



TRANSFORM

POLITICIANS, NOBEL PRIZE WINNERS
AND TECH LEADERS

WHY WOMEN ARE KICKING OPEN THE DOOR TO OPPORTUNITY

February
2023

#WomenInLeadership



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IN THIS ISSUE, WE LOOK AT
THE SUBJECT OF
WOMEN LEADERS

EDITOR'S NOTE

IGNORING THE DOUBTERS AND DRIVING THE CHANGE

**Gavin Allen**

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Inira Bokova was the first female Secretary-General of UNESCO. The key was to not be the last.

"One of my success stories is that another woman was elected after me," she told me proudly, for this Women in Leadership edition of *Transform* magazine.

And it went further than just a single baton handover. When Bokova was elected in 2009, only 23% of the senior posts, she says, were filled by women. When she left just eight years later, that figure had soared to 50%. In some of the very highest director-level and above positions, it was more than 60%.

"And you know, it really changes, it really physically changes," she tells me. "It changes the overall way the work is being done, what kind of teams you put together. But you have to make a really deliberate effort to make that happen. It doesn't come naturally."

It's a mindset that underpins Huawei's own Women in Tech initiative [<https://www.huawei.com/en/sustainability/women>], now in its third year and driven by the goal of "Tech by Her, Tech for Her, Tech with Her." The aim is to promote and invest in female leadership, skills and role models in all industries, especially science and technology.

And like Huawei, Bokova is impatient at the slow pace of progress towards greater gender equality and opportunity. But while she welcomes the benefits brought by the global interventions of companies such as Huawei and others, she's clear it's also about women helping themselves.

"There was a chance, which I just reached out. I grabbed it," she says. "And I think many women do have opportunities, but they don't dare (to grab them)."

Another contributor to this edition, Teresa Gloria Cervero García, a lead research engineer at the Barcelona supercomputing center, agrees – but puts it slightly differently:

"Sometimes it's not that the people around you don't believe in you, it's that they don't believe in themselves... If you don't make your own decisions, someone will decide for you."

And that thread of agreement is what's perhaps most striking across these *Transform* interviews. Despite the very broad range of expertise and experience – from a Nobel Prize-winning chemist and an ITU director, to an infectious disease professor and an academic painter and beyond – the same shared insights keep bubbling back to the surface.

First, **digitalization offers new opportunities for girls and women**: "Digital technology can help us visualize things that maybe we don't see around us. It gives us new options. It inspires us to really do what we want" (Arantxa Martínez, academic artist). And, "The internet is democratic and opens up the world to you: it makes it possible for many people to disclose what they think" (Dr. Maria dos Remédios Freitas Carvalho Branco, infectious disease physician).

But **digital needs to be managed** too: "It's important to make sure that men and women benefit equally from technology... Women are technology

consumers, so we should express our demands" (Atsuko Okuda, International Telecommunication Union director). And, "Sometimes artificial intelligence and technologies may entrench stereotyping if you're not careful and sensitive about it. It's a critical moment now" (Bokova).

Connectivity for ALL is key: "Some areas, especially the poorest, do not have access to it at all. So, technology can actually end up increasing social inequality, especially in terms of information" (Branco). And "Digital transformation is driven by one formula: speed multiplied by intelligence. When we equate inclusion to connectivity, and everyone is connected, that's where the real amazing transformation will happen" (Okuda).

The road to success can be very bumpy: "You're going to find some moments where the path disappears under your feet, and you're going to feel difficulties, and doubt. But you can go back to your essence and conjure up more positive feelings" (Martinez). And, "Finding a way to balance your personal space with your kids, and then with your work, is not easy" (García).

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The person who has to make your dreams come true is you
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Role models matter: "Inspirational colleagues and supervisors in my career... enriched my perspective and way of thinking" (Okuda). And, "Sometimes you do serve as a model for future women, too, so that pressure is always there" (García).

There is real progress: "More women use digital for business: 54%, compared to men at just 39%. This suggests that, given a proper understanding of digital utilization, they can carry it out" (Mira Tayyiba, Secretary-General of the Indonesian Ministry of Communications and Informatics). And, "I'm a glass half full person. I believe in being progressive and positive, and looking back at what has been afforded to both men and women in this country" (Mary Coughlan, former Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland).

But there's **still another half of the glass to fill**: "I sometimes am resentful because (my) field has many women. Yet if you go to an infectious disease conference, you will see many men speaking" (Branco). And, "It is felt that women cannot do mathematics, so girls are encouraged to study literature or something.

You wind up with a lot more men in technical fields" (Judith Yah Sunday épouse Achidi, CEO of Cameroon Telecommunications).

More laws may be required to force change: "You need to define the proportion of women who enter management. Regulation would help" (Branco). And, "The stick should be there. I'm sorry to say it, but if we just leave it, it will take hundreds of years" (Bokova).

Women are just uniquely stronger in certain qualities: "We are sensitive. We pay attention to details. Women know that they need to keep their word, and to work twice as hard to prove themselves" (Achidi). And "Women possess a number of advantages in the corporate world. They incline naturally toward teamwork and collaboration, and are usually eager to help others succeed" (Catherine Chen, Huawei Supervisory Board).

But **keep perspective**: "Work seriously, but also don't forget to enjoy the process" (Tayyiba). And, "You just have to try and believe in yourself and do your level best on your own behalf and on behalf of the people you represent" (Coughlan).

And all our interviewees tended to return to **education as core**. As a former minister for education, Coughlan identified it as "key to helping people have capacity." It was seen as equally fundamental by Branco: "When you have schooling, you can have your own life."

When Bokova was still leading UNESCO, she visited one of the organization's community centers near Petra, in Jordan. A little girl there, when asked what she would like to become in the future, said she wanted to become Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO. And Bokova replied, "You can do this if you continue your education."

From young girls to global leaders, from Jordan to Japan to Jamaica, education should have neither geographic nor age limits, because it can transform ambitions and lives continuously.

But "You can do this" is surely the magical ingredient that fires that education.

The crystallographer Ada Yonath could certainly do it, and did, dismissing the doubters along the way to win a Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 2009. "Everybody laughed at me... I ignored them," she says.

Her formula for life is a simple one. "The quality of your work, and your innate curiosity – those are the key determinants of success."

García is equally clear-minded about where responsibility lies: "The person who has to make your dreams come true is you."

In short, it's in your hands. You can do this.

ALWAYS KEEP LEARNING



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interview video

Mary Coughlan
Former Deputy Prime Minister
Republic of Ireland

Gavin Allen: It has taken some time, but, have women ever had it so good?

Mary Coughlan: I think things have changed dramatically, and legislation has helped – greater opportunities within education, for example. But there are still challenges, and those can become profound when you have a difference between what people would like to achieve, what their capabilities are, and whether opportunities will be afforded to them. And all of that is mixed with the challenges that have existed since time immemorial: trying to have a partner, have a family, all those things, and how that all integrates into achieving what people rightly deserve to achieve.

Gavin Allen: So overall, do you have a kind of glass-half-empty, or glass-half-full viewpoint?

Mary Coughlan: I'm a glass-half-full person. I believe in being very progressive and positive, and looking back at what has been afforded to both men and women in this country, particularly when it comes to younger women getting involved in all types of leadership roles, in all types of capacities.

Gavin Allen: You were a member of the Irish Parliament for 24 years, and you are a former Tánaiste, or Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland, so you're a prominent woman leader. Did you feel a responsibility to be a role model for girls and women?

Mary Coughlan: I always tried to encourage more women to go into political life. In the main, women are very community-orientated. They're non-confrontational, they try to bring people together. So that is actually the baseline where a lot of women get elected. But they never seem to think they can take the next step.

We introduced quotas within the political parties, so you had to have a certain number of women who would be putting their name forward for election. I was elected not because I was a woman, but because I had the capacity to do the job.

When I was Minister for Education, I was hugely enthusiastic about getting more women involved in STEM, in science, mathematics, and technology. They have the capacity, so we were trying to see where the opportunities were to get them more involved.

Gavin Allen: I am always slightly baffled as to why women are so underrepresented. They're not underrepresented so significantly in other fields, it seems.

Mary Coughlan: You know, entrepreneurship is something I am very enthusiastic about, and you will see that a lot of women entrepreneurs are in the agri-food sector, or the beauty sector, something they feel very comfortable with. But we want women to be entrepreneurs in high-tech, in bio-pharma.

There's this perception that it's difficult. But it's just as difficult for a boy as it is for a girl. It's how you apply yourself.

Gavin Allen: So how much is it the responsibility of the girl or the woman to seize opportunities, and how much is it the responsibility of policy makers, and maybe businesses, like Huawei?

Mary Coughlan: Companies know they need more women. There have to be far more women at board-level in the corporate world, because there is a balance that can be brought to a board table, to an organization, by having both men and women express an opinion. That makes for better decision-making.

But, you know, life isn't easy, and it never will be. Young people have to have the capacity to be able to take those hard knocks.

Resilience comes from your home, your school, your friends. You have to have that capacity to say, "Look, it didn't work out, I'm going to start all over again." If you don't do that, then you're going to find it very difficult, it doesn't matter what you do in life.

Gavin Allen: Are too many businesses paying lip service to gender equality, and therefore does there need to be a bit more stick, rather than carrot, for businesses?

Mary Coughlan: It's difficult to know, because at the same time, a lot of companies are scratching their heads thinking, "Who is out there that would bring something to my company, my organization, my board?" And, they can't find that someone. So it's up to women as well to put themselves forward and make themselves available.

Gavin Allen: You rose to be the deputy prime minister in Ireland. Politics is a pretty bruising profession. How did you build your own resilience?

Mary Coughlan: I served a number of years as a backbencher before I was appointed as a minister. That gave me experience, and the capacity to build relationships within my own political party. Competition is keen, and if you want to go up the ladder, you have to get involved in legislation at a national level. So I had that grounding for a considerable number of years. I also had a group of people who supported me in my political career – as many men as women. That allowed me to go ahead and work hard within every department where I was given the opportunity to participate.

Gavin Allen: Did you feel treated differently as a female leader?

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There have to be far more women at board-level in the corporate world. It makes for better decision-making.

