JOYNEYS TO LEADERSHIP:
NARRATIVES FROM THE FIELD

A collection of stories from the delegates of the Women in Public Service Project institutes
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INTRODUCTION

Rangita de Silva de Alwis
Director, Women in Public Service Project
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

The Women in Public Service Project (WPSP) was launched by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in December of 2011 in partnership with the U.S. Department of State and the Seven Sisters women’s colleges and is now a global presence. Through innovative learning institutes and continued mentoring, the WPSP is committed to a new global partnership aimed at reaching a minimum of 50 percent representation of women in decision-making roles in public service by 2050 – 50 by 50. The WPSP provides a platform to amplify the voices of emerging women leaders and builds a repository of narratives of women whose stories mirror the journeys of women who are seeking to rebuild their nations and serve alongside men as equal partners in forging solutions to complex challenges of our time.

Who leads in public service is important – now more than ever. From security to sanitation, public service has the most intimate and powerful impact on our lives. A diversity of experiences and plurality of voices are needed to meet the complex challenges of the 21st century. From globalization to financial markets to safe schools to access to water, women’s and men’s equal decision making can lead to more effective, more equal, and more efficient problem solving. That is why now more than ever, women’s leadership in public service is the cause of our time.

Public service, more than any other sector, has to set the standard in gender equality. This is because there is a clear correlation between women’s voice in decision making and
policymaking. There is also a nexus between women’s decision making and gender equality outcomes. Women’s underrepresentation in political life reinforces the unequal relations between men and women both in the public and private spheres.

An analysis of available data reveals that despite the fact that women make up over 50 percent of the population, no country has achieved full and equal participation of women as public sector leaders. According to Ernst & Young data, in Mexico, women constitute 14.0 percent, in Turkey 13.6 percent, and in India 7.7 percent of decision making in public service. On average, although women account for more than 48 percent of the overall public sector workforce, women still represent less than 20 percent of public service leadership.

Any system of representation which tolerates pervasive underrepresentation does not count as full and fair representation. However, women’s equal participation in decision making is not only about accurately reflecting the composition of society but also about creating diversity, transparency, and accountability in government. The underrepresentation of women in government has prevented women from having a significant impact on many key institutions and policies. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has found that women politicians give more attention to social welfare and legal protections and improve trust. However, gender-based occupational segregation remains a pervasive problem. When women are in leadership positions, they are in positions connected with youth, education, and gender equality and excluded from national security and finance.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified women in power and decision making as one of the 12 critical areas of concern. What impact has this had? United Nations Security Council
Resolution 1325 in 2000 and subsequent resolutions have moved the role of women from conversations among women to the mainstream of Security Council deliberations. However, despite the normative change, little has changed in terms of numbers of women in decision making at the table in peace and conflict resolution. Today, the global average for women in legislative bodies stands at a little over 20 percent, far less than the 30 percent critical mass point of change that was proposed in Beijing nearly 30 years ago. Far more must be done to make good on the promises made in Beijing.

These stories of our Global 50x50 Changemakers capture the urgency of that call to action heard in Beijing and echoed around the world: the full and equal participation of women in decision making is imperative for peace and development. At a time when global forces are coming together in policy dialogues to reimagine the way forward post-2015 and two decades after Beijing, the Women in Public Service Project is excited to present the narratives of our delegates, emerging women leaders who are blazing a trail to serve their communities and their countries as decision makers. Their time is now.
My name is Adji Thiaw, and I was born in Yoff, a 600 year old village in northern Dakar, Senegal. My mother was the first of my father’s four wives, and we all lived together in a crowded compound along with three of my father’s brothers and their families. My mother, having been married to my father at a young age, didn’t have the opportunity to go to school and therefore had the fate of being a housewife her whole life. With 10 children of her own (two boys and eight girls), my mother struggled to raise us. Still, she managed to send all her children to school, leaving herself in the difficult situation of having to do all the heavy domestic tasks without any help. She would cook around seven kilos of rice every two days to provide for the entire family. Eating was organized by age and gender: men with the best of the food, then the women, and lastly, the children. I remember that reaching for the food was hard because we were so many children around the bowl.

Even though my mother wanted all of her children to go to school, it was not easy. We only had one bathroom for more than 30 people and I remember having to wake up very early in the morning and lining up for hours in order to be able to take a shower. I was late to school on several occasions because of this long wait and the long distance to school. I also remember
having to go door to door with my older sister, looking for my father so that he could give us our ticket fare for school. However, my father would sometimes send us away because he did not have the money or just did not feel like sending us to school that day.

Even though my father had a good job working as a civil servant for the Mayor’s office, his salary was not enough to support four families. Religious law allows Muslim men to have up to four wives only if they can provide and equally support all of them and their kids. Knowing today how much my father earned, I don’t understand why he would put himself in such an uncomfortable situation.

Yoff is a highly conservative village, founded about 600 years ago, and is the birthplace of Seydina Limamou Laye, founder of the Layene brotherhood. The Layene brotherhood is one of the smaller Muslim brotherhoods of Senegal. The Lebou are a highly cohesive group, sharing Lebou (slightly different from Wolof) as a common language. With Islam well established 700 years ago in West Africa, the Lebou integrate devout Muslim practice with ancient tribal (animistic) traditions.

One of the most striking aspects of Yoff is that its strong cultural traditions have all of the "social software" of an eco-village. The social organization and cohesiveness of the community cannot be found anywhere else in the world. There are no police or jails in the village. A complex hierarchical structure of religious leaders, council of elders and wise community members, and women's economic cooperatives (out-dating many recent developments around the world) hold the village together, almost like a large family.

Like most traditional communities in Africa, the old fishing community of Yoff can be described as a gerontocracy, that is, decisions and disputes are generally handled by the elders, with
little resort to the police or any other state organization. At the village level, the djaraff or village chief is the central authority, but his power is held in check by the ndeji–ji-rew, who handles internal village matters as a kind of Minister of the Interior, and the war chief (saltigué). These authorities are supported by two assemblies: a council of notable elders made of those above 65 serving as advisers, and a council of younger notables aged 55 to 65 (frey) playing the role of the popular militia and the actual decision-making body. Another pillar of authority is made up of the religious leaders of the Islamic Sufi order of the Layennes, established by the Yoff-born Lebou Spiritual guide Seydina Limamou Laye at the end of the 19th century and led by a Khalif (religious leader) who also plays an important role in local, social, and political life.

This traditional decision-making organization seems not to leave any room for women or for young people my age because in order to be part of the frey, one has to be at least 55 years old. As a young educated woman, I had no say in matters, which affected my life.

However, this all changed when the government decided to engage in land reforms. In the late 1970s, the central government declared that all non-registered land would now become state property. This was a huge threat because our elders did not have any sense of land/property ownership; therefore, they did not understand why they should register any land that had belonged to the community forever.

As the first generation of high school graduates, we understood the threat this posed to our community, and we tried to tell the elders. However, the elders dismissed us, saying that we were too young and inexperienced to understand such matters. I remember them saying, “How can you grind rocks when you have no teeth?” Nevertheless, we did not give up. We realized
that in order to gain the elders’ respect, we had to show them what we were capable of doing. We collected trash, did street clean-ups, planted trees, petitioned the government, and raised money for a new school in the village. Meanwhile, the government built a large main road as well as Dakar’s International Airport on the unregistered lands they seized.

We continued to petition the government for an exemption, and after 12 years of legal battles, we were able to obtain community control over Yoff-extension – a 46-hectare (115 acres) area of land next to the traditional town of Yoff. We were able to relocate most of the community members who were in need of better housing on this newly reacquired land.

It was in this context that the elders demonstrated their own wisdom by recognizing the need for change. Traditionally, only men and women over the age of 55 are considered elders and thus able to make decisions. Now, with the elders’ blessing, the younger generation created APECSY (a French acronym for Association pour la Promotion Economique et Culturelle de Yoff), a community association whose mission is the protection of the natural and cultural resources of Yoff, which is still opening up to the new world. I was given the very challenging task of serving as executive director of the association, under the authority of an elected president.

As Chief Executive Officer of APECSY, I had to deal with many political and social upheavals. The true purpose of the organization was criticized by government officials, which led to investigations by the Ministry of Finance into our resources as well as audits. We also encountered some opposition from the village elders themselves who doubted the authority of the APECSY in assigning plots of land to people in need. This criticism led to the illegal selling of and occupation of empty
Another problem we encountered was women’s representation within APECSY. Even though I made things happen on the administrative part, I was not part of the decision making, which was the responsibility of the board, namely the President and his four assistants, all of them male. This issue was one I held dear to my heart and worked very hard to solve, helping these women build their capacity through literacy and advocacy so that they could better advocate for a seat on the APECSY board. I also emphasized self-confidence because this allowed the women to have the self-assurance to start their own small businesses.

Another step forward, this time at the national level, came in 2010, when Senegal’s gender parity law came into force. This new law required political parties to ensure that at least half their candidates in local and national elections are women. More than half of the population is female, and although women have long organized at a local level by forming cooperatives and associations like APECSY in order to improve access to public services, this has not easily translated into power at the parliamentary level. Now, thanks to the political will of former President Wade, the parity law was applied to the last parliamentary elections, and we now have 43.5% female representation. Our hope is that the upcoming local/municipal elections of 2014 will give us more voice in decision-making processes with local government.

We also saw change at the grassroots level when the traditional councils in Yoff opened the doors for more proportionate representation of women above 55 in the 10 committees. Currently, there is quota of at least 5 women representatives per committee. Although this is not a huge percentage overall, we
see it as a huge step for women’s participation, particularly in such a conservative community.

Land issues have become progressively more complex as a result of the increasing monetization of land value due to urbanization. In addition, the institutional landscape has come to include various traditional authorities, religious leaders, the community council, and the central government. All play a role, but none seem to dominate the others. Instead, there is an overlap and intertwining of authorities that sometimes leads to competition, rivalry, and a subtle game of coalition making that has been brought to the attention of the Justice Department and to the courts but has not yet been resolved.

Over the years, I have greatly benefited from President Carter’s advice on how to provide affordable housing to low-income families in my community. I met him at a conference on social justice at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. When I brought up the land and housing issues we were confronted with, he invited me to join him in Americus, Georgia to see how Habitat for Humanity (HFH) started and how it was being run. This was at the same time that Senegal was approved as a HFH country, and I was accepted as the first woman on the Board of Habitat for Humanity, Senegal.

My strong advocacy for a seat in the board of APECSY — combined with the fact that women in Yoff were becoming more aware of their rights and no longer saw themselves as mere bystanders of the decisions made for them by the leadership — weakened the already fragile relationship between APECSY and the women. Moreover, my family life also suffered from my leadership role with APECSY, due to the fact that my husband was a board member and did not approve of me saying no to him on the board. You know how gender roles work in African societies as well as how they affect power and decision making.
My husband would expect me to be submissive as his wife and always say yes to his wishes; however, they would negatively affect my emotional health. It was hard for him to differentiate between family and professional relationships. At this point I had to make a choice: my family or work?

I decided to save my family and quit my administrative position with APECSY and simply remain a member, but I was as determined as ever to fight for more female representation at all levels of decision making.

Luckily for me, the Peace Corps, Senegal was looking for a Programming and Training Assistant for their Health and Environmental Education Project. When I read the Peace Corps goals, which consisted of fostering peace and friendship among communities while helping in development work, I immediately fell in love with their ideals and applied. Thanks to my understanding of U.S. culture and my leadership and facilitation skills, I was selected as a health technical trainer.

