



Photo courtesy of Reidar Kvam

CONVERSATIONS WITH WOMEN ON LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

SRILATHA BATLIWALA
AND
ARUNA RAO



INDEX

ELA BHAT	India	4
WU QING	China	5
SOLEDAD LARRAIN	Chile	7
CECILIA LOPEZ	Colombia	8
MARTA LAMAS	Mexico	9
XIE LIHUA	China	11
SUZANNE PHARR	USA	12
VIRGINIA VARGAS	Peru	13
SUELI CARNEIRO	Brazil	15
AUDREY JOHNSON	USA	16
OLIVE SHISANA	South Africa	18
ERNA WITOELAR	Indonesia	19
GLORIA BONDER	Argentina	21
JIHAD ABU ZNEID	Palestine	23
LUCY NKYA	Tanzania	24
NGUYEÃN THÒ OANH	Vietnam	27
JIRINA SIKLOVA	Czech Republic	30
MAIRO BELLO	Nigeria	32

INTRODUCTION – WOMEN’S INTERESTS AND LEADERSHIP

The conversations with eighteen outstanding women leaders that follow elucidate women’s visions, their perspectives on coalition building and leadership, and fundamental questions on how to challenge power and accountability.¹ In their own words, these women talk about leadership and particularly women’s practice of that leadership for social change. To support women’s leadership, they point to the need for:

- Building an enabling environment for the articulation of women’s visions of development and rights at a global level
- Supporting coalition building within the women’s movement and across women’s organizations as well as coalitions between the women’s movement and other social change movements
- Challenging power structures and resource control in the political, economic and social arenas and in all types of organizations that keep women and women’s interests out
- Supporting the emergence and sustenance of women leaders at all levels for a transformative social change agenda
- Building accountability mechanisms across institutional arenas for women’s interests

At the outset, we need to unpack assumptions about women’s interests and leadership. Women’s interests are problematic for two reasons. First, ‘women’ like men, are not a

1. This study on women leaders and social change was commissioned by the Ford Foundation. Interviews were conducted between March and July 2002 over the phone and in some cases, face-to-face.



social category – they cross social categories such as race, ethnicity, class, language and region. Accordingly, their ‘interests’ will vary depending on the importance in their lives of other social categories. Thus, women and women’s organizations will not all focus on similar interests and very few in fact will focus on a ‘feminist’ agenda partly because of the social opposition to changing fundamental relations of gender and power in most communities and institutional arenas. Almost all of our interviewees communicated their support for women’s interests but qualified their support for ‘feminist’ interests and leadership. Some clearly pointed out that there are many feminisms and many feminist interests and strategies for change. At the same time, men’s systematic control over women’s sexuality – what we might call the “sexual contract” — crosses all institutional arenas such as the family, community, market and the state. This argues for congruence at a very basic level of women’s interests. As women across the board continue to play a key role in reproductive activities in the family and community, they will be more concerned for support and capacity building in carrying out these responsibilities. It is primarily women in Tanzania for example, who have developed community-based networks to care for people living with AIDS (with negligible government support) as this is seen both by themselves and the community as an extension of their care-giving role.

Women’s leadership also needs to be unpacked both because it is but one in a range of strategies to advance women’s interests and also because it is not always enacted in favor of women’s interests. Erna Witolear as Minister for Public Works and Infrastructure in the Wahid cabinet in Indonesia could do more for women’s access to housing than many avowed women’s organizations in that country. Erna does not see herself as a feminist or necessarily as an advocate for women’s interests. She does see herself as a change agent in favor of poor peoples’ interests including women’s interests and operates using a gender-differentiated analysis of policy options. Erna’s example suggests that a gender-sensitive policy maker or advocate who does not self-identify as a women’s advocate can have an enormous beneficial impact on women. At the other end, women’s constituencies if they are organized and resourced are equally important in advancing a women’s agenda.

In addition, while it is true that more women than men tend to be advocates for women’s interests both practical and strategic, it is also true that women’s leadership is not always focused on advancing a women’s agenda. Jirinia Siklova in the Czech Republic was an active participant in the Velvet Revolution, which was about democratization, free speech, and the right to dissent. Secondarily, she is interested and works for gender equality issues in the labor market, in the context of that country’s rapidly aging population, and in building the field of academic and popular understanding of the nuances of gender differences in policy and programs. Women’s leadership can in fact also be retrograde to women’s interests. In that same country, the two right wing political parties (that espouse neo-liberal policies and conservative politics) are led by women and widely supported by women voters. Margaret Thatcher of Britain and Jayalalitha (Chief Minister of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu) are both women leaders who for different reasons, one could argue, were/are not good for women.

Notwithstanding the complications in the terms ‘women’s interests’ and ‘women’s leadership’, we are, for the purposes of these conversations, concerned with women’s leadership that advances a positive social agenda inclusive of women’s interests but not exclusively so. As the conversations show, women’s leadership is an important element in advancing equity and social justice for all.



ELA BHAT (INDIA)

Ela R. Bhatt founded the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India and has been a tireless advocate for the rights and development of poor women workers in the informal sector in India and worldwide. A lawyer by training, she began life as an organizer for the Textile Labour Association in Ahmedabad, India, a major node of the Indian textile industry. Disillusioned by the male domination of the union, the marginalization of the women members' concerns, and the gradual elimination of women from the workforce, she founded SEWA in 1972. Under her leadership, SEWA revolutionized strategies for organizing and empowering informal sector and self-employed women workers. She helped innovate programs of savings and credit, a women's bank, production cooperatives, and negotiations with city and state authorities for more enabling policies towards informal and self-employed workers. Under her guidance, the SEWA movement has mobilized hundreds of thousands of women workers in the country and then became international, with the formation of Homenet, the International Federation of Homebased Workers. In recognition of her pioneering contributions to both policy and practice, she was nominated to India's Upper House, the Rajya Sabha, served as a member of India's Planning Commission, and also won the prestigious Magsaysay Award. This shy, self-effacing but passionately committed and tireless pioneer belies popular images of a leader.

I don't know what an innovative leader is or if I am one. What I have done is very basic. Maybe the uniqueness is that we organized the unorganizable and brought them into the mainstream of the union movement, or the uncreditworthy into a bank!

I believe that women's leadership has a great impact. It is different from traditional forms of leadership because the culture of women is unique. In the textile union, I was the only woman union official, although nearly half the members were women. The president, a man, would enter a meeting like a big person, make a joke, the women would politely laugh, and then conduct the meeting without much involvement of the participants. The timings were set according to the norms of the formal sector – at times that suited men, so hardly any women workers could attend. But women were nearly 45% of union members at that time, and very loyal to the union. Even when their strength went down to 10%, they participated in every union activity – strikes, marches, meetings. Then the union developed the ideal of the "sansaar" (homemaker) role of women to justify displacing them with machines or with male workers. I tried to stop this, but failed.

Women deal with issues differently - they are slow, and take a lot of time to build consensus. They are more serious, direct, and patient. Women leaders need to listen to members, checking in with them and testing their readiness to move on issues. But I do not feel that women have come together enough to provide feminist leadership; I think women have failed to form a common vision of society and the future of women. My colleagues and I have been out-casts [from the feminist movement in India] maybe because we [SEWA] are membership-based and so huge, we have the strength and numbers to fight; maybe other groups may get intimidated, feel they will be devoured! Maybe it is also because we are Gandhians.

My interest is in constructive work – fighting is necessary at times, and I'm not afraid to fight – but tackling the concrete problems of poor women is also very important. If a poor village doesn't have a well or a road, we will struggle for that – and take up all the battles in between to get to that goal. Going through all these steps, even if you fail, is very empowering. And when we approach anybody, even if they are not friendly to us, we believe in the goodness of every being, that they can do good – including myself. That keeps me healthy. When you try to find goodness, nobody loses, everybody gains. But we are too slow – even I myself. And we need to understand more about the world and ourselves. Women don't have enough contact with the outside world, whereas men bring



all sorts of information from outside, so they know more and can take decisions quickly.

My practice of leadership is based on bringing individuals with no voice into the mainstream. Between 1964 and 1970, I became increasingly agitated that so many workers were outside the mainstream of the labor movement, the majority being women. I felt strongly that women workers in India should play a role in the movement, and therefore worked to unionize the "unorganizable".

I think there are two areas that most need to be addressed in the realm of social justice work in India: poverty and diversity. As long as India remains poor, no progress can be made. I feel that diversity is India's plus point, and it must be maintained and nourished within a structure of unity. Eradicating poverty and fostering diversity will bring India into a leadership position in the world. More specifically, I believe that social justice work needs to focus on empowering individuals through employment. For women and for the poor, organizing is a critical tool and therefore, a current priority in justice work needs to be organizing around work. The poor always ask for work, not for charity or the dole. This also means that informal workers' contribution must be recognized, protected and enhanced, especially in India where informal workers are responsible for the production of most goods and services. There has been a lot of change, but the political visibility of the informal economy and women's contribution is yet to come. One of the greatest challenges and priorities is to have women's participation and leadership in the economy recognized by policy makers.

In order to address women's problems we must look for solutions within the larger economy. Foundations must look at every grant in terms how women will participate [in that project] and how it will benefit them. They should examine what part of the budget is applied to the goal of women's empowerment and specifically, question if when they talk about "women" they mean women in the informal economy and in poverty. There must be overlap and integration in this area for there to be real change.

Overall, I think organizing one of the best strategies for bringing about gender and social justice. It is critical that we expand the participation of women in every forum and allow them the space to change the values and norms as they become empowered. I myself was timid in school and then faced many people in textile union who attempted to discredit me. I was able to draw strength from the warmth and support of other women members and my husband. I would not say that my leadership has brought about changes – they have been the result of the work of thousands of women, the SEWA women and all of their efforts.

I think the next layer of leadership for gender equality and social justice work is present, it needs only to be tapped. At SEWA we have continually tried to identify and train new leadership. I have traveled up and down the country meeting thousands of small women's groups and found that each group had at least three or four younger women leaders. They are there; we just have to give them the opportunity.



WU QING (CHINA)

Wu Qing is well known for fighting for the rights of rural women in China. She was trained as a teacher. She is currently serving her fifth term as a People's Deputy to the Haidian People's Congress, where she has pioneered an entirely open, transparent, participatory and accountable way of functioning. Because of these innovations, she was awarded the prestigious "Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service" in 2001 in Manila. She was the 4th Chinese recipient and the first Chinese woman to receive this award. She has also been a supporter of women's empowerment work in China, and adviser to the Rural Women Knowing All project of the All China Women's Federation, run by Xie Lihua. Wu has also served as Honorary Chair of Women's Intercultural Network in the U.S. and has numerous awards in teaching.



I have never thought of myself as a leader. I am a person and a citizen. Like a writer, nobody becomes a writer because they say they are – people have to read and like what they write for them to be called a writer. But as my actions and ideas are accepted by people, they may regard me as a leader. I am not a leader in the traditional sense of the word. As a People's Congress representative, I am even further from [usual] definition of a leader because you are elected by the people – in that sense, the people are my leader. My job as a representative is to find out the needs and priorities of my constituency and act upon those. In this way the people lead because what I do reflects their needs. My relationship with the people is one of mutual learning, monitoring and communication. To be a good leader (within this sort of exchange relationship) you must not separate yourself from the people, but at the same time be half a step ahead. An innovative leader must have a vision, an idea of what he/she wants to do in the future and then develop strategies to reach those goals. It is critical to be innovative because no two situations are alike and it's a leader's responsibility to find the best approach in each.