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Mary Coughlan: One of the things I was asked after I'd lost my seat was, "Did women journalists treat me differently to others?" And there was a very interesting article by Alison O'Connor, who quite rightly said what I couldn't say, which was yes. And that's a pity, because women should be supporting women. I'm not saying that they shouldn't criticize. But some of the vitriol was awful. And it's worse now. That will be a disincentive to people, both men and women, to go into political life. For that matter, it may be a disincentive to people who want to move up and be leaders, be entrepreneurs, or whatever.

Gavin Allen: You think it's toxic for leadership everywhere?

Mary Coughlan: I think it's quite toxic. We need to come back to a level where there is a balance and where there is respect for everyone and respect for people's views, whether you like them or not.

Mary Coughlan
Former Deputy Prime Minister
Republic of Ireland

Gavin Allen
Editor-in-Chief
Huawei Technologies

And this conjuring up of, I suppose, what they call fake news now, that has to stop, or we're going to create anarchy. We've seen it in the biggest democracy in the world, the United States. We see now what's happening in Brazil. It's awful.

Gavin Allen: We talked about toxicity. In terms of helping women in the future, is it more important to spotlight the successes that women achieve, or the obstacles they've had to overcome? Is it the grit or the glory that we should hone in on?



Mary Coughlan: You can over-glorify things. When you see over-glorification, for example, on Instagram, that gives a wrong impression about life. It creates this aura which is unrealistic to 99.9% of the people of the world.

What do people want in life? They want to be happy. They would like a job. They would like to be healthy. They'd like to be afforded the opportunity to live as well as they can. In my view, education is the key to all of this.

Gavin Allen: This is a generalization, but why do women collectively tend to lack confidence?

Mary Coughlan: They become unsure about their own ability. And in order to address that, you educate, you support them in different ways.

I think public speaking is an area where a lot of women find they're uncomfortable. Just the very simple things that you need to do in public speaking: how you dress, how you speak, how you think. Breathing exercises, practicing in the mirror, reading off a cue card – all those things are very important. And that will give women the ability to speak. It's just supporting and encouraging them. Encouragement is very important. In an education system it is afforded through drama, through sport. People don't realize it, but that's actually what they're learning.

Gavin Allen: I've got a vested interest in this. I've got an 18-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old daughter. But if you were talking to a young woman now, what is your message to people who have self-doubt, who think, "I don't think I'll go into tech, it sounds a bit male." Or, "I'm not sure I see myself as a leader." What would you say to them to make them believe in themselves?

Mary Coughlan: Well, I suppose when it comes to deciding where you want to go in life, what you decide at 18 is not necessarily what you're going to be doing when you're 50. So my view and my advice is, you take a broad perspective. So if you want to go to university, take a broad degree, take something that can then be used as a building block to doing something else. Like there are anthropologists working in tech. Now where's the correlation? Well, it has to do with their capacity to think, and that is a skill in itself.

Gavin Allen: So, keep learning.

Mary Coughlan: Yes. Take a degree that's fairly broad, and then you'll be afforded the opportunity to see what you want to do. And when you're 19 and 20, and you have an opportunity to go to university or a college of technology, that experience is a stepping stone to the rest of your life. That is where you might meet your colleagues. That is where you get people who come together to be entrepreneurs. Look at all of the massive companies that have been created over the years in tech. A lot of the founders were at college together. Now they are multi-billionaires.

So, you know, it's about creating an opportunity for conversations to take place. The college experience is so important because that's where ideas come from, that's where conversations come from, and that's where politics comes from.

Gavin Allen: So, keep learning and have fun.

Mary Coughlan: Exactly. I should have taken that advice myself!

HOW CURIOSITY TRUMPED RIDICULE TO LAND A NOBEL PRIZE



Ada Yonath

Winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry



I am not the type of person that talks about women's lives, but I can talk about my own.

From about age eight, I studied in a class that had boys and girls. In high school, I had to choose whether to concentrate on the humanities or math and science. I chose the latter.

It was an easy choice. First, these were not difficult subjects for me. Second, I liked them. Third, I felt that everything else, I could do on my own. But for science, I needed some guidance.

Teaching class out on the balcony

I was born into an extremely poor family. My father died when I was 11. My mother was wonderful, but she didn't have the benefit of an education.

She did her best to raise me and my little sister, who was only two years old. But she could not provide everything. So essentially, from the age of 11, I was working. I had a lot of jobs.

I tutored kids in chemistry or mathematics. We had a tiny apartment, so I taught them out on the balcony.

I also cleaned stairwells, carried shopping bags home from the supermarket, and babysat people's children. I started working at 5:00 in the morning. I also took care of my little sister.

After I finished high school, I studied to be a teacher so that I would have a profession. Having done so much tutoring, I was used to teaching.

But in science, what drove me – and still is driving me – is curiosity. I really wanted to understand.

Take paper clips, for example. Because they're made of thin wire, you can change their structure with your fingers. Once you do, even a little bit, they won't hold papers together anymore.



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The sciences are gender-neutral. The quality of your work and your curiosity are the keys to success.
 ”

Like a paper clip, nearly all of life is related to structure. I wanted to understand this better.

Don't shoot the messenger

When I was a young scientist, DNA had already been discovered. And scientists had found that DNA was full of genes. All proteins are coded by genes. What I wanted to understand was, how do the genes express themselves? And what about the proteins made by the genes? How does this happen?

It was known already that there was an intermediary between the gene, which is DNA, and the protein, which is called mRNA or

messenger RNA. We hear about mRNA today because of Covid, but at that time, it was still a mystery.

This messenger RNA, which has all the information of the gene, binds itself to a particle, called a ribosome, which is known to connect the building blocks of proteins, called amino acids, connecting one to the next, according to the instructions in the messenger RNA.

This was known, but scientists still didn't understand how it happened. This is what I wanted to understand, and I knew I wasn't the only one. I was young, a beginner, but there were

already established scientists, big professors at Harvard, Oxford, Stanford, at the Max Planck Institute, in many highly respected institutions, who wanted to understand but failed.

Like me, they reasoned that function is related to structure. And the structure had yet to be determined, it was not known – especially the structure of the machine that puts everything together, the ribosome.

To determine the structure at that time, they used a method called crystallography. It's complicated, but the principles were well established. The starting material should be a crystal: a little body made by symmetrical operation in three dimensions.

So crystals of ribosome were needed and could not be obtained. When I declared that I wanted to do it, everybody told me I would fail like all the others.

But I had another idea about crystals of ribosomes. This was because I had a bicycle accident. The accident gave me a concussion, a serious traumatic brain injury. That kept me in bed, in the hospital and then at home, for almost half a year. During that time, I could not read science every day. So I read everything else.

Hibernate mode

I got my hands on a travel brochure from one of the airlines. This was the mid- to late 1970s, over 50 years ago. I read about a delegation that went to the North Pole to see how the bears hibernate during the winter. They go to sleep in December, then wake up in May and are able to function – but how?

In addition to studying live bears in the wild, researchers looked at the cells of dead bears, and found that, in the inner part of the cell, the

ribosomes are very well organized, like blocks, one next to the other – almost like a crystal, but only one layer.

At the time, it was believed that ribosomes could not be ordered or arranged. Until that point, no one had ever done it under laboratory conditions.

I thought, “The bears barely function when they're asleep. But when they wake up, they have to do all sorts of things.” If their ribosomes had disintegrated during their hibernation, they would not be able to function when they awoke. So that meant that nature had a system to preserve the ribosomes and keep them from disintegrating.

Ribosomes are packed very tightly. From this, I deduced that under pressure, ribosomes can be kept in ordered configuration. This was my idea, but people laughed at me.

In addition to that, I didn't really want to go to the North Pole and kill bears in order to do my research. I thought about other pressure systems. The Dead Sea is the lowest point in the world, very hot, and so salty that there's almost no life there: no fish, no trees, nothing.

“She's in the Dead Sea”

But there are two types of bacteria. And I thought, I will extract the ribosomes from these bacteria. These ribosomes know how to live under pressure in the sea, so they will be a good starting point.

Everybody laughed at me: “Oh, she's in the Dead Sea, she's in the salt water.” I ignored them. But after my colleagues and I determined the structure and function of ribosomes, two groups of very famous men – professors – copied us.

After all of it, people asked me, “Did you feel

upset that people laughed at you?” Honestly, I didn't even have time to think about it. I won't tell you all the problems I encountered along the way, but the wish to understand was so strong that I just didn't pay attention to the ridicule.

Afterwards, many women told me, “If you weren't a woman, they wouldn't laugh at you so much. If you were a man, they would respect you more.”

Maybe, but so what? That doesn't change anything, and you don't have to pay attention to it. The sciences are gender-neutral; this is clear. For that reason, salaries and compensation have to be the same for men and women. The quality of your work, and your innate curiosity – those are the key determinants of success.

SPEED × INTELLIGENCE: A FORMULA FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION



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Atsuko Okuda

Regional Director, Asia and the Pacific
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

The International Telecommunication Union is the oldest UN agency specializing in information and communications technology (ICT). We have three areas of expertise.

First, in the area of radio communication, we coordinate the efficient use of radio spectrum frequency.

Second, we work on standardization, an important topic for the development and use of technology. Third, we have a development bureau, which aims to connect the unconnected and bridge the digital divide.

My responsibility is to support all three in Asia Pacific, where our office covers 38 countries.

Can you tell us a little bit about your career?

I started my career in New York, at the United Nations Development Program, in 1997. At the time, the field of "ICT for development" was very new. When I came to the UN, there was no expectation that I was going to stay, or was going to do the job I'm doing now; it didn't really exist. But it was an exciting time and the field started expanding.

After working in New York for about four-and-a-half years, I was given the assignment to go to Bhutan, to implement an ICT-for-development project, which was really exciting. Then other organizations started picking up this line of work. I then moved to Africa, then Thailand, New York,

Lebanon, and back to Thailand, all within the context of UNDP and the UN Secretariat. But two-and-a-half years ago, I was given this opportunity at ITU to really specialize in telecommunication and ICT for development. So that was an opportunity for me to scale up what I had done in the past. So that's, like, the last 25 years in one minute!

Can you talk more about your experience as a woman in the ICT world?

I'm often asked, "How do you feel about being a woman in this male-dominated sector?" But in hindsight, in the UN, my supervisors and colleagues were frequently women. And I have many female counterparts in the industry and in academia.