I was expecting equal opportunity in the work place at the Peace Corps, but I did not realize that we were still in Senegal where gender roles seem to always affect your work. The hierarchy was such that I had two supervisors: the first being the Health Program Manager and the other being the Training Manager to whom I reported all training related activities. Unfortunately, the Training Manager was very conservative and so proud of his gender that he seemed not to want an independent, self-confident, and outspoken woman in a place that so far had been dominated by other men. Collaborating with this man has forced me to learn how to peacefully work with people who are threatened by women like me.
I also learned the value of forgiveness and how to give it to those who, like my father and my Training manager, do not care for me.
WPSP was very interesting and motivating for me because it gave me new ways and methods to deal with challenging issues by using the experiences of others, which I learned during the program.

After attending the institute, I asked about 30 men from different backgrounds about women’s representation in government, and they said, “OK, let it be 50% women and 50% men [in parliament], but are the women all active? And can they achieve what society asked? Can they defend their rights and share in the decision making like men?” To this group of men, the specific number of women is less important than a woman’s ability to be active within the society.

Women shared this opinion as well, saying, “We have 25 percent women in the parliament but we don’t know any of them, we don’t even know their names. So what is the benefit of the number of women? Until now we have not gotten any of our rights. Give us one or two women who are active and it will be enough. It will be better than the 50 that were not active.”

Until now, most of our women parliamentarians have not known their duty. Either they entered into parliament by a quota or their parties chose them to serve simply because they were women.
Their objectives are vague because they are new to this experience. Women used to be isolated, and suddenly, they are given a high level of responsibility. What would you expect from them?

“

I have participated in trainings and workshops related to women’s issues, and thank God I am active in my field of work and in my organization.

”

When I thought about running for political office, I was met with opposition that came from other women more than men. Our women need to be qualified enough. They need to sharpen their skills in order to fill their position in parliament. When that happens, they can think about having 50 percent women and 50 percent men.
Attending the Women in Public Service Program was very useful for me within political life and activism regarding women’s issues. Throughout the program, I learned more about the experiences of other countries fighting for women rights, and it was an inspiration for me for when I defended those rights in my own country Kosovo. I learned the precious lesson that we as women should fight every day for our rights if we want to achieve gender equality. I am now clear in my views: democracy can’t be completed without the respect for women’s rights, and it will never function without their participation in every corner of society.

As a member of Parliament in Kosovo, I increased my engagement and activity. I became more vocal on issues of democratization; I intensified my network with the other women of my country; and I cooperated with a lot of moderate men to support the gender equality agenda.

Speaking for concrete activities as an MP, I proposed, in the Kosovo Assembly, the building of a memorial dedicated to the contribution of the Kosovo women during the war '98-'99. Women were very active during the war: some of them lost their lives fighting; others contributed by taking care of children, older
people, and sick people; and some served as nurses or cooks in very hard conditions. About 20,000 women were raped by Serbian forces, and I consider this a big sacrifice for freedom. Fifteen years after the war, the Kosovo women will finally have a dedicated memorial which honors their contributions.

One of my achievements during my mandate as MP was the drafting and the approval of the law on the protection of journalism sources (Law No. 04/L-137).

This law is a contribution to the freedom of the media, which is essential for democracy. Proudly I can say that Kosovo has the best law in the world regarding journalistic source protection.

Women leaders today face a lot of barriers. One of my challenges during the last two years was the battle with religious extremists about women’s integrity, morality, and rights. I have been threatened and pressured because I was vocal inside the parliament and in the media to oppose any kind of tendency to turn us back to the dark days when women were not counted as human beings. The Islamist extremists, much like the extremists in other countries, are trying to spread their primitive agenda in Kosovo too, even though they are small in number. As an MP and a feminist, I took a strong position on defending the secular state and women’s freedoms. At the beginning, I found myself alone in this fight because no politicians wanted to take the risk; no civil society member wanted to react; and some unprofessional media were serving as a platform to spread hate speech against me. Today, I am still fighting for this cause, but I have thousands of supporters, men and women, young and old.

Today, society is more aware of the dangers, and the state has reacted against primitive ideologies. Now, I am on the second mandate as an MP, and I will continue to give my contribution to achieve democracy in my country by taking on other initiatives.
and proposals and spreading my vision in politics and all over the country.
As the chairperson of a party and the chair of the Indonesian Women’s Political Caucus, I am very concerned about democracy in Indonesia, especially in my city of Malang, East Java. My friend and I work to support women’s participation in politics. We also educate voters about the voting process and how to vote for the right candidates. In Indonesia, our main problem is that many people are not interested in politics and often candidates prefer to incentivize people with money on Election Day. This is “Money Politics” in Indonesia.

“Money Politics” happens in every stage of the elections and in all levels of the government. This May, we will have a mayoral election, and we will see how much money each candidate spends for his or her campaign. Most of them spend more money in comparison to what they will earn.

To combat this problem, my caucus and I are planning to host as many people as we can accommodate. We hope to provide a political education on “how to become a smart voter.” We did not target the mayoral election because the time frame was too short, but we did have our sights set on the general election in April 2014. We hosted a kind of grassroots political school for a target of 5,000 voters. We hoped that they would in turn share
their knowledge with five others, ultimately reaching 25,000 voters at the grassroots level.

This project was very significant because we aimed to get more people to vote and to also get them to vote for the right person. Our hope was to minimize the candidates’ political cost due to “Money Politics” and to prevent them from becoming corrupted. As a chair of the Indonesian Women’s Political Caucus, I focused on the voters because in this caucus, members are from many parties. The point is to get more people to vote well.

As a party chair, I had a different focus. I was focused on preparing my candidates for the general election. I tried to select my candidates well in advance because I wanted to get the most qualified candidates, whether they were male or female. In some cases, the potential candidate had a good education but did not want to hold a political position. Therefore, it took some time to convince them. We worked together with some organizations such as NU, Muhammadiyah, CHURCH BOARD, and a few NGOs in order to select our candidates. This helped tremendously because these organizations sent me their best people as potential candidates.

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country. Some people believe that women can only work at home, and this belief about the subordinate status of women has become an accepted cultural norm. However, if people understood more about Islam, they would see that there are actually the same opportunities allotted for both males and females. This just goes to show that we need higher levels of
education. We need to educate our citizenry so that such views about women are no longer a big problem in rural areas.

Editor’s Note: This narrative was adapted from a conversation with Ananda Gudban.
I have been an activist in favor of women's rights for 18 years and have experience in several fields of NGO work, in particular women’s organizations with a strong emphasis on gender equality and the autonomy of women. I work in a number of areas, including bottom-up projects promoting education, health, peace, culture, and leadership.

As a member of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), I network with various grassroots local, national, and international organizations. I am the President of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, DRC Section (WILPF/DRC); Vice-President of the Lower River Women's Action (AFEBAF); Second Treasurer of the Gender in Action Association; member of the Permanent Concertation Framework for the Congolese Woman (CAFCO); member of the International Women's Network for Democracy and Peace; and a delegate of the WPSP Institute on Women's Leadership: Public Service and Global Health.
I represent the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (LIPFL), which promotes women's rights and peace and relies primarily on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Within the AFEBAF, we do grassroots work helping women to develop initiatives to generate revenue.

“We have a bread oven that we call the “Congolese Women’s Pedagogical Oven” where I teach women to make bread. While waiting for the dough to rise, we discuss a different theme every day (UNSC Resolution 1325, diseases like breast or uterine cancer, domestic and environmental hygiene, etc.).”

We have provided training for more than 100 women, 30 street children, and 30 orphans. Training is provided free of charge. Unfortunately, due to electricity supply problems we have been forced to interrupt this program and are looking for an electric generator to be able to continue. In the field of peace promotion, we conduct lobbying and appeal activities targeted at decision makers because we seek lasting peace that will allow development in the DRC. We recently organized a Women's Dialogue for Peace that brought together women from Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Rwanda, and the DRC to contribute to the consolidation of a durable peace in the DRC and the Great Lakes region (www.gnwp.org).

At the local level, we work with community leaders, young people, and women to make sure women's rights are respected. With the backing of the MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo) we have strengthened opportunities for women in line with UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820.
I have also been involved in appeal activities, including at the international level, such as participating in a roundtable at the UN Peace Fair for the 10th anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. I also joined the group discussion in New York with Margot Wallström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Recently, I participated with Mrs. Bangura, who has replaced Mrs. Wallström, on a panel of discussions about the problem of violence against women, especially sexual violence, in the DRC.

During the 57th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), I made a declaration on behalf of WILPF and 15 other NGOs involved in combating small arms proliferation and the follow-up of the Arms Trade Treaty.

*Editor’s Note: The translation from French to English was done by Adrien Bradley (Annie Matunda Mbambi’s brother and a translator).*
WPSP provided me with the opportunity to meet emerging women leaders from around the globe. It was the first time for me to interact with so many inspirational change makers. The two weeks that we spent together in the institute helped us know what women around the world were doing for the development of not only fellow women, but for the whole community in their part of the world. It was heartening to see our sisters struggling and fighting traditional thinking and mindsets and carving a niche for themselves in societies shattered by conflicts.

The difficult part was how to give practical shape to the philosophy of WPSP and all that I learned there. Women throughout the world face problems because they are seldom taken seriously. They have to overcome resistance both at home and at the workplace. After WPSP, I think all of us regained our confidence and faith and have planned to move ahead against all odds.

The network developed at the institute is helping me to expand my ideas and get support and encouragement. It is good for
sharing information and opportunities as well as advice and suggestions. The social media links and the mentorship program are building our capacities as leaders

The greatest menace that we face in Pakistan is violent extremism. The root causes of extremism are many, but the major ones are illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, and a lack of access to resources. Before WPSP, I have been working to moderate extremism through education as an entrepreneur and as a trainer with Paiman Trust. I continue doing my work in the same fields but now with more support from the WPSP team.

I run my own private school in Peshawar, which has children from ages three to sixteen. I teach my self-designed peace education curriculum in the school. My school is the second school in Pakistan to offer peace education. I work with local madrassa (religious schools) students and teachers and train them in peace building and conflict transformation skills and interfaith dialogue along with my own students and teachers.

As an entrepreneur, I build the capacity of women and vulnerable youth from conflict areas and help them to set up their own businesses and find markets for their products.

As a trainer, I have been training parliamentarians, youth, women, and civil society members in conflict transformation, peacebuilding, leadership, interfaith harmony, and media messaging.

After WPSP, I am going into play writing and documentaries. In collaboration with Catherine Filloux, I am working on a play about the effects of conflict on children. I intend to stage it in the U.S. and around the world. I am making a documentary on the same topic and women in conflict zones. The work for my private radio station for education is underway. I am forming a Global Fund for Children of conflict zones.
After joining the two week program with WPSP, I have shifted my focus on women’s rights to a global scale. Critical political decisions that affect people from all walks of life are being made as rural markets become international markets. These decisions are made without the consultation of women leaders and to the detriment of women across the globe. With these issues in mind, the networks that I am working with such as Harpswell Foundation and Cambodian Young Women Empowerment Network (CYWEN) have focused on the discrimination of young, rising women leaders fostered by the political spheres dominated by men. We are especially concerned with current female leaders who are influenced by these political spheres to participate in the discrimination of rising female leaders. Women suffer from a distinct lack of supportive role models who are conscious of gender disparities in politics. Women also face a distinct disadvantage in political fields all over the world that applaud the assumed aptitude men have for leadership. Given this situation, there are very few women in public service serving in leadership roles and even fewer women who see the value and necessity of fulfilling these roles.

