. Wherever women find this state of affairs in their institutions, organisations or communities, they should reflect upon what they can do about these situations, rather than expecting someone else to push them forward. Leaders do not wait to be told what to do — they find what needs to be done and they do it. We all hold fears of rejection, of taking a risk and failing. Women can often be too modest about their skills, attributes and qualifications. They need to adopt a more confident and assertive approach. In terms of creativity and innovation, there's a lot that women can do if they only dare to speak up for themselves, spell out what must be done and say why they feel they are the best persons for the job. "Seize the day" should be their motto.

As Lucille Ball, American comedienne and TV executive, once said, “I’d rather regret the things I’ve done than regret the things I haven’t done.”

One does not have to look far on the Web to find stories about women in Africa, Asia, the South Pacific, the Caribbean and South America who are taking the initiative and providing leadership in matters ranging from climate change and land reform to education and women’s rights.

Merilyn Tahī, the co-ordinator of the Vanuatu Women’s Centre, has worked tirelessly over the years, building a network of hundreds of male traditional chiefs, police, youths and health workers who act as advocates for women’s human rights. In 2009, the United States government recognised her with its “Women of Courage” award. She argues that women are resourceful and can build on their indigenous knowledge to explore means of addressing the difficulties they face, as well as to collaborate with governments and development partners in shaping policies that address their needs. She says:

When there is no equality, the fundamental rights of individuals are abused and there is no peace in the hearts, families, communities and the world. It surfaces in various forms such as deliberate omission of women in governance, gender-based violence, sexual assault, abuse of human rights defenders, sorcery and under-resourced national women’s machineries. (UNICEF, 2010)

Nancy Iza Moreno was only 18 when she became Vice President of San Bartolome, a 300-person Kichwa community in the Ecuadorean Andes. Although her father was also a leader, she soon realised that she had to earn respect in her own right. Required to travel between far-flung communities, she became the first woman in the area to drive a car and ride a bicycle. Twenty-two years later, with Oxfam’s support, she became the first female leader of Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas,¹ helping indigenous women in four South American countries protect their natural resources, become advocates and lead lives free from gender-based violence and discrimination. Nancy says:

Women are feeling the effects [of climate change] more, because they are more tied to the earth. They are the ones who work in the gardens and in the fields. No one listened to me at first, because they weren’t used to a woman in charge. I had to develop a strong personality. (Kramer, 2012)

Every year, the Moremi Initiative for Women’s Leadership in Africa² selects 25 outstanding African women aged 19–25 who demonstrate leadership capabilities to become Fellows and receive special leadership training. In 2012, one of those selected was Sierra Leonean Adima Etta Yambasu. A University of Ghana graduate in political science and history who was studying for a post-graduate degree, she had previously worked in refugee camps in Gomoa, Ghana, co-ordinating a youth network and assisting and counselling young women victimised and traumatised by years of civil war. She said:

I am going to use this award to address critical issues that affect . . . girl children’s education and health, women’s participation in governance and politics [and] women’s rights and empowerment . . . The full

¹ www.tni.org/organisation/coordinadora-andina-de-organizaciones-indigenas-caoi

² www.wikigender.org/index.php/Moremi_Initiative:_Investing_in_Women_and_Girls'_Leadership_in_Africa

participation of women in leadership is a pre-requisite for positive change and development in Africa, and addresses the current problem of leadership imbalance. (Awoko Business, 2013)

Kuhu Das, a physically challenged woman activist in India, tells what prompted her to combat the enormous discrimination against women like herself by training them to be leaders in a movement for their rights. She says:

I had polio in early childhood, causing impairment in my mobility . . . When I started working for the empowerment of women in general, I realised that empowerment programmes did not include disabled women. [So,] I started an organisation in 2002 called the Association for Women with Disabilities. I became a leader over time; not part of my plan, but it happened that way . . . In South East Asia, largely because of this initiative, disabled women [are] coming forward, speaking for themselves and showing strong leadership to other disabled women. (Health Exchange, 2007)

In rural Afghanistan and Pakistan, Professor Sakena Yacoobi has risked raids, floggings, imprisonment and even death to provide literacy programmes for girls and bring education to over 350,000 women in learning centres and underground home schools. And her Afghan Institute of Learning, which she founded in 1995 to provide teacher training, education and health services, has benefited eight million women. Her initial commitment arose from witnessing her mother bear 15 children, only five of whom survived (Global Room for Women, 2011a). She says:

I am often asked why I do the kind of work I do . . . Each time the question is posed, I am reminded of the children in Peshawar when they first come to school. In their eyes, I see fear, sadness and hopelessness. But in just a few weeks, the same children are standing taller, laughing and playing with smiles across their faces. And I answer the question with this: when you make education available to Afghan children, it is like giving them a new life and hope for their future. (Afghan Institute of Learning, n.d.)

Managing her time between a journalistic career, politics and raising three young children, Humaira Awais Shahid was elected to one of the seats reserved for women in the conservative Provincial Assembly of the Punjab. She developed a reputation as “the most unmanageable woman in the legislature”. She tabled groundbreaking resolutions to protect women’s rights, to recognise acid crimes as attempted murder and to prohibit honour killings and women being forced into marriages to atone for crimes committed by male family members. All of these were eventually unanimously passed by the assembly. Despite being part of the political establishment, she was faced with never-ending resistance and prejudice both inside and outside the parliament. Szymanski (2004) quotes her as saying:

To my horror, most of the time, [we] aren’t allowed to speak up in debates. It’s like we are just there to amuse the male legislators. Women’s issues . . . will never totally disappear from the agenda of the [assembly], but they will only be touched upon and never debated. Women’s empowerment is a fashionable discourse.