Do you feel there is any sort of different perspective you can bring to your professional work as a woman, in terms of the way that you approach projects and so on?

I didn't realize until I actually implemented projects and worked on policy, how important it is to make sure that men and women benefit equally from technology. For example, when I was working in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, we needed to make sure that women's perspectives were taken into account in the design of the projects. Men, for example, felt that in order for expand the access to the internet, it would be a good idea to set up an internet kiosk in a bar, because that's where people gather.

But women wouldn't necessarily go to a bar. So if this project was in fact implemented, and an internet kiosk was set up in a bar, it would have excluded women from accessing the internet.

Women are technology consumers, so we should express our demands. We can say no, let's not make it a bar, let's instead establish the kiosk in schools, or hospitals, or community centers.

Another example is gender bias in AI. If AI solutions screen out equally competitive female candidates for a job, for example, that's wrong. We need a collaborative effort with the government and industry and society as a whole, so we can really create an inclusive society through the application of digital technology.

What about the challenge of getting more women into ICT?

We want to make sure that more girls and young women become interested in pursuing STEM as an academic and professional career.

I believe it's very important to show that there are important roles women can play in the ICT sector, including leadership roles. We must encourage more girls and young woman to pursue STEM and ICT careers. Eventually, we will see more female leaders in the ICT sector.

The ITU runs ICT Day celebrations in different parts of Asia Pacific, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, and the Philippines. We're also planning events in Pakistan and India. So I believe that momentum is being built in Asia Pacific. And many girls and young woman as well as government counterparts are seeing the benefits.

What measures do you find are most effective in encouraging women to study STEM subject?

In Thailand, we organized a training program with UNESCO on AI programming. They met online, girls and young women, aspiring programmers, and ICT leaders from all across different provinces of Thailand. And they saw other enthusiastic participants in this program. That builds confidence: they can see that it's not only them, but that there are many other girls and young woman in Thailand who feel the same way they do.

What drew you to work in the United Nations in the first place?

I was studying in Helsinki, Finland, in the early 1990s. The internet wasn't really well-known, but I had to take a course to learn how it worked. And I thought, "This is it, this will really change the world, change the development landscape. This tool is powerful for developing countries."

It wasn't my original intention to work for the ITU, but I applied for an internship at the UNDP that was just starting to use ICT for development. My background and interest really fit into what they wanted to do, and there were not so many graduate students who had a telecommunications and internet background.

My supervisor at UNDP also said, "It's interesting that you have an internet background, so early in the development of that technology." So that was the genesis of my career.

I found the UN environment to be inclusive and empowering. And I could pursue my career, while promoting the internet and technology for development. So that's the reason why I stayed on for the past 25 years.

What are you working on now?

As you may know, ITU has a mandate by 2030 to connect the unconnected – about 2.7 billion people. Most live in developing countries, in remote areas and islands, and have limited incomes. Our work focuses on understanding their challenges, then providing solutions. These include policy recommendations, or initiatives, as well as capacity development and advocacy.

Two examples are the Smart Island and Smart Village programs, ITU programs aimed at delivering connectivity and services to disadvantaged village and

island communities. In Asia Pacific, because of the geography and the smaller economies in the region, some commercial telecommunication services cannot be provided. So we need a separate, dedicated program to address development challenges, including climate change. This is a quick summary of what our support could look like, especially for those sub regions and countries and communities, which are not all connected until now.

What responsibility does a company like Huawei have in encouraging women to enter into tech?

I can cite one concrete example of what we did with Huawei. That was the “Girls in ICT Day” celebration in Thailand last year. We supported about 25 girls and young women to visit Huawei’s innovation center in Bangkok. It showed them about IoT, 5G, and AI, and about augmented reality. They could see how intelligent cities can manage, say, the flow of traffic at rush hour. Feedback from participants was, “You can learn about this on TV, but seeing it in person is much more powerful.” This is just one concrete example of how a company such as Huawei can partner with the ITU and other organizations.

As a woman, do you get as many opportunities as your male colleagues?

Because there are very few female specialists in ICT-for-development, I think I actually get more opportunities than male colleagues. These days, if the panel discussion doesn’t include women, it doesn’t look complete. I think that’s a game changer. And I think that should encourage more women to be visible and to be invited.

Throughout my career, I got more exposure and opportunities to speak with various audiences at different events. And maybe there is an expectation that I should behave in certain ways, but because I’ve been away from Japan for so long, I’m not that sensitive to such expectations anymore. I hope that the girls and young woman who are pursuing this path will not be discouraged if there are such expectations from society on how they should behave. They should follow their passion.

Perceptions and culture constitute a very real barrier preventing girls and young women from pursuing STEM as a career. In my previous job at the UN, we did a study on gender perspectives in STEM education in five countries in Asia and the Pacific. Although some of the more advanced countries have more female students and faculty members in STEM, the number is still very small. It’s about 30% in some countries, and less than 10% in others.

How did you get into the STEM field?

I just wanted deeper understanding of how things work. So when I jumped from my undergraduate study in Japan to Finland, it was like, this was something I wanted to pursue. And the same with my PhD program. It wasn’t really necessary; I wasn’t pressured to obtain a degree. But I really thought

that this is something that I wanted. That’s why I think I could finish it, because the path is very hard.

Did you feel any sense that the absence of role models and so on was an issue?

In hindsight, I never actually looked for a role model in my career. The internet was new, and ICT-for-development was very new. So, man or woman, there was no one in front of us. So it wasn’t necessary to have a role model. We just wanted to carve our niche in this vast development field, and to advocate for what we believed: that technology could really be good for development.

Have there been any women in your life who have been particularly impactful for you?

My supervisors who were women were very inspirational. In the past, I had a very good supervisor who was an economist. She didn’t have an ICT-for-development background, but because she looked at the technology in a different way, from an economist’s point of view, she asked many questions we wouldn’t have thought to ask.

The inspirational colleagues and supervisors in my career were not necessarily from the ICT field. But they also enriched my perspective and way of thinking. For example, I had a female supervisor who was a communication specialist. In fact, she had worked for the BBC before. I learned a lot from how she wrote, spoke, and presented ideas.

Coming from Japan, I am very shy when it comes to public speaking. I was really bad at it. But she was really inspirational. And I learned a lot about how to communicate clearly and precisely. So I had interesting supervisors and colleagues throughout my career, and I’m really thankful for them.

Are there any specific technologies you think will be particularly impactful when it comes to development?

It’s not just one technology that’s going to change the world, it’s a combination of technologies. I think digital transformation is driven by one formula: speed multiplied by intelligence.

So the speed is, let’s say, 5G or 6G, multiplied by intelligence, such as AI, or blockchain, or data analytics.

But equally important is connectivity. Because if this formula applies only to a few individuals in a big city with excellent connectivity, that may not be impactful. So when we equate inclusion to connectivity, and everyone is connected, and the data comes from everyone, which will feed into the speed multiplied by intelligence formula, I think that’s where the real amazing transformation will happen.

What does it feel like to set the rules and practices for the whole ICT industry?

I feel the responsibility to make sure that what we are promoting or recommending works for everyone, and to connect the unconnected and achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. I feel a great pressure to fulfill that function.

I think about the practicality and applicability of these recommendations because we know that, if they are not implemented, for whatever reason, they won’t do any good. So we always consider the circumstances and contexts and how they can help governments achieve socio-economic development.

One concrete example of that is our support of Indonesia’s G20 presidency. As you may know, the ITU was invited to become a knowledge partner to the G20 Digital Economy working group. And we worked with member countries on four topics: people-centered digital connectivity; digital skills; overcome the challenges of Covid-19; and how to connect practically through Smart Village and Smart Islands.

And through the Indonesian presidency of the G20, we supported Indonesia in establishing agreement among the G20 countries on these key topics. So this is one concrete example of how the ITU supports both developed and developing countries through the G20 platform.

What emotional impact does your work have on you?

Personally, the impact that I see on the ground really motivates and inspires me to do more. For example, a few years ago, the ITU conducted a study on unconnected schools in Thailand. When we shared our findings with the Ministry of Education, they immediately started connecting the schools, and a student from one of the newly connected schools joined our “Girls in ICT” Day. It was a moving moment for me, and made me feel that what I do is meaningful.

You’ve led many ICT projects through your career. Can you share a way that women can improve their digital skills and be more engaged with technology?

I think the important entry point is to find out why you want to improve digital literacy. That will motivate you to really master the particular digital skills you need.

For example, my family back in Japan wasn’t really interested in the internet, or email. But since we live abroad, and very far away, they now are motivated to learn how to do a video chat, and send email and share photos with me. That was really the starting point for them: exploring different applications and different things that they can do with digital technology. So a good way to build and to explore these skills would be to find the topic that really is important to you, and motivates you to go for it.



WOMEN MUST BE INSPIRING AS WELL AS INSPIRED



Catherine Chen

Executive Member of the Supervisory Board
Huawei Technologies, Inc.



Ada Yonath won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2009, the first woman in 45 years to win the Prize in that category and the first woman from the Middle East to win it in the sciences.

Huawei was therefore honored that Ada attended our largest Women in Tech conference in November 2022. Listening to her speak at the event, I was struck not only by her scientific accomplishments, but also by how hard she had to work to achieve them.

Ada was born into an extremely poor family. Her father died when she was 11. Her mother never got an education and struggled to provide for Ada and her younger sister. As a consequence, Ada began working various jobs starting at age 11. She did everything from babysitting and cleaning stairwells to tutoring classmates in chemistry and math.

To start from a childhood like that and eventually become a Nobel-Prize winning chemist is remarkable. Ada is a great role model for young women interested in science and technology.

But her story got me wondering: do things really need to be so hard? Technology is transforming our working environment and giving women more opportunities. We as a society can and should do better, equipping more women with ICT skills and serving as advocates to help women climb the ladder –with just a bit less effort.

Although it's tempting to focus on women who have excelled in their chosen fields after decades of work, equal attention should be paid to the early career development of young scientists, entrepreneurs, and other high-potential women. These young women, in turn, can inspire their juniors, especially girls in middle and high school, who are more likely to respond to role models closer to their own age.

Take, for example, Dr. Zheng Xi, a principal research engineer at Huawei. Dr. Zheng is lead inventor of SRCON, a digital twin for communications networks. Dr. Zheng's invention is an extremely sophisticated tool that optimizes the performance of broadband networks, while at the same time lowering their carbon footprint.