These barriers can be overcome by shining a light on gender issues that women leaders face that affect society on a global
scale. Harpswell and CYWEN have been working diligently on educating future female leaders about gender issues and their important roles in public service, bringing awareness of the discrimination that leaders unwittingly participate in against the inclusion of young women in public service because they are disparaged by certain older cultural values. We provide educational resources for future leaders to learn about gender issues, gender stereotyping, and legal documents that promote and protect women’s rights. We facilitate workshops that connect current leaders with rising young female leaders to create those networks of apprenticeship and learning that previously did not exist. We are connecting with other women networks so that together we can make change in solidarity and help each other. We are bringing voices of young women leaders from different parties by quoting their speeches and wonderful works. We write radio shows urging all people to stop judging the leadership qualities of an individual, man or woman, by the biology of their body and to start promoting them for the merit of their minds.

These concerted efforts come from powerful lessons taught by the WPSP: Don’t stay silent and allow men to voice their opinion instead of you! Don’t become complicit in injustice through inaction. Don’t become complacent with inequality by choosing ignorance. Tell the truth.

Those are the ideas that young women should carry. Young women may have to work harder than ever to build a world where women will become leaders based on merit and not disqualified based on biology.
I was chosen to participate at the Women in Public Service Project (WPSP) inaugural institute for Latin America in March 2013. Since then, I continued working for a non-governmental organization in Mexico advocating for quality education. However, my time spent at WPSP helped me to realize my full potential, and I decided it was time to move on.

In September 2013, I started serving with the U.S. State Department on its diplomatic mission in Mexico as the Culture of Lawfulness Program Specialist at the Section of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement. Another thing I have accomplished since the WPSP is that I am part of the Women’s Democracy Network, an initiative to increase women’s political participation, leadership, and election to public office.
Listening to successful women narratives encouraged me to take further steps in my career. It also made me realize that I could help other women to reach their full potential. This global initiative is a supportive network for all of us trying to make a difference in our countries.
I am honored to share with you our experience on the participation and representation of women in politics in Timor-Leste. Having emerged from conflict some 12 years ago, our newfound democracy afforded our women one of the highest percentages of women in parliament in Asia and in the world.

Timor-Leste has a legal framework in place that includes a gender quota system for women’s representation in the parliament. Citizens and action groups have worked tirelessly to increase the quotas and ensure adherence to them. Though there have been significant achievements in women’s involvement, there are still challenges as we move forward.

Formerly a colony of Portugal for 400 hundred years, we were invaded by Indonesia for 24 years – the most violent period in our history which left behind many raped and widowed women. We are a small nation with a population of just over one million people. From that number, we have had one Nobel Peace Awardee - our former president, Sr. Jose Ramos-Horta.
Today, I represent Rede Feto Timor-Leste—National Women’s Network and FKSH, a member organization of Rede Feto. Rede Feto is the only women’s network in the country. It was formed following the first National Women’s Congress in 2000. Rede Feto currently has 24 member organizations, which operate in all 13 districts of Timor-Leste, implementing various programs focused on socio-economic and political fields.

**LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The Constitution provides for equality in the exercise of civil and political rights and non-discrimination on the basis of gender for access to political positions. Timor-Leste also has taken seriously its obligations under the Constitution and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which it ratified in 2003.

In 2006, our Electoral Law established a gender quota system. We first started with the mandatory one woman candidate for every party list of four candidates, but in 2011, we demanded that the quota be increased to one woman in every three candidates. Believe me; we worked hard to get this.

**PROGRESS WE HAVE MADE IN IMPLEMENTING OUR GENDER QUOTA SYSTEM**

With the introduction of the gender quota in the Electoral Law, the proportion of women elected to the new Parliament rose to 27.7 percent in the 2007 election. As a result of the amendment, there was a substantial increase in women’s representation in the 2012 election to 38 percent— the highest percentage in Asia and the Pacific and the third highest in the world.

We had two women candidates for presidency in last year’s election, but the results show that Timor-Leste is not yet ready for a woman president. Timor-Leste is a highly patriarchal, post-
conflict nation; it will be a long journey toward this goal, but we will eventually get there. Nineteen percent of our political parties are led by women, and in last year’s parliamentary election, 35 percent of the 1,908 candidates were women.

In terms of women’s current standing in representation in government, we have 38 percent women compared to 62 percent men at the National Parliament. This means that of 65 total members of the parliament, we have 25 women. Someday we hope to get higher and more strategic posts at the Parliamentary Table beyond Secretary and Vice Secretary positions.

In non-elective positions in the government, of 55 top level positions we have 10 women, two of whom are female ministers, four of whom are vice ministers, and four of whom are Secretaries of State. That brings us to 18 percent (versus men’s 82 percent) in top government positions.

**HOW DID WE ACHIEVE THIS? THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

Preparations for the election were of utmost importance. We started two or three years ahead of the election with our advocacy for the amendment of the Electoral Law. It was also necessary to conduct dialogues with political parties because women will run as candidates within the parties. Capacity building on transformative leadership for the political parties and special training on public speaking for women were part of our preparations. We had conferences and workshops as well as public debates using the media (district and national) to project the importance of women’s participation in the parliament and for people, especially women, to register as voters and run as candidates.

During the election period, we concentrated our energies in civic education and voter education. We travelled great distances to
We campaigned for women candidates and trained the polling staff. Learning lessons from the past election where violence erupted in some areas, we held a march for a peaceful election. Together with the international community women served as observers of the election process.

We kept ourselves busy post-election, going back to the communities and presenting the election results. We have started strengthening the capacities of our women parliamentarians so they are in a better position to function as legislators. Rede Feto has regular meetings with them to discuss policy issues. We are now preparing our strategies to perform better in the upcoming elections (municipal in 2014, village in 2015, and General Election in 2017).

**The Challenges We Face**

The patriarchal system is still very strong and pervasive, especially in more isolated communities.

> Formal and traditional systems limit women’s full participation in the economic, social, and political spheres. The mind-set that women cannot do the job — believed to be true by most men and women in my country — must be changed so that women can gain the confidence to lead.

Low levels of education among the majority of Timorese women narrow options of women candidates. Our gender quota system has been circumvented by political parties. Political parties comply with the gender quota but place women in the third slot, preventing women from taking seats in the parliament in cases
where political parties acquire a limited percentage of votes (three percent of the vote guarantees one seat in the parliament).

**NEXT STEPS FORWARD**

We need a concerted and systematic effort by our government and civil society to inform women of the opportunities available to them and how they can take advantage of them. Our plans to place our women in better positions in the upcoming elections include a programmatic leadership formation for target women candidates. The earlier we start aggressively advocating that political parties enlist women, the higher women will climb in electoral lists based on merit.

We also need to widen the scope of our voters’ education and to find creative ways to motivate women to go out and vote and run as candidates. With the assistance of international donors and NGOs, we will continue with programs and projects that aim to promote gender equality and transform patriarchal system. We will continue with our advocacy for increased women’s participation in education to improve their capacity to run for elective positions in the long-term.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Timorese women’s advocacy for representation has found results, to a certain extent, in the policies that are now in place and being implemented. The steps taken by our government in response to our demand to increase the representation of women in Parliament is highly appreciated. It shows that the government of Timor-Leste is adhering to its commitments to CEDAW. The prominent role played by Timorese women in Parliament and other spheres of public life since independence shows that the gender quota system and similar policies have had a positive effect in our nation-building.
Living in the current world, it seems that women get a bit better treatment from society than they previously did. They have the chance to study and work as well as to make decisions about their living. Women also get the opportunity to have their voice heard in higher positions in the public and private sectors. However, those opportunities are still limited. Even with this limitation, there are women who work and become leaders. They fight the many obstacles to be leaders. Therefore, it is important to inspire the women in the next generation to fight for their place too.

It is not easy to fight and stand as leaders, especially for new, emerging women. There are many barriers in both the family environment and outside environments. Being a woman, there are many responsibilities to handle, including family responsibilities and societal responsibilities. Emerging women leaders are discriminated by men and even by women themselves. Some men look at women as someone whose only work is to take care of the family and house. Those men never see women’s abilities to handle hard work, problems, or issues. Added to this, some women see women who work
outside of the house as useless people. Their mindset is that women only need to stay home to take care of their family and their husband, rather than pursuing higher education or working in higher positions. The barrier that women face most often is the underestimation of their abilities to work or make any decisions. This inner barrier is one of the heaviest anchors that bring women down and make it hard to rise. When women underestimate their abilities, they lose all their confidence to have their voices heard by the outside world.

The only way to tackle those barriers is for women to wake up and show the world that women can do men’s jobs with better outcomes. The outside world can help emerging women leaders by encouraging them to step forward. However, the most important power to keep women moving forward comes from inside a woman. For women who have built their inner strength, there is no one who can take away that motivation, which is a different kind of encouragement. The question is: how do women build this inner motivation? From my point of view, to build this motivation, it has to start from the family. Parents are the most important sources to make this tree grow in their daughter’s mind. It might take time to grow, but when it grows bigger, it will be the most powerful force to hold women up to the highest position. Women leaders should also mentor emerging women leaders to step forward, even when they are facing the most difficult situations in their lives. These leaders act as the role models to motivate young women to carry on their journeys. What I keep in mind is: “You can do it, and I also can do it!”
Taking courses in the WPSP program for two weeks has strengthened many of my abilities, including critical thinking, finding my voice, and taking part in societies. All of the abilities that I have learned during the training courses have an impact on my studies and my work in the future, since such skills are required by most institutions, units, or companies. It must be easier to find a proper job as a woman who has a strong mind of inspiration, motivation, and the ambition to be a leader. I will have more opportunities to be selected by companies or possibly even in ministries as a Minister.

Now, women in Cambodia and all over the world are facing many problems that sometimes seem hard to solve. These problems are particularly challenging since the status or position of women in companies or in public institutions may not be recognized or valued by men. Stereotypes have a tendency to give power to men, since people think that only men have enough responsibility to be an essential part of society. However, that’s not true, and here is the evidence: Helen Clark (UNDP Administrator) says,
“Without gender equality, societies will not meet their full potential.” In order to get rid of those bad concepts, firstly, we need to stand up to find our voice. It is no wonder that we have to find stages or forums to raise our voices. Secondly, we have to make our voice widespread and to show our strength to make society a better place. We also have to exercise women’s rights to equality.

Most importantly, all women cannot just stay at home. They have to get out of their houses, which contain a lot of housework that is not considered at the same value as men’s work outside the house. Women have to engage in society by first developing skills, then by taking part in all positions in any institution, and lastly by proving that our ability has the same value as men’s ability.

I strongly recommend all women to stand up and raise their voices in order to change bad perspectives of people worldwide and to get gender equality recognized.