How have I been innovative? Last year I was awarded the 2001 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service because I was the first people's representative who set up office hours for the constituents. I believe I cannot do a good job if I don't understand the situation of the people and continually hear their ideas and problems. I must work with my constituency to use laws to create change. One issue I have been addressing is education for the children of peasant migrants. I worked at improving communication between the headmasters of the school for the peasant children and the leaders of the Beijing Municipality. They passed a new regulation for education of migrants' children, and I brought people together to talk about implementation of the law. Again though, I think the passing of the regulation depended on the help of many people. It was not any one person's effort. One person cannot change the world and thus, it is important to cooperate and share.

Women know how to share because of their historical role as the center of the family. In this way, women leaders tend naturally use the learning/exchange model that is necessary for social justice work. However, I think it is still difficult for women to take up leadership positions due to the role they have played in the past: tending to the home while men took charge outside the home. As a people's deputy, I try every day to do something to benefit women and help to shift the norms. For example, the training school for the Rural Women Knowing All had trainees from the rural areas. Seeing their change is encouraging, but it also makes us appreciate that it is a slow process if it is to be long term – it's like peeling an onion.

Women's leadership needs to know what is particular to a women's group, while challenging the mainstream attempt to exaggerate biological uniqueness and use it as an excuse to limit access to power or resources. The best way to overcome the lack of recognition that women face is to 1) always stay connected to the people by reporting to them and obtaining their guidance; and 2) use the constitution and laws to further your cause whenever possible.

For example, The constitution of the People's Republic of China says that all the power of the PRC belongs to the people. So, before I attend a People's Congress meeting, I ask the constituency to write me about their ideas and problems, and then I report back to them after the meeting. In one dispute between a university campus' residents and a production team over the location of a waste disposal pit, I used the Constitution's Article 53 regarding social public morality to help affected citizens pressure the Municipal Government to move the pit to a better site. The problem was solved in five days, and even the government officials learnt something about the Constitution!

The most important issue for all leaders, regardless of gender, is how they treat people. It is my hope that China will eventually let all people be real masters, citizens in the genuine sense meaning that they know about their rights and obligations, utilize their potential and care about the country. In order to foster new leadership, we need to create opportunities and space for young people to develop. We need to be careful not to impose our approach on others as there are many models for doing social justice work and young people need to learn for themselves in order to then continue the cycle of putting learning into action.



SOLEDAD LARRAIN (CHILE)

A long-time and well known women's rights activist and advocate, Soledad Larrain trained as a psychologist. She was active in the feminist anti-dictatorship movement in Chile, and headed the Chilean Democratic Alliance. After the transition to democracy, she helped create the National Service for Women while serving as Undersecretary in the Chilean Women's Ministry. She has worked as a consultant with the Inter-American Development Bank and is currently a UNICEF Consultant in Chile.

I believe women's leadership is falling short in Chile. The feminist movement advanced dramatically during the fight against the dictatorship but it has since lost space in the political arena by negotiating with political parties. Because we've been unable to produce strong women's leadership, the public agenda lacks feminist content. Women's issues are continually buried by party considerations. In order to develop strong leadership women must focus on the collective, not the individual. Unfortunately, I think the women who are able to gain political power begin operating independently and start to shy away from controversial issues. Good leadership needs to modify the current power structure by working from a collective base.

I am surprised to be called a leader. Perhaps it is because I played a role in the feminist movement during the Pinochet dictatorship and during the first democratic government thereafter. I also took part in the creation of the National Service for Women. I guess the most important thing I did for the movement was to help raise public awareness of key issues, most notably, violence against women.

I do think feminist leadership is different from other forms of leadership, but I have a rather skeptical view. I think we haven't been able to [transform] the public agenda – the public agenda on women and gender equality does not have feminist content. There was progress in terms of labor conditions, some legal reforms, but there is no contestation of current power structures. Feminist discourse is more radical; it goes beyond those advancements in order to question the family structure and power structure within institutions. [Maybe this is because] we negotiated our participation and feminist content within political parties. [But] in the end, political parties have not assumed feminist content in their agendas. Our causes are buried.

Good leadership has the goal of modifying structures of power. It also claims spaces not for individuals, but for the movement. The problem is that leadership has been individual, not collective – that feminist leaders drop the feminist flags to be able to make progress in politics. [But] in my experience, the leader who sticks to feminist ideas does not gain power spaces. Feminist leaders feel that they are on their own, and that sticking to the feminist agenda excludes them from politics. The ideal feminist leadership should..... represent the movement. There are some women in Congress that succeeded in [this] beyond their political alignments. They are there because the movement supports them; they are there because there were discussions inside the movement (to increase feminist representation in Congress), and they are speakers for the movement, despite discrimination or confrontation with their colleagues.

I think there are several key challenges in the fight for gender justice and social justice. Gender equality and social equality are related, and this is one of feminisms characteristics. It is important to acknowledge ethnic and class differences - also generational discrimination – in our movement we have little representation of the younger members. [But] now that we have a significant movement of indigenous peoples, feminism has little to say – it has not been involved in these kinds of discrimination. The movement in Chile has made progress in integrating women into politics and the labor market, but now needs to question the larger structural issues and power inequities, particularly in the family. The Catholic Church is a large obstacle for the movement, making it difficult to make progress in areas such as sex education, AIDS, divorce and abortion. Due to the



Church's influence and other conservative forces, the National Women's Service's agenda fails to analyze the power structure within families. How can we fight domestic violence and not question the patriarchal structure of the family? And with the integration of women into the labor market, issues of sexual harassment and workplace discrimination must also be addressed.

In our future efforts towards gender equality and social justice we need to form a broad coalition of feminist women in different fields. It is essential to reach out to those who are in the movement but do not have exposure to public opinion. The collation should cross political party boundaries and work across NGOs and ultimately construct a women's agenda that each woman can put forward in her own organization. In Congress, I feel that women should represent the movement beyond political alignments, gathering strength from and remaining connected to their base.

The incorporation of young women into the movement is something that I feel is lacking in Chile. At the university where I teach there are young feminists, but in general they do not feel discriminated against. Therefore, they believe that the feminist fight is the fight of the older generation of women. They think that progress has been made and tend not to experience (or recognize) discrimination until they attain or attempt to attain positions of power. Or when they have children. We need to change the feminist discourse to attract young people.



CECILIA LOPEZ (COLOMBIA)

Cecilia Lopez is a Colombian economist with graduate training in Demography and Education Economics. She worked at several academic institutions before getting involved in government activities in the late 1970s. In the mid 1990s, she became Minister of Environment, Agriculture and Planning. She currently works in consulting for the IADB, ECLAC, World Bank, and other institutions. She has authored several books and articles on economics, gender, and political issues. Having

resided the last three years in Washington D.C., Cecilia recently returned to Colombia to pursue her career in politics - she is currently a presidential candidate. She publishes weekly opinion articles in her website, www.cecilialopezcree.com.

I find that there are two current trends in women's leadership. The first is a more traditional feminist leadership, under which "woman" is the central issues. This view is quantitative: it is looking for more jobs, more health care, more opportunities for women. It is a vision focused on demanding women's rights. A more innovative trend in leadership is the second one, which aims to place women at the center of the development debates. This vision is represented in the REDEM approach [Uruguay-based *Red de Mujeres*] and the recent movement around the Monterrey Financing for Development meeting. This type of leadership examines how power is managed. In addition to examining power, I think it is important to find space for gender in the economic arena. And by gender, I also mean to *include considering men* because one must consider all the differential impacts of policies.

I think women have an advantage [as leaders]: we have suffered discrimination, are more sensitive because we bring life (e.g. we oppose war more emphatically), and we have a non-violent way of doing politics. We have the endurance to carry out a long-term agenda, like the fight against exclusion and poverty. I would like to find more leaders who want to challenge the power structures; however, I have found that many of the feminist leaders disagree with my approach.

There have been many quantitative improvements made for women; for example, many more women are educated today. But I think that future strategies must aim to make *qualitative* changes that substantially change the current power structures. What good is it

to have well-educated, healthy women who are powerless? I don't like the World Bank's report on Engendering Development for this reason – development does not bring gender equality. It is the transformation in social capital that matters – we need a change of rules that men are not going to undertake. In order to do this, women will have to get in to the political system with decision-making power – and *make autonomous decisions*. One current problem is that frequently women leaders do not vote as themselves, but rather as 'machistas'. A women's leader must instead propose something different and use a discourse that reaches women and reinforces the idea that power does not belong exclusively to men. But to take this qualitative leap (real access to power), women need to support women leaders; otherwise there won't be any changes.

I think that future projects in social justice work must go beyond the feminine. The movement should work to involve men and build a broader agenda that incorporates a macro perspective and looks at building a new society. Development is not just economic growth but also the creation of an egalitarian, fair and pacifist society. We need a new paradigm of development. While power structures remain unchanged, there won't be any change in gender equality. Projects should be aimed at the entire country and effective leaders in this context will interpret what society needs as a whole and mobilize people in pursuit of these goals. I try in my work to incorporate women's development into a broader social agenda and recently organized a conference on current affairs in Columbia from this perspective. The issues addressed were broader than gender but I approached the discourse from a gender perspective and in this way *helped to validate feminism while exploring a wide range of social justice issues*.

It is also extremely important to build networks and gain political power if lasting changes are to be made. Feminist groups get caught up fighting for small issues and should try instead to better understand the macro dimension. To fight for change at that level, it will be necessary to gain political power and ensure that political parties pursue a social change agenda. International networks helped me gain political power and so I am now working to create a network of support for Latin American women politicians.

I am optimistic about the new generation of leaders. There are some spaces opening up as the movement transcends a narrowly framed feminist discourse. Our women's coordinating networks achieved what the World Bank and IADB hadn't previously, in terms of introducing gender issues in the development agenda. We were able to attack the prevailing model from a gender perspective without getting entangled in a discussion of reproductive rights. Young people are not willing to embark on old-fashioned revolutionary projects: they support a pacifist, new revolution in which globalization presents new opportunities. This new generation of women has a different relation to men and thus a new space from which to articulate a post-feminist position.



MARTA LAMAS (MEXICO)

Marta Lamas is Executive Director of GIRE (Grupo de Informacion de Reproduccion Elegida), a NGO dedicated to reproductive rights. Marta was born in Mexico to Argentinian parents. Her mother was a highly educated feminist, very different from the typical Mexican woman. Marta began participating in Leftist movements early in life, and took part in the 1968 student movement.

From 1971-1986 she operated under the "collectivist logic of the feminist movement", working in collectives, working for victims of rape and poor working class women. In 1979, together with leftist political organizations and unions, her women's coalition created a national front for women's rights and liberation. In 1987, experimenting with other types of public intervention, and concerned about popular education and the intellectual basis of the movement, she began writing a feminist column in a Mexican newspaper. Encouraged by the response, she



started a journal of feminist studies in 1990, Debate Feminista - the only journal of its kind in Latin America. The journal has become an important academic reference in Latin American feminist studies. In 1991, she founded GIRE, that pioneered the discussion of issues like abortion with decision makers and health care workers, outside the feminist circle. Because of this effort, GIRE became an important reference point in the public debate on reproductive rights. She has also helped launched two other institutions – a Mexican Society for Women’s Rights and MUSA, an organization that supports sex workers. She also helped create an innovative training model for younger feminist activists: the Simone de Bouvoir Institute for Leadership Training.