Dr. Zheng only got her Ph.D. three years ago. But she has been fascinated since childhood by research, engineering, mathematics, and understanding how things work. Although her natural talent would have opened any number of doors for her, Huawei provided a platform that let her build upon her considerable skills.

The company is committed to advancing the careers of women in tech, and we do this for thousands of young women all over the world.

But we don't have hiring quotas. And I don't think we need them.

In my decades at Huawei, I have never experienced a situation where women are seen as inferior to men. Huawei is a competitive environment, but it's a meritocracy: we discriminate on the basis of performance and hard work, not sex.

Hiring quotas make sense if you believe women have some innate disadvantage in the workplace and need special measures to help them succeed there. I don't believe this is true. In fact, I believe women possess a number of advantages in the corporate world. Among other things, they incline naturally toward teamwork and collaboration, and are usually eager to help others succeed. If Huawei has any predilection for hiring women, it is partly because of those traits.

Hiring women also makes sense because diverse teams produce better results. Far more than just a corporate buzzword, diversity can be a point of competitive advantage. Research by Scott Page, a professor of complex systems at the University of Michigan, indicates that diverse groups tend to perform better than homogeneous ones, and that the collective ability of any group is equal to the average ability of its individual members, plus the group's diversity.

Page calls this "a mathematical fact," and has expressed it as an equation. It is also a source of strategic advantage for any organization willing to make use of it.

Disparities based on income, gender, or other factors have always existed, all over the world. Corporate initiatives that focus merely on achieving male-female parity are only a small step toward a meaningful solution.

At Huawei, we believe progress toward fairness requires a more ambitious mindset, one that aspires to provide a level-playing field not only for our employees, but for everyone. By using ICT to connect the unconnected, Huawei hopes to give all individuals – men and women – a chance to pursue their dreams. The key is equality of access – to education, to training, to digital resources. Women who take advantage of those things will maximize their potential without the need for any special treatment.

Some women may be deterred from pursuing a career in tech because they think it will be hard, or male-dominated, or otherwise disagreeable.

Don't be deterred! If you're interested in science, math, coding, or any technical subject, pursue it. To quote the writer and poet, Maya Angelou, "I love to see a young girl go out and grab the world by the lapels."

Your courage will inspire others, and they will inspire others in turn. Over time, this will increase the number of women working in high-tech R&D, a crucial step toward finding new and innovative solutions to global challenges.

A WOMAN IN A MAN'S WORLD



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Teresa Gloria Cervero García

Lead Research Engineer
Barcelona Supercomputing Center

Tell us about your work.

I have a PhD in telecommunication engineering, and I'm a lead research engineer at the Barcelona supercomputing center in Spain. My job is to develop technology for future supercomputers, accelerators, and other infrastructure, to solve big questions like how the universe was created.

It's really great, because we need a lot of computation to solve big problems. My job is to work on developing devices that make this possible.

When you first started in this line of work, what was it like?

I had an engineering mind, so I decided to go into engineering. Technology and communication looked like the future. I got into the hardware side, because I like electronics: processing information to help people communicate with each other. It was fascinating.

I like to explore, so when I finished the degree, I decided to go a bit further and go for my PhD. Then, two years ago, I started working at the Barcelona supercomputing center.

Did anyone discourage you from pursuing a career in engineering because it's a male-dominated field?

No, it was relatively easy for me because I had the full support of family. And I think that's the most important thing.

But it's true that, when I said to my friends, for example, I want to go for an internship in engineering, some of them said, "Hey, are you sure? I mean, it's a male world." And my answer was, "Well, it's a male world because no women decide to go. So why not?"

I wanted to go for it. And I did. It's not because we cannot do it; it's because we decide not to go for it. It doesn't matter what the people around you say, because sometimes it's not because they don't believe in you, it's because they don't believe in themselves. So you have to go for it.

Did you get any particular advice that you feel was important?

For me, my best reference in my life is my mother. She always has been a fighter, and she has always done what she wanted, even if everything was against her. Even in the bad moments, her advice was "Push, push harder."

The person who has to make your dreams come true is you.

One of her best qualities was that once she makes a decision, she is determined, and she goes to the end for that. It doesn't matter what other people around her say. Because I've had a lot of discussions, we're here saying, "Hey, you're wrong in that regard. That's not gonna work." And she always said, "No, no, this is gonna work, look." And, step by step, she builds that reality. So for me, that's inspiring, saying, okay, little by little, we can build big things. Just one day after another, continue pushing. It doesn't matter how hard it is.

How has that quality of determination served you in your engineering career?

Sometimes you go far from your home, so you can feel alone. You're learning new subjects, facing new challenges, having new adventures. But I always continue, I never give up. That's something I learned at home. And even sometimes, when I was overwhelmed, my mother said, "Take a breath, relax, enjoy the process." So that's something else I've learned, something I've practiced and continue practicing.

Is your job especially challenging for a woman?

Yes, there are challenges. I have kids at home. So finding a way to balance your personal space with your kids, and then with your work, is not easy. Many women decide at some point to stay home, instead of continuing their professional career development.

I'm very lucky in the Barcelona Supercomputing Center because we have some groups trying to work on equity and diversity, supporting all the people at the Center - not just women, but people from different cultures, with different mindsets. The women in different departments are trying to meet regularly to talk about this. Men are invited, too because that's the way we can enrich the workplace: not just by taking care of our own needs, but also by understanding how the rest of our colleagues feel.

But I think this kind of unbalance between personal life and professional career is still there. Sometimes this is hard. I feel pressure: I don't have time to do things, I have to work, then I have to be a mom. I want to be a good mom, but also a good professional.

Do you think women and men have different expectations of themselves?

I think women are never taught to say no. We are very polite and say yes. Men are much better about that. We need to be sure that we don't say to girls, "You have to be perfect as a woman. You have to always help others. You cannot say no; you have to share; you have to take care of your parents, brothers, sisters, or whatever."

But we are socialized to take care of others. For example, even as an engineer, I always tend to take care of the people around me, like a mum in the office. I feel like I have to take care of my colleagues. "Are you okay? Can I help you?" I have to learn to say no, sometimes.

Do you feel additional pressure, being one of the few women in the profession?

I feel some responsibility, because you have to be an example. So if they don't have any other example, then you will be the example in all future conversations [about women].

You were talking earlier about how, when diversity and equity are being discussed, men are part of that conversation. What might that dialogue sound like? And how to do you ensure that there is a fruitful dialogue going on about this?

I'm in a group called Women in Computer Science. We wanted to create a dialogue with our colleagues. So we need to understand how things are seen, not just by us women, but also by our male colleagues. We are all part of the solution if a problem arises in the workplace.

Sometimes it's difficult to get men involved in this kind of activity. It's like, "Ah, this is only for women, I don't know what they're gonna say, what they're gonna do," and they don't want to be part of that. So, again, we need to educate our colleagues to be part of the solution, and get involved in this kind of activity.

How do you mentor people?

Using numbers is not enough. What I've tried with my colleagues is to go a bit deeper, having conversations about different subjects. "How do you feel about the number of women we have in the office?" Or, "How do you think we could improve the number of women here?" Or even just, "Where did you go last weekend? What kind of hobbies do you have?"

Those are not things you can measure, but they are important. We have to be able to include those things in order to understand, for example, why someone is not being productive. Perhaps that person is having a problem at home, or feels bad, but doesn't want to say anything, because they're

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If you don't make your own decisions, somebody will decide for you.

”

afraid of getting fired. So, those are the kinds of things that we need to include as part of a work environment or to measure the quality of the work environment.

We need to take care of the people, not just the numbers.

How would you describe yourself?

I'm an optimistic person, and a hard worker. Sometimes I'm very passionate - in good and bad ways, because sometimes I'm not very tolerant, and I'm competitive. But I always try to see things in a positive way, looking for solutions, being independent and autonomous, making my own decisions. That's something I learned years ago: if you don't make your own decisions, somebody will decide for you.

What are the main characteristics of female leadership?

That's a hard question. I don't know if I have the answer. But for me, it's important to take care of the people we have around us. It doesn't matter if you are a woman or a man. You should be like a shield, you know, for the people. You should have the capability of listening to others and also making people feel part of a team whose members collaborate and support each other.

Because you work in computer science, have you ever felt that people see you in a particular way? Have you ever felt pigeonholed, or restricted to a certain category because of that?

I feel lucky, and very happy to share the experience with my colleagues. But sometimes I can feel alone, because there are some things you cannot

share. Or if you talk too much, for example, about the stress of taking care of your kids, because they don't feel good, or whatever. It's like you can feel people thinking, "Ah, she's complaining again."

But over the past few years, I've seen an increase in the number of women in computer science. I'm very happy about that. Every time I talk to one of those women, they never felt bad, even if they have been surrounded by men all the time. So things are moving in a good direction. But what I would like is to not just to be talking about gender, but to talk about human beings.

What do you find exciting about your job?

What's really exciting to me is having the opportunity to spend time with top people. Because in the Barcelona supercomputing center, there are lots of incredible people with a lot of knowledge, and exchanging ideas with them is great.

We need to evolve every day, to adapt to changing circumstances. It's a constant evolution and growth, because we are talking with new

people from different cultures, with different mindsets. It's a sharing experience. It's inspiring.

What do you find exciting about the future impact of what you do?

It's important to have an impact on the people around you. Little by little, if you have a positive impact on others, then they feel better, the environment gets better, and then things grow naturally.

At the Barcelona supercomputing center, we are working on technology that will be used in the future. We are also working on educating future researchers. So of course, we have a responsibility to show people what we are doing, to help them understand what we are doing. You use a smartphone for everything nowadays, but what's the technology? And what are the things that are needed to make that technology possible?

We must communicate why our work is important, and why the research is relevant. We need to take care of the talented people that we have. If we do that, we can help make a better society, a conscious and aware society.

WE NEED “CULTURAL DIPLOMACY” TO UNITE THE WORLD



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Irina Bokova

Diplomat and former
Director-General, UNESCO

Describe your career so far.

I was born in Bulgaria. I graduated from university speaking four languages, so a multicultural approach was very much embedded in my early years and my education. I actually wanted to become a journalist – to travel the world. And I wanted to become an archaeologist, so I could discover ancient civilizations.