In 2012, the Pakistani-Canadian journalist and documentary film-maker Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy won an Oscar for best documentary in the short

subject category for her film *Saving Face*. This film exposes acid attacks on women in Pakistan, shows the British-Pakistani plastic surgeon Mohammad Jawaid performing reconstructive surgery on survivors of these attacks and tells the stories of the survivors going through the recovery and reconciliation process. The film was shot primarily in the cities of Rawalpindi, Karachi and Islamabad, where thousands of women are scarred by acid attacks and are victims of other horrific crimes that are rarely reported. In her acceptance speech at the Academy Awards ceremony, Ms Obaid-Chinoy said: “For all the women in Pakistan working for change, don’t give up on your dreams — this is for you.” Valarie Khan, Chairperson of the Acid Survivors Foundation, said: “This documentary shows we are not powerless — Pakistani women . . . are not victims anymore, but agents of change” (Abbas, 2012).

Azra Jafari was Afghanistan’s first female mayor, in Nili in Daykundi province. Fighting to improve conditions for her community and women’s rights, she was warned by a powerful local mullah against “exploiting her femininity to complete a few projects and influence our women”. Three months later, impressed by her work, he was thanking her, saying, “If a man could do just half of what you’ve done here, our province will surely flourish.” They now work well together, but Jafari says:

There are plenty of men here with no ambition to work, who are bad at their jobs and on whom a lot of money has been wasted. Because they are men, no one really asks them, “How successful have you managed to be?” But as the only female mayor, I am always being asked, “Show us what you’ve done for your people.” (Motevalli, 2013)

Regardless of geographical, social or physical circumstances, individual women can make a difference, however unsure they may be of themselves at the outset. All of these women were self-starters. They managed to maintain their vision and courage and to overcome setbacks and disappointments. As they took their beliefs, knowledge and skills to the wider community, their confidence and influence grew with time.

Leadership can also be displayed by groups of like-minded women who become outraged about something, are committed to a cause or principle or want to achieve something for the common good. The community-led approach employed by the international development agency Tostan³ taps into existing social connections to create ever-widening networks, learning partnerships and resource sharing, thereby bringing about positive practices and eliminating harmful ones. Women and girls play a central role in this, and the outcomes have included (i) the collective public abandonment of female genital cutting and child/forced marriage in over 4,000 communities in Senegal, Burkina Faso, The Gambia and Guinea, (ii) new forms and lines of communication between men and women, (iii) the creation of community management committees, the majority of which are headed by women, (iv) increased involvement of women in civic activities and community-managed micro-credit operations and (v) increased birth registrations, marriage certificates and school registrations. Molly Melching, the founder and Executive Director of Tostan, says:

³ Tostan is a non-governmental organisation whose mission is to empower African communities for sustainable development and social transformation in the respect of human rights; see www.tostan.org.

The first thing I always say about lasting change and community development is that when someone learns their human rights, they cannot unlearn them. When a woman knows that she has the right to health, a clean environment, a life free from violence and the right to have a job and economic security — she doesn't forget that.

When whole villages, their intra-marrying communities and their social networks all publicly declare the promotion of these human rights in front of everyone — that cannot be undone. (Melching, 2013)

As Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women, said in her recent visit to Senegal: “In critical processes and decisions, there must be a critical mass of women.”

Women in the small, remote, socially disadvantaged rural community of Fancy in the Caribbean nation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines embarked on a community development initiative in income generation, social training and non-formal education using information and communication technology (ICT), with the assistance of The University of the West Indies' Women and Development Unit (WAND) and Distance Education Centre (Soares & Thomas, 2009). The women in the Fancy Community Help Group (FCHG) developed their own version of a community banking system, which provided emergency assistance to members and access to medical care not available within the community, and enabled members to invest in their children's education and income-generating activities such as farming. Soares, Thomas and Batson-Rollock (2009) suggest this example shows that rural and low-income women have the capacity and the creativity to conceive workable and effective responses to community needs and see themselves as leaders who can render assistance in practical and altruistic ways.

Engaging men and explaining the benefits of the projects for the entire household and community can bring enormous benefits. For far too long, achieving gender equality has been seen as a “women's issue”. In fact, the whole of society needs to take responsibility for and collaborate in breaking down entrenched stereotypes and achieving gender equality. Dr Denis Huber, the former Executive Director of the North-South Centre (officially the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity), says, “Gender equality is not about empowering women alone . . . We need to convince men that they have something to gain from getting involved in the so-called ‘women's issues’” (Neel, 2012).

And as Afkhami, Eisenberg and Vaziri (2001) observe, women's leadership, like women's participation or women's power, does not need to signify men's loss of leadership, participation or power. Not only women but all of society will gain politically, economically and culturally by levelling the power imbalance between men and women. Gender equality is a human rights issue and a human development issue in which both women and men should be proactively involved. As Aung San Suu Kyi (1995) said at the 1995 NGO Forum on Women, in Beijing, “In societies where men are truly confident of their own worth, women are not merely tolerated but valued.”

In today's world, organisations, communities and programmes require democratic or participative rather than autocratic or directive leadership. So, women should not wait for organisational or cultural shifts to occur, but should initiate the changes they wish to see and create the paths they would like other women to follow.

What More Can the Institutions and Organisations Do?

When it comes to both formal and non-formal education, it is often the case that women are the leaders of change, are using new methods, media and technologies to reach out to and serve individuals and communities. However, these women are likely to be operating in the low to middle levels of institutions and organisations, sometimes in part-time roles and without tenure. The fact that they are seriously under-represented and unrecognised at the more senior levels of decision-making may be due to the fact that they have become disillusioned with institutional or organisational politics, have no desire to be involved in the power struggles and prefer to work at levels where they feel they can make better use of their energies and retain their independence and integrity. In other cases, they may be held back because they lack (i) the knowledge, skills or confidence to move further up through the system, (ii) the role models to guide them or (iii) the encouragement and support they need to realise their full potential.