I do consider myself an innovative leader. Because I have not stayed in just one field or activity, but have tried to act in different spheres – from an academic journal to changing the abortion laws in my country. I succeeded in combining theoretical and practical work. I have not only promoted teamwork, but actually created teams, in which the decision-making and agenda-setting are democratic processes. I like the tensions of moving between these different spheres. I learned a lot from the management world, a world traditionally rejected by both feminists and intellectuals. The management field taught me important strategies for executing change. I am unconventional and bring my history, the “personal”, into what is political. It is the mark of 1970s feminism – I want to rescue the personal in politics.

I consider Patricia Mercado an example of good leader. She’s now the most important feminist political leader in Mexico. She moved from left organizations to feminism. She realized that in order to change things, we need representatives in Congress, and was been willing to take the risk of being marked as ambitious in order to build alternative approach. Beginning with the training of young leaders. She’s conscious of the need to establish links between feminism and politics. She has many followers - her leadership has an impact. Hundreds, even thousands, are willing to replicate the kind of work she does. In contrast, many feminist leaders are just focused on their area, without an open mind. They work at NGOs that cushion them economically, and give them a place in the feminist ghetto. Patricia is a notable exception.

The most important change I’d like to see is to transform the political logics of the feminist movement. That is why I seek to train leaders. Leaders with a different concept and approach: leftist, open, modern, committed, with a sense of humor – humor does more for change sometimes than a serious discourse!

We also need to change the political culture of my country – we have to overcome the one-party culture, corporatism, authoritarianism and government paternalism. We do not know how to protest in Mexico. The colonial heritage still looms large – the Indian who submitted to the conqueror, who preferred under-the-hood action rather than confrontation.

The movement for gender justice requires that women have their own organizations and projects and I have supported two institutions in particular. The first, A Mexican Society For Women’s Rights, finances development project for women. The second NGO, MUSA, supports sexual workers, promotes the use of condoms and recently has evolved into a shelter for street girls. I also support the work of Diversa, created in 1994 by Patricia [Mercado], a national political organization that this year also became its own political party. Mercado’s leadership has been especially important because she has recognized that women need representatives in congress if conditions for women are to change.

I also think that coalitions should be formed with every progressive person, regardless of his/her involvement in the government or in political parties. It is detrimental to the work that many feminist groups still refuse to ally with women in government. They do not realize that the political scene has changed dramatically in recent years.

Hopefully, the establishment of the feminist party will spark a generational revolution. The young today are more optimistic, enthusiastic and more willing to become involved in politics and broader range democratic processes. But in order to truly engage them and make lasting social change, we need to unite many different activists – ecologists, pacifists, gays and feminists.



XIE LIHUA (CHINA)

Xie Lihua is Chief Editor of Rural Women Knowing All (RWKA), the first magazine for rural women in China. Since its founding in 1993 RWKA has sponsored a number of initiatives to promote rural women's development, including the Migrant Women's Club, the Practical Skills Training Center for Rural Women, the Migrant Sisters magazine, the Cultural Development Center for Rural Women, and several ongoing projects in rural China on literacy, micro credit, and reproductive health. The effective leadership of Xie Lihua has received wide recognition. She is the recipient of the "Resourceful Women Award 1994" (1994), "New Venture Award 1995", (UK), and "Award for Popularizing Science and Technology in Rural China 1996" (China), among others. Xie Lihua is also Deputy Editor-in-Chief of China Women's News, the national newspaper for women for which she has worked in various capacities since 1984. She previously served in the People's Liberation Army for 14 years.

I think feminist leadership is unique in four ways: 1) there is a sense of mission to improve gender equality; 2) there is an investment of emotions in addition to other energies into the work and communications; 3) it is governed by democratic decision making; and 4) it is self-reflective. Feminist leadership is not the same as "led by women" but rather, it means that one is working with a sense of mission and for/with disadvantaged groups. Our feminist magazine, Rural Women Knowing All (RWKA), has been instrumental in changing the perception of and opportunities available to rural, migrant women. We worked to create China's first rural migrant women's organizations, The Migrant Sister's Home, and set up the Rural Women's Practical Skills Training School, also the first of it's kind in the country.

I think I am an innovative leader in that I have always paid attention to the new needs of the rural women, those reflected in the women's own writings and their letters to the magazine. I am never satisfied with carrying out the routine; I am always looking to improve upon things. At the magazine I went beyond the traditional role as editor to see how I could integrate my thinking about rural women's issues into the work and writing. While working for the Chinese Women's News, I organized a discussion on how to evaluate a woman's worth, i.e. whether it was feudal idiocy or spiritual civilization to use a man's perspective for a good wife and daughter-in-law. I think women should not be judged by traditional values or contributions to others, but by their degree of self-awareness. The dialog went so far as to touch upon the core ideology of the Women's Federation that, at the time (1986), was sponsoring a competition for five-virtue families. I wanted to reform the criteria for the competition. In many ways I have used RWKA as a space from which to enter into many spheres of work on behalf of rural women.

What changes would I most like to see realized? My work strongly influences what I think needs to change. I want to eliminate rural-urban differences. I want to eliminate the household registration system and give peasants the right to live in the cities and receive equal treatment. I would like all people to have the ability to choose where they work and live – the Migrant Sisters' Home was founded on this ideal. I hope that more women, particularly rural women, are able to participate in public affairs (e.g. the process of village self-governance). The Women's Federation is campaigning on this issue and RWKA is doing training to raise the percentage of women participating and improve the quality of the participation itself. These issues need to be at the forefront of public discourse and activity in order to make lasting changes for women. I also hope to advance rural development in general through rural women's development and promote the democratization process through rural women's participation. In this way, my work for gender justice is inherently linked to my work for social justice.

There is a long history of women's organizing and involvement in NGOs outside of China.



I think we can learn from other's rich experiences and integrate them into our particular culture and situation. Ford Foundation Program Officer Mary Ann Burris has been the most influential and important resource for me. She helped me start the first project and saved me time and energy by introducing me to the experiences abroad. Although a western feminist, Mary Ann understands the Chinese situation. She introduced me to the ideas of respect, equality and participation. The Ford Foundation has also played a key role in my learning through its information and support for organizational learning. Foundations have an important role to play, far beyond providing funding, and I hope that more organizations can benefit from these types of relationships in the future. We are considering summarizing and distributing the results of our experiences in combining international learning with Chinese realities. Offering training and providing groups with specific examples from our experiences would be an effective way of spreading our model.

Many new leaders are emerging from our migrant sisters groups, especially through the Practical Skills Training Schools. Many of the earliest members have become teachers in the School. Such rich rewards are why we have been able to persist in our work.



SUZANNE PHARR (USA)

Suzanne Pharr is the Director of Highlander Research and Education Center, dedicated to eradicating poverty, bigotry and economic injustice in the Appalachian region of the American South. She became a social change activist at an early stage, participating in many of the social movements sweeping across the United States in the 1960s. She was the founder and nineteen-year employee of the Woman's Project in Arkansas; a community based nonprofit working to eliminate poverty and racism through women's leadership. In 1999, Suzanne joined the Highlander Center. She is an organizer, writer and strategist focusing on building a multi-issued, multi-racial movement for social and economic justice. Suzanne is the author of Homophobia, A Weapon of Sexism and In the Time of the Right: Reflections on Liberation.

I think there are many types of women's leadership in the US. For example, there is leadership for change where sameness is the goal – where women would have whatever men have. This type of leadership, however, is not my idea of feminist leadership. I think of feminist leadership as "transformational," I would like to see systemic change that results in all people getting a fair share of monetary and natural resources. I cannot envision a successful women's leadership that does not seek to eliminate racism and any other form of discrimination or injustice. The lack of attention in the past to racism destroyed most of the hope for the feminist movement. Leaving people out makes you limited in what can be achieved.

I'm not an original as an innovative leader – a lot of the methods I use and think about were established by feminists in the seventies. Most of my grounding in terms of leadership came from the women's movement; and in terms of politics, comes out of several other movements. My ideas about leadership come from the Women's Project in Arkansas – the emphasis on collective leadership rather than individual or charismatic leadership. I was also influenced by the African American leadership and the women of color leadership – especially the political publications put out by the Kitchen Table Press. It was a time when a group of women were willing to put so much time and effort into changing our thinking. I'm not certain though what sort of impact my leadership has had. I really don't think that things happen individually; I think they happen because lots of people get engaged. I probably have helped some people doing workshops over the years. I have helped people see some of the common elements of oppression, to connect homophobias and racism in their analysis. A lot of people now talk about women being considered targets of biased violence (not just relationship violence) and I think I was pretty helpful in getting the documentation out and drawing attention to it.



It is difficult to separate out leadership for gender justice and leadership for other types of social justice. The injustice around gender is historically dreadful and has led to thousands of women in the US and millions world-wide being raped, battered, tortured and forced to live in poverty. But it's also dreadful to think that within this country and in other countries people are treated in the same ways because of their race. Therefore, it would be extremely difficult for me to think about working for gender equality without working for racial equality. Because of the great overlap, organizations working for social justice [and gender justice] must continually ask themselves what they are trying to change and question what they may be ignoring.

What makes a leader innovative is his/her willingness and desire to make these connections and to create a less hierarchical structure. At the Arkansas Women's Project and now here Highlander Center this means that those affected by decisions needed to be at the center of the decision making process. In order to change systems of oppression and hierarchy outside organizations, it must be changed *within* organizations as well. In the Women's Project we decided to eliminate some of the traditional hierarchy by giving everyone the same pay. At the Highlander Center we have pulled the highest and lowest salaries close together.

I think eliminating structures of oppression within and outside of organizations and bringing those most affected by decisions into the decision making process are the greatest challenges still ahead. The women who are the subject of the violence are not at the center of the movement, and worse still, are very rarely even part of the movement. I'd like to build a broad based movement that is multi-issue and multi-racial, one that seeks change in women's lives with women playing the foremost role in that process. I think the Southern Partners Fund has good model of this new kind of leadership – the leadership of the organization is African-American *and* feminist and they deal with people's *whole* lives. One does not come to the table and talk only about the work but *everything* going on in a person's life including sexual identity, race, age and health. This makes it impossible for the organization to be single issue based. I think an international project needs to be created that includes a meeting of women to talk about violence against women, economics and organizing. I would like to see the women shed the perspective of "victim" and together explore what power they can build.

We at Highlander are extremely concerned about developing the next generation of leadership and are trying to go at it as hard and as fast as we can. We hired several younger people for positions that carry significant responsibility and have also changed our board such that one-third of the members are under age 30. We developed a program working with people ages 15 to 21 called "The Young and the Restless." But in order for true progress to be made there needs to be autonomous youth organizing and other organizations must also work to include younger people and in such a way that their issues are raised and addressed. The international project and gathering of women I have suggested would necessarily include younger women as it is critical to create space for them to exercise power and develop leadership skills to move the agenda for social justice forward.



VIRGINIA VARGAS (PERU)

Virginia Varga, a sociologist and an active feminist militant, founded the Center for the Peruvian Women, "Flora Tristán", in 1978. From 1990 until 1998, Virginia worked partly as an activist and organizer in Latin America, and also as a professor for the Women and Development Program at the Social Studies Institute in The Hague, Netherlands. She is also invited professor in several gender studies

programs in Peru and Latin America. In the region and at global level, she has been involved in several networks and regional initiatives, such as "Between



Women: a North-South Dialogue," Social Watch, and DAWN. Virginia was the Latin American and Caribbean NGOs' Coordinator to the NGO Forum held in September 1995, on occasion of the Fourth World UN Conference on Women in Beijing, China. In Beijing, Virginia received a UNIFEM Award. From 1995 till 1999 Vargas was a member of the Consulting Council in Women of the World Bank. She has also served as a member of the Consultative Council of Women in the Inter-American Development Bank. Virginia has co-edited several books and written many articles about democracy, citizenship, the state and globalization from a feminist perspective. She is currently finishing a book about the feminists movements in Latin America throughout the past 20 years and continues to work in the Center "Flora Tristan" in Lima.