I wound up becoming a diplomat. I have been an ambassador, a deputy minister of foreign affairs, and a member of parliament during the drafting of the first Bulgarian democratic constitution.

I was also the first woman to be elected Director-General of UNESCO. That was where I could combine all this thinking: about diversity, about different cultures, about education etc. and science and heritage and communicating and how we embed this into technology. Currently I hold positions in civil society, in academia, working with global leaders to promote international cooperation in education, culture, the sciences, and, of course, gender equality and women's empowerment.

When did you first see yourself as a leader, and as a female leader, specifically?

It's an interesting question. We pursue careers, we believe in certain values, we believe we can

change the world. I think this is when a leader becomes a true leader. For me, it was a journey that began with the national politics of working to transform my own country. Within UNESCO, I felt like a leader when I started going to schools and universities and young girls were looking at me and saying, “I want to be like you.” It's a big responsibility, but also quite inspiring.

Did you feel an added responsibility, because you were the first female director general of UNESCO?

Yes, expectations were higher. Everybody said, “Oh, you're the first woman. So now you will do more than usual.” I felt a particular responsibility to promote women's empowerment. I always tried to look at the different activities and projects we were launching from the lens of, “How we can empower women?” I believe this is important for the world.

Can you talk more about moving from national to international diplomacy?

I have always been attached to the idea that nowadays, politics is not just being done in headquarters in high places. You have to know what are the concerns of the people. I traveled extensively when I was hyphenate Director-General of UNESCO, and I had this thought that, “UNESCO is not in Paris, UNESCO is in a small school in Pakistan.” Going to Africa and seeing the challenges they confront there also helped me form this view.

You grew up in an Eastern Bloc country. Now we live in a multi-polar world. What was that transition like?

On a personal level, what stays with me is the example of my mother. She was a typical girl of her generation. She dropped out of primary school before the war. After the war, already married, she went to school in the evenings. She became a scientist. She studied medicine, radiology. This taught me the importance of education, especially girls' education, and how it can change lives.



At the United Nations, I worked on issues related to women and human rights. I attended many of the big meetings of the United Nations, particularly the Beijing conference in 1995. It was a landmark conference that released a document that, to this day is the most progressive UN document on women, gender empowerment, and women's role in society. This really left a huge mark on my vision of world, the importance of the UN and international cooperation, and what we should do in our century.

Can you give us a little bit more context about this document?

The Beijing conference in 1995 represented the culmination of a decade of the UN's work on women, peace and development. It was the fourth such conference, but was the biggest such gathering, with a lot of civil society and academia participating. This conference set the stage for many of today's important policy decisions about women's political participation, women's economic empowerment, women's peace and security, and policies related to stopping violence against women.

What was it like at UNESCO?

My time at UNESCO was wonderful. We launched big initiatives, like the Global Compact for Girls' education. There were many such moments of, I would say, global significance. At the same time, one of the most cherished moments for me was when I visited girls' schools in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Brazil, Central America, and also schools in Asia. These were probably the moments that impacted me most, and which convinced me of the power of connectivity, of the power of the sciences and culture.

I also had a wonderful visit to Jordan, in one of the World Heritage Sites, next to Petra. I visited a Community Center established by UNESCO for girls who had dropped out of school. It was touching to speak with the girls about why

they had dropped out of school, what they wanted to become in the future, and whether they saw any merit in going back. One girl told me she dreamed of becoming something like the capitalize Director-General of UNESCO. And I told her that she could do this, if she continued to pursue an education and pursue her dreams.

You talked about how women are often perfectionists, and sometimes don't try for an opportunity because they are afraid to fail. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Yes, women sometimes do not embrace opportunities or pursue certain careers because they lack confidence and because they are afraid of failing. Women should have confidence in themselves, and they should pursue the career paths they want. They should not be afraid of failing. You may fail, but does it mean that once and for all, it's a failure? Of course not.

How did you learn to deal with failure in your own career, or in your own life?

I have been in politics, and in politics, you don't always win. But what is most important, I think, is that you not look at failure as a negative, but instead just move on, and transform the failure into an opportunity. This is what I tried to do.

What is "cultural diplomacy"?

Diplomacy requires a lot of knowledge. It requires understanding historical and cultural sensitivities. It sometimes requires putting yourself in the shoes of someone else, looking at them not as an enemy but as a partner, even as you defend the national interests of your own country. The goal is to find common things that unite us.

I'm teaching a course on cultural diplomacy at the Paris School of International Affairs. We need to look beyond our own concerns at the things that unite us. This year, we're celebrating the 50th anniversary of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. This is a perfect example of diplomacy beyond national borders: having more

than 1,000 sites on the World Heritage List. We need more of this type of cultural diplomacy.

Why is it important to encourage girls to be courageous and brave when they think about their careers?

It's important to treat boys and girls equally when it comes to encouragement for their studies or future careers. It is important that girls are encouraged to be courageous, to take up studies or disciplines that still are not, unfortunately, thought of as being for girls and women.

I have three granddaughters. I remember the eldest, who's 16 now, telling me, "I'm so interested in astronomy, I'm looking at the sky and I don't want to play only with dolls." It is very important to tell the girls that, from that point of view, they're no different than boys, and that their future lives and careers can be very interesting, very challenging, and can include discovering the skies, or the sciences, or anything else.

Can you talk about challenges related to equal representation of women and men - both in politics and in private enterprise?

The issue of equal representation of women, and the empowerment of women in politics, the economy, and the private sector, is a huge issue.

We have made progress, but the changes are too slow. The World Economic Forum (WEF) projects that, at the current pace of change, we will achieve women's equality in two centuries. I don't

believe this is acceptable. The challenge is how to accelerate progress.

We need to analyze what works and what doesn't. And I think from that point of view, in political participation, quotas for women definitely help a lot.

When I was younger, I thought quotas were not acceptable. But the pace of change is so slow that I now endorse them as a temporary measure. I think requiring diversity, having women on boards, or in high positions, would have a positive impact on the private sector. Diverse companies tend to be successful in all of their activities. Also, I believe the overall economic empowerment of women increases the economic growth of countries and makes societies prosperous, not to mention more inclusive.

What would you encourage a company like Huawei to do?

Technology companies have a huge responsibility to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. I could talk about this for a long time, but let me just focus on a few issues. First, technology nowadays is all around us. It helped us overcome the Challenges of Covid. So it is about our health, and education. It is about the quality of our work, and about the environment. It's about truly everything.

Technology companies should promote connectivity, first and foremost. I had been

“**Technology companies should promote connectivity, first and foremost.**”

working with Huawei, when we established, more than 10 years ago, the broadband commission for development with the International Telecommunication Union and UNESCO. We were promoting connectivity, education and technology. We should not forget that the digital divide in the world is huge: billions of people still are not connected to the internet.

Also, the gender Digital Divide is growing [The Gender Digital Divide refers to the gap between women's and men's ability to use technology, including the internet.] Technology companies have to look at why this is happening, and to give women the opportunity to get access - and to have the skills needed to be part of the digital economy.

Can you talk about gender bias in AI?

In 2020 UNESCO published a report on this topic. Artificial intelligence, of course, is based on the data that has been accumulated. Unfortunately, we're seeing that this tends to embed gender bias inside AI. We can't allow this to happen.

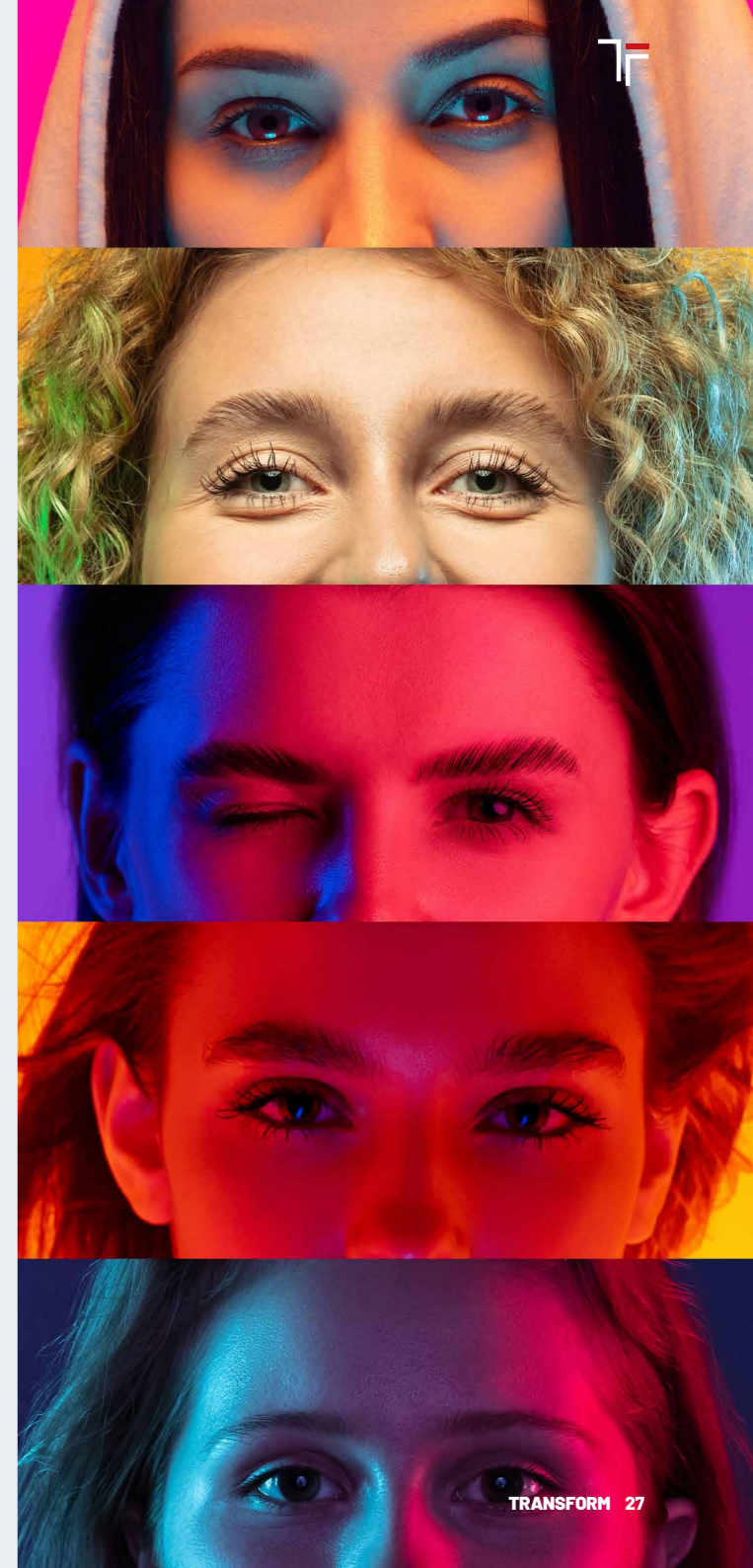
What we see is quite worrying. In response, some technology companies have stopped using AI for recruitment. For example, Amazon recently abandoned work on an AI program it was developing to evaluate resumes. The company realized, after a while, that the AI was comparing candidates' resumes against patterns it found in resumes submitted over a 10-year period, most of which came from men. Resumes from women were often downgraded as a result. We have to work hard so that AI does not entrench gender inequality in the future.