Last but not least, I know I am strong enough to get any position as a woman leader, and I know that men and women should be equal in order to share power to develop the world in the near future. I will become an inspiration and motivation to the next generation of women, and they will see that they are not born to work in their houses but to lead societies and their countries. Thus, women will be more engaged in public service, and they will develop services for their own countries. I cannot imagine how developed my country will be when women lead.
The year 2012 witnessed a decline in the position of Egyptian women on the political, social, and economic levels. As clarified in a report by the World Economic Forum 2012, Egypt reached level 128 out of 131 countries regarding women’s presence in Parliament as the percentage of female Women Parliamentarians in Egypt decreased to two percent in the 2011-2012 Parliament after reaching 12.5 percent in 2010. Additionally, in the so-called "Revolution Parliament," female members were just five of 180 in the Shura council, or 2.7 percent. This decline was due to the rise of fundamental voices calling to constrain women into stereotypical roles and to limit their right to participate on all levels, especially politically. This year also witnessed a systematic attack against women activists, specifically at the incidents of Itihadya (Presidential Palace). In terms of sexual harassment, the number of cases recorded reached 162 cases in one occasion, Eid Al-Fitre.

On the economic level, Egypt was on the top of the list of countries that recorded a decline in access to economic opportunities for women, and the unemployment rate reached the highest level in recent history. A 2012 report on the status of the Egyptian woman was prepared by the Egyptian Center for...
Women's Rights. The report gave an overview on women’s positions in the political, social, and economic scene.

While it was a rough year for Egypt in general, I was delighted to be able to participate in several events directed toward the political participation of women. I was selected for a nine month fellowship program by the Arab Women Leadership Institute (AWLI) from February-October 2013 to develop a policy paper on the deterioration and lack of achievements in gender equity in Egypt. I attended a two day orientation workshop in Jordan followed by a five day mentoring program in Macedonia, where a State Counselor for Equal Opportunity from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy helped me with my research.

I was nominated to deliver a presentation in a public seminar on the Women's Movement in Indonesia, Iran, and Egypt. This seminar was conducted on November 13, 2012 by Kalyanamitra and OXFAM Indonesia.

Working as a Grant Specialist at CARE-International in Egypt in the Affiliated Network of Social Accountability in the Arab world (ANSA-AW), I developed the ANSA-AW grant management manual. The purpose of the grant component is to support ANSA-AW members' CSOs in their strategic initiatives for increasing participatory civic engagement in public policy processes by using social accountability tools at the national and local levels to improve public services through increased transparency and effectiveness. On March 28, 2012, I delivered a presentation in Beirut on the concept of social accountability, and it was attended by 94 participants from the target four sectors: government, civil society, media, and private industry.

I successfully passed an e-learning course from November 5-December 31, 2012 on social accountability tools and concepts delivered by the World Bank Institute. I am an active participant
in the Women's Voices Project and contribute many answers on women's issues in Egypt.

Currently, I'm working closely with 11 selected grantees' CSOs in Jordan, Palestine, Yemen, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Morocco to provide technical assistance on the implementation of their initiatives to improve the provision of public services in their communities through the application of social accountability tools.

Finally, I would like to extend special thanks to all WPSP and Wilson Center staff for their continuous and constructive support. The two-week training at the WPSP Institute in 2012 provided me with vital momentum as a woman leader in public service. It was a great opportunity for shared learning and dialogue, exchange of experience and expertise, and peer-to-peer mentoring, which was quite efficient. I also learned a lot from the context of different cultures that had effectively enriched the program with different views and beliefs, but at least we all agreed on the importance of the role of women in public service.

In fact, this experience equipped me with enthusiasm, energy, and desire to keep working on expanding my knowledge and skills to reach my goal as a woman seeking a leading role in public service, which is definitely reflected in my current career.
The WPSP two week workshop was very inspiring. It has been my pleasure to attend this workshop, to meet women from all walks of life, and to listen to their experiences and the pain of what they’re going through in their countries and the kind of work that they are doing.

We are all women from post-conflict countries. When we talk of post conflict countries, we mean countries going through reconstruction. Of course, by reconstruction we mean that all the institutions were destroyed, and it’s high time that we, as women, help in reconstructing our society. I can see around that every woman is
really willing to help reconstruct her society, and this is what I have learned from this workshop.

Even the presenters of the different topics were really inspiring, giving us their experiences of what they have gone through, what they have seen, and how they stood firm to ensure that their country become something and employ women. They served as the voice of the voiceless, and I think that’s why we are here. As I have said before it is my strong belief that this workshop will make me someone. I will be able to be the voice of the voiceless and help the poor.
My name is Joannie Bewa, and I am from Benin. I started my medical sciences studies in university at the age of 16. I am currently undertaking scientific research on the cost of maternal health care in Benin. As a general practitioner at 23 years old, I work in various prominent clinics in Benin.

I grew up with my parents and looked to my mother as a role model. She is a dynamic young woman, but she did not have the opportunity to reach university. This fact motivated her to do her best for her two daughters. My mother taught me the value of courage, audacity, determination, hard work and dreaming big. People discouraged her from sending me to school, but she resisted and sent me to school anyway.

"Defying the norms of society, I was able to reach high school. People discouraged me from pursuing my studies in high school and university because they believed that education is not important for young girls, but I was convinced that education was the key if I was to fulfill my dreams."
Life was not very easy, but I passed my Baccalaureate exam (which students are required to take before being admitted to university) with such exceptional grades that the government of Benin offered me a scholarship to pursue my degree in Medical Sciences. During my time in university, I discovered my passion for community service, which was a new activity for me because young woman activists are not common in my community. I started volunteering for non-profit organizations whose focus was sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. Working with these non-profit organizations helped me discover and develop skills such as leadership, courage, conflict resolution, and human management.

In 2010, I founded the Young Beninese Leaders Association (YBLA) and led a Red Ribbon campaign with 300 people who marched against discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS. My organization was also able to reach 10,000 young people through a national awareness campaign. In November 2012, I led a campaign against gender-based violence (GBV) in order to lobby for the vote of the Benin anti-GBV law. The law was passed through the vote, but it needed to be ratified before it could be put into effect. With the support of the American Cultural Center in Benin, we collected 2,000 signatures on a national petition and obtained the ratification in January 2012. With the members of YBLA, I’m currently working on a year-long mentoring and leadership program for the most outstanding young women in Benin. We decided to focus on mentoring because we believe that it is an innovative strategy to help empower women. We are also looking to form partnerships with other organizations interested in working with us on this creative new program.
I also founded and coordinated the “Women’s Empowerment Campaign,” which was selected by the U.S. government to receive a grant. The campaign consisted of leadership and self-confidence workshops as well as entrepreneurship training in five cities in Benin. Two thousand young girls benefited from our leadership workshop and we trained 400 young women entrepreneurs in the early and middle stages of their careers.

After gaining national recognition and experience, I decided to expand my experience to an international level. My activism was recognized in April 2012 by the U.S. government, which nominated me for the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), a U.S.-based exchange program in which participants are selected by invitation only. In the IVLP, visitors are selected by U.S. Foreign Service Officers through American Embassies around the world. As of March 2012, there are 53 current and more than 275 former Chiefs of State or Heads of Government who are IVLP alumni. In October 2012, I was selected as a delegate for Secretary Hilary Clinton’s Women in Public Service Project. Focused on public service and global health, this program shaped my strategies for health programs for youth and women.

As a participant of the January 2013 7th Gender Pre-Summit which was organized for the 20th Assembly of the heads of states and government by the African Union Commission, my mind was opened to my potential contributions to Pan-Africanism and Africa development. After this event, I decided to be more engaged in debates on the subject of Pan-Africanism, and I wrote articles in order to sensitize and engage more youth and women in the reunification of our African continent. After being selected by Office Franco Quebecois de la Jeunesse, I am also representing my country as a youth delegate at the first francophone women world forum in March 2013. We designed a “white book” with 15 recommendations on gender-based
violence, entrepreneurship, women’s education, and governance. I was honored at the International Organization of Francophonie, which recognized me as one of the 10 most outstanding young women leaders in Benin through the “Francophonie au Féminin” exhibition. As of April of this year, I have been shortlisted as a finalist out of over 2,000 applications from 44 African countries for the 2013 MILEAD (Moremi Initiative’s Leadership Development) Fellows Program. This fellowship identifies 25 young African women with potential and passion for transformational leadership roles and prepares them to take such roles.

The road to success was very hard. My colleagues who started volunteering with me abandoned me because they were not able to understand how important it is for women to acquire and use their leadership skills in order to fight for women’s issues. I was alone in planning and coordinating the social programs, and unfortunately, only a few of my colleagues have continued in our work. Many were men who couldn’t handle being managed by a woman. My peers constantly challenged me due to the fact that my values and priorities were very different from their own. Personally, the resistance I have faced from my friends has not discouraged me because my family has always supported me. I have also remained extremely focused regardless of the obstacles I had to face, and I remain motivated by the positive results I am able to achieve through my community program for young girls and women.
When I joined the Women in Public Service Project 2013, I believed I was entering a realm of vision, perspective, and aim. I had entered something radiating with the aura of changes and sharing, providing and offering opportunities, inspiration, persistence, passion, and commitment. Now, a year later, after my experience at the WPSP, my hopes and expectations proved their real meaning.

The motive and the network keep me going. We have already set the purpose, but what we need is to wisely achieve it. The public service project is like raising a WPSP child — we must see to its growth, step by step, throughout the years, facing and taking down all challenges, making it reach maturity by year 2050.

The WPSP network is knit of 35 countries and provides the possibility for the historic transition of women’s participation, communication and coordination in addressing challenges, and the persistence and manners to make WPSP sustainable and consistent.

To achieve 50/50 representation of women and men, it requires actions, patience, and persistence. What remains to be done is to
provide greater information and organization of women and to have more personal involvement and inclusion of the state and institutions. To be able to run the race for the equality of men and women, it’s necessary to assert and create a coalition of firm partnerships with men and their absolute involvement and endorsement.

Women with power and influence, together with the ones lacking such qualifications, need to walk side by side along the “WPSP heated plate.” We need to use all existing dissemination forms to spread the WPSP, starting with our neighbors over coffee, genuine discussions with friends, and by organizing lectures, seminars, conferences, regional, and global meetings. A woman leader needs to encourage and affect other women from every sphere in society.

Human rights are the same for everybody regardless of people’s diversity. Human rights are men and women’s rights. They should not exclude each other but lead toward the same aim.

I am not a woman in a high position. Availing of my own capacities and possibilities provided by the Ministry of Interior which is headed by a woman who is a truly open minded person and completely aware of the importance of gender equality, I use every possibility to promote WPSP. In cooperation with the Police Union and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, we organized seminars for women leaders in different spheres and workshops with the Ministry of Defense and UN Women for NATO mission representatives. I spoke of WPSP in Tirana on March 8, 2014, and I gave an interview

“What I know for certain is that what I do, I do from the heart. I retell the story, remaining open and transparent to possibilities offered by 50/50, believing the vision, sharing and communicating, and staying persistent.”
for print media promoting the WPSP.

To be able to replicate the value of WPSP, we need to build up and raise our collective voice. I promote WPSP not as statistics and publicity but as a reality that awaits, a reality with the woman becoming more aware of her position and the necessity of her input to improve the quality of living in this world. Her role cannot possibly be weighed and her worthiness measured.

Doing nothing and going with the flow is no longer an option for us women.
I am Khin Phyo Tint, an English teacher and a nurse from Myanmar. A few months ago, I attended a two week institute for the Women in Public Service Project. I learned a lot from the many women leaders and gained a lot of knowledge. I shared what I learned from the WPSP with my colleagues, friends, and with my students. I explained to them how women are leading in politics (such as Aung San Su Kyi, Hillary Clinton, and Angela Merkel), why the international women network is important to improve our society, and why women have to stand in the front.