Constant learning defines my leadership. Feminist leadership is about the quest for new strategies of intervention and learning from and building upon experiences. The Beijing Conferences is an example of an innovative quest. We didn't know what we were facing and we couldn't manage the international codes of the UN. The UN had appointed a woman from a conservative Catholic faction and my colleagues had put me at the front and to my own surprise, we won. My leadership is not without insecurities, it is the element of insecurity that allows one to learn.

I try to remain innovative in my leadership and work by deliberately transferring knowledge and experience to others during group trainings. I do this also in my teaching, in expanding and elaborating on feminist theory and in creating discussion groups. I support teamwork for groups based in Lima and the provinces. I hope these efforts will help bridge the generational gap between the feminists. One program, Feminist Studies and Debates, has been extremely successful on this front. I serve on the program's Director's Board and share my experience and expertise but am not directly responsible for the work. A Board that is comprised of three different generations of feminists runs it instead. The program runs workshops, produces publications and teaches courses, all with the intent of empowering women to make change to move society close to gender justice.

In Peru, society is far more aware of rights for women and for diversity than it once was. It is intentional that along with the feminist fight, fights have emerged against gender-based exclusion and for the acknowledgement of homosexuality. The activism has helped achieve laws for equality, divorce, and anti-violence and has sparked conventions related to these and other topics. However, tough barriers still remain in the way of lasting change. The economic rights of the population, particularly women, are devalued. The government has manipulated problems like hunger by creating 'help programs' that exchange rights for charity. Sadly, women are more exposed to manipulation. We must also be careful because changes can be reversible. In addition to fighting for more progress, we must work hard to maintain what we have already achieved. Under President Fujimore, for example, we had advanced policy in the area of women's rights. Now policy is moving towards eliminating gender and there is an emphasis on natural conception. We are now fighting again to achieve what we already had a few years prior.

What strategies would I suggest in the effort to achieve greater gender justice and social change? In addition to street protests, I am growing increasingly convinced that 'shock' strategies should be employed to demonstrate what women are thinking. A couple of years ago a large number of posters appeared on the streets of Lima that carried disturbing messages such as, " You are a bitch; if you are raped it's because of your miniskirts." It created quite a disturbance. It turned out that a team of artists, very sensitive to women's issues, organized the campaign with the intention of making society more aware of the issues. The artists were imprisoned for disturbing the public order and we in turn mobilized to support them. Sometime subversive strategies are most effective to aiding the movement for social change.

I have always placed great importance on supporting collective work and shared learning in order to bridge the generational gap among feminist leaders. I believe that the older generation can learn from teamwork as well. The multiple perspectives add a pluralistic view that can only help to foster participative leadership. I see the Flora Tristan Institute as



an example of an organization with clear direction regarding pluralism. We have national and regional spheres in which different feminisms coexist. A leader cannot be in all positions. We need to insert new leaders in multidisciplinary fields, networks, and concrete initiatives. Leaderships should be multiple and autonomous.



SUELI CARNEIRO (BRAZIL)

Sueli Carneiro is the founder of GELEDES, a black women's organization which intertwines concerns of race and gender, and addresses the particular problems confronted by women of color in Brazil. GELEDES's focus is to take action on health, violence, and legal assistance and to produce data that will support evidence of discrimination against black women. In addition to her work with GELEDES, Sueli was coordinator of the program on black women for the Brazilian National Council

of Women's rights. She was an organizer of the first National Meeting of Black Women in 1988, and collaborated with the Brazilian Bar Association in organizing five seminars for the Winnie Mandela Tribunal. Topics included black women and the workforce, black women and violence, reproduction and demographic dynamics, the representation of black women, and black women and legislation. Prior to her work on the National Council of Women's Rights, Sueli had undertaken similar work on the state level as executive committee member and secretary general of the Sao Paulo State Council on the Condition of Women. She builds bridges between social movements, dialogues with public policy makers, and forges new directions for the socio-cultural and political rights of black women in the Brazilian landscape.

I do not think that I can call myself a leader. Leadership is a condition that others attribute to you, not you to yourself. I suppose others may attribute that condition to me because of some of the initiatives that I've been developing as a feminist and anti-racist militant. I don't think that a leader accomplishes much alone, rather, a leader's effectiveness is directly proportional to her ability to empower people over which she has influence. At GELEDES we work to help black women achieve visibility and autonomy. My role is to exercise power to help other women grow and become leaders. GELEDES was created to address the contemporary black women's needs, to build a political instrument to value black women. The organization also aims to build cultural identity that is an alternative to the identity of western women. We seek models that insure political affirmation of women in their own tradition without having to subordinate themselves to a western feminism that homogenizes a feminine condition that is historically and legitimately different.

Women's leadership has an enormous impact in the quest for gender justice. Because women are more open to exchange ideas and reach consensus, they produce horizontal political structures based upon group accomplishment rather than the traditional, hierarchical management structures seen in most parties and unions. Women know how to manage better because of their inherent social abilities: compassion, generosity, understanding and the ability to care for others - we are usually the grand managers of need. However, this does not mean that some women's leadership cannot be ineffective, particularly any leadership that replicates the traditional male-leadership stereotype.

We are proud of the changes GELEDES has been able to achieve. It has created the S.O.S. racism, an initiative inspired by the French experience that legally supports people who suffer racial prejudice. The initiative has been multiplied throughout the country with many organizations adopting the service, and it is today part of the Brazilian public politics and supported by the ministry of justice. GELEDES introduced legislation that added racial prejudice injury as a new crime under the criminal code. It also opened up public discussion to issues such as diseases that occur more frequently among black



women. As a result, proposals now exist related to health care and the right of reproduction from a racial standpoint. One of our greatest achievements is that GELEDES has inspired the creation of dozens of other organizations working on behalf of black women.

Despite our progress there are still many challenges ahead. We face strong resistance to changing gender relationships within the context of family. Although women have substantially changed their roles outside the home – increasing participation in politics and the workforce – they still maintain the same responsibilities within the home. Men have not yet assumed new roles, nor have they come to recognize women’s autonomy and independence. There are also challenges in the political arena that remain to be addressed. The number of women participating in parliament may be on the rise, but women still make up only 5%, which is non-representative, and women govern only 2 out of the 27 states in Brazil. We also need to make changes in the cultural arena. The way the female body is used in Brazil to sell everything from soap to cars is extremely dangerous. This exploitation is one of the most grotesque things preventing women’s freedom.

The development of the next generation of women’s leadership is a huge concern for GELEDES and one of the biggest problems facing organizations today. We do not have a scientific methodology to work this out, what we do is give new and young women opportunities to take on decisions. GELEDES has a pedagogy that encourages young women to develop projects of public representation. The president of our organization is 32 and has been developing projects for the group for ten years already. It would be interesting and potentially extremely helpful if someone were to establish a program or formal methods for training a new generation of leaders. At the moment, we do it intuitively and hope that by delegating responsibilities we provide an environment that helps to optimize the talent and power of the younger women.



REV. AUDREY JOHNSON (USA)

Reverend Audrey Johnson was one of the first ordained, seminary trained women in the Baptist Church in the South. She is a Registered Nurse and nurse educator, and has a Master’s degree in Theology from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. While she was barred from admission to the Seminary for many years, because of her excellent Christian Education training from other institutions, she was asked to teach emerging pastors in smaller seminaries. For twelve years, she and her husband conducted weekly bible study in their home. Today, many of the major pastors in the New Orleans area attribute their grounding in the faith and their pastoral preparation to the training received from Reverend Johnson. As a community activist, she served for six years as the Director of Education for the initial Pediatric AIDS Program in the mid-south region. In that role she helped influence area churches to openly discuss the AIDS epidemic and to provide community education especially to African American women. Audrey has faced the challenge as a women pastor with wisdom and grace without acquiescing to the traditionalism of the Church. She has helped to inform the conversation about competency in community leadership as a faith leader and has served as an excellent example to other women regarding overcoming barriers.

Feminist leadership: As African-Americans, we have changed the traditional feminist language. We call ourselves **womanist** leaders. Feminism in this country was a racist concept and so as womanists, we are working from our own culture, history and our position as African-American women. The feminist movement was a white women’s movement and white women didn’t have to deal with the combination of sexism and racism



that we faced. More generally, I do see leadership as different for women because of how we function and see things. Because we are nurturers, women know how to get people to do what they feel they need to do instead of doing according to someone else's ideas. You have to remember that when women got into leadership in this country – in corporations and such – they started to act like men, even dress like men, which was very far from who we were. Men lead differently – women lead by relating to people. If I see somebody hurting, I say it's because something hurtful happened to them, and want to figure out how to help them get past it. The men leaders, they want to philosophize and analyze!

Building relationships is the key to being a good leader. My experience as a nurse helped me learn how to do this. Relationships are dynamic and always evolving, so good leadership is constantly learning and growing together. I think I have been an innovative leader because I have learned to be a careful listener. I get to know people, observe them and see what their strengths are in order to help them develop into the leaders that they can be. I also try to stay conscious about not forcing my way onto others. You need to share visions and listen to everyone's voice in order to work for change. Everyone should be involved in the process, in building and implementing the strategy – it is a poor leader who dictates the strategy.

Power has to be shared in society and we can only share power and responsibility through building relationships.

Unfortunately, I don't think there have been a lot of changes [in the United States] – only selective changes. We still have to deal with racism, the number one enemy in our society, and it is closely tied to sexism. Furthermore, in some ways the problem has become more subtle and invisible. Men may say, for example, that their wives are equal, but when it comes time to make decisions, they still think it is their job to decide. We have to deal with racism and sexism together. When I teach cultural competence, we talk about the melting pot idea – how it's a cliché. I say I see us as a gumbo or a tossed salad. Though each piece has its integrity, mixed together, they bring richness, wisdom, all kinds of leadership. That's what makes the difference – when I don't have to become white, or Indian; I can bring my own culture, and we all become richer. I don't like the melting pot analogy because you lose your difference – it's about assimilation. This is important when you're building alliances and relationships with others.

I have, however, seen change in my local church because we have a significant number of women in leadership positions. The other pastors and the community have discovered that women can lead and some good changes have been made in the way men and women relate to one another. In this community, with two public housing projects right near our church, it has been interesting to see that many of the men do respect women, especially if they that you are in control of your life. If you compare our community with the Hispanic community, there's a lot more change. For instance, when somebody comes from outside to interview people in their homes for any reason, in the African-American families, they will interview the women, because they recognize their power. In Hispanic families, they would still talk to the man.

We have a family leadership program where we help people become their own leaders in the community, to learn to deal with city hall, do whatever their families and communities needed. We got about 47 people signed up, most of them couldn't even read when they started. At the end of a year, we still had 36. By then, people who couldn't even talk in public when they started became leaders who made a real difference for their communities. It was on a small scale, but it was important – they realized they were the leaders, not somebody from outside. When talking about people coming from outside to work with them, we tell them: You have the power in this community to let these people in; you have the power and authority to work with these people and tell them what you need done. Test them to see if they can meet your needs. If you are poor, and you do something for your community or neighborhood, you get a certificate and a ribbon - the outsiders get big salaries! We don't want to do this - we want community people to understand that they can do more than any outsider – we say, you live in the same community, you know better than anybody else what the problems are, what needs to be done. And you can do it – you can be your own leaders.