Institutions and organisations that wish to encourage and support more females to overcome the barriers to career progression and become leaders need to:

- Acknowledge that leadership is not simply a question of being in positions of power, authority or seniority. It involves taking responsibility and influencing change. So, it is important to nurture a culture that encourages all women, no matter what position they occupy in the hierarchy, to become leaders.
- Analyse the leadership/management demographic: the number and proportion of women and men in various management positions, the roles held by these women and men, their years of experience, their educational qualifications and the gender distribution of internal promotions and external appointments to leadership positions.
- Reflect upon where gender attitudes and behaviours exist and can be encouraged or discouraged at the various levels.
- Develop policies, plans and procedures that address gender equity and gender relations and redress the under-representation of women at senior levels.
- Avoid gender role stereotyping during recruitment and promotion processes and establish balanced shortlists of male and female candidates.
- Recognise that men and women may have different needs and work styles, and that some women may be more reticent to apply for positions of greater responsibility and promotion and thus need to be encouraged.
- Examine all stages of the employment lifecycle to identify and eliminate the disablers for greater female representation.
- Identify female talent for leadership positions and encourage these women to be open about their willingness or reluctance to apply for and take on leadership roles and to look beyond present constraints.
- Devise workplace flexibility and care schemes that enable women to both be caregivers and take on more responsibilities in the workplace.
- Provide women with more demanding work experiences to prepare them for their leadership roles.

- Provide women with leadership programmes, motivational events, networking opportunities, seminars, workshops and similar opportunities.
- Ensure that there are well-placed, highly regarded champions for women as leaders.
- Establish networks and mentoring systems to help women develop the confidence, knowledge and skills they need to become leaders in their chosen fields.
- Avoid having lone females on teams; outnumbered, they can be ignored by men.
- Ensure that performance-evaluation criteria and evaluation processes have no gender bias.
- Develop special recognition and reward schemes that recognise women who provide outstanding leadership.
- Assess the effectiveness, efficiency, outcomes and impacts of the women in leadership positions.
- Assess the organisational/community benefits of having more women as leaders.
- Conduct research into such issues as the styles and benefits of female leadership.

When it comes to helping women become leaders in non-formal education and community development, this also entails identifying women with leadership potential and then empowering, training and mentoring them in such areas as public speaking, lobbying, campaigning, community mobilisation, networking and fundraising, project planning and management. Using a “training the trainers” model, these women can then coach and mentor others, thereby immediately creating opportunities for them to apply these newly achieved attributes and competencies.

In communities where mothers have central roles and moral authority, it can be useful to capitalise on the traditions of matriarchal leadership. It is also important to try to channel the energies and ideas of the younger generation. Conducting a community development project in Malaysia, Hassan and Silong (2008) found it difficult to persuade the younger women to assume leadership roles, because they had other pressing needs and priorities; it was also difficult to involve the older women, because they felt that they lacked the confidence, knowledge and skills to act as leaders. In such situations, it may be useful to aim for inter-generational leadership — helping younger and older women to find ways of sharing their goals, experiences, strengths, capacities and energy for the common good. This inter-generational model has been employed by the Young Women’s Leadership Institute.⁴ This organisation was established in 1999 by a group of young women attending the African Women’s Leadership Institute, which was organised by the Pan-African NGO Akina Mama wa Afrika (Solidarity amongst African Women)⁵ and the Federation of Women Lawyers, Kenya. It encourages young women and girls to act as advocates, champions and leaders on the priority issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV and violence against women, whilst at

⁴ www.ywli.org/about-ywli

⁵ www.akinamamawaafrika.org

the same time developing a support base of older champions to help in developing these young women's leadership skills.

It may be useful for all women thinking of becoming leaders, in whatever sphere, to complete the following simple self-examination checklist to clarify their motivations, intentions, actions and circumstances. It may also be useful for them to revisit this checklist from time to time, keeping a careful note of their changing views, circumstances, successes and mistakes.

- Why do I want to be a leader?
- Where do I wish to be a leader?
- What is my vision of myself as a leader?
- What am I trying to achieve?
- Do I regard myself as an advocate (lobbying, representing, awareness-raising and convincing people to look favourably on some idea, interest or group) or as an activist (taking some kind of direct and deliberate action to bring about political or social change)?
- Do I have a clear plan for achieving my personal and professional goals?
- How do I rate my leadership potential?
- How do others rate my leadership potential?
- What risks do I face as a leader? What is the worst thing that could happen to me, and would it really matter?
- Does it matter to me if not everyone likes me, likes my ideas and follows me?
- How strong is my self-belief? How happy am I moving out of my comfort zone?
- How well do I understand my institution, organisation, programme or community and the changes each needs?
- How clear am I about how to bring about these changes?
- How much time and opportunity do I have to lead such changes?
- What are my personal strengths and weaknesses?
- How good are my organisational and management skills?
- How good are my communication skills?
- How strong is my social support network?
- How well do I relate to others?
- How well do others relate to me?
- How prepared am I to persist in the face of adversity and resistance to change?
- How willing and able am I to delegate and match people to tasks according to their strengths and aspirations?
- Am I good at striking the right balance between leading people and not getting in their way?
- How skilled am I in evaluating processes, outcomes and impacts?

- Who can champion or mentor me?
- Who are my role models?
- What further steps do I need to take to develop my leadership knowledge, skills and experience?

At some point in their careers, women aspiring to leadership positions in formal or non-formal educational institutions and organisations may need to assess their strengths and weaknesses and learn about some or all of the following:

- The differences between leadership and management.
- Definitions of leadership and the characteristics of good leaders.
- Leadership styles and skills.
- Management styles and skills.
- Gender and leadership issues.
- Identifying needs and opportunities for innovation and change.
- Inspiring and motivating others.
- Building a support network.
- Envisioning.
- Strategic planning.
- Costing innovation and change.
- Managing innovation and change.
- Project management.
- Risk management.
- Financial management.
- Managing people and their performance.
- Managing teams, partnerships and strategic alliances.
- Communication skills.
- Facilitation skills.
- Mentoring skills.
- Assertiveness training.
- Conflict resolution.
- Stress management.
- ICT skills.
- Quality assurance and continuous improvement.

Women interested in assuming leadership in online and distance learning (ODL) and ICT-based fields may need to improve their knowledge and skills in:

- Course development, adoption and adaptation, including the use of open educational resources (OER).
- Selecting appropriate teaching and learning methods.
- Instructional design.