Since WPSP, despite many barriers, I have been encouraged more to continue my capacity building project at my native place, Inle Lake. As I was born and grew up in a small village, I always wanted to improve the educational and health standard of the local people in and around my village. There are about 10 villages with 30,000 people who are living in my native place, but the library we have is not big enough. To have a better nation, the most important thing is to pursue education. In Myanmar, it’s very important to be able to speak English and to have some working knowledge of computers. Therefore, I have been trying to open a library for about six months, and I will also provide the local people, especially the young, with basic computer courses for very little charge or, when necessary, free
of charge by cooperating with the other local people who are interested in doing capacity building. We are going to conduct summer English classes for the community’s youth in the coming summer. I have also been working together with my friends who are doctors and nurses to conduct health education programs around Inle Lake, but we still can’t do that as we are now in different places.

After attending WPSP, I decided to improve my education, and I had great success. I have been taking a tourist guide training course for about four weeks. As a tour guide, I can improve my knowledge level because I always have to learn and travel. When I know more about tourism, I will work together with the local people in my native place or throughout Myanmar and help them to become tourist guides like me if they are interested.

“I will always be grateful to the WPSP for helping me improve my knowledge, for giving me the opportunity to meet with great women from different parts of the world, and for encouraging me to go forward with a positive attitude in the rest of my life.”
Every person has gone through the stage in their life when they wonder what they are going to do when they grow up. I have changed my future career so many times that I’m not even sure what all I have wanted to be, but something that was always present was the idea of helping others. As a child, I did not care if my toys were new or used, but I did care if a little girl at school didn’t have a toy. At the time, I did not realize that serving others could be a feasible career. As I ventured into college, my world was greatly expanded. I realized that serving others, or public service, could be what I do for a living. As my mother says, I truly have a servant’s heart, and I strive to use it.

As a rising junior a Berea College, I have begun to embrace my future. I am fiercely passionate about ending sexual violence, specifically sex trafficking. Someone very close to me experienced sexual violence as a child, and I want to rescue children and young men and women from those sexually violent situations. As a woman, I have always had the fear of experiencing sexual violence. I fear walking alone at night or being the only female in a group of males.

When Berea College offered the WPSP
course, I was biting at the bit to take it. The WPSP course is exactly what I want to with my future. I want to work in public service to better my community and so many other communities, and the course specifically taught me how to do that. I also wanted to take the course because there were some amazing speakers on the syllabus that I wanted to interact with. I was exposed to so many influential and powerful women that truly work in public service. It was extremely inspiring. The WPSP course gave me so many tools that will benefit me in my future career. I learned the true power of my voice and how to relate what I am passionate about to others. That is an invaluable skill. I also learned how to develop a political policy and how to research an issue.

Why is it important to promote women in political participation? The answer is that I, too, would like to be represented. For so much of our country’s history, women have been vastly underrepresented if at all. Every single person has a different point of view for every issue. So why aren’t there more women in politics? Although some countries resort to quota systems, I do not think that is necessary in the United States. We need to promote women in politics to young women. We need to let them know that a political position is attainable, and that a woman can aspire to be president one day. Getting more women in politics is not a policy change, it is a social change.

To make this exceptional course even better, I got to share this experience with some of the best and brightest students that I have ever worked with. The other students in the class opened my eyes to issues that I had never thought of. We, as students, had to work together during a lot of role play and scenarios that our professor would give to us, and it was so refreshing to get so many different points of view. My relationship with my classmates will continue to extend outside of the class and most likely into my future career.
The two week WPSP institute for emerging women leaders was very efficient and effective, and I learned a lot from WPSP family members and high-level dignitaries representing the U.S. This valuable program developed my leadership skills and expanded my knowledge. The program empowered and enabled me to raise my voice against the violation of women’s human rights.

I could not have imagined that women have the same problems in all parts of the world. The WPSP facilitated a wonderful opportunity for women leaders to meet educated and leading-class women from around the world. Women had the opportunity to talk face-to-face, establish links, and share thoughts, visions, missions, and experiences. This useful program provided the opportunity for women to understand the common problems of women around the globe. The WPSP established a strong network of women leaders around the world, and they weaved all women leaders together. This opportunity enabled women to share knowledge and the experiences of their societies and countries.

“...The program also gave me hope to expand my vision and dream to work internationally for women’s empowerment, access to justice, and self-sufficiency.”
I helped women study the WPSP vision by sending them links of the WPSP website and workshop handouts. I also explained to them the value of the organization’s 50x50 goal. The message of 50x50 inspired the women, and they were hopeful and ready to support the goal of the WPSP. They added that the achievement of this organizational goal will have a powerful impact on the human rights of future generations.

Women leaders face many challenges such as socio-cultural challenges, security threats, political instability, as well as weak support from the government in their areas of work, especially in developing countries. I helped my team and network with the implementation of a leadership workshop for women in my community. I shared the achieved knowledge with the trainers to deliver the message of 50x50 to women and to help them become aware of the issues to cause a change.

I also encouraged women to participate in public service activities, and I advised them to establish teams, groups, civil society organizations, and to work independently as powerful leaders. I mobilized them to convince the community male leaders and government authorities to support women’s rights by taking part in social activities and to raise their voice against the violation of women’s rights.
At the Women in Public Service Project (WPSP) Institute in the U.S., I met delegates from all four corners of the world. Many were ambassadors and ministers from affluent backgrounds. They used sophisticated language and terminology. This was a stark contrast to South Sudan, which is poor and war torn and where many of the women are not well-educated if they are educated at all. At the Institute, we discussed what women would do if they were in leadership positions.

My first field visit following the Institute was to a remote area in Sudan with a high level of rebel activity, awash with interstate and intrastate tribal conflicts. I met with women who had never been to school at all, and I asked them the same WPSP question: what would they change if they were leaders? In simple sentences, they told me exactly the same things the WPSP Institute delegates articulated at Bryn Mawr. Most women in Africa South of the Sahara are not literate, but they can articulate their needs just like wealthy women.

Leadership is not about the level of education you have attained. It is about knowing, articulating, and meeting the needs of your
constituency. Although they might use a different language, women’s perspectives can cut across academic education, color, or creed. Women at every level prioritize education, security, water, sanitation, and health.

“Being a part of the WPSP has made me aware that I am not in the fight for women’s rights alone. The WPSP network gives me courage and motivation to pursue my dreams. I want to change the world order, especially the way society views women.”

Since becoming involved with the WPSP, I have started writing a constitution for the Civil Society Council that would serve as a training and mentoring tool for women aspiring to be leaders.

My first main leadership position was State Coordinator with the Zimbabwe Peace Project, a human rights monitoring and documentation organization. Currently, I am working with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan on peace consolidation and extension of government authority, especially involving the voices of women and young people. Apart from the WPSP, I also belong to the World Pulse and Peace, Development and Collaborative Network.

My next step will be creating a platform for women to mentor emerging female leaders to make the transition into leadership positions easier for them, guided by the goals and actions of my role model Hillary Clinton. Aspiring women leaders must believe in themselves and develop an “elephant’s skin,” but also remain objective. They must learn how to build relationships at an individual level in order to be able to enact necessary changes.
I believe that men can support women’s leadership if they are engaged every step of the way. Men culturally hold the key to participation, and if they aren’t engaged, they will resist and close the opportunities for women rather than opening them. Men are able to make politics a violent game, which is unappealing for women. My hope is that my country will create an inclusive government that encompasses both female and youth perspectives. One of my personal goals for the future is to run for elected office so that I can contribute to this vision.
Learning about and focusing on these women motivated me to produce a musical documentary about the role of the new female generation in the independent music industry in Brazil.

I am applying for the newly launched Brazil’s Ministry of Culture and the President's Special Secretariat for Women, prize for women and culture. It aims to foster film production by women and recognize the work of directors and technicians in
the Brazilian audiovisual world. Though I have never produced a film before, the women I knew in the industry were absolutely open and excited to make it happen together as a sisterhood. One of the most exciting things about this project is that I assembled a production team that is 80 percent women. I am very excited about the possibility of having the President’s Special Secretariat for Women as a partner, so I'm working non-stop day and night to make it happen.

I feel like I have to do this, and I believe I can. I need to tell the history of the struggles and victories of Brazilian young female artists in my generation. Those are some of my living mentors, and I have the opportunity to show that they are valued. I do not want to pay tribute after they are gone. I want to help them now so that they believe in what they are doing even more. I guess I'm learning the true meaning of empowerment.

At the WPSP, we studied Pamela Yates’s film, *Granito - How to Nail a Dictator*. Learning about her work — work that documents injustice in Guatemala and ultimately led to the prosecution of the dictator Efrain Rios Montt — inspired me to pursue this project. Seeing the power of her work and the impact it had was eye opening and gave me a new way to honor and express the values I hold most dear. Another fruit of this experience is that it drew me closer to another very special project. I have started collaborating with “Alma Livre,” a grassroots organization in my city that promotes the reintegration of former female prisoners into society. It is run by women for women. It is extremely challenging, but it is even more rewarding because it directly impacts lives.

My recent trip to Mozambique opened my eyes to the many opportunities I have to serve there.
I lived in Mozambique 10 years ago as a volunteer and recently came back for a work mission as a public servant representing my home state, Minas Gerais.

By being a Brazilian and speaking the same language and having a similar colonial history, background, education, experiences, and personal interests, I identified many areas to collaborate with them.

After coming back, I shared this experience with a few contacts and was recently invited to be the CEO of the Brazil-Mozambique Chamber of Commerce, Agriculture and Industry. It will be a great challenge, since it's my first time in such a position and more so because I will be the first woman in that position. Since 2007, when the Chamber was created, only men assumed that post. I am also thrilled and super excited.

Mozambique is a country that is in rapid growth, with excellent economic growth rates and a stable political/social environment. There are a lot of opportunities for Brazilian companies, especially related to Agricultural, Gas and Mining sectors. Again we are two countries that have similar economic and development backgrounds with open space for doing business together. Many of the biggest Brazilian companies are already in Mozambique: the international giant Vale (mining), OAS, Odebrecht, Camargo Correa, and Embrapa.

My job will be to bring those two countries and business sectors even closer in the near future.

I want to share my narrative with the WPSP as a way to thank you all with gratitude and love for opening my eyes, my mind, and my heart to a life-changing experience.
WPSP and its networks have greatly inspired me. The WPSP Institute gave me the spirit of confidence, courage, and even aspiration to scale the heights. I feel that the sky is the limit in my pursuit to positions of leadership in my country. By using my networks optimally, women in my country and I will gain positions of leadership in Uganda.

Together with grassroots women organizations in Northern Uganda, I am a committee member monitoring trials of perpetrators in the Ugandan conflict at the International Crimes Division. We observe the trials of warlords and our presence in the courts ensures issues affecting women are not left out of the court proceedings. I represent the interests of women in the courts, especially issues connected to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and sexual and gender based crimes. We also work with the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) in the development of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Policy.

I am working on women’s empowerment through advocacy, networking, and educating women about their rights as enshrined in the Ugandan Constitution and other related protocols and
conventions such as UNSCR 1325 and CEDAW. Since attending the WPSP institute, I have been nominated to be on the Project Committee for a coalition that was recently formed to monitor the fulfillment of Uganda’s obligation to UNSCR 1325. This coalition is a member of the Global Women's Network for Peace. My advice for aspiring women is that they should always persevere and be abreast of the trend of events, especially regarding conventions, protocols, declarations, and other instruments that protect the rights of women. These tools come in handy whenever a woman is challenged.