We must continue to build leaders and everything I have done has been to that end. I have grandchildren and I want to see them carry it on through their lives. I want to see people lead in any way they can because everybody has the capacity to lead something in their own way.



DR. OLIVE SHISANA (SOUTH AFRICA)

Dr Olive Shisana is Executive Director of the Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS and Health program in the Human Science Research Council of South Africa. From a poor rural family who struggled to obtain education for their children, she trained as a physician, and became an anti-apartheid activist and member of the African National Congress (ANC) at a young age. She served as the head of the ANC Women's Wing, and later head of the ANC's US unit, liaising with US Congress and

Senate on South Africa and the ANC's positions to end apartheid. She also worked at the World Health Organization, where she first began to focus on the growing HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa. She also served as South Africa's Director General of Health after the transition to democracy. In this capacity, she spearheaded – and helped South Africa win - the fight against both pharmaceutical companies and powerful countries who used TRIPS agreements to prevent countries like South Africa from manufacturing new and effective HIV drugs at lower cost. She continues to develop new and innovative community health programs, especially for young women and AIDS orphans.

I come from a rural, socially deprived area. I grew up in the Apartheid days - We needed resources to get to any developed area; we had to stand in separate lines for the bank and shops. So I experienced oppression firsthand. I also spend many years (1976-1991) in exile working within ANC for the liberation of the whole country. I worked with the US Congress and Senate to influence the staffers on their policies towards South Africa. This changes you as a person – you become resilient, determined, and passionate.

I consider myself to be an innovative leader in the sense that whatever position I occupy, I occupy not as me but as an ordinary person playing a role, the role that the people want me to play. I relate to everyone as a human being. When I was Deputy General of Health in South Africa I had an open door policy and this characterizes my interactions with everyone. In order to lead people, I must understand them and they must understand me. I think this is an asset; I help even young interns move up the ladder by encouraging them to go beyond what they think they can do. These efforts are succeeding and I'm hopeful that there will be new leadership ready when I retire.

I see power as the ability to persuade others to agree with your efforts in pursuit of a good cause. In order to gain the power or ability to work for the larger good you must be clear about where you're going and that must be in line with what people feel intuitively. You must have a sixth sense about what the people feel and take it forward to persuade others. I think that women use power and lead differently than men. They have a passion for what they do and they take a personal interest in their staff. They care about staff development whereas men frequently don't look beyond the job and whether or not the work is done. Women are also better at multi-tasking because of our reality and we like to get everyone involved.

There have been a lot of changes in South Africa due to new policies and legal reforms. Many more women are moving up in education, job, and even in parliament. But I am not convinced that they have been able to push the women's agenda in Parliament. Men still dominate in the decision-making, even if it means co-opting women. There is also still a great deal of progress that needs to be made in the relationships between men and women. Many women are dying prematurely of HIV/AIDS because of the power



imbalance in relationships and women's continuing economic dependence. I want to see a change that gives women in South Africa, especially black women, power without disempowering their partners. If you empower women at the expense of the men, you will break black families, and that's not going to help our society. If you're an educated woman, you could end up without a partner – they are looking for women with less education. We need a more holistic view – the whole notion of gender implies equality, it's not imbalance with either men or women higher. We say gender but we mean women. The ideal is reaching a level of equality where, for example, a couple can both say "let's use a condom."

We need to focus more on work that does not pull women out of their families but rather, empowers women *within* their families. When women are pulled out of the family, they are more at risk. If programs were targeted at family interventions, it could reduce these social costs. We are starting now with a big project that uses an approach like this. We wrote a report on gender and HIV/AIDS, recommending starting a program for children orphaned by AIDS, targeting the extended family and community in which these children are located. The report itself was written based on discussions with members of poor communities on how they saw the problem and the solutions. We need programs based on empowering women within households through mothers-in-law, mothers, male partners, etc., so after delivery for instance, young women are not made to stay home for ten days and other traditional practices that mean they can't bring the infant for Nevirapine vaccine (which prevents HIV transmission, but must be administered immediately after birth).... We are encouraging their right to choose to breastfeed or not we are trying to strengthen her within that unit. In South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe, we haven't had a lot of experience of funding organizations that would support this kind of approach — encouraging women and children to be supported within households and communities.



ERNA WITOELAR (INDONESIA)

Erna Witoelar is the founding director of WALHI, the Indonesian environmental forum, which is the first major environmental organization in Indonesia. She is a founding member and former director of the Indonesian Consumer Foundation. She is the former executive director of the Asia Pacific Philanthropy Consortium, and the founding director of the Community Recovery Program (a post-1997 economic crisis social safety net program). Most recently, she was Minister of Settlements and Regional Infrastructure in Abdurrahman Wahid's cabinet.

I'm different because I am a woman. The places where I am leading are not usually where women are leading. For example, I was for 22 months Minister for Public Works and Housing; there has never been a woman in that position. I put my emotions, my heart, into my leadership. I love the people I work with; they are like a family. It's not a hierarchical set up. We share information; we develop relationships. We don't see it as a one-time thing. We see it in the context of time and space that is much longer than the job itself. The ability to see things in a holistic way is an important quality of leadership; it's the opposite of seeing things only in one track for example, looking only at the economic aspects of an issue and not the social aspects.

Men on the other hand are looking for constant recognition. Therefore they need concrete results. In politics you can't have long-term vision; you only have short-term interests and you go for short-term gains in order to get re-elected. I don't feel the need to fight for recognition or compensation. I do my thing and do it well. I do it with all my heart. If I do that then power and recognition will come. Keeping your integrity is more important than power. Political processes force on you choices about what you will compromise. Women are not comfortable with money politics; women want to be recognized for their merit. So



you see so few women in politics. Men's model of leadership is hierarchical with one leader and many followers who hang on to the leader's coattails – pyramidal in shape. With women, a more viable model would be to have a peer relationship – more circular in shape. Women return home to do their jobs at home; women have to take care of their family responsibilities. Men don't have these responsibilities. Men develop peer relationships as well but they can have a one-track career.

I have never been a member of a women's organization. I used to be uncomfortable with women-only organizations until I came to know of women's grassroots organizations that worked with men as well. When I worked in the consumer movement, I wondered why there were separate women's organizations and issues. I've graduated in my thinking after a few years – I began to understand the problems of women as consumers —in some cases they had bigger problems like water shortages. Then I started becoming a feminist. I didn't start with feminist causes or women's organizations but from a consumer and environmental activist place and got a better understanding of gender issues from there. Now I make sure programs are gender-sensitive and women leaders are nurtured. Because of the route I took, it's easier for me to talk to men, not attacking men, which causes retaliation. I'm building dialogue and trust and seeing men's point of view as well. I know that in many cases, women's situation and the problems they face are more severe but women cannot solve them alone. But at the same time, people who come specifically from a women's perspective or a feminist analysis may see things more sharply, more deeply.

Where you enter in makes a difference. Those who enter the debate from a women's perspective have often been confrontational but at the same time they have an in-depth understanding of the issue from a gender point of view. But they can lose out on a broader perspective. Both perspectives have strengths – they are equally valid; there is never only one way to solve a problem. I get annoyed with strong hard-core women's activists who turn against men and also other women (if you don't share their feelings, attend all the rallies etc.). They see you as disloyal and make an enemy of you whereas you could actually be doing a lot more for women than them.

Positive change happens when people are judged by their merit; where rules are transparent and fair and implementation of the rules is fair; there women have thrived. Where you need political deals, compromises and need to market yourself, you see less women. I want to see more women mayors, governors – then the situation in those areas will be better. If there are more women in leadership they will make change happen because of their leadership. . Women have to be given the chance to grow; they need opportunities. We don't have the mentorship model and we need that.

My department in the government had the second largest budget and the largest receipt of foreign funds. The department was responsible for mainstreaming poverty and environmental concerns into infrastructure building and rural works using participatory processes. I always included my deputies in decision-making processes. This is continuing under my successor. What is not being continued is gender mainstreaming both in content and in the promotion of women.

I see power as something you can use to get an impact for what you want to do and to do more. Power and authority has to be exercised with care and affection. The care I feel drives me. For example, when the big flood hit my, that emotion I felt forced me to be resourceful – to move budgets around so that we could deal with people's needs right away. My successor has the same power but he's not resourceful; he's waiting for resources – waiting for proposals. My risk assessment and his are different. I always consult people when I take decisions. But then I take responsibility for my vision. I am trained to make decisions. My successor didn't have the same kind of training in leadership.

"My support is my family". Whenever I am stressed I turn to my family and they just hold me, support me. Religion is very important for clearing your mind – finding a dialogue with God. Through your religious processes you can keep a clear mind and so look at things fresh. It helps you to let problems go; not to get sucked in by them. My daily practice of prayer energizes me.



My sense of purpose was sharpened at an early age. I started as an activist against corruption; then moved on to issues of environmental destruction and then led the fight against big business practices that had detrimental impacts on the consumer. "I'm a fighter". As I grow older, I am more of a negotiator, a bridge; I build coalitions of people with the same vision. It's always useful to pull people to a higher goal to release them from petty competition.

What changes has my work achieved? Changes in the bigger cause did not happen as a result of my interventions, for example, the consumer protection law. Consumer abuse continues, especially if you are poor, you are vulnerable. In terms of the smaller picture, I've made an impact in the consumer and environment movement. I have built leadership – nurtured new leaders, opened doors for them, given them opportunities. That is my greatest satisfaction. I am also proud of my own example of leadership. I mix easily with people. If you show that you are sincere, if you really mean what you are saying, people will trust you. In government too, mainstreaming of the concerns I have fought for are continuing.

What's next? "I don't know what I'll be when I grow up".



GLORIA BONDER (ARGENTINA)

Gloria Bonder is the General Coordinator of the Regional Program on Gender and Public Policies at FLACSO, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She is also Coordinator of the UNESCO Regional Chair on Women, Science and Technology at the same institution. She was the former Director of the Argentine Government's National Women's Bureau. In 1979 she formed Centro de Estudios de la Mujer (CEM), the first NGO committed to women's studies

in Argentina. Gloria Bonder has funded and managed several pioneering programs related to women/gender issues in academic institutions, governmental offices and NGO's. She has developed research on gender and education, science and technology, communication and young women in Latin America.

I don't think there is such a thing as feminist leadership. Feminist women are very different from one another, there is no one model. Because of the principles of feminism, most women leaders are involved in changing things – they are more value-based, they are more relationship-oriented. They change things in their own way. Because of internal reasons or social expectations, feminists who are in leading positions are more concerned with personal relations, with creating some kind of cooperative climate in a group. This doesn't mean they always achieve it

In my own context, most of the gender equity changes have happened in the legal sphere, in culture and in the greater acceptance by both men and women of equality, and in political participation. We have 30 per cent of women in Parliament because we passed a quota law.

But I would like to see more changes in organizations. We work to including gender equity ideas and practices in institutions that have not changed but are in fact fundamentally undemocratic, corrupt, and weak. This is most important. We are developing gender equity policies in a context that is not working for social equity in any sense. Feminists have to reconvene to understand what it means to talk of gender equity in the context of globalization and a new arrangement of power relations. How do organizations and institutions work in a globalized context and how do we change them? Women need to form alliances with others working for social equity. Because of differences in styles of leadership (both men and women), this is hard to do. Making alliances is about negotiation. But often 'feminists' prefer to remain isolated or avoid conflict. But this too issue too has a class dimension – for poor women, the costs of not negotiating is often very high.