- Selecting and using appropriate infrastructure, technology and media.
- Online and blended learning methods.
- Exploiting social media.

Women interested in providing leadership in community development may need to develop the following attributes, knowledge and skills:

- Building relationships with key people and organisations and identifying common needs and concerns.
- Motivating, persuading, energising and showing respect for others.
- Knowing when to step forward and suggest new approaches, and when to step back and let others take over in making decisions and changes.
- Empowering and training individuals and groups to effect change in their own communities.
- Fostering social inclusion and equality.
- Supporting local entrepreneurship and small-to-medium business development.

Women keen to provide leadership in open schooling may need the following knowledge and skills:

- Providing advocacy and gaining support for more “open” systems of schooling.
- Mounting awareness programmes.
- Fostering collaboration and partnerships to share facilities, teaching expertise, learning and support materials, technology and infrastructure.
- Training teachers to meet the needs of a broad range of learners.
- Motivating, empowering and helping young people, young mothers and working adults who missed out on earlier schooling, so they can pursue basic, primary or secondary education by a variety of means.

Helping Girls to Become Leaders

Zenger (2012) argues that it’s never too early to be teaching leadership skills. Introducing the same ideas of leadership to American children in Grades 3 and 4, in corporate sector schools, he found that nine- and ten-year-olds were quite capable of understanding such concepts as preserving self-confidence in colleagues and focusing on problems rather than personalities. In fact, he found these children lost no time in applying those principles to their parents. He observes that his children and grandchildren learned to ski at early ages, whilst he began at the age of 41. They learned the fundamentals early and well, whilst he did not, and they didn’t develop any bad habits, whereas he did.

Sheryl Sandberg, the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, observes that as early as the age of four, boys are being taught and are learning informally to be leaders, whilst girls are being encouraged to stay in the background. She says, “We say we want to educate girls, but we don’t really believe it. We don’t raise our daughters to be as ambitious as boys” (World Economic Forum, 2012). As the baton passes to a new generation, girls need to be raised to have leadership ambitions and

capabilities. There are more than 600 million adolescent girls in today's developing countries. Few of these are able to achieve anything like their potential, because social norms or stereotypes, together with a lack of educational opportunity, limit their development from infancy. One 15-year-old Turkish girl observed:

I never ever understand why boys and girls are not equal to each other. In rural areas elders think that girls are born to give birth and to marry and for cleaning the house. Girls who live in rural areas . . . are not sent to schools. Their parents are not aware of the changing world yet. (UNICEF, 2006, p. 3)

Girls who grow up with limited or no education, a low sense of self-esteem and low expectations will find it very difficult to acquire the attitudes and skills for leadership later in life. So, it is important to encourage them from the earliest age to voice their opinions at home, in their classrooms and in various community settings, to learn about things that need to be put right and improved in their communities and the wider world, and to learn from women who have overcome disadvantages and barriers to become transformational leaders. They must be taught to ignore such negatives as “women can't be leaders” or “you wouldn't understand, you're only a girl”. Otherwise, these beliefs will become engrained and drain confidence and ambition in adulthood. And wherever possible, the girls should be given opportunities to lead. This can start with helping other children to learn. As one 13-year-old Bangladeshi girl said after teaching her peers:

Before [this] I was never allowed to talk in front of adults. Now I am getting the chance and the courage to talk in my family and community. When I share the information I learned from my course, people not only listen to me but they respect me. (UNICEF, 2006, p. 9)

The Dream Foundation Trust, in Pakistan,⁶ reports on 12-year-old Humaira and her sister, the only girls in a Karachi slum who were able to go to school. Troubled by the fact that all her friends were excluded, Humaira decided to teach these other children, in her home, the lessons she had learnt in class and persuaded her other classmates to help in this. She was backed by her mother, who had endured social boycotts and verbal and physical abuse for ensuring that her daughters went to school; but they met resistance from Humaira's father and brothers and from other community members. After two years or so, such was the demand from other children that the family's modest home could no longer accommodate any more. Humaira was just on the verge of giving up when her efforts came to the notice of an organisation running street schools in a nearby neighbourhood. Impressed by Humaira's work, this organisation approached the Rotary Club of Karachi for funding, and Humaira — at that point 15 years old — was able to relocate her classes into what is now known as the “Dream Model Street School”. Six years later, the school educates over 700 children, in shifts from 07:00 until 22:00, and also provides adult literacy classes for young women and evening classes for child labourers. The 22 young teachers, aged between 13 and 24, continue with their own education at the same time as they teach the others.

More girls can be helped to discover their leadership potential. CARE (2009) claims that girls' leadership programmes are most successful when they combine opportunities for acts of leadership with self-reflection on the changes brought

⁶ <http://dreamfoundationtrust.weebly.com/index.html>

about by such acts. In India's Educate Girls,⁷ democratically elected Bal Sabha Girls' Councils help to develop leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving and communication skills for school and for life outside school. Fourteen-year-old Renuka said: "Everything changed when I joined the group of Bal Sabha. I have a lot more self-esteem and gained confidence to make my voice heard at school and at home" (GlobalGiving, n.d.).

Sadly, in some countries and cultures, programmes like these can be seen as questioning or challenging patriarchal norms or laws that subjugate women and girls. So, any initiatives in such contexts must occur in safe and enabling environments. In October 2012, the courageous leadership of a 14-year-old Swat Valley schoolgirl, Malala Yousafzai, led to her being shot in the head by the Taliban. Her "crime"? In 2007, when the Pakistan Taliban was closing or bombing girls' schools, the then 11-year-old Malala had written a diary for the British Broadcasting Corporation about living under the Taliban, and in August 2012, she had received a National Peace Award for her outspoken advocacy for girls' education and children's rights. In October, she was shot for being, as the Taliban spokesman said, "a Western-minded girl". Defending her right to do what she did, the local nazim (mayor) said, "She is just a small kid who wanted to study and spoke in public about it. This was her crime. We are all very angry about this." The shooting prompted worldwide outpourings of anger and support. In 2013, after recovering from her injuries, Malala presented to the Secretary General of the United Nations a petition bearing more than three million signatures, demanding education for all, and she spoke to 500 students at a specially convened youth assembly at the UN headquarters in New York. She said:

Dear Friends, on the 9th of October 2012, the Taliban shot me on the left side of my forehead. They shot my friends too. They thought that the bullets would silence us. But they failed. And then, out of that silence, came thousands of voices. The terrorists thought that they would change our aims and stop our ambitions but nothing changed in my life except this: Weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born . . . Dear sisters and brothers, I am not against anyone. Neither am I here to speak in terms of personal revenge against the Taliban . . . I am here to speak up for the right of education of every child. I want education for the sons and the daughters of all the extremists, especially the Taliban. The wise saying, "The pen is mightier than [the] sword" was true. So let us wage a global struggle against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism and let us pick up our books and pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world. Education is the only solution. Education First.⁸

Girls also need to be helped in envisioning their future. As a small girl fetching water and firewood on her head in her village in Nigeria, Biola Adimula visualised herself becoming an educated woman. Thanks to her brother's support for her schooling, she went on to study law and become a principal partner in a law firm, an international advocate for children and women, the Chairperson of the Women and Child Watch Initiatives and a co-ordinator of youngsters in the Nigerian Children's Parliament (Global Room for Women, 2011b).

⁷ www.globalgiving.org/projects/help-girls-to-become-tomorrows-leaders

⁸ For the full text of Malala's speech, see <https://secure.aworldatschool.org/page/content/the-text-of-malala-yousafzais-speech-at-the-united-nations>.

Leadership development can also be cross-border. The United Nations Foundation's Girl Up campaign⁹ helps teenage girls in the USA learn about leadership by fundraising and helping their peers in developing countries to become educated, empowered and the next generation of leaders.

How Can Open and Distance Education Help Women and Leadership Development?

COL (2000) suggests that open and distance learning offers a number of advantages to both learners and providers. The problems of distance and time, which can be barriers to conventional learning, are overcome by taking the learning to the learners and offering flexible schedules. There is no limit to the number of course places available, and the enrolments can be low or dispersed. Maximum use can be made of the limited number of educators, trainers or facilitators available, and account can be taken of cultural, religious and political considerations.

Open and distance learning is especially advantageous for women. It:

- Offers them online access to high-quality and otherwise unaffordable education, training, information and networks.
- Enables them to learn wherever they are — whether in rural or metropolitan settings or overseas.
- Allows them to fit their study around their family and social commitments and work schedules.
- Enables them to learn when they are unable or unwilling to attend face-to-face classes.
- Allows them to study in the privacy of their homes or within study groups, according to their preferences.
- Offers them opportunities to study subjects and topics not offered by local institutions or organisations.
- Helps them make contact with other women with similar interests and concerns.
- Provides for the needs of populations affected by violence, war or displacement.
- Makes learning possible even when group assemblies are proscribed.

In all of these ways, open and distance learning can empower women and help them improve their lives, livelihoods, personal circumstances and career prospects. It can also help them become leaders.

There is such a wonderful array of tools available for providing distance education. The ones that first come to mind are print, radio, TV and the Internet. In some contexts, traditional cultural events such as festivals, street theatre, drama and dance are successfully used in educating women about their rights and men about women's rights. The recent rise of freely accessible, openly formatted and openly licensed OER makes hitherto unavailable courses and course materials accessible to women, either for self-directed learning or to enable them to teach or train

⁹ www.GirlUp.org

other women. The UNESCO Open Training Platform¹⁰ comprises many hundreds of OER, on such topics as community development, entrepreneurship, economics and sustainable development, developing small-to-medium enterprises, gender, management, and media and communications. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) website provides links to freely available publications and training materials on gender-related topics, such as *Resource Materials for Women in Education Management*,¹¹ authored by the Department of Education and Culture, KwaZulu-Natal, and COL; open and distance learning, such as *Training Educators to Design and Develop ODL Materials*¹² and *Supporting Distance Education through Policy Development*;¹³ and entrepreneurship, such as *Learning about Small Business*¹⁴ and *Small Scale Business Management*.¹⁵ COL also has a micro-site¹⁶ dedicated to gender, open and distance learning, and technology-mediated learning, which features online and other resources as well as examples of policies and action plans for mainstreaming gender issues. In 2012, COL also produced a video series, “Distance Education Leadership and Management”,¹⁷ in which Helen Lentell, a Fellow in Distance Learning at the University of Leicester, in the UK, and former COL staff member, interviews several successful leaders/managers, some of whom are women, who talk about what they do and what they see as the critical ingredients for sustainable, quality distance learning. These videos are freely available for downloading and use by anyone. Searches on the Web will reveal many other courses and sets of materials on leadership matters, some of which are free, some of which require fees and some of which lead to formal qualifications from highly reputable institutions and agencies.

Internet forums, weblogs, wikis and podcasts, using such tools as email, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube, can be used to collect, create and share information, experience and wisdom pertinent to women’s interests and create supportive learning environments. The Internet also allows the formation of “communities of practice” — social networks of individual women who share or develop a set of beliefs and collaborate in creating some form of knowledge base, common practices or mutual enterprise.

The value of social media was clearly demonstrated by many young women who assumed leadership roles during the Arab Spring. In the societal and political transformations occurring in the Arab world, female “netizens” use of social media has evolved from social networking and entertainment to encompass civic engagement, political participation and social change. ICT has been used by women to organise rapid-response women’s rights advocacy campaigns, create blogsites, forward news stories, form partnerships with other women’s organisations and promote content across the web.