Can you talk about equality with respect to sustainable development?

Gender equality and the sustainable development agenda are closely linked. SDG #5 is about equality, empowerment, political representation, and eliminating violence against women.

But most of the 17 SDGs contain a gender lens, whether it relates to education, equal opportunities for boys and girls, health, access to drinking water, sanitation, or some other issue. This is not just to pay lip service to the gender equality agenda. It is because women have a particular role to play, or they're affected more than men. For example, only 38% of countries have gender parity in secondary education, meaning girls are less likely to continue their studies in those countries.

Or we know that women have specific needs in terms of health, motherhood, child mortality and other factors. So this specificity is all across the Agenda for Sustainable Development, not least because women make up half the world's population. When it comes to the implementation of sustainable development, we cannot ignore half of the world.



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Dr. Maria dos Remédios Freitas Carvalho Branco

Infectious disease physician
Professor, Federal University of Maranhão, Brazil

Tell us about your work.

In addition to teaching at the University of Maranhão, I do research in the field of infectious disease, including dengue. I also do research on beriberi, which is not infectious, but is related to poverty and food insecurity.

Practicing medicine is a challenge, but I think teaching is a greater one. Students are always demanding information that forces you to go looking for facts. To be a teacher, you have to master a series of technologies. The great challenge in my career was not so much to be a doctor, but to be both a teacher and a doctor.

You've gone from being a doctor and teacher to being a spokesperson?

Yes. I actually did my medical residency and went back to Maranhão, where I live and work. I started to be interviewed quite a bit on the topic of infectious diseases, which is relevant to Brazil, especially Maranhão, which is an area of poverty.

The local press always liked to do these interviews with me, especially for television, because I can explain things clearly. When the pandemic began, we started getting lots of interview requests. We needed a place where we could make available all of the information that we were giving out. My daughter is a website developer, and we concluded that it would be useful for the public to put this information online. We created a website, which went live in March of 2022.

During the pandemic, especially in early 2020, I was doing lots of interviews. Once, I had in one day interviews for different channels, radio, television, classes, or online meetings. People started to approach me on the street. “Hey, are you the TV doctor?”

I'm a shy person, but I've become more assertive, more sure of my own knowledge, my own ability. I'm really not the same person I was before the pandemic.

But it was stressful. Covid is a disease that kills. At the start of the pandemic, a lot of people were dying, and even before this happened, I knew it was coming. You feel like you're in a gunfight and you could be one of the people who gets killed. In June 2020, I started going to therapy, because I couldn't face the pandemic without psychological support.

What were the most difficult moments for you?

One of the hardest moments was when people started dying in São Luís [the largest city in the state of Maranhão]. People like Roberto Fernandes, a well-known journalist there. I'd known him for decades, going back to college. So I saw a lot of people I knew die in a very short period of time.

You couldn't leave the house, which for me was very bad, because I have always worked and have always left home. Many deaths and decreasing physical activity, which for me is fundamental – that was a bad combination for my mental health.

As a woman, have you faced any barriers? Or has it created more career opportunities for you?

The teaching field is predominantly female. At the Federal University of Maranhão, where I work, the most important management positions generally are held by men – even in an environment that has more women. But I don't feel I'm being discriminated against because I'm a woman.

In medicine, traditionally some specialties are for men – surgery, for example, or orthopedics. But I chose as a specialty clinical infectious diseases. I sometimes am resentful because the field has many women. Yet if you go to an infectious disease conference, you will see many men speaking.

Would you give any specific advice to a woman who is considering a career in medicine or biomedical research?

Women need to understand that they have all the capabilities men have. They should fight for their partners to share tasks equally, so that they don't get overwhelmed. But I don't think we will change that unless we enact specific policies.

So you need to define the proportion of women who enter management. For example, in a new government, 50% of ministries would have to be run by women. Or within a company, 50% of, let's say, the highest positions within the company need to be women. I think in everything you're going to do, you need to keep that in mind.

Also, it bothers me a lot to see a debate on television with several researchers, that you don't have women in that group. Regulation would help.

Which women in your life were important to you?

My paternal grandmother, because she had an extremely strong personality, and she was a black woman, poor, an orphan, who had a very hard, very long life. She died at 98.

Also, my mother. She was the breadwinner in the family, and pretty much took on everything by herself. These were strong women who took care of the situation and worked in a sexist, patriarchal society. These women were super-important to the family.

My grandmother was against marriage. For her, marriage was a negative situation in a woman's life.

But I think that the situation of women is improving in a society like ours. Financial autonomy is key. When you have a job, when you have schooling, you can have your own life. Then yes, you can get married, you can have children. Otherwise, you will suffer a lot. So, first comes education, then working to earn income.

Has the internet changed your ability to express yourself?

I'm almost 60 years old, so I went to college before the internet. At the beginning, I had a lot of difficulty doing anything on the computer. It seemed like a very difficult thing. And because you are a teacher, you have to adapt to all technologies.

More specifically, the internet has changed how I communicate. I had to express myself quite objectively, recording videos to publish on the website or to send to the press. So, many television and radio channels would ask for video or audio they could publish.

Maranhão is a state with a lot of poverty, and many people do not have access to the internet. But they have access to TV and radio. So I knew that when I sent a video to a TV channel or radio station, people with low education would listen, and that would probably be the only information they would have access to. So, it needed to be quite understandable.

Anyway, I think the internet opens up the world to you, because for any problem, you can try to find the solution on the internet.

Let's talk about the digital divide. How important is connectivity to ensuring prosperity and quality of life?

The internet is democratic: it makes it possible for many people to disclose what they think. These are people who, without the internet, would not have that opportunity.

But the internet in Brazil is still very bad. Some areas, especially the poorest, do not have access to it at all. So, technology can actually end up increasing social inequality, especially in terms of information.

Imagine you live in Maranhão, which is extremely poor, with areas practically without internet coverage or very bad internet – or with families that have very bad devices, bad telephony packages, or just a cell phone shared by several people. These people practically live in another world, cut off from all kinds of information.

So, I think that for us, who are middle class, who are teachers, we need to remember that it is not just important for us to have access to better and more technology, and faster internet. Instead, we should think about how this country can have a better future. In a country like Brazil, with great social inequality, it's not enough just to have cutting-edge technology. We also have to create access to this technology.

THE WHOLE OF WHAT WE ARE



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Arantza Martinez
Artist

You portray strong women in your paintings. Why did you start focusing on women as a subject?

I am a woman and it is easier to express myself through female figures.

When you started painting, what kind of learning process did you go through?

At the beginning, I was not so clear about which subjects were most important for me. I realized eventually that every project I started took several months, and sometimes more than a year.

You have to decide what you really want to talk about, what kinds of thoughts you're going to be thinking, and how to make them take shape. I started around 2005, and it probably took two or three years before I was confident with the way I was painting.

At the beginning, I was scared about how to start a project. Because the first lines, the first drawings that you do, they are always very nice. Every time you have a new idea, that idea is just very simple.

You start from something simple, and you think about it more, and you go back to your drawing. And then you move a little bit further and try to visualize it again. And you go back again to your paper, and you realize that if you keep moving, every single day you will know more about it, you will have more information, and it's more clear.

Then suddenly, one day you say, "Okay, you know what? Now it's perfect." Now you know the shape,

every part of the painting, the characters, the colors, everything. But that happens at the end. It always starts from something really tiny. And in my case, that tiny thing is always an emotion. We can talk about absolute trust, or we can talk about freedom, or we can talk about strength balanced with power.

Those emotions make us feel good. They are the ones I like to feel, to be involved with. It is sad that many people somehow think the feelings we have inside are completely out of our control. In my experience, we can train ourselves to conjure them up, and we can do it in a very conscious way.

In fact, even if you really are passionate about your career, you're going to find some moments where the path disappears under your feet, and you're going to feel difficulties, and you're going to feel doubt.

But you can go back to your essence and conjure up more positive feelings. My paintings, for me, are a way to share the emotions we find inside ourselves. In my paintings, the models are not exactly a portrait of myself, but somehow they're the avatar of these emotions. I don't know if that makes sense.

Almost like a more perfect version of yourself?

Yes, that's a beautiful way of thinking about it. But in fact, it is not something that we don't yet have; it is something that already exists. It is our focused way of perceiving reality. And then, depending on what we decide to do, we can get closer to, shall we say, that "more perfect version" of ourselves. It is already a part of us. But you know, sometimes we look in other directions, we don't experiment. We are not always 100% of what's really ours. This perfect version of ourselves is the whole of what we are.

Maybe you can talk a little bit about your journey, how you got to where you are now.

I paint at least two hours a day, but I also dedicate some time every day to train my emotions. Painting is just another part of it.

I started doing this many years ago, when I moved to New York. I was 23 years old, and I'd never lived outside my home town before. The last five years before going to New York, I was studying finance. And then I wanted so badly to be able to paint. I went to New York without being able to speak English. I spent like three months smiling a lot. I was facing the possibility of not being able to become the person I wanted to be. In that first year, I started having panic attacks.

Then came September 11. And then it was hard: emotionally, I was not balanced at all. And I made a serious decision that I didn't want to experience that ever again in my life.