We are past the stage of convincing other people. We don't need to convince those who are already convinced. We need to be more efficient, to know exactly what to do, to come up



with concrete proposals. This is difficult for us because we come from a tradition of struggle. But now we need solutions. We are trying to build a new social contract but we also need to have contracts among ourselves — new kinds of rights and responsibilities, and the ability to live and work with differences. This is very hard.

When I was in the govt. and I had to address a very critical situation. The church wanted me to resign because I was transforming educational policy to allow equal opportunities for women; I was changing the curriculum and teachers training. The church thought I was changing social morality and family values. I decided to be very clear about my stand, but also protected my group. I had strong support in my group, but I was also not afraid of differences. I took advantage of the situation — I used the press, I strategized about how to react to the church attack and turned it into an educational situation itself. I wrote a lot for the media, gave interviews on TV and kept asking the question 'why'? I had some support from women's organizations but many did not support me. I understood finally that it's not always about being for or against something; it depends on your situation. Some of my provincial colleagues were very scared to speak out and support me. Their situation was not mine

I learned during that period that sometimes what we think is resistance is not resistance to gender equity per se, but just the way things are — the way the state works, the way policy makers work. Women can sometimes be very paranoid, thinking everything that's happening is resistance or rejection to them and what they are proposing. So it's very important to understand what is really happening. When the church attacked me, I didn't know how the church works. I didn't know that inside the church there were many groups and many different opinions. My mistake was to not establish dialogue with those groups who might have helped me or supported me. So what is the nature of the resistance? We have to understand that when we try to promote some change. We have to understand the different logic at work in each situation — bureaucratic logic, feminist logic.

Sometimes resistance is just misunderstanding, sometimes it is rejection to complex ideas that are difficult to implement even though the underlying principles are shared.

I cannot distinguish between gender justice and social justice. On the other, I have seen for some years all the political education that feminists have achieved was very specific to the women's movement and women have been empowered as a result. In Argentina an extraordinary thing is happening — people are organizing at all levels — they have set up neighborhood assemblies, they are meeting and demonstrating in very much the same way as the women's movement mobilized women. And women lead this current grassroots movement in Argentina. It is not institutionalized; it is a movement. My concern is that when it is institutionalized, men will take over its leadership.

I'm not a Buenos Aires native — I was born in a middle-class Jewish family, my mother was a feminist and came from a very poor family. She was the only child in her family to finish a university degree and one of the first women in the country to get a degree in mathematics. I was given a lot of opportunities to study and travel. I'm the oldest of three kids. My family was fond of culture and of life. My mother was a strong woman, powerful but with a great joy for life. She had lots of friends and was active in lots of organizations.

There are three main influences in my life. I was part of a generation of women who entered the university in large numbers in the 1960s. This was a time of great cultural changes, and these women were very powerful, even if there wasn't much focus on gender equality, the expectation was that we were going to be successful professionally, we were going to achieve something in life. Another big influence was Peronism and role of women during the Peronist period. We had 30% women in parliament during the 1950s, including women coming from very poor backgrounds like Eva Peron herself. We knew that we had a tradition of women in public power, in political power. The third was the dictatorship period. I decided not to leave the country, and learnt a lot about resistance, survival, and about keeping your spirit in very dark times. My brothers left; many friends were kidnapped or killed. Friendship was vital to the survival of those who stayed. We were internal exiles; we didn't have a public life, we were invisible. So we spent a lot of time with friends, not talking about the situation, but listening to music, seeing films, reading books, and developing a deep personal link. I was raising my children then, and needed to be very awake for them. I formed CEM towards the



end of that period – in 1979 close to when the dictatorship ended. Those were hard times, but these times are harder because people can't think in terms of a future and the enemy is not so clearly defined. The enemy is everywhere – our own leaders are our enemies.

I haven't accomplished anything alone. I've always worked with people, and this is an accomplishment – first with other women, now with both men and women. I think I've done a lot in education – I created the first postgraduate women's studies program in a Latin American University, in 1987, in Buenos Aires. CEM was first NGO committed to women's studies in Argentina. My work in the Ministry of Education has sustained. Even now, in the provinces they continue to use the materials and teaching methods we designed. But I want to accomplish much more! I'm very proud of what we are doing now with the PRIGEPP e-learning program. People are enjoying it very much. I love working with young people. What I have learnt from them is not to judge them in terms of more or less feminist, more or less committed. Instead I have learnt how to be more concrete, efficient, more open to different things, how to take care more of your private life – they work hard, but they defend their private life, for leisure, for not doing anything. This is something that was hard for me. Most of the young people I work with are leaders – working in organizations, many are in parliament, in politics, in international agencies. Many of them are my students! For mothers and teachers, it's a challenge to enjoy them while they are with you and recognize that they are not going to be with you forever.



JIHAD ABU ZNEID (PALESTINE)

I was born in 1967 in Shafat refugee camp in Jerusalem. I was born into a traditional religious family. My father was a guard of the Al Aqsa Mosque. I studied psychology at the university. My first job was as a field worker for the Palestine Human Rights Information Center. I was Coordinator of human rights work. I did volunteer work with Amnesty International. I have participated in many training programs in different parts of the world on human rights, gender

relations and leadership. In 1997, I headed the program on young women leaders for the Women's Affairs Technical Committee of Palestine. I established a women's center in my own refugee camp which has grown to become the largest women's center in Palestine. I am now Deputy President of this center and I continue my volunteer work with it. In 1998, I was one of 3 women elected to the leadership of Al Fatah from Jerusalem. The Israelis arrested me, broke both my hands and imprisoned me. Presently, I am Director of the Division of Prisoners within the Palestine Authority. We work with prisoners (most of whom are men) when they get arrested helping them get a lawyer, helping their families with food and medicines and when they get out, we work to rehabilitate them such as providing them with vocational training

To be a leader you have to have a vision for your own community and a program of action. You need to ground your work in the community and its needs. I started working the women and housing rights movement in Palestine. It wasn't easy because we were under occupation. I have to start from my people and change the community around me. I focus a lot on leadership not just training. Now I have become someone who is respected in the community. Men lead women because women are weak. Women often don't have the same opportunities; it's not easy for women to get their rights. I am strong; I can work. You have to know your society, the needs of the people, have a vision and you have to work in a group – not alone. Men have power and money. They don't face the traditional problems that women face. I for example, can't stay out till late at night. I have about 70% of the freedoms that men enjoy. Without my family's support, I can't be strong. If your mother gives you the chance, you can be strong. The mother is very important to changing the



vision of women in a community.

I believe in gender issues not in feminism. I support women's struggles but not alone and separate from men. If men support me, I can be stronger. Freedom doesn't mean changing all the customs. More importantly it means changing the vision of society. I am also very active in politics. I was very active in protests. I was arrested many times. I will never forget that I am Palestinian. Justice and peace is the most valuable thing for me. I have rights; I have to talk the language of rights not hatred of the Israelis. I want men and women to share in building new visions and working together to achieve them. We need to change education, change norms. We can't blame the other; we have to understand the other. I want to support the development and growth of young leaders. We don't have young leaders. They have to work hard because they need to think about how to implement equality and how to live in peace.

The situation of occupation is overwhelming. It stops everything. So, the most important thing to both men and women is freedom and to have a national identity. The second most important is that women and men share the value of peace. We have to make something special for the future between Palestinians and Israelis. The people need to work for peace for their children. They need to understand how to go from conflict to peace.

We are different from any other Arab society. Occupation has changed us. On the one hand we are under occupation by the Israeli army and on the other, we work side by side with Israelis everyday. Ours is a mixed culture. I had formed a group of Palestinians and Jewish women some time ago to talk about the future of our children. I mix with Israelis; I talk to them about my identity. So, in many important ways because of the occupation, women and men have the same priorities and needs.

But at the same time, women have a special knowledge and vision for the future. They are the ones who have to live with and deal with everyday problems and they know the aspirations and frustrations of their children. They know why they are afraid, they think about the future. Therefore, women are in touch with what needs to change and how. They have many ideas and they can really challenge the visions for the future, the visions for education. We, the ordinary people have to do this, not the rich people or the politicians. In the end, we have to really implement the peace. The people on the ground have to build a new society.



LUCY NKYA (TANZANIA)

Lucy Nkya was born in Moshi, Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. She was the last born in a family of 8 children. During Lucy's secondary school days, she was the Coordinator of an Anti-Literacy Campaign. She and others went into the community to mobilize people in learning to read Kiswahili. She taught classes and coordinated the program. After secondary school, Lucy participated in the compulsory Mafinga National Service Program where she

received paramilitary training and participated in harvesting, piggeries and taught civics. Following her national service, she moved to Romania for 3 years where she started her medical training at Cluj Medical School. In 1980, Lucy finished her medical training and was posted in the Morogoro government hospital as the Medical Officer in charge of the medical wards. While in this post, she took time off to obtain additional training in Japan on TB and Leprosy Control. When she returned to Tanzania, she became a member of the National Mental Health Coordinating Committee and was in charge of a National Mental Health Project in the Morogoro region. In that program, they trained peripheral mental health workers and planned for community sensitization with an emphasis on epileptics. Dr Nkya arranged for a Mental Health Outreach Program for the



African National Congress refugees from South Africa. She was also involved in counseling these refugees. In 1988, Lucy obtained a Masters in Psychiatry and later a Masters in Public Health at the University of Nairobi. When she returned to Tanzania, she was attached to the Ministry of Health as a Counseling Advisor regarding HIV/AIDS. As a consultant, she did a Counseling Needs Assessment for HIV/AIDS cases in Tanzania. Lucy became a member of the AIDS Counseling/ National AIDS Counseling Sub-Committee, which advised the National AIDS Control Board on Homecare and Counseling in the country. She later became the Head of the Psychiatric Department of the Morogoro Regional Hospital and was responsible for southern and eastern Tanzania. In 1990, Dr Lucy Nkya started going to the brothels in Morogoro to hand out condoms, treat STDs and offer Homecare for sex workers with AIDS. Based on the needs she was seeing and wanting to address those needs more effectively, Dr Nkya started and registered an NGO called "Health For All Volunteers Trust Fund". As the director, she formally started a Commercial Sex Workers Resocialization Project. The name of the organization later changed to Faraja Trust Fund. The programs of Faraja include a Peer Education and Community Mobilization, Women Neighborhood Association and Faraja Microfinance Project, Youth and Orphans Support both in and out of schools (which includes the Street Side School and Resocialization Centre), School Without Walls (SWW) and Legal Advice for Battered Women. Through the SWW program, Faraja has been able to assist more than 34 other AIDS Service NGO/CBOs in developing the skills they need to provide HIV/AIDS services to their communities throughout the country. These NGO/CBOs learn skills in counseling, homecare, peer education/community mobilization and working with sex workers. Faraja has trained people in 13 of the 20 regions in Tanzania. In 2000, she was elected as an MP with special seats for women and she sees her role as an opportunity to promote the role of women in leadership. She also hopes to influence the policy and budget in the country so that policies favor women and children more than they have in the past. She is passionate about assisting people who are poor and vulnerable. Through her faith, her love of fellow human beings and her perseverance in assisting others, she has done what she can to "alleviate suffering among the poor" and to offer comfort, education and hope to the vulnerable people of Tanzania.