However, some words of caution are needed here. Whilst ICT has great potential to promote gender equality, as Sandys (2005) observes, there is still a “gender divide” to be reckoned with. Women’s capacity to use the new ICT can be constrained, not only by lack of technical infrastructure, computer literacy, language skills

¹⁰ <http://otp.unesco-ci.org>

¹¹ http://dSPACE.col.org/bitstream/123456789/395/1/KwaZulu-Natal_Training_Materials_for_Women_Managers%283%29.zip

¹² www.col.org/resources/crsMaterials/VUSSCcrsMat/Pages/TrainEd.aspx

¹³ www.col.org/resources/crsMaterials/Pages/DistanceEd.aspx

¹⁴ www.col.org/resources/crsMaterials/Pages/SmallBiz.aspx

¹⁵ www.col.org/resources/crsMaterials/Pages/SSBM.aspx

¹⁶ www.col.org/resources/micrositeGender/Pages/default.aspx

¹⁷ www.col.org/resources/publications/Pages/videos.aspx

and high connection costs but by gender-based determinants. As Gillwald, Milek and Stork (2010) observed in Africa, social norms and gender-based attitudes and behaviour can spill over into the ICT world. Females are usually not as well educated as men and are poorer, so these two factors alone can be barriers to their access to and uses of ICT. In some parts of India, mobile phones — cheap to buy and run — can empower women. But in some societies, men feel threatened by the fact that women and girls can communicate in private and secrecy with whomever they want, outside the reach of their parents, siblings or community elders. In some societies, this can lead to conflict and persecution (Doherty, 2013). Women's use of public facilities can also be frowned upon. And whilst radio is a commonly available technology, because women are either always busy or unable to choose what they listen to when their husbands are at home, they tend to listen to the radio less than their menfolk.

Marcelle (2000) observes that in many developing countries and cultures, as presently constituted, the ICT sector is dominated by values traditionally associated with a power imbalance between men and women. In the markets and institutional contexts through which ICT is diffused, power relations do not favour women, and the few groups representing the interests of gender equality are marginalised, have low status and are seen as having little legitimacy. The ideology that governs practices and attitudes in the ICT arena privileges profit over human well-being, including that of women, and there is very little room for renegotiation of power imbalances. There may be women who are capable of enhancing their incomes and work and leisure experiences in the knowledge-based economy, but the majority are outside or marginalised by market forces and unable to make their voices heard — for example, in regard to teleworking or telelearning.

ICT-based learning materials may contain indirect messages about the status, roles and stereotyped characteristics of men and women. And the uses of ICT for education and training are socially constructed and thus may have different impacts on women and men. So, packaging and augmenting information in ways that accord with women's needs, priorities and circumstances are critical to ensuring that they gain maximum benefit from the new tools and networking capabilities. In many situations outside formal Western education or academic contexts, where women may be initiating and authoring online programmes, females are virtually absent as substantive producers of content. It is important that women have the ability and the opportunities to produce content that is relevant to their needs and skills in using ICT to represent their viewpoints, experiences and concerns.

Surveying Commonwealth countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the South Pacific, Green and Trevor-Deutsch (2002) observed that many of the barriers women face in accessing ICT-based ODL are similar to those they face in accessing education of any kind: illiteracy, shortage of time and socio-cultural factors. They concluded that whilst a number of networking initiatives are being undertaken in regard to women and ICT, at both local and international levels, there is a need for a single point of entry, a portal or network of networks, to provide an updated summary of initiatives that are valued and successful in the local communities. This would help “connected” women, particularly those in developing countries, to find, repackage and share online information

with “unconnected” groups through whatever communications channels are available to the latter. It would also help women in developing and developed countries alike to share their knowledge and experiences in using ICT to provide education, improve healthcare and child care, help women advance socially and economically, provide social and political advocacy, establish women’s help lines and collaborate in the fight against injustice, discrimination and violence against women. The potential for this is shown in the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women’s Mentoring Women in Business Programme.¹⁸ This enables female business professionals and entrepreneurs around the globe to support women who are in the process of establishing small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, China, Pakistan and the Philippines. During the year-long courses, the mentors Skype or use 3G-enabled smartphones or tablets for one hour every two weeks to help these women develop knowledge and skills in business and technology. The process has a positive impact on these aspiring entrepreneurs’ English and their abilities to use technology as well as access and succeed in new markets.

With the right kinds of policies and programmes, gender inequities in access to and use of ICT can be overcome. Sandys (2005) provides examples of the ways in which women’s organisations, radios, radio clubs, mobile phones and computers, ICT centres, telecentres and opportunities for teleworking are helping to empower, train and liberate women. Reporting on the COL-supported Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programme in Tamil Nadu, India, Thamizoli and colleagues (2011) report that not only has this initiative enabled 5,000 women farmers to study dairy methods, goat rearing, horticulture, finance, business, credit management, law and human rights, through a judicious mix of mLearning, local television and face-to-face training, but it has encouraged the women farmers to create their own website for mLearning. Created in the Tamil language for other farmers, this site features multimedia agricultural learning materials, regional agricultural news and daily weather and market information. Cases such as these show that whilst rural women in developing countries may be poorly educated and even illiterate, they can possess wisdom and the knowledge of successful practices derived from deep-rooted cultural norms and generations of experience. The L3F network has been a great motivator and support system. The traditional methods of information exchange and consensus building need to be harnessed to modern technology-based delivery. After all, who better to reflect women’s perceptions, needs and perspectives, and the opportunities and solutions open to them, than women themselves?

To address these issues, organisations such as the United Nations, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), USAid and International Telecommunications Union (ITU) are providing programmes to train women in ICT. For example, the ITU and the Philippine-based NGO telecentre.org¹⁹ have inaugurated Telecentre Women, a digital literacy campaign that will leverage the combined reach of the Telecentre.org Foundation’s global network of 100,000 telecentres, ITU’s 192 member states and 700 sector members to deliver training in ICT use through a “train the trainer” model. The aim is not only to help improve the conditions of women, wherever they may live,

¹⁸ www.cherieblairfoundation.org/mentoring

¹⁹ www.telecentre.org

and whatever their circumstances, but to develop “The Telecentre Woman”, a manager who is capable of establishing and managing telecentre services, encouraging telecentre use in the community, adopting, adapting and producing knowledge assets, and mustering local and external resources to shape events, build aspirations and create futures never before imaginable.²⁰ Gabe (2013) chronicles the lives of 100 women from over 30 countries around the globe who were the winners of the Global Search for 100 Outstanding Telecentre Women Managers, conducted by the Telecentre.org Foundation in 2011. This illustrates how these women came to rise to positions of greater responsibility and influence, the struggles they encountered and overcame along the way, and the projects they are working on to bring about change in their communities and societies.

