



THE FUTURE IS FEMALE - EQUALITY FOR WOMEN & GIRLS

Dr. Mithilesh Kumar

Ph.D. VKSU. Ara. Bihar.

ABSTRACT:

When it comes to global challenges, girls face the greatest risks and fight the toughest battles. They're also defending their rights and their futures and making the world a more equal place for everyone. From violence and poverty to discrimination and displacement, girls in every country experience the global scourge of gender inequality. And in larger numbers than ever before, girls are rising to these challenges and raising their voices on behalf of one another, the planet, and our future. Not as victims, but as survivors and trailblazers who are reshaping our world. Their call is resounding: Our time is now. The qualities, character and competencies of all leaders vary and indeed it is diversity that brings richness and possibilities. In our polarising, complex and uncertain society, leaders that can build trust, lead collaboratively within their organisation and with partners, and identify a purpose and vision that unites people and inspires commitment from them are critical qualities. This requires IQ (intelligence quotient) and EQ (emotional intelligence), authenticity, confidence, presence, strategic thinking, political savvy and a range of influencing and management skills.

INTRODUCTION:

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the world is currently home to more than 1.1 billion girls under the age of 18. They are poised to become the largest generation of female leaders, entrepreneurs, and change-makers the world has ever seen. Today, 2 in 3 girls are enrolled in secondary school, compared with just 1 in 2 in 1998. And thanks to better access to health care, food, education, and economic opportunity, girls born today can expect to live an average of nearly eight years longer than girls born in 1995. But progress is still far too slow and far too fragile. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's decree forbidding girls and women to attend secondary school or enter the workforce has undermined two decades of educational and economic progress. The recent

rollback of reproductive rights by the U.S. Supreme Court means girls and young women in the United States now have fewer rights than their mothers and grandmothers did at their age.

DISCUSSION:

The inequality that is growing has a gendered face – more women live in poverty and are vulnerable to economic and social insecurity and so women’s leadership is essential to ensure that we develop more equitable policies and systems of governance. Where women are under-represented such as in hard security, science and technology, women bring diversity of thought and skills, supporting more effective outcomes. Women are also shown to bring a higher average degree of emotional intelligence and support higher collective intelligence and team performance. In many ways, the global economy depends on the unpaid, underappreciated work of girls and young women. In every country on the planet, girls bear disproportionate responsibility for domestic labor, including caring for young, elderly, or sick relatives. In Burkina Faso, girls between the ages of 10 and 14 spend 21 or more hours each week on household chores than boys their age. Girls and young women across the globe also play crucial roles as human rights defenders and agents of change. From Chile to South Africa, girls have emerged as an integral part of the struggle for fairer societies. Their activism has brought about unique contributions to the advancement of gender equality and human rights. In Brazil, thanks in part to the advocacy of local Girl Up clubs, 16- and 17-year-old girls registered to vote in record numbers for this year’s critical national election. The right of girls and young women to participate in public and political life is guaranteed under international human rights law for a reason: For societies to thrive, their voices are vital. Sexual and reproductive health and rights isn’t just an issue of civil liberty. It’s a matter of life and death. Some 70,000 girls die each year from pregnancy or childbirth complications, making it the second leading cause of death for girls aged 15-19 worldwide. One in 4 adolescent girls aged 15-19 has an unmet need for contraception. Seven million girls under the age of 18 give birth each year. Today, over 1.2 billion girls and women of reproductive age live in countries and areas that have some restrictions on access to safe abortion. An additional 102 million live in places where abortion is prohibited. Though female genital mutilation is recognized internationally as a human rights violation, 1 in 3 girls aged 15-19 are still cut today in 31 countries that compile national data on the practice’s prevalence. But the tide is shifting; in 2021 alone, 4,475

communities made public declarations committing to eliminate female genital mutilation. While child marriage has declined in the past three decades, 1 in 5 girls worldwide still wed before the age of 18. The ripple effects of child marriage are well-documented: Child brides are more likely to leave or be excluded from school, live in poverty, suffer from complicated pregnancies, and experience social isolation and gender-based violence, according to UNICEF.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES:

Research suggests that girls and young women are the hardest hit by climate change. A study in Botswana found that 56% of girls are traveling longer distances than usual to fetch water as a result of extreme weather. Globally, four out of five people displaced by climate change are girls and women. Studies show a rise in gender-based violence during or after extreme weather events, often as a result of economic instability, food insecurity, mental stress, disrupted infrastructure, increased exposure to men, and exacerbated gender inequality. Despite climate change's disproportionate impact on girls in particular, their voices are still not adequately represented in climate discussions, resulting in policies that don't address their specific needs. Less than 2% of national climate strategies mention girls. At the same time, girls hold enormous potential to inspire change and make progress. At just 13, student Greta Thunberg staged a strike outside of Sweden's Parliament that kick-started a wave of global youth strikes for climate action. Importantly, girls are increasingly aware of their capacity to spark change. One survey found that 80% of girls and young women believe they have the power to tackle climate change directly. Another showed that 1 in 3 girls has already taken action. Leadership programmes for everyone are important to continuously upgrade our thinking, our skills and tools and unlock our full potential. Leadership programmes for women are particularly important to allow them to benefit from the latest leadership insights, and to identify their personal strategies to develop confidence, influence and resilience to rise above harmful political, social and cultural norms. There are a range of measures including: 1) Financial and technical support to be able to stand for office and run campaigns; 2) Robust accountability mechanisms to address violence and intimidation in person and online; 3) Learning and development opportunities to develop knowledge and skills; 4) Role models and networks of support to shift perceptions and support resilience; and 5) Quotas to ensure political parties nominate women, and women are encouraged to step forward.

CHALLENGES:

Some challenges start within ourselves – our thinking is shaped by social and cultural norms which are often outdated and unhelpful, and we need to reflect on our own mental models and develop ways of thinking which serve us now and in the future. Some challenges lie with others or systems which discriminate against women – and this requires women to develop courage to speak up and invest their time and energy in influencing and changing socio-cultural norms and systems.

CONCLUSION:

Rarely do women have the time and space to reflect on how they arrived at their present situation and then develop a positive personal purpose and vision and identify ways to achieve it. And we know this exercise is far more powerful when done socially. We provide a structured journey to guide women through the effective mind-sets, skills and tools of leadership; and facilitators and fellow participants provide personal feedback and insights to support individual reflection, learning, accountability and success.

The Emerging Women's Leadership Program (EWLP) leads to building the following for our participants:

1. Understanding Gender: A deep awareness of various lenses through which gender plays a role in women achieving their maximum potential
2. Capacity Building: Build competencies that are necessary for women to be successful leaders in the social sector
3. Understanding the Self: Increased confidence and conviction to advance one's career
4. Peer Community Network: Access to a community of people championing their success, including peers and coaches
5. Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes: One's own knowledge bank on leadership that includes a range of tools, templates and frameworks as well as other resources.

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