

Women In Leadership: Achieving An Equal Future in a Covid-19 World

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Women stand at the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis, as health care workers, caregivers, innovators, community organizers and as some of the most exemplary and effective national leaders in combating the pandemic. The crisis has highlighted both the centrality of their contributions and the disproportionate burdens that women carry. This year's theme for the International Day, "Women in Leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world", celebrates the tremendous efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also aligned with the priority theme of the 65th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, "Women in public life, equal participation in decision making", and the flagship Generation Equality campaign, which calls for women's right to decision-making in all areas of life, equal pay, equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, an end all forms of violence against women and girls, and health-care services that respond to their needs.

International Women's Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women, who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities. The world has made unprecedented advances, but no country has achieved gender equality which forms part of the UN's focus in the hopes of achieving this by 2030. Fifty years ago, we landed on the moon; in the last decade, we discovered new human ancestors and photographed a black hole for the first time. In the meantime, legal restrictions have kept 2.7 billion women from accessing the same choice of jobs as men with less than 25 percent of parliamentarians globally being women, as of 2019 and with one in three women still experiencing gender-based violence.

The pandemic is not just a health issue but rather a profound shock to our societies and economies, and women are at the heart of care and response efforts underway. UN Women is bringing up-to-date information on how and why gender matters in the response. Women leaders around the world have demonstrated successful management of the pandemic in fact, women are shining through as outstanding leaders as the COVID-19 pandemic escalates. From Germany to New Zealand and Denmark to Iceland, women leaders have shown clarity in their decisions and policies, they are compassionate, empathetic, strong communicators and they show solidarity. When women participate in high-ranking political and state level circles they contribute to more balanced, gender-sensitive, environmentally considerate and forward-looking policies. It is only through such a policymaking approach that we stand a chance in meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and in making this a genuine #DecadeOfAction and a #GenerationEquality.

Globally, women leaders have been able to unify the public and to engage people on the importance of changing their everyday behaviours to help contain the virus' spread and to flatten the curve. Although the burden of the pandemic falls heavily on everyone, there are several aspects that require a specific gender-centred approach, such as securing safe childbirth and controlling maternal mortality; the impact of school closure on women as primary

caretakers; and its connection to workplace activities. During the pandemic, women worldwide have been exposed to serious social risks and high levels of vulnerability, as demonstrated by the rise in domestic violence cases since lockdown in some countries. Although measures were introduced, many women in leadership in those countries continue to raise their voice about the pandemic's gender dimensions, sharing relevant facts and information, while closely monitoring all government actions. In partnership with various organizations and initiatives, they also seek to raise awareness about the pandemic's implications for women and girls.

The fact that a limited number of women hold leadership positions globally means that social productivity cannot be reached while people are marginalized, discriminated and face gender-based barriers. It is only when both genders, men and women, collectively enforce the need for the inclusion of more women in decision-making processes will this lead to greater representation in leadership positions. It is imperative to tackle the male-dominant culture that we cultivate at home from an early age and It is also our responsibility to raise our children free of stigmas and of traditional gender roles. There are great examples of women in leadership positions doing extraordinary work during the COVID-19 pandemic and this illustrates why women should occupy more decision-making positions. In fact, as countries and communities start to slowly recover from a devastating pandemic, we have the chance to finally end the exclusion and marginalization of women and girls. But to do that, we need immediate action.

Women must have the opportunity to play a full role in shaping the pivotal decisions being made right now as countries respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting choices that will impact the wellbeing of people and the planet for generations to come. This will only occur when we break down the deep-seated historic, cultural, and socio-economic barriers that prevent women from taking their seat at the decision-making table to make sure that resources and power are more equitably distributed.

Despite the barriers, women, especially young women, are at the forefront of diverse and inclusive movements for social change both online and in the streets. That includes their leading role in taking a stand against climate change, fighting for a green economy and pushing for women's rights amongst other critical issues. It is also widely known that more inclusive leadership and representation leads to stronger democracies, better governance, and more peaceful societies. To build forward better from the COVID-19 crisis, and to get the UN Global Goals firmly back on track, we cannot simply return to the world we had before. We must do things differently. That means shattering the barriers that hold women and girls back. This year's International Women's Day is a rallying cry for Generation Equality. It is time to finally fully harness the power of women's leadership to realise a more equal, more inclusive and more sustainable future.

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