Concluding Remarks

Even in countries and cultures where employment and career advancement are not obviously gender-based, most organisations and institutions are still run by men who, in turn, have learned their methods and styles of leadership from other men. This is even more the case in developing countries. And this is despite the fact that as Eagly (2003) shows, being more transformational, more concerned about developing their followers, more inspirational and more ethical than men, women are more likely to possess the leadership qualities required for the modern era.

A question often asked is, “Why do only some women get to be leaders?” This is the wrong question. Instead, the real question is, “Why don’t all women get to be leaders?” The answer is obvious. In many regards, women are leaders all the time, but in too many cases, something occurs that prevents them from making progress. Phelan, Moss-Racusin and Rudman (2008) conclude that in some cases, no matter how women present themselves at interviews, they are at a disadvantage. If they come across as confident and competent but modest, they are less likely to be appointed to positions than similarly qualified men; and if they appear to be competitive, capable and ambitious, they run the risk of putting off interviewing panels whilst men get away with displaying a macho, masterful interviewing style. Some women feel that self-promotion is unbecoming. Unfortunately, such modesty feeds into the gender stereotype of women being insufficiently tough or ambitious, too ready to defer to male leadership or easily discouraged from seeking leadership positions. For women to actualise their dreams and become leaders in open and distance education and community development, they need to reflect upon their life experiences, knowledge and inherent strengths and recognise where they have a “competitive advantage”. Personal networks work well for men, so women must also try to develop supportive personal and professional networks. Like every successful entrepreneur, women must seek opportunities and take intelligent risks. As Reid and Casnocha (2012) say, “invest in yourself, invest in your network and invest in society”.

It is often said that women lack role models for leadership. As shown in the stories in this book, all women have powerful role models in their lives, in the

²⁰ See <http://women.telecentre.org>.

shape of mothers, teachers, friends and women in community and public life who have demonstrated unique and effective leadership traits and made huge differences to the lives of others. Every human being is unique. Everyone has his or her specific knowledge, skills, vocation or mission in life. Everyone seeks fulfilment. Everyone has leadership abilities. It is important to bear in mind the words of Mahatma Gandhi:

Let the winds of all cultures blow through the windows of my house.

Let me not be blown off my feet by these winds.

References

- Abbas, N. (2012, February 27). Pakistan's Oscar triumph for acid attack film Saving Face. *BBC News Asia*. Retrieved from www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17180530
- Afghan Institute of Learning. (n.d.). *Dr. Sakena Yacoobi*. Retrieved from www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org/dr-sakena-yacoobi-bio.html
- Afkhami, M., Eisenberg, A., & Vaziri, H. (2001). *Leading to choice: A leadership training handbook*. Bethesda, MD: Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace. Retrieved from www.learningpartnership.org/docs/englctmanual.pdf
- Aung San Suu Kyi. (1995, August 31). *Opening keynote address*. Read on video at the NGO Forum on Women, in Beijing, China. Retrieved from <http://gos.sbc.edu/k/kyi.html>
- Awoko Business. (2013, February 13). *Sierra Leonean selected among Africa's most outstanding women leaders*. Retrieved from <http://awoko.org/2012/06/29/sierra-leonean-selected-among-africas-most-outstanding-women-leaders/>
- Burman, K. (2011). *A gender-sensitive ICT strategy for open schooling*. Vancouver, BC: Commonwealth of Learning. Retrieved from www.col.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/gender-sensitve-ICT-strategy_2011.pdf
- CARE. (2009). *The power to lead: A leadership model for adolescent girls*. Atlanta, GA: CARE. Retrieved from www.care.org/campaigns/2009/downloads/SigProg_PW_Leadership.pdf
- Commonwealth of Learning. (2000). *An introduction to open and distance learning*. Vancouver, BC: Commonwealth of Learning. Retrieved from www.col.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/ODLIntro.pdf
- Doherty, B. (2013, July 13). Women persecuted for their phones. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from www.smh.com.au/world/women-persecuted-for-their-phones-20130712-2pvk5.html?skin=text-only
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. (2003). The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 807-834. Retrieved from www.wellesley.edu/Psychology/Psych/Faculty/Carli/FemaleLeadershipAdvantage.pdf
- Gabe, V. Z. (2013). *Outstanding Telecentre women managers: 100 stories*. Quezon City, Philippines: Telecentre.org Foundation. Retrieved from [http://telecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Outstanding%20Telecentre%20Women%20Managers%20100%20Stories%20\(English%20Edition\).pdf](http://telecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Outstanding%20Telecentre%20Women%20Managers%20100%20Stories%20(English%20Edition).pdf)