In my role as a leader, I have three areas of focus:

- Getting help in the health sector so women who have been diagnosed with cervical cancer are treated and cured;
- Encouraging women to participate in politics and to aspire for political positions; and
- Encouraging women to vote as a block for fellow women who demonstrate capabilities in leadership.

I have several experiences in my work in education that highlight the challenges that women leaders face and the importance of women in leadership positions. My first main leadership position was deputy head teacher of a high school. When the head teacher left, he was to be replaced by another male head teacher instead of me. Our school had been moved to a new location due to the ongoing wars between the government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony. The replacement teacher wasn’t informed of our new location and found an army detachment camped at the old location. He went back to his home and never showed up again. I assumed the leadership role, and after three months in this position, my male counterpart organized the male students to strike against my administration because they did not want to be led by a female. However, due to
my excellent performance in the administration of the school, I got full support from the other staff members, the Board of Governors, and the parents.

When I was teaching in Dr. Obote College, there had been a reduction in the number of support staff in the kitchen. The school administration wanted the older female students to help in the kitchen. This was patriarchy at work. I suggested the support in the kitchen should be done class by class regardless of sex. This was discussed in the staff meeting, but it was not implemented because the administration did not know how to make boys participate in cooking. My suggestion saved the girls in the school from being used to cook for the rest of the male students.

“Male mentors have played a huge role for me. My greatest mentor was my father. He gave me all the support a father would give to his daughter and the same support he gave his sons. There was no segregation of girls in our family, and we all did the same domestic chores.”

My teachers in high school were also my mentors, especially our headmaster, Mr. Bwire, who encouraged us to work hard and to come back and teach. Men can support women’s leadership. At individual levels, most men treat the women they live with very well but collectively men undermine women. It would be wise to point out to men that they should treat all women with the same courtesy they treat their close female relations. I still face challenges from males who say I am too manly or think too independently for their comfort. Men often work against my rising in any position of leadership.
I am spreading the WPSP’s vision of 50 by 50 by sharing the declaration of the delegates with other women’s organizations in Uganda and the Horn of Africa. They too can join us in emphasizing the need for women to lead. With women’s leadership, I hope my country will be able to change our government peacefully without one party waging war against an elected government. War has happened in the past, and it bought a lot of suffering to the people of Uganda.
In summer 2012, I attended the Women in Public Service Project Institute at Asian University for Women. Throughout the program, students were encouraged to think about the pressing issues and obstacles that hamper women’s participation in public service and leadership positions in general. One of the issues that I was concerned about was women’s safety and security in public spaces and what could be done to eliminate street harassment. Inspired by Dr. Rangita de Silva, director of the Global Women’s Leadership Initiative, and with the support from Women in Public Service Project, Zeinab Noori and I carried out a school campaign to raise awareness about street harassment in Afghanistan in summer 2013.

We conducted two days of workshops in four major public high schools in Kabul, three boy’s schools and one girl’s schools. About 200 students, mostly male students, participated in the workshops. The goal of the project was to raise awareness about the issue of street harassment and to start a discussion about the issue among students. Our campaign was the first of its kind in high schools, especially all-boys schools.

The workshops were designed in a way to be both informative and interactive. Workshop activities included: reading narratives about Afghan women facing street harassment, watching
documentaries made by Afghan women about street harassment, having students interview female members of their families about their street harassment experiences, discussing ideas, and writing final messages.

Our workshops in Ariana High School, an all-girls school, provided a platform for students to share their personal stories. They all had experienced harassment regularly on their way to school, even though they were wearing school uniforms. None of them could share their problems with their families, especially their fathers, brothers, or uncles because they would have been blamed, suspected of immoral behavior, beaten up, or even forced to leave the school. Students were very happy to have shared their stories and feelings with us and promised not to continue to remain silent again regarding sexual assaults in streets.

However, the reactions of the male participants varied significantly. Some students held strongly conservative views about women’s presence in public spaces and thoroughly blamed women for the sexual harassment they receive. On the other hand, some students considered low education levels and poor family upbringing as the main reasons for street harassment, and they claimed men should take more responsibility to fight against this social ill.

Additionally, both male and female students should attend the workshops together; educational institutions need to incorporate
gender equality concepts into school text books; and the mass media should address the issue more seriously. But above all, current laws related to punishment of aggressors should be implemented efficiently. I hope after graduation I can work with the government, educational institutions, and the media to take greater steps toward reducing sexual harassment in the streets of Afghanistan.
I got a bird's eye view from the WPSP experience, and I met with 101 women with compassion and vision and also a few men within 15 days. It was really a lifetime achievement for me. Interacting with them every second makes something click in my heart and head. I returned back from that amazing experience with fully recharged batteries. Though I had been working in the human rights and women’s rights field for quite a long time, I realized the power of working with the authorities during my short stay. After being a part of the WPSP program, I tried to replicate what I learned, and I started working with the government authorities very closely. In Nepal, the government had developed the National Plan of Action to Implement the UNSCRs 1325 and 1820. Additionally, a structure called the District Coordination Committee (DCC) and chaired by the District Chief Officer (CDO) was formed. As a program manager, I worked with the DCC to implement it at the local level. I worked in three out of five development regions of Nepal. I am satisfied with the work I did with them through my organization and with the support of UN Women.

How does change happen? For me, there’s a critical thing:

“If something happens within you, only then will you start thinking about things, and that leads to change.”
Change is a natural process that you cannot stop, but you could make it faster if you wanted. For me, I need to feel something in my heart, in my body, and in my mind. Born and raised in a very conservative family with many limitations for girls, I grew up feeling things very minutely. Thus, my actions and reactions are based on my experiences.

Hence, my theory of change or my mantra is to work on the thinking level first and to change the mindset attitude of the people, and then they will naturally apply it.

It is also necessary and important to observe actions too. When people feel changes through your actions, you are motivating them to move ahead and inspiring others to join hands. When people can see their role in the big picture and feel as if they are contributing to the mission, then that definitely brings the desired change which is sometimes beyond your imagination.
I have never had to persuade my husband that my education and my political career are important. Prior to our marriage, he always dreamed of having an educated wife, a goal that brought us together and has led us to a calm and steady life. When he came with his family to ask for my hand on my engagement day, he told me that he would support me in whatever I wanted to accomplish.

I was a part-time women’s rights activist at the time, and I was about to finish my bachelor’s degree in law and political science. My husband started to help me look for universities that I could go to for my master’s degree. Even though it was right after our wedding, my father-in-law spent a great deal of time and money so that I could study in the United States. It was our first time in the U.S., and I was expecting my first child. We had nobody and we didn’t have a car, but it was not so difficult as long as I had my husband’s support. He made so many sacrifices for me.

“Why Not?”

After finishing my degree in the United States in 2010, I returned to Herat, my province in Afghanistan. One day my husband popped the question, “Why don’t you run for office? You studied in this field, and you can open many new doors for your
generation, including women.” I was shocked. I was even more surprised when my father-in-law said the same thing, “Stay here in Herat and help women, help your province. What are you going to do if you go back to the U.S.?” And I said, just for fun, “Okay!”

The idea didn’t come from my own mind; it came from the men in my family. I really didn’t know what it would mean to be in politics. I just thought, *Why not? Why don’t I experience it?* So I ran for office. I found the willpower that I needed to win. I found every opportunity to campaign and tell people about my ideas, always thinking, *Identify yourself to the people before your opponents do so.*

My brother-in-law and my brother both had very important roles in my campaign. My brother-in-law was my speechwriter. When I go through my old speeches, I see how powerful they were – he knew what would get people excited. He wrote speeches for me to change the minds of people who thought women couldn’t participate in society, run for office, or even be outside of their homes. He helped me tell stories that defended my right as a woman to run for office and get to Parliament.

The 58 days of my 2010 campaign were the toughest, most stressful days in my whole life. A huge wave of resistance to my campaign mounted from conservative society. You can imagine how hard it was for me to hang posters in the city, participate in TV debates, ask people to vote for me, all while being threatened and ridiculed by fundamentalists. When I was hanging up my billboards in the city, some people had a negative reaction to them – they cut my face out of the pictures on the billboards. They didn’t want me to show my face. They didn’t want me to run, and they continued to fight until the last day of the campaign. Before I decided to run for office, I did not expect such enormous pressure.
I will never forget the day a religious ex-Member of Parliament came to my house and asked my father-in-law to shut down my campaign. He told my father-in-law that it would be dishonorable and indecent if I were to work in the National Assembly. He said that my family’s reputation would be ruined and that it would be a huge embarrassment if I won. He said, “You can still save the face of your family.”

My father-in-law came to me and told me what had happened. “If you think it will ruin you as a woman and you don’t want to keep going, that’s all right,” he said, “but I am going to continue to help you in whatever you choose.” He supported me through everything. Instead of buying a house, he spent his money on my campaign.

“"That was when I realized how important it is to have men in the process of women’s leadership. If I didn’t have men who supported me, I wouldn’t have been able to achieve so many things. In the United States, politicians have an official crew with speechwriters, advisors and secretaries. I have nobody but my family.""

Together, we are motivated, hard-working, and committed. Anytime I have an interview, my husband watches and gives me feedback. Anytime I have a speech, he is there. He helps me understand different points of view. He helps me amplify my voice and enhance my skills.

"IF I FAIL, A GENERATION WILL FAIL. IF I WIN, A GENERATION WILL WIN."

The journey of leadership that I have taken and all the accomplishments I have made so far are dedicated to the young women and men of my country who will follow in my footsteps.
I want to communicate with my generation and remind them of the importance of our role in Afghanistan. If I can’t connect with my constituency, then I can’t represent them properly, and I will fail. If I fail, a generation will fail. If I win, a generation will win.

My dream is that one day, Afghan men and women together will launch a powerful movement for women’s rights in Afghanistan. I want to take part in paving the road of equality for all people. Lack of unity delays this movement. Even the women in Afghanistan’s Parliament are not united, not just because we are from different backgrounds but because many are influenced by powerful men from their provinces. When women are not represented in high numbers, they come under the influence of other male politicians.

_A Network of Women Leaders_

Being involved with the Women in Public Service Project (WPSP) was the first time that I realized how important it is for women to be in public administration, especially in developing countries like Afghanistan. I now see myself as a member of a global sisterhood, a network of women leaders from around the world.

I want to fulfill the promises I have made to my constituency to represent their wishes, hopes, and concerns at the national and even international level. As the youngest Member of Parliament, I represent the youth of Afghanistan. I want to create a new reality for them. They want our country to have a new identity in the world, not as a country of violence against women and terror against humanity but as a country of hope. There are many young Afghan women like me who want to take part in this process, and the WPSP is a wonderful platform for us. It helps us to motivate our nation and mobilize an international effort for a
better Afghanistan. The WPSP gives power to our words in this long struggle.

Editor’s Note: Naheed Farid’s story was edited and transcribed by Christina Nelson, Program Intern of the Global Women’s Leadership Initiative and student at Smith College.
From the WPSP 2014 program, I was able to get an international network. One of the greatest points of the conference was the gathering of powerful women at the same place who all gave us inspiring speeches on how to overcome difficulties. Learning about the city plan for Mount Holyoke was also effective for me. In my country, we need city development and planning policy, and now we have suggestions for that.