My style of leading may not be different from other leaders but I believe the context (economic underdevelopment) in which I exercise my leadership requires me to be innovative. Good leadership is one, which can induce or influence others (the led) to achieve organizational goals and objectives. For example, the way I myself led Morogoro urban women to empower themselves economically by establishing self-management income generating activities assisted by the extension of micro credits. Unlike good leadership, which involves stakeholders in decisions, poor leadership imposes decision on stakeholders. In such poor leadership incidents, objectives are not achieved.

My vision of change is based on my own experience and perceived experience of those I lead and serve. I look forward strategically in terms of my own leadership strengths, opportunities and threats in the leadership environment, including political imperatives. In Tanzania, you cannot do anything unless it conforms to government policy but the government itself is not implementing its antipoverty policies. My strategies of change grow out of the perceived needs and motivations of those I lead to help the disadvantaged groups in society. I ensure that the beneficiaries of my strategies participate fully in the implementation of programs and activities. I build relationships on the basis of identifying and recognizing the various needs and interests of all major stakeholders in a participative manner. I helped development of coalitions and alliances with outside (the organization) related groups such as religious, youth, people living with HIV/AIDS, and other non-governmental organizations. We have built the largest network of organizations working for HIV/AIDS patients providing counseling, home care, material support, support for children to go to school, and care for AIDS orphans. I define and visualize power as a



capacity to influence others to achieve my goals which take into account their needs and interests. I exercise power and authority through participation of all major stakeholders. I usually allow resistance while trying to convince the resisters through good results and involvement of opinion leaders in the resisting sections of community. I have always made use of spiritual appeal to bring-in doubtful and resisting groups or individuals. I start my workday with meditation and prayer. It helps me a lot. My husband and children help me a lot too.

If feminism is viewed as a movement to recognize rights of women, then there should be leadership, which aspires to those goals in all development activities. Feminist leadership would differ with conventional leadership in the sense of being sensitive to women roles, needs and rights. Women have undergone a lot of struggle and use more participatory methods of decision making; they are not power hungry. Many men who have started NGOs here look to their own interests. For a woman, self-actualization means achieving her goals but for me, because of the way they are socialized, it goes beyond goals to achieving economic, social and cultural power and recognition. And they don't care how they get it.

But more than leadership I want to change the attitudes of women themselves; to help see themselves as effective forces of change that incorporate their aspirations and rights. I have seen women empowered in my own activities through provision of education and economic support (small credits and counseling). This is the biggest change that is required. If women feel empowered and have confidence, they will change the community. You cannot have larger structural change if the women don't first believe they can make the change. The Urusha Declaration in Tanzania aimed at structural change. Under Ujamaa, land was collectivized and social groups were formed. But noone was responsible for anything; everything was the business of everybody. And it failed. If you can change an individual life, families can change, and from there, communities and the nation. But you have to start with the individual and you have to be clear about responsibility.

It is important to understand specific cultural and religious norms in order to bring changes and gender justice in various communities. It is also necessary to recognize and use the same aspects of culture and religion to have actors in those communities participate fully in my activities. It is always necessary to understand the historical, national and local contexts from the point of view of the stakeholders and get their interpretation of the context in view of my activities. I have also to work within the national and local policy framework in order to avoid contradictory strategies of intervention. It is also important to work within a given political context since as a single organization, we cannot change the political context both at national and local levels.

What do I see as a result of my leadership? I see a rising public consciousness as indicated by the surge of demand for the services of my organization and the adoption of my intervention approaches by other similar organizations. Local governmental by-laws in regard to women economic activities have changed in favor of women. Material conditions of women in Morogoro have changed positively in terms of increases in incomes, education of HIV/AIDS, changes in attitude and increased solidarity among themselves. Women have organized themselves in self-supporting groups and have more voice in civic activities. They have also being enabled to exercise "exit" strategies in some cultural and religious demeaning practices such as FGM and indoor confinement of women.

The most effective strategies in changing values and norms are: raising of consciousness through continuous education and skills building in women; general education in society and communities; empowering women through enhancing their incomes, knowledge of their rights and their organizational capability; and activism. In my work, for example, empowering women economically by providing them with small credits and helping them to organize into groups, has helped them exit from some of the demeaning socially attributed roles and practices. For example, some have been able to walk out of a battering marital relationship and stand on their own to support their children. The biggest barriers in trying to change the norms are a low level of general education, lack of economic power and poor organization capacity of women. The best ways to nurture and train younger leaders to sustain achievements is to motivate individuals through exposure to skills, good practices and training.

I grew up in a dynamic family situation with education and a hard work ethic. Now I work in a Muslim community and there norms about women's roles and mobility are changing very slowly. I would like to understand experiences of how women in other similar cultures and similar conditions of poverty have broken these types of barriers – for example, in Bangladesh. I think it would be very useful to set up a Forum for site visits and analysis of experiences.



NGUYỄN THÒ OANH (VIETNAM)

Oanh came from a land owning family in the Mekong Delta. Her father was a public servant during the colonial period. Her mother who was born more than 100 years ago was particularly free from traditions. She seemed to run the family even though her father was more educated and had an important public role. Oanh had 10 brothers and 4 sisters. Oanh went on her own to get a scholarship to study for a Masters in Sociology in the US in 1951. This was not only innovative but also "revolutionary". Her mother approved but her father feared that she would loose her soul there. She went into a Catholic college where she fell in love with Catholicism and went back to Vietnam as a Catholic militant working with the progressive wing of Catholic intellectuals struggling for national independence (from the French and later on from the Americans). She also acted as an advisor to catholic students and workers movements. In 1972, she studied for a Masters in Community Development from the University of the Philippines. Before Liberation she worked for the reconciliation between Communists and the Church. The work lasted a few years after 1975. Oanh was in the core group advocating for intellectuals to stay in Vietnam to cooperate with new regime. She was respected as a nationalist but never integrated in the new system. Between 1984 and 1994, Oanh founded and headed the Social Work Research and Training Group (now called the Social Development Research and Consultancy-SDRC), set up the Psychological Counseling Office at the Psychology Association, set up the Women Studies Department at the Open University, and 'Mai Handicraft' which is a company that works on income generation for the poor. Between 1995-2001, Oanh was Vice President of the Ho Chi Minh City Association for Psychology and Education in charge of the social work section; Lecturer on Sociology, Social Work, Community Development and Education at the Ho Chi Minh City Open University, the National University and other academic institutions. Oanh is the author of several books on sociology, social work and education.

I am a kind of marginalized leader, influencing people without a position of authority. Since I was trained in the West in the social sciences, I was not easily accepted in the new socialist system in Vietnam. I worked just 5 years at the HCMC Institute of Social Sciences and chose to quit because I could not bear it. It was too bureaucratic; research had to be focused on illustrating the party's viewpoint; and you couldn't tell the truth. At that time it was a dream for everybody to be a government official and it was dangerous to quit such a position. However, I chose to stay in the country to serve the people and I took part in the antiwar movement before 1975. I had much sympathy for socialist values of justice, equality for the working class and for women. I became loosely attached to an official organization, which tried to gather formerly western-trained intellectuals to contribute their knowledge and skills for the reconstruction of the country.

We (economists, social scientists, and technical experts) then tried to introduce such notions as development, behavioral sciences, modern technologies to a society which became about 100 years behind the world after 1975. We were protected by the higher authorities



but not easily accepted by the average officials. Western social science was denounced as 'bourgeois'; it was considered to do harm to the party ideology. While working with this group called the "Research and Development Group" which was based at the University, I was asked by the Communist Union to train their members to work with youth groups. I was also asked by some people at the Health Service to introduce the community approach to Health care and education. All this was done for 5 or 6 years, informally and free of charge. But people started to know me as having something to offer to solve social problems and asked me for advice or training. I gathered formerly trained social workers and started a group called the Social Work Research and Training Group which took eleven years to get a license to operate as a private development Research and Training Organization, now named SW and CD Research and Consultancy (SDRC). SDRC is small, with only core staff but is very effective and provides services all over the country and known as (may be) the most innovative local agency for development. Vietnam doesn't know what development is; they just preach and ask people to change. The SDRC worked with grassroots communities – they knew how to build teams, how to develop leadership, how to organize people for poverty alleviation programs.

My third official 'baby' is the Women Studies Department, which was "co-delivered" with Dr Thai thi Ngoc Du a Ph.D. in Geography who became the Head of it because she is younger and a party member. Dr. Thai invited me to develop the curricula for an interdisciplinary women's studies program. It was and is very popular. It is a degree granting program under the sociology department. Recruitment of students has been steadily increasing. I taught in the program till 1999. Neither of us knew very much about gender and development issues but we learned by doing. What we tried to do is not only produce people who talk feminism but also through action make it become a reality.

Through the Department I was also able to introduce participatory education which is even still new to some universities. During the last 10 years our group of social workers had introduced social work methodology into a number of different areas ranging from disability to urban and rural community development. The biggest problem is the recognition of social work as an academic discipline. After trying for 20 years, with hope and despair, we have finally got some results. Some other universities will also teach social work and maybe later we shall have an Association of Social Workers. I would not be such an innovator if the country were not that far behind. What is different about social work in this country as compared to other former socialist countries is that we redeveloped social work here. Social work did not exist as an academic discipline in Russia and in America it was much focused on individual case-work. In Vietnam, it was developed as more community- and group-focused and geared to solving problems of poverty. We convinced the authorities through demonstrations of success at the grassroots level and with patience and endurance.

I was able to write a dozen of books not only for social workers but also for youth education in general that are well read. Since the last 4-5 years I regularly write on big newspapers on hot issues with a frank and direct approach that no official would dare to do. To my surprise, I am known countrywide because of these articles. Of course 25 years living in the system I know how to write. Some people think I could have done more if I were a party or a government member. I think that on the contrary I would be so tied up that I could not do anything. I think the fact that I am accepted is that I have no interest in power of any sort, that I want the best for the country, the people and socialism, that along with criticism I always propose solution to problems. I am very motivated to serve. I am all by myself. If I were married with children, maybe I would have left the country along with the rest of my family. The fact that I stayed is not so heroic.

Power is neither good nor bad; it is neutral. What's important is the way you use it. When you have power you are tempted to use it for other goals; with little you want more. So, I've always warned myself about power. I work in teams a lot and we always remind each other. This is something I learned from lay theology - let the people lead. I worked for decades with youth. After liberation they were fearful. I pushed them forward. This attitude is also part of my professional training – in counseling we must be passive and promote the other; encourage but don't take the decision yourself.



Thanks to Ho Chi Minh, women were granted political equality in the 1949 Constitution. Policies have defined the percentage of women in political leadership positions. The health care and education systems during the centralized, subsidized period were in favor of women. But now with the market economy women have lost all that. Since I started working on feminist issues I discovered that political measures are not enough. There also needs to be a cultural revolution. Our society culturally speaking is ultra conservative and authoritarian. Women's liberation in such a context is almost impossible. However due to international trends we talk feminism and have national policies on the advancement of women. But all this is done top down. Gender equality is preached in theory. Even since the liberation of the country, women like everyone else, submit themselves in great passivity. But, there is less corruption in women leaders and business managers. Still, women in positions of authority act only when there is an order from above. No initiative is possible, especially feminist initiatives, outside the official women organization. Even today there are no feminist NGOs in Vietnam, although after the Beijing Women conference, Union's leaders have reported the impressive work of feminist NGOs in the world.