- Gillwald, A., Milek, A., & Stork, C. (2010). *Towards evidence-based ICT policy and regulation: Gender assessment of ICT access and usage in Africa. Volume One. 2010 Policy Paper 5*. Cape Town: Research ICT Africa. Retrieved from www.ictworks.org/sites/default/files/uploaded_pics/2009/Gender_Paper_Sept_2010.pdf
- GlobalGiving. (n.d.). *Empower girls with life skills: Create leaders!* Retrieved from www.globalgiving.org/projects/help-girls-to-become-tomorrows-leaders/
- Global Room for Women. (2011a). *Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, Afghanistan: Biography*. Retrieved from <http://globalroomforwomen.com/sakena-feature-page/176-dr-sakena-yacoobi-new-biography.html>
- Global Room for Women. (2011b). *Biola Adimula, Nigeria: Biography*. Retrieved from <http://globalroomforwomen.com/biola-adimula.html>
- Green, L., & Trevor-Deutsch, L. (2002). *Women and ICTs for open and distance learning: Some experiences and strategies from the Commonwealth*. Vancouver, BC: Commonwealth of Learning. Retrieved from www.col.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/women%20and%20ICTs.pdf
- Hassan, Z., & Silong, A. D. (2008). Women leadership and community development. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 23(3), 361–372. Retrieved from www.ufhrd.co.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/3-20-refereed-paper.pdf
- Health Exchange. (2007, February 20). Disabled women leaders: The new face of disability. Retrieved from <http://healthexchangeneeds.com/2009/02/20/disabled-women-leaders-the-new-face-of-disability/>
- Hoffman, R., & Casnocha, B. (2012). *The start-up of you: Adapt to the future, invest in yourself, and transform your career*. New York: Crown Business.
- Kramer, A. (2012). *In South America, indigenous women break new ground*. Oxfam America. Retrieved from <http://firstperson.oxfamamerica.org/2012/05/24/in-south-america-indigenous-women-break-new-ground/>
- Marcelle, G. M. (2000). *Transforming information & communications technologies for gender equality*. Gender in Development Monograph Series #9. Gender in Development Programme. New York: UNDP. Retrieved from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Seminar-Series/20210395/mono9.pdf>
- Melching, M. (2013, January 1). Giving economic freedom to women in West Africa. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from www.huffingtonpost.com/molly-melching/giving-economic-freedom-to-women-in-west-africa_b_2535792.html
- Motevalli, G. (2013, February 24). Afghanistan's first female mayor proves critics wrong. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/feb/24/afghanistan-first-female-mayor
- Neel, A. (2012, November 11). Gender equality: More than just “women’s issues.” *Sunday’s Zaman*. Retrieved from www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=297796

- Phelan, J. E., Moss-Racusin, C. A., & Rudman, L. A. (2008). Competent yet out in the cold: Shifting criteria for hiring reflect backlash toward agentic women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 32, 406–413. Retrieved from <http://pwq.sagepub.com/content/32/4/406.abstract>
- Sandys, E. (2005). *Gender equality and empowerment of women through ICT*. New York: United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. Retrieved from www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/w2000-09.05-ict-e.pdf
- Shahid, H. A. (2012). *Devotion and defiance: My fight for justice for women*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Soares, J., & Thomas, M. (2009). Leveraging ICTs for open and distance learning in non-formal education for Caribbean women: The case of St. Vincent & the Grenadines. *Educacion Superior y Sociedad*, 14(2), 109–124. Retrieved from ess.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/index.php/ess/article/download/63/50
- Soares, J., Thomas, M. L., & Batson-Rollock, C. M. (2009). Community banking for all: Rural women's savings and loan scheme in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 4(2). Retrieved from www.jrcd.ca/viewarticle.php?id=411
- Szymanski, T. (2004, January). Humaira Awais Shahid: Fighting forced marriages. *World Press Review*, 51(1), 31.
- Thamizoli, P., Francis, H., Soundari, H., Kamaraj, K., & Balasubramanian, K. (2011). *Learning for farming initiative: Longitudinal study tracing the Lifelong Learning for Farmers activities in Tamil Nadu, India 2011*. Vancouver, BC: Commonwealth of Learning. Retrieved from www.col.org/PublicationDocuments/ProgEvalReport_L3FarmersIndia_2011.pdf
- UNICEF. (2006). *Violence and discrimination. Voices of young people: Girls about girls*. The Expert Group Meeting on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child, Florence, 25–28 September 2006. Retrieved from www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/elim-disc-viol-girlchild/ObserverPapers/UNICEF%20Girl%20Child%20report.pdf
- UNICEF. (2010). *UNICEF East Asia and Pacific*. Retrieved from www.unicef.org/eapro/about.html
- World Economic Forum. (2012, January 27). *World Economic Forum calls for more women leaders*. Retrieved from www.weforum.org/news/world-economic-forum-calls-more-women-leaders
- Zenger, J. (2012, December 17). We wait too long to train our leaders. *Harvard Business Review Blog Network*. Retrieved from http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2012/12/why_do_we_wait_so_long_to_train.html

PERSPECTIVES ON OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Despite significant progress in female emancipation during the last century, women remain in the minority when it comes to formal leadership positions. Today, they hold only 21 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide. In the 53 Member States of the Commonwealth, only six heads of state are women and just four are heads of government.

Women's empowerment and gender equality are central to the Commonwealth of Learning's agenda of "learning for development". *Women and Leadership in Open and Distance Learning and Development* clearly and eloquently demonstrates that women's leadership is a critical step in promoting gender equality.

Enabling girls and women to overcome cultural barriers and thereby access educational opportunities whilst fulfilling other responsibilities calls for radical solutions; these include the pioneering of open and distance learning policies, organisational processes and programmes to promote gender equality. Such work requires far more than empty rhetoric or cursory gestures. It demands multi-site, multi-perspective, innovative action — encouraging and supporting girls' participation in schooling, empowering and developing women's capacity through non-formal education and participation in higher education, and enabling more girls and women to be contributors to and leaders of such initiatives.

In this global context, *Women and Leadership* could not have come at a better time. Many women of the Commonwealth Member States in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia continue to face great challenges of severe discrimination and violence. Education is one means of equipping these women to deal with their ongoing struggle, one step at a time. Each and every woman who comes forward to take a lead in these matters makes a difference and clears the way for those who follow.

The authors and editors of this book are such leaders. *Women and Leadership* provides a unique set of insights into the aspirations, visions, setbacks, disappointments, breakthroughs and successes of 12 remarkable women who are, or have been, engaged in open and distance education and in helping other women to become leaders. This book is not weighed down with academic jargon. Rather, it lets us hear the voices of women who have led, or aspire to lead, open and distance innovations in a variety of socio-economic contexts. Readers learn how, in so doing, these women have broken the mould of what was expected and allowed within their particular societies.

Their articulate, instructive accounts will inspire many other women to find their own pathways to leadership.

PRINTED IN CANADA

Printed according to environmentally progressive print practices, using chlorine-free, recycled fibres. Electricity used in manufacturing the paper stock has been offset by Green-e renewable energy certificates.



MIX
Paper from
responsible sources
FSC® C014956