My first aim is to be a policymaker. Today in my country, women who are older than 45 years old can run for mayor. I want to be mayor, and now, I believe I will get a chance. Mayoral duties are a lot, and they include public policy. In my country, all of the public policy has failed — the government should have checked and evolved policy.

The WPSP program also included public speaking, which was useful for me. In my school, where I am getting a Masters for Professional Studies and Political Management, there are many debates, presentations, and knowledge-sharing opportunities. I now have a volunteer group that is teaching and sharing knowledge at the grass roots level to women and also to executive-level women. In my volunteer work and my job, I re-use and re-share the knowledge from the WPSP program and try to inspire other women.
We have faced some traditional barriers against emerging women leaders. Traditionally, our women are tolerant and patient. In my country, women can get rights, but most educated women are married and take care of their children and don’t participate in social community work. Therefore, the community loses their ability. They think their obligation is to their husband and child. It is hard to bring awareness to them, and this is one of the barriers faced by emerging women leaders. Another issue is that of female trafficking. Most of our people are poor and our government has created enough local jobs to fulfill needs, so people want to leave for work abroad and traffickers take advantage of that situation. We advocate for women in customary law, women’s rights, and gender equality. I have also done research on why public policy has failed and why female trafficking in Myanmar is so high, and the report will be going directly to the Presidential Ministry in my country.

I have been encouraging and empowering peers and younger women that we can do it: we can have the same opportunities using our brains and we are not lower than men. I have been teaching and sharing knowledge about peace, democracy, and development to my community, trying to replicate the values that are inspiring and empowering for women.
Women in Israel, regardless of race or religion, enjoy full political enfranchisement and equality. In accordance with the 1951 Women's Equal Rights Law, women's right to equality is explicitly granted in many arenas including the work force, military, and political leadership. However, the law includes an express reservation (article 5) with regard to issues of personal status (family law), which are placed within the sole jurisdiction of the semi-autonomous religious courts. Israel recognizes 14 different systems of religiously based personal status law including Halacha (Jewish Law), Sharia (Muslim Law), Druze, and different permutations of Christianity. Their religious courts adjudicate in accordance with religious norms that often disadvantage women. In addition, the quasi-constitutional Basic Law of Human Dignity and Liberty of 1992 has been interpreted by the Israeli Supreme Court to include an explicit right to gender equality. The courts have applied the article to some of the discriminatory practices of personal status law but stopped short of nullifying the system, claiming that such a decision carries deep political and societal significance and is the providence of the legislature and not the courts. The legislature is continually attempting to meet the challenge of amending the personal status law system without violating the autonomy of religious communities. For example, I personally was involved
in efforts to amend segments of Jewish personal status law to make it easier for a woman to receive divorce documents from an uncooperative husband.

Israel does not practice a formal affirmative action or quota policy designed to increase women’s involvement in politics, but many of the major parties have enacted such measures voluntarily within the party primaries as part of the party charter. For example, the Likud, the ruling party, reserves four spots within the top 30 for women, and some are especially slotted for new female candidates. The Labor party, another major party, reserves two out of every ten slots for women. The lack of legislative affirmative action is perhaps reflective of the fact that women have largely succeeded in the Israeli political system. Israel elected its first female prime minister, Golda Meir, in 1969. In addition, women have served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Head of the Opposition and Speaker of the Parliament and are represented in every major party with the exception of the Jewish Ultra-Orthodox parties and some of the smaller Arab parties. The current government boasts the largest percentage of women in elected office in Israel’s history, 27 women out of a total of 120 parliamentarians, including women as heads of two major center-left parties, Labor and Hatuna.

Perhaps the greatest success for women in the current government is the appointment of Yael Anderon, age 42 and mother of two, to the position of Director-General of the Ministry of Finance. This marks the first time in Israel’s history that a woman has been appointed to this position, which is one of the most senior positions of leadership in the financial sector. Equally encouraging, Anderon was appointed despite being eight months pregnant with her third child. In addition, in November 2013, Dr. Karnit Flug, became the first women to be chosen to serve as Governor of the Bank of Israel.
Perhaps the most critical observation is that, these women achieve professional success while still building a family. In fact with an average birth rate of 3, Israel has, by far, the highest birth rate in the OECD. The secret for this success may be found partially in the Israeli legal system, which is especially supportive of working mothers who receive substantial tax benefits. In additional, recent legislation has lowered the age of free education from age 4 to age 3, which will hopefully encourage more women to stay in the workforce after becoming mothers. Finally, every working mother is entitled to 14 weeks of fully paid maternity leave, which is financed by the National Insurance Agency, as opposed to the private employer, and serves to further encourage employing and promoting women.

In my own experiences at the decision-making table, I have not found that there is a significant difference in the outcomes “in terms of laws, policies programs and changes in values and political culture” when women are involved.

I am an attorney by training and worked briefly in the private sector before entering the political arena. My first appointment was to the position of Legislative Advisor to the Coalition Chairman. It is worth noting that I went through the selection and interview process when my infant son was about eight weeks old. When I was offered the position, my prospective employers were willing to wait for me to finish my 14-week maternity leave before beginning the position. Following this appointment, I relocated to the United States for a year to complete a master’s degree in legal theory at New York University where my research focused on a comparative study of Israel and India and their respective attempts to balance the rights of the individual with those of the community with regard to religiously based personal status law.
In May 2013, I returned to Israel to begin serving as senior advisor to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. As of November 2014, I will complete my current post and begin a new position as Legislative Counsel to the Coalition Chairman in the Israeli Parliament. It is also worth noting that in April 2014, my second son was born. Once again, I was able to enjoy my guaranteed 14 week paid maternity leave.
The Women in the Public Service Project (WPSP) was a unique chance to cross different realities: reflecting on each other and gaining a deeper understanding of who we are and who we could become. During the Institute, I thought about how different realities challenge each other and to what extent we are ready to challenge ourselves, and maybe even change ourselves.

My whole life I have lived in a small suburb near the city Novi Sad, capital of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Republic of Serbia. I graduated from the Faculty of the Political Science in Belgrade on the eve of the Balkans’ wars. Although the official statements were that Serbia had not been involved in wars during the ’90s, the reality was that the Serbian political and military elites launched four wars during 1991-1999. Half a million men had been enrolled into different military operations in Slovenia,
Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, and that Great Serbia project resulted with tens of thousands killed and missing people.

Being a woman in Serbia in the ’90s meant I had no support. I could not get an official job, even though I was part of the six percent who had a university degree. From 1989-2008, instead of an official job, I was involved in different civil society activities, which was the only way to survive. For almost 20 years, I have been excluded from the system: I didn’t have health insurance or any official certificate proving that I was a member of society. I stayed invisible and non-existent. I was often asked the question: “What are you doing here?” and told, “Leave the country, no one needs your knowledge and skills.”

As a civil society activist, I did not enjoy any kind of protection or support. One highly positioned representative of the regime of ’90s, told me, “You do not have a strong political party behind you. You do not have an influential family, influential friends, or an influential lover. The only way for you to survive is to become my lover.” He was almost 80, and I was about 30.

The question of survival became very real when I was almost lynched. It seemed like a scenario for a Hollywood drama. On the eve of the NATO bombing campaign in March 1999, I was in a small village doing research for historical articles about small-village churches (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestants) and cemeteries (of different confessions, with some graves protected as cultural heritage). My research aimed at saving memories from churches and cemeteries from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and involved collecting pictures and interviewing priests and village folks. After the bombing, my neighbors accused me of placing NATO locators at strategically important places such as churches and cemeteries in order to help direct the NATO bombs. My research led to a call for my
elimination, a reflection of the reality a majority of people deeply believed.

The fear of my neighbors stemmed from their fear of the “other.” I have learned that the fear of the “other” is based on the fear of perception of reality and in the fear of the loss of freedom. Societies that stick to cultural, racial, and ideological exclusivism decline in isolationism. In Serbia, the elites forged their reality and wanted us to live “a life of history”: “in fact, we do not know how to live, but how to survive between constant disasters” (David Grossman). The elites legitimized various perspectives of parallel realities in order to gain power. The lasting effect during the ’90s was self-isolation and the social climate of targeting enemies, xenophobia, and ignoring modernization; the resulting consequences of which the elites do not take responsibility. Twenty years later, we see the results, and new generations objectively incapable of perceiving the world outside their self-imposed boundaries.

In the face of degradation and humiliation, I have strived for new knowledge while facing life’s ups and downs, staying optimistic, and believing in change in my near and regional surroundings. I have been hoping that my endeavors will bring change and make my country a better place for the future generations. In 2006, I launched Centre for Politics and Euro-Atlantic Partnership with a group of people who believed in daring “to be free” and “daring to think.” The goals of the partnership are to promote active and responsible participation of citizens in public life, reminding the next generation that there are numerous ways of becoming a man, and that every one of us is sometimes the “other” on the other side of a border.

In 2008, being appointed as Political Advisor to the President of the Assembly of the AP of Vojvodina opened a new professional chapter. This was a high position as the credible analyst of
political processes. It was a strange feeling to enter the institution without any political party membership card but knowing it was where I was supposed to be. The first goal of my program was to help Serbia win a battle for modernization, but only with self-understanding and self-acceptance of political reality coordinates, not with a losing battle against reality.

Meeting and talking with a group of brave and highly-spirited women during the Bryn Mawr Institute, I understood that I’ve dared to cross real and, more importantly, symbolic borders. I believe that borders in my heart have been canceled forever. At WPSP, I learned a free citizen accepts the categorical imperative which says “dare to be free and dare to think.” Taking the risk of new experiences frees citizens to merge horizons and change their own criteria. Assuming we change because we have met and lived with the “others,” we should not evaluate the world according to familiar criterion. Thinking requires the “other,” invites the “other,” and responds to the “other.” The Women in Public Service Project encouraged us to be free, and to think, and gave us a chance to cancel borders.
SRENG THIDA
University Student
Cambodia
Summer 2014 Leadership Institute with the Harpswell Foundation and Paññāsāstra University

WORKING FOR CHANGE

This summer, I have joined the summer course to promote women’s empowerment and women in public service that was created by the Harpswell Foundation, The Women in Public Service Project, and the Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia. I can say that I have learned many important ideas, suggestions, and concepts which were given by many highly qualified guest speakers and mentors to help empower me to be one of the future women leaders in Cambodia. In the summer course, I have built a network with the guest speakers and other trainees, with whom we can share our experiences in leadership and help one another to achieve our goal. From this network, we can keep in touch with one another, and we can create a group of young women leaders one day.

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Women leaders nowadays have faced many barriers such as traditional norms, unsupportive attitudes from family and
society, and a lack of mentorship. However, women can dismantle those barriers when they work for the changes in their society and country. First, education is very important in our academic life. Through education, women can be successful leaders. Second, as women leaders, we need to start changing the ideas of people around us regarding women by showing them that men and women are equal and that what men can do women can also do. Third, to keep up our good work, we need to find people and mentors that can inspire and make us keep going with our obligation. These three factors could bridge us to the world with the advancement of the 50x50 action, which states that the number of men and women in public and private sectors should be equivalent.

The steps that I have taken to engage in public service and public policy are my volunteer work in the field of reducing the poverty of the Cambodian people and environment in Cambodia. Furthermore, I have also joined the summer course to promote women’s empowerment and women in public service, and I can use this knowledge to share with my friends that did not have the opportunity to join. Regarding my major that I have chosen in the university, I have chosen law and international studies, which can bridge me to work in the public sector of the Cambodian government in order to strengthen women’s status in Cambodia.