Sometimes you realize that you have to change a lot of things in your background

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Digital technology can help us visualize things that maybe we don't see around us. It gives us new options. It inspires us to really do what we want.

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that you're not even conscious of. An important part of my life suddenly was focused on how important it was to feel good. Because without that option, without the possibility of really being in charge of your own emotions, life can be very difficult. So for me that was a change. But it was necessary. It was like, "Okay, if I want to stay alive, I really have to do this."

So, at about 23 years old, I just started training myself. Then you know, when you're interested in something, you find people interested in the same thing. You find books and you find different kinds of information that you can learn from. And you can practice. I suppose it all came together like one thing in my life: at the same time I was learning how to paint, I was learning how to make myself happy and strong. Suddenly, clarity comes and you're very conscious of what you don't like and what you do. And so then, something as simple as sitting in a bus, going home, and feeling warm inside the bus in the winter, feeling comfortable and safe – that was enough. I was smiling and happy because I was comfortable.

You know, it's like my goals. There had been this terrible fear that I was going to fail myself. But suddenly, it was not important, because the most important thing in my life was just feeling good, feeling alive. We are here to enjoy this life, and if we cannot enjoy life, it does not matter how well you can paint.

How do you feel about using digital technology in art?

Say there is something that ignites your mind. But maybe there's nobody painting it. Digital technology can help us visualize things that maybe we don't see around us. It gives us new options. It inspires us to really do what we want.

You paint women primarily because you're a woman. Have you tried to break away from the tradition of painting women as submissive?

I think it's natural that men and women express themselves in different ways. We have certain different beautiful ways of perceiving reality and facing reality. I have seen so many painters whose main characters are women. You can see beauty, you can see beautiful colors, you can see sometimes domestic scenes, but you can see goddess scenes too. So it's not just one point of view, we can see in art many different roles for women being expressed through these paintings.

In my paintings, it's maybe more distant. It's like, when I look at men, I see them

from the outside. I can only perceive what I can perceive, but I don't know exactly what are the feelings inside.

Even if you're close to someone and very familiar with that person, there are things that only we ourselves can understand. The difference between men and women is obvious: you can approach, but it's never going to be the same point of view.

It's true that in my paintings, women appear delicate, and all of them are beautiful. But maybe, since I know the background, I know the main idea that ignites those paintings, I can see strength and power and eagerness in the women. If you put my paintings in a museum, surrounded by other paintings where the main character is a woman, I don't know exactly if people will feel the difference.

Do you have a clear sense of what your subjects, the women in your paintings, may be feeling?

For me, these paintings are really personal. The characters have a will, they have a real personality, they have this inner conversation, they have their own intention. So it is true, in the way that I visualize the paintings, what I'm thinking about is that power we've been talking about: being capable, keeping your balance, moving forward, feeling good.

Now there are different moments, different situations and different personalities. I suppose that's where it's easier for me, as a woman, representing a woman on canvas. If I tried to do it with a male figure, it would be much more difficult. And that's why, when we see a painting where the main character is a woman, but it's painted by a man, maybe we cannot really feel the insights so clearly.

The good thing is, the different perspective and the different way of facing reality that men and women have, it is special, it is unique. Nothing ever comes from sameness. So I think this contrast, and these differences, give us the strength of humanity.

There are many powerful and competent women in your paintings. Are these women a reflection of yourself?

Sometimes. It's that same power, it says those feelings are what we like to feel, the ones that I look for, and sometimes I get them to become what I want to be. And some other times I lose them and I find them again.

All these paintings are created based on how I want to be, how I want to feel. They reflect the power that we all have to conjure those feelings, as individuals and as humanity. Those women are trying to convey those feelings for all of us. The paintings are for all of us, and the feelings are for all of us.

WHEREVER I SIT, I AM THE DIRECTOR



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Judith Yah Sunday épouse Achidi

General Manager
CAMTEL (Cameroon Telecom)



You've been named one of Cameroon's five most influential women of the year. How does that feel?

Well, to be nominated means that one has achieved something, and that makes me proud. I'm happy to be doing something remarkable.

Can you talk a little bit about the foundation created in the memory of your late husband, the former Prime Minister of Cameroon, Simon Achidi Achu?

We want to continue what my husband had been doing, what he believed in. He loved peace. We believe that with this foundation, we can also work towards building peace around our community, and our country. We also believe in educating underprivileged children. So we're going to look into education to see how to support the underprivileged, and help those that cannot pay their school fees. We also plan to work in the field of agriculture.

The foundation particularly emphasizes gender equality. Can you talk more about the importance of this?

Gender equality is important in Cameroon and the world as a whole. Traditionally, the view is that girls are meant to get married and have children, not necessarily to go to school. My husband believed in giving girls the opportunity to go to school, to empower themselves in a way that helps bring about gender equality.

Everybody should have the choice to do what they want to do, to achieve what they want to achieve. So by giving them the opportunity to go to school, we allow them to choose, to do what is good for them.

Can you talk about your own personal journey to reach your current position as CEO of CamTel (Cameroon Telecommunications)?

When I was younger, I believed I could bring something to help build my community and my country. As an internal auditor, my job was to make sure things were being done right. Usually in our internal audit department, specialists or experts end up having major positions in the organization. So that was my path. I worked as an internal auditor for 15 years, then later as regional director. I was appointed director of CAMTEL in five of Cameroon's 10 regions. This gave me insight into how things worked, in the field and at headquarters.

Was there any fear when you got promoted? Or were you always, you know, "I know I'm gonna do it, it's gonna be great, no problem"?

Well, usually I'm very bold. I don't fear anything. So whenever I had a position, I just asked myself, "What does it take to make the best out of this position?" And I just went for it. I did what was necessary to succeed.

Were you in charge mostly of men, or was it men and women?

It was a mix, but in terms of technicians and directors, we had more men. So it was quite funny, actually, because when I had meetings, I'd be the only lady in a conference room, wearing a pink or purple dress. They used to look at me and say, "She is our boss. How come?" Usually the director had a seat at the head of the table, but I decided not to sit there; I sat in the middle of the table instead. I always told them that it is not a seat that gives me the position. Wherever I sit, I am the director. And they would all smile.

Can you tell us what it means to you for CamTel to be at the center of innovation.

CamTel is the main state company that deals with telecommunication, and our Head of State said that we should drive the digital economy. So I believe I have an historic position, and I don't take it for granted. I have worked hard to make it possible for Cameroon to go digital by bringing innovation into CamTel. That's a privileged position.

Would you describe Cameroon as an equal or unequal society with respect to gender?

I would describe Cameroon as having gender-equality, in the sense that women have the same opportunities as men and there is no discrimination in school. In Cameroon, you have the opportunity to go to school, and if you want to hold a certain position, you are given the opportunity to do that as well.

Are there any challenges that you're facing there as a woman?

I really can't say I feel any challenges as a woman, because I hold a position like CEO. Women who are not CEOs may face challenges, but from what I see, women are very strong emotionally. So, they face whatever challenges are in front of them.



As for women in tech, statistically there are definitely more men working in technology than women. Certainly it's true at CamTel. Why do I think there are more men in technology? I believe it comes from school, where usually it is felt that women cannot do mathematics, so girls are encouraged to study literature or something. You wind up with a lot more men in technical fields.

Do you think there should be more women in technology?

I don't think it is a matter of wanting more women in technology, it's a matter of what you want to accomplish. We want to train young girls so they can do whatever they want, and be whatever they want.

What can a female leader bring to the table that is different from men?

I think a woman can bring a lot to the table. We are sensitive. We pay attention to details. If you go into the details, you make sure you do the things the right way. Women know that they need to keep their word, and to work twice as hard to prove themselves.

How does this apply to your work as a CEO?

As I said earlier, women are sensitive. So we want to make sure our collaborators work in a decent environment. We make sure they have all they need – in terms of comfort, health coverage, or whatever else they're supposed to have.

Also, as a woman, everybody's looking at you, so you work double-hard. I come to my office at 7:20 or 7:30 every morning, and don't leave until 9:00 PM or 10:00 PM. My colleagues have to do the same: come early, leave late. And we've seen a lot of improvements in Cameroon Telecom in the last three years.

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I don't think it is a matter of wanting more women in technology, it's a matter of what you want to accomplish. We want to train young girls so they can do whatever they want, and be whatever they want.

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Who are your female role models?

My female role model was the late Queen Elizabeth II. She was a woman of substance. She dedicated her whole life to serving her people.

What three qualities do you personally value the most – and try to embrace in your own life in work?

First, humility. I believe it's important to be humble. Second, loyalty. Third, I believe in being resourceful, being of service and able to help people.

Huawei supported CamTel in building the largest data center in central Africa. What change will this make to the lives of local people, especially women?

Huawei is our strategic and technical partner. All the infrastructure of CamTel is being handled by Huawei. The data center they've built will definitely bring innovation to our country, and not only to women. We believe this will help bring all the content from Europe or America closer to the people in Cameroon, and in Africa as a whole. So it's a huge investment and a huge achievement.

BE AMBITIOUS, WORK SMART, AND ENJOY THE PROCESS



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Mira Tayyiba

Secretary-General
Indonesian Ministry of Communications
and Informatics

I have worked for the Indonesian government for about 24 years. I worked at the Ministry of National Development Planning for 17 years, then spent five years at the Coordinating Ministry for the Economy. I joined the Ministry of Communications and Informatics (Kominfo) in 2020.

Kominfo basically aims to become the foundation for the country's digital transformation. We do this by providing digital infrastructure, including human resources. As Secretary-General, I coordinate all programs, including budgets and HR for all the Technical Directorates-General. That way, the Ministry functions as one unit.

Digital literacy for women

Since I joined Kominfo, we have seen that our programs, particularly the digital literacy and digital skills programs, have opened up many opportunities for women.

We are doing several digital development programs for women. These programs have enabled women to acquire new skills that will benefit them in the long run.

Indonesia's national digital literacy program provides training for women, children, and families, plus tools to help people spot hoaxes and deal with online harassment. Second, a digital entrepreneurship academy facilitates a training program to help entrepreneurs grow their businesses.

At the global level, discussion of the digital gender gap was brought to the table at the G20 digital economy working group, which Kominfo had the honor of chairing.

Women, especially those from under-developed countries, face continued challenges in accessing and making use of digital technologies. For that reason, it is important to strategize and initiate ways to support the participation of women in the digital economy by equipping them with digital skills. This is done through a combination of capacity-building, and the development of women's digital entrepreneurship and trade.