What do I want most to change? Maybe women's minds, because unless they liberate themselves nobody will do the work for them. Changes are happening, but slowly. The young women especially students think quite differently. There is so much change going on around them; they have more information; they see new models of women leaders. Now, the fear has lessened; there is less punishment if you don't conform.

Changes should be done in a subtle and skillful way because there is great fear to loose control. So my wish is that people start to think more on their own and that our society opens itself much more to social sciences outside the country to be more self confident in front of changes. Disruptive changes are not necessary and beneficial. You should use non-violence and peaceful means, even forgiveness and tolerance.

To me good leadership should be for the people. It is shared and should generate new leadership. It should make people grow, mature and able to solve their own problems. A good leader should quickly step aside when the work is done. In Asia we have good slogans for leadership. "In a good group, when the work is done, all members say that it was thanks to their contribution" (Lao Tsu). In Vietnam we often say that "the old bamboo should die (or even cut off) so that the shoots can grow". In shared leadership we all earn the results of success and we also share the consequences of failure. This helps to make your responsibility light, easy to bear. Since my early years of work I apply these principles and become more and more skillful in sharing responsibilities and training younger leaders. The democratic style of leadership enables you to get feedback and find solutions to problems with colleagues. I do not train people separately but as a group and they share leadership in their work.

You cannot run a movement without spiritual energy. In our situation we promote the human values of social work, nationalism, the ideology of social development, the love for the poor and the oppressed, human growth and liberation (Paolo Freire). I was a very fervent and committed Christian (now the church is very archaic). Love of the other, by the poor and disadvantaged have always moved me. I am concerned with solidarity and unity and to change the lot of the poor.

I am angry when I see men using their force, their power to crush women – especially through violence. Violence against women issues are not addressed here. There are good counseling centers – but they are not used much because men don't want to lose face and women don't want to leave their families. These centers try to do community awareness raising and encourage community action.

What I have been able to accomplish is still small, maybe invisible, but social work as a profession the 3 organizations I have created are there to stay. We also have an informal, invisible SDRC network throughout the country. Our common ideology is simply human and social development, of course with gender justice and equality. Among those people and groups there are provincial and district women's unions officials who have studied with us. Those are the ones to bring further and deeper changes. Young people seem to like my writings. They are also eager to see norms and values changed. They'll do the work.



JIRINA SIKLOVA (CZECH REPUBLIC)



Jirina Siklova is the founder of the Gender Studies Centre in Prague (1991), the first center of its kind in the nation. Dr. Siklova has been Professor of Sociology at Charles University, and in 1995 she won the Czech Woman of the Year award. Dr. Siklova was deeply involved in political-intellectual dissident groups under the Communist regime, and was at various times jailed and barred from the University. She has written extensively on social costs of transformation of Eastern Europe, feminism, national minorities, NGOs, citizenship rights, and gerontology. She sits on numerous advisory boards of foundations and editorial boards of European and international journals.

In the Czech Republic, it is possible to achieve changes in women's empowerment only step by step by enhancing their self-assessment, changing their stereotypes about themselves and women in general, about their roles and opportunities. Legislation nowadays is quite all right. But if you do women's empowerment just by new legislation, i.e. "from upper force", I think this can weaken the position of women. In the communist regime, for example, all decisions about social position were made by the state ("upper force") and it is only by self-organizing ("from down") that you can change the self-assessment of women in the Czech Republic and thus increase their empowerment.

I am not leader. I see myself as an organizer. I don't use the word "leadership" to describe what I do. I call it "service to society". It didn't bother me that people didn't know my work (my articles were written under a male pseudonym because it was safer to do that). If in 1989 the Velvet Revolution never happened, no one would have known my work. I didn't care; what I cared for was the cause.

I try not to work up rivalry in people. I don't want them to inform about each other's doings. I don't want them to be competitive and to show me which one is better or worse. What I find very useful is that people should feel they are working for a good cause. It is of great advantage if they are concerned about a good name of Gender Studies as such; if they feel satisfaction not only about their work and work of their group but take it as a whole. This also applies to the department of Social Work at the university where I as head for 10 years. I believe in relationships of equality – everybody knows how to do some things and others, other things. So, from everyone according to their abilities and to everyone according to their needs. When you put it all together, it all works. I am against coalitions if they are against somebody. Coalitions should be to join people for a purpose to do good. There should be individual motivation and recognition of what they bring to the collective keeping in mind what it contributes to the greater whole (so that you don't give too much attention to one person). Power means having respect from other people. Power is exercised by setting high standards for oneself and leading by example.

Women are not so prestigious. They don't have to reassure themselves of how unique and perfect they are. Their form of leadership is more in the examples they show rather than in the form of orders. When people accept you as a sensible person, and even they can take you as an older and wiser friend, but never as a formal authority, then you have accomplished something. When you succeed in this, people are not afraid to express their ideas freely, they are not afraid to disagree with you, they can take initiatives and still the work is coordinated. Poor leadership (it is also called authority) is when people have fear. They are afraid of losing their jobs, of not getting enough money. The members of the group lose their initiative because they know that the leaders to enhance their own image will use their initiative.

I was part of the dissent movement, which pushed for freedom of expression. I wanted to help others to freely express their ideas. In 1968, the time of Prague Spring, I was a party member and chairperson of party organization at the Philosophy faculty at the university.



But after August 1968, I started to engage in the reform movement because I believed it was possible to reform the communist party and that that was the only possible way to sustain change. But I didn't think this was possible in the USSR. I thought that when the Soviet Union would lose its grip on Czechoslovakia and see the change there, it would have a ripple effect on the Soviet Union. But this didn't happen. USSR wanted to have total power over its satellites and it lost its credibility in the west as well as in communist and socialist parties around the world. In 1969, I left the party. It was easier for me to do this as chairperson. I wanted to connect with the dissent group – writers, politicians, and artists. I realized that it was a mistake to try to reform the party.

At the moment my work is focusing on problems of aging (women living longer than men) and I am working with women self-help groups on this issue. I am also writing and teaching at the University. I teach a course on the life span and development stages during the life; social gerontology, on the problems of identity during the different life stages; on social problems from a gender-differentiated point of view (this includes looking at women in the labor market, women in politics and includes an analysis of ethnic, and class differences)

In the Czech Republic there are not major differences in the situation of women and men and therefore the kinds of change that they want are not so different from each other. There are however, differences in the leadership styles at certain levels. Women in small business enterprises for example, have built a support network to help each other and newcomers in this field – they share information and cooperate. I don't see that happening with men. That could be because women have a higher consciousness; but it also could be because they are not the big players and so they need each other more. There is a culture of competition among men whereas there is more of a culture of cooperation among women.

There are two women heads of political parties here in the Czech Republic. They are both heads of fairly right wing parties. In fact, women support right wing parties more than do men. That could be because women want to see a change in policies and leadership – these parties follow the Western development model while the other parties are social democrats (still they too have followed capitalistic policies such as privatization of banks etc.) Women are happy that socialism is over. They are active in local level politics; they are relatively more concrete – men think this is an extension of family level issues and it has lower prestige. Women also have less mobility – if there is a car in the family, the men will use it. But women and men are making the same mistakes of leadership. This is the model of power they are used to – they are arrogant and they support right wing development.

You cannot separate gender equality from social equality and justice. You cannot separate rights as those of women and those of men. You have human rights. I don't like the term "women's rights" because it can be interpreted as more than human rights. Within a human rights frame, working for women's rights means taking a different strategy. You need to talk to women first – this is the starting point for generating ideas and consensus around issues. If there are successful women who have achieved something, this is inspiring to others. It is important to gradually change attitudes of women and people on certain issues. It's more effective to talk and write about a topic – to make people aware of new issues at all different levels. Using popular media is important, as is getting the message out widely in public space in simple language. Women will become aware of these ideas. The academic way is not the only one to make change happen.



MAIRO BELLO (NIGERIA)

Mairo Bello is a pioneer in adolescent reproductive health and a mentor to other colleagues in northern Nigeria. She is the founding director of the Adolescent Health and Information Project (AHIP), located in Kano, Nigeria, which provides information, education, and counseling on sexuality and reproductive health to thousands of young people. The group's vocational training programs provide girls with not

only practical, income earning skills but also lessons in decision-making, leadership, health management, and assertiveness. AHIP's research and advocacy activities promote the reproductive health and rights of adolescents in a region where such issues are not readily discussed. Mairo has a long history of involvement in the women's movement, nationally and internationally. In Nigeria, she has been active in the labor movement, Women in Nigeria, and WISSEA, a coalition of Muslim women from the northern region of the country. She was a strong voice for women's and girls' sexual and reproductive rights at both the International Conference on Population and Development, and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

If you try to live by the understanding that feminism means that a woman strives to be seen as a human being with full human rights who wants to realize her full potential and succeed in her endeavors, you are seen as a threat to the opposite sex. You are seen as going out of line of the conventional norms of the society by less empowered women and considered a lost soul by the religious leaders. What needs most to change are unequal opportunities and power relations between the sexes. It's happening gradually in different communities and especially with the changing economic power of women. The biggest change yet to happen is in marriages and personal relationships in the society.

I don't believe that we can divorce gender inequality from social injustice, as gender inequality is the root cause of most social injustices. So, you cannot be leading on one without working on the other. However, working for social justice will involve also working for justice between and within the different classes in society. Working for social justice is less threatening to society and sometimes the leader receives some support for their work. The leader who fights for gender equity gets a lot of resistance. This is why a leader working on gender equality needs to continuously do intensive advocacy and be subtle in their approaches and strategies. If you go head on in dealing with sexuality issues, you will crash. But you still have to take risks and get outside the box of convention.

Changing gender relations is slower than any other kind of social change – all the lawmakers are of the opposite sex, all the implementers of the law are of the opposite sex. And the women that get into political power are those who are put there by the men. Either they have some connection with power brokers or they are related to some blue blood. They don't get there on their own merit. So, they have to dance to the tune of those who put them there. If they work on feminist issues, they are out.

All my life I have been fighting for rights and I realized that it's very difficult for grown women to change because they have internalized many social norms. I work in Northern Nigeria, which is predominantly Islamic and a difficult terrain to work in. So, through AHIP, which we set up in 1992, we work with young people – both girls and boys. We have a large program with many components – a vocational skill building program, a sports program, a personal skills program, a youth friendly clinic and a peer-health educator program. A young person can join anyone of these but through all they develop their personal skills and learn about rights including sexuality and reproductive rights. We don't talk use the words "gender roles" but we talk about them; we don't say we are talking about "sexuality" but we actually do. We talk instead about building young people's self-



esteem, which includes knowledge about their rights, building their capacity to earn a living, learning about new ways of relating to the opposite sex, and new roles which are fun and fulfilling. For example, we hold a carnival of learning in which boys compete to take care of babies and girls compete to learn construction skills. At the end, the best gets a prize! The young people are enthusiastic about this program. We work with over 30,000 young people through over 135 schools and we also work with out-of-school kids.

We have seen positive change as a result of our efforts. More people are talking about sexuality issues; more NGOs have been formed to start programmes to address sexuality issues; and more schools are involved in AHIP's program. We, along with others, developed a national curriculum for sexuality education in schools and advocated for its adoption. Popular attitudes towards sexuality issues have changed. We have developed skills of young women to have economic power, to negotiate for their rights, and get involved in decision making. Young people and young women especially have gained a sense of worth through the process of learning new skills and challenging negative positions of authorities in their local environment.