One of the main goals of the WPSP is to advance the 50x50 action in Cambodia for both the public and private sector. To reach this goal, WPSP should try to help female students, especially in the rural area that mostly do not have access to education. Only education can help women become leaders in their country and can inspire other women to also value education. Furthermore, WPSP should organize seminars or educated advertisements on TV in order to promote female students’ educations.
I'm the co-director for Search for Common Ground in our Jerusalem Office. We are the largest conflict transformation organization in the world, and we have been in Jerusalem since 2000. During this difficult period in the entire Middle East region it is even more critical for women to take on leadership roles and work to secure gender equality.

The new reality of extremism can't be allowed to hijack our basic human rights.

Many extreme political and religious voices are being heard leaving many women silenced and distressed for what the future holds, therefore, it is our role and responsibility as women in leadership positions to open doors and create platforms in order to empower women to engage in this new reality. Search for Common Ground works through many channels to empower women in government. Currently, we are in production on a 16 part TV series called Madame President in five countries, Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunis, and Yemen. The drama series follows a vibrant, sharp-witted female president in a fictitious Middle Eastern country portraying the possibilities and challenges of running a nation in a male dominated society.
Similarly, I was the executive producer for the first ever social reality TV format in Palestine called *The President*. This reality show has allowed Palestinian women and men to literally become "presidential candidates" on TV competing for votes. We have combined the entertainment world with politics to encourage women to see their potential in all aspects of their government. Media is a powerful tool and we believe new programs focusing on women in government will help the world visualize what it means to have women leaders.
I am Tausifa Hasin Tajalli, a senior student at the Asian University for Women in Chittagong, Bangladesh. I participated in the Summer Leadership Institute at Asian University for Women organized by WPSP. I was very moved by our instructor Ms. Rangita de Silva de Alwis when she taught us about the impact of domestic violence against women and how it is conceived as a social norm rather than a crime in our society. As I grew up in a village of Bangladesh, from my childhood I have been acquainted with the stereotype: husbands batter their wives as if they are domestic animals. No one, including relatives or neighbors, dare to stop him, as they think he deserves the right to batter his wife. Almost in every house, there is a woman who has come back to her father’s house after being tortured by her husband or in-laws.

“I knew that I alone could not do anything. After being inspired from the WPSP, I decided to organize a seminar on domestic violence against women in my village.”
I talked to the mayor of the municipality, the panel mayors, lawyers, social workers, NGO workers, news reporters, and influential people from the village to help me in this venture. They agreed to help me. Then, I invited all the villagers to the seminar. The speakers and I talked about impacts of domestic violence on the women, family, and their children as well as existing laws against violence in order to make them aware that domestic violence is not a norm but a crime recognized by the law. I requested the women not to keep silent in the face of domestic violence. I also provided them pamphlets with contact information of legal and medical assistance for the victims. The representatives of the local municipality also promised to help the women.

The seminar was very appreciated in the town and reported in all the local newspapers. However, the beginning was not easy at all. When I went to invite the villagers, the men scolded me saying that I want to make their wives disobedient. After I explained to them that domestic violence does not only hurt their wives but that their children’s mental growth will also be disturbed, they allowed their wives to attend the seminar. Very few males were present as most of them were daily laborers and they wanted me to compensate their wage if they attended. I could not afford that. By the end of the seminar, I had realized that we can make change, despite all obstacles, if we are motivated and cooperative. Changing people’s minds is not difficult. A group of motivated and well-educated youths from any community can make a positive change in the community.
The Women in Public Service Project seminar challenged me and provided me with a lot of advantages. I was really lucky that I had an opportunity to join this program. I could meet a lot of speakers and powerful women leaders. I am especially very happy to meet all the women that had joined the seminar.

I exchanged a lot of experiences with them. I also got new knowledge and ideas. I also have learned to communicate with people, and I have improved my speaking skills a lot. I just know that it’s very important to speak out and to show our ideas and share what we know to the public. Before I joined this program, I was shy, and I really never spoke out when I presented in public.

"But after two weeks, I could find this strange thing inside myself. I wanted to speak out, and I just found my voice.

Besides, I am clear about the meaning and the importance of leadership now. When I was in high school, I wanted to be a good woman leader in my school, but I myself didn’t know about leadership and what the leader should do. Everything has
changed now, and I know clearly about this. Another thing I found is that networking and communication are very important for a leader. If leaders do not have people follow them, they can’t be a strong and good leader. If we want success, we have to have a good network.

Moreover, this seminar clarifies women’s rights and women’s power. As a matter of fact, women all over the world, especially women in Cambodia, are still facing many problems. Men think that women cannot be good and strong leaders like men. In fact, women can do anything men can do. If I become a good leader in the future, I’ll wake up all women in the public to know about their rights and their duties in society. I want to show men that all people know that if the world does not have women leaders, the world is lonely. I would like to set my goal, and I am not afraid to be a leader anymore. I am sure that I can reach my goal to be a good leader in the future in order to inspire women in leadership and to develop our country.

Last but not least, I would like to show my respect and thanks to the WPSP that created this valuable program and gave me the opportunity to join this program. I hope that this program will continue the mission to inspire all women to be good leaders.
I participated in WPSP in 2012. It had a great impact on my professional life and opened a wide door of opportunities. I learned networking; I learned from the experiences of others, gained role models and learned the skills to engage the community and shape public policy.

Networking has been vital in advancing my career. By networking, I learned about universal best practices through exchanging experiences with other leaders and learning solutions to those obstacles including overcoming issues universal to women. In my role as a Parliamentarian, I refer to examples from other countries to support any of my proposed amendment to the law. It gave me confidence when engaging in discussions in Parliament, with the public, and in the media.

After participating in WPSP, I was elected for a second term to the Jordanian Parliament and won my seat competitively outside the women’s quota. I am an active Member of Parliament, now well-known and respected as a leading female figure in my country. I have adopted a number of legislative amendments for the benefit of women such as: the right of Jordanian women married to non-Jordanians to pass their citizenship to their children; including a new article in the Penal Code criminalizing
acts of sexual harassment and, advocating for the elimination of article 308 of the Penal Code which waives the charges against a rapist if he marries his victim.

I was the first to hold the seat of Coordinator in the first-ever established Jordanian Parliamentary Women’s Caucus. I am a member of Al-Wasat Al-Islami (Islamic Centrist) Parliamentary Bloc and Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Order & Conduct as well as a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Women & Family Affairs. RASED, a Jordanian NGO that annually monitors the performance of Parliamentarians, ranked me among the top five best performing Parliamentarians for 2014. I was also selected to head the Pan-Arab Women’s Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Domestic Violence. By a Royal Decree issued in March 2013, I was selected by the King to sit on the Advisory Board of the National Center for Human Rights. I have participated in a number of conferences around the world and also served as an international trainer in countries across the Middle East & North Africa region. I also regularly mentor young women by hiring them as both paid and unpaid volunteers in my Parliamentary office. It is only through empowering these young women, training them and simply giving them a chance that we can change the face of our countries and achieve the WPSP 50x50 call to action.

Barriers facing women leaders here in Jordan are the traditional societal perceptions and attitudes towards women and the work-family life balance. It is incredibly important for any woman leader to persist in her work and prove herself as a decision-maker. In this way establishing that she is not only capable of leadership but able to often times exceed the performance of her male counterparts.
In the present, I work at Central American Bottling Corporation known as “CBC,” a multinational corporation of beverages with operations in 17 countries, with strategic partners including PepsiCo, Ambev, and LivSmart. My position is Public Affairs at the Department of Corporate Affairs.

My position in the company is working in communication with the media, collaborators, companies and also the execution of public affairs in the social responsibility projects. I identify with CBC as part of its vision is to “contribute to a better world”, by identifying opportunities related with the cycle of the company where we can apply the social responsibility projects such as education, nutrition, and recycling.

The WPSP institute inspired me to continue working with women throughout Guatemala. I have been working on the support and coordination of leadership lectures moderated in the Socratic method by a Guatemalan famous periodist Sylvia Gereda. The lecture series is directed at future women leaders between the ages of 25-30.

I also support the movement “Poderosas” www.poderosas.org, with the purpose of Guatemalan women’s empowerment in all
women’s surroundings, such as women and family rights. My goal is to continue helping and promoting women empowerment throughout my career.

My first position of focus in the public sector was when I graduated from law school and founded with other law classmates a non-profit association called Pro-Lideres. The association was dedicated to driving participation of young people in politics and activities to help improve Guatemala.

There are three ways that men can support women’s leadership. The first is to support the women in their families. In my personal life, my father always supported me and my decisions. He made me believe that I could achieve any goal I set my mind to and thanks to him, I am a lawyer. The second way men can support women is to encourage the boys to gain an education. Men’s views of women change when they go to school rather than starting in the work force. The third way that men can support women’s leadership is to open spaces at work for women. By making space, women will be able to take on more leadership roles and show just how much they can accomplish.

As a woman I have faced several challenges to entering public service and leadership positions. One main challenge was obtaining respect and credibility from Guatemalan society. I worked to overcome these hurdles by showing the impact of my actions. I still face the barrier of finding people who really care for the country and who are not trying to only support their personal interests. The ones who really care follow up with the programs I have started and completely commit to the activities.

I have two main role models. The first is RosaMaria Angel de Frade, President of Corporate Affairs of CBC, and ex congresswoman and president of the Transparency Commission.
The second is Sylvia Gereda, a Guatemalan famous journalist who is also on the Board of Directors for Vital Voices.

I share the dream of Hillary Clinton, that for 2050 Guatemala's public position will be 50% of women or more. After each election there are more and more women in our Congress.

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My main advice for other women is to always believe in themselves and to get an education, as education generates progress.

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WPSP has impacted me a lot. Throughout the institute, it inspired me to face every gender problem and solve it, meaning that I can be the part of the solution. Additionally, WPSP helped me to have the chance to meet other women with the same attitude, ambition, and goal to fight against those gender problems. Especially because we are from different places, we can share information, knowledge, and opportunities with each other.

Furthermore, the knowledge shared during the institute is very influential. It has shaped my work, and now before doing things I think critically and ethically. Also, the institute taught me that it is important to make my voice more effective by gaining new knowledge in addition to my main major at university. However, there are many difficulties women leaders have to face. For instance, the traditional belief that women will marry, become wives, stay at home, take care of children, cook, etc. Even worse, men are treated like gold, but women are treated like paper, which is easy to tear or make dirty. To overcome these barriers, I have to be positive, stay strong, and show the public that they are wrong. Other than this, it is a good habit to always revise what I have learned, because that will help encourage me to keep going with my ambition. Importantly, seeing female role models in the
world who have overcome problems is very useful for us to stay inspired and keep moving toward our goal. Additionally, having female role models would encourage us to never give up.

One of the most important lessons I have shared with friends and other women is to be inspired and confident to use our voice; mainly when people look down or have the wrong perception of women. Moreover, WPSP also has helped to expand my opportunities. Obviously, opportunities are all around us, but the traditional misunderstandings of women’s capacity blocks the way. Therefore, the key is with us; we have to clear the way and grab the opportunities.

Regarding the strategy to shape the public policy and conduct the value of WPSP to action, once again I would say I will start from using my voice in public, advocate, and persuade the public to value us as well as inspire women in society.