"It's because you didn't try"

I come from a small family: father, mother, older sister and me. My parents had two girls, and they taught us not to look at gender.

My mother worked for 40 years as a judge. She used to move around outside Java for the sake of promotions until she became the deputy chief justice of the Supreme Court for Judicial Affairs. She was also appointed Ambassador to Romania and Moldova. My mother was a career woman who reached the peak of her career, but did not leave her family. I really respect and feel inspired by her role in our upbringing.

My father also moved around when he was working, including as Ambassador to Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia. We were taught to be independent, to do everything based on our abilities, not based on gender.

It started early. In elementary school, we did daily chores: making our own beds, bringing dirty dishes to the kitchen after eating, and so on.

I also saw my parents complementing each other's roles. So when my mother was outside Java, it was my father who looked at my sister's and my report card. Usually, it's mothers who do that, right? But father did it, and it was not a problem for him.

My sister and I were always taught that if you can't do something, it's because you didn't try, not because you are a woman.

I've always been in an environment where I learned to be competent. And I also happened to work in a job that, in my view, was gender-neutral. It could be done by men and women, and there's no reason why women can't do it, or why men could do it better.

In my current position in government, I use the approach my parents taught me. When selecting high-ranking officials, I consider competence above all else. Before I joined, out of eight Echelon-II positions under me, there were only two women. After I joined, there were two more. So now, half of Echelon-2 positions under the scope of the Secretary General are women.

A leader doesn't always have to be in front

Women often hesitate to embrace digital. They think it might be some sort of high technology that might be complicated.

But there is one interesting piece of data collected by the UN, together with Pulse Lab Jakarta. It turns out that more women use digital for business: 54%, compared to men at just 39%. This suggests that, given a proper understanding of digital utilization, they can carry it out.

Through programs run by Kominfo and other ministries, we help women unlock their potential. As a result, our economy can be resilient. With two engines working together – men and women – economic growth can be stronger and faster. So, we must unlock the potential of women through digital technology.

For me, a leader doesn't always have to be in front. She can push from behind, she can accompany on the side, or she can lead the way.

When I first started working, I was on a one-person team; I worked alone. Eventually we made a team and I got used to leading a project. After 20 years, I started to get a real staff of 15 or 20 people. I noticed that, coincidentally, the number of women and men was equal.

They were all young and inexperienced. They were enthusiastic but needed guidance. So I mentored them. I noticed that some only needed hints or pointers, while others needed to have their hands held. This is where I learned that leadership can take many forms; there's no one right way to do it.

Whether a goal can be achieved or not, I like to see effort. Girls are usually, from what I observe, embarrassed to be called ambitious. A girl often doesn't want to show too much effort, because she will look too ambitious, and that will embarrass her.

Wanted: Ambitious women

But I look at, "To what extent do you want to improve your skills, do you want to chip in, to contribute to a team?" I assess those things because I'm like that, too. I don't want to be in an environment where I don't have anything to contribute. For me, that's not satisfying. What's satisfying for me is if I work hard, try hard, and the results are good.

So to young women, I want to say, "Having ambition is not wrong."

We do have to work. But in the past, we only had to work hard. Now, we also have to work smart. We don't want to lose our personal lives.

There are people who work all the time, but they don't play, they don't rest. We don't want to live like that. There must be work, but there must also be entertainment and rest. Life balance helps us maintain our sanity.

Take, for example, Indonesia managing the digital economy working group of the G20. As far as the work is concerned, maybe the visible activities extend from March to September. But the work itself has actually been going on since last year. It's intense: we work, and work, and work.

But we managed not to lose the element of fun. It was like, "This is the G20, let's embrace it! We will have to wait another 20 years to have the same opportunity."

So work seriously, but also don't forget to enjoy the process.

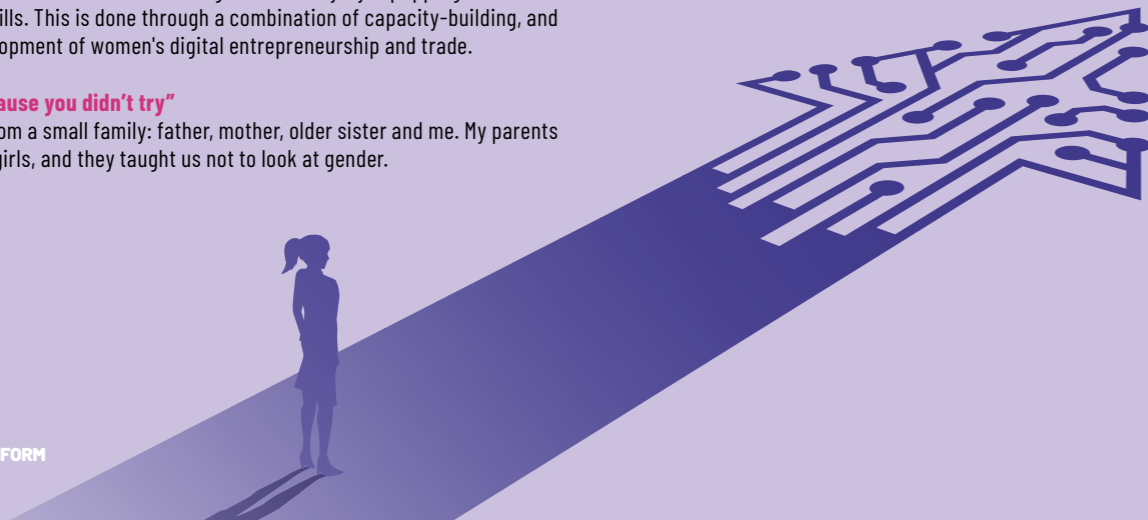
Other advice would include, "Do the right thing, even when nobody is looking." That's what I always hold onto. If it's the right thing to do, that's enough reason for me to do it.

The second thing is to develop resilience. How? During the pandemic, we saw firsthand how businesses that lacked resilience would collapse. We must be like a spring: the more it is pressed the more it jumps. Resilience is important.

And maybe the third bit of advice is easy to say, but maybe difficult to do. Once we have done all we can do, we must accept the result, whatever it is. I believe we always get the best from God, whether things go according to our wishes or not. Things work out for the best, and we must sincerely accept them and carry on.



**So to young women,
I want to say,
"Having ambition is
not wrong."**



FOSTERING CHANGE FROM WITHIN



Berta Herrero

Head of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
Huawei Europe

When I first knocked on my boss's door with the idea of building (from scratch) an academy to train women to become the leaders this digital era needs, I was pretty sure the pitch was not going to last more than one minute.

I was convinced that he would listen politely at first, nod, and then kindly say: "This is a very nice idea, but we cannot go for it now; perhaps next year." But despite last-minute nerves, I was convinced that I had a great project in my hands – one that could change people's lives, both within and outside the company.

As I left his office, I smiled at the realization that my conviction had turned out to be correct: this was a great project – in fact, the very project that both the company and women in Europe needed as the Covid-19 pandemic was starting to shape a new world, where digitalization was to play a much bigger role.

During our meeting, my boss had not only approved my idea, but had said: "Drop everything you are doing and focus on this. Women are the future of technology, and we will be here to support them."

Nearly 18 months have passed since that conversation. Within this relatively short time, we have already held three sessions of our Schools for Female Leadership in the Digital Age, plus an additional session dedicated to closing the divide affecting remote and depopulated regions, The Women's Academy for Rural Innovation.

These programs have become flagship CSR initiatives of Huawei in Europe, providing talented women with full scholarships to embark on a life-changing series of masterclasses, workshops, and debates guided by world-class experts and renowned mentors. Through these courses, women acquire the skills and

tools they need to lead in the digital age – everything from coding and AI ethics to sustainability, global collaboration, and innovation against gender-based violence.

With more than 6,000 applicants since the first course was launched in 2021, this program has empowered Europe's next generation of female leaders to speak up, strive for more, and reach ever-greater heights.

One of our students, previously unsure of her potential, is now a rising star within Europe's aviation industry, making flying safer, more efficient and less environmentally impactful. Another, formerly a language teacher, discovered her passion for global collaboration and is now on track to become a respected diplomat committed to inspire young minds to build a more inclusive digital transition. A third alumna is using her expertise in AI and carbon accounting to provide the construction industry with next-generation climate intelligence solutions, charting a path to smarter and greener buildings.

Like them, many bright female minds are overcoming limits and shaping the upcoming phase of the digital revolution – one where "Tech for Good" will be the common theme, and the end goal will be to make sure no one is left behind.

The program has had a catalyzing effect on Huawei's work culture and our own employees. I have noticed that now, fellow female colleagues are listened to more in meetings, and are being further invited to participate in events and debates.

Diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) have always been important to the company. Now, these values are being taken into consideration in a way that contributes to equal opportunities within society and enables an inclusive approach to leadership, innovation, and growth.

At our Schools, we not only mentor students, but listen to them actively to find new ways to improve the situation of women at the workplace, within the tech industry, and in the digital economy as a whole. Active listening brings about small actions that can lead to big advances. As one female journalist who reported on the students' progress once put it, "You are not only changing their lives. You are making us all believe that we have a place in the tech revolution, and that the future is ours to shape."

This beautiful journey has not just led me to believe that change is possible. It has demonstrated that it can happen quickly and successfully if leaders can spot high-potential proposals fast, empower employees to effectively match their vision with the company's mission, and be willing to walk the talk.

One thing is clear: this dream has become reality because of preexisting corporate values that have enabled its smooth rollout. The Schools that are changing lives in Europe exist because the Huawei culture says that deserving and committed individuals should be supported in their development and growth, regardless of their gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, age, or a disability.

Developing this project has not always been easy, but we have made it happen, and the lives of the many women and men impacted by our programs will never be the same. Every former participant now listens more, understands better the role of technology in today's world, and feels empowered to shape the digital transition in a way that helps make it fair and beneficial for everyone.

That is why it matters so much.

// Tech with Her.

// Tech for Her.

// Tech by Her.

Huawei held a
“Tech by Her: Leadership” event
during the Peter Drucker Forum in
November 2022.

Watch it here:





**In the next issue,
we look at the digitalization of small and mid-sized enterprises.**



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