

## **CHALLENGES TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP**

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Speech in honour of YWCA of Salt Lake 100 years celebration July, 13, 2006

First of all, allow me to thank you for inviting me to be part of this all year centennial celebration. I thank you all for your graciousness and hospitality for these last two days. I have indeed learned something about this City and especially the exceptional work of the Church of the Later Day Saints (LDS).

The vision of the World YWCA is of "a fully inclusive world where justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom and care for the environment are promoted and sustained through women's leadership."

The YWCA has been a leader for women and with women for 150 years. Began as a local association in the city of London in 1855, today the movement exists in 122 countries and it is present in most countries represented here today. Annually YWCA programmes reach 25 million women and girls in about 300, 000 communities in every corner of the world. People invest in the YWCA because they believe in our mission and vision. The movement was founded by Christian women but has always been open to all people. Women are the leaders of the movement, but volunteers, both men and women, sustain the movement and hold it accountable to its vision by participating as implementers of programmes and projects, advisors, donors, policy makers and cheerleaders.

The YWCA is a women's movement devoted to working in communities for and with women to bring about change. It is an organization with a past and a future. It is an organization whose present celebrates a proud past and embraces a visionary future. This is an organization which believes that building and developing the leadership of women in communities is the best way to ensure a future for our communities, our nations and indeed the world. I walk tall when I join communities such as yours that help to sustain the dreams and visions that women in the YWCA have nurtured for the last 150 years. And today I join you to celebrate 100 years. Hooray. You share this birth date with the YWCA of Nigeria who this year too are celebrating 100 years of service to and with communities in several locations in that vast populous nation on the African continent.

I want to talk to you about Why YWCA value and promote women's leadership. I know that this room is full of different experiences of leadership. In the YWCA, we believe that every woman has a potential and power to be a leader. However women often lack opportunities, skills and resources for realizing their potential. Therefore what we do is create and advocate for appropriate solutions to the things that stand in women's way. That is what we refer to when we say we are developing the leadership of women.

For us in the YWCA, any woman who makes something happen or affects how something is done or viewed in a particular context is practicing leadership. It can be something as big as effecting a policy change at national level or as local as getting the city to fix lights on a street that is dark and could be unsafe. Leaders are motivated motivators. They are people who make things happen and who inspire others to make things happen.

So let me talk about women's leadership.

Leadership is both about individuals who take initiative and about collective capacity of a group whether a community, movement, an organization or a nation or nations working together to create change. For collective leadership to emerge there are individuals who take

the responsibility to vision, mobilize and invite others and manage diversity that results when more than one person is involved in something.

Leadership is intricately connected to the ability to use power to influence action for change. People have power in different forms. A popular student in class has the power to influence her peers because they feel there is something they like about this person. A person born into loyalty has certain birthright privileges that translate into power. Try inviting a group of business people to come and have lunch with the king of Jordan. You get very few apologies. In this country, Oprah has lots of peers to influence. Elected people have power because of the trust that those who have elected them have for that position. The process of leadership is an influencing relationship occurring among mutually dependent members. People need opportunities to exercise their leadership. They need community to make visible their leadership. Leadership does not happen in a vacuum.

In the YWCA when we talk of “women’s leadership,” we are referring both to women who take leadership and also to a particular political and philosophical perspective that women bring to leadership. Both are important, although significantly different. Recognizing women’s leadership comes hand in hand with accepting that there are many types, styles and arenas of leadership. Although it is important that women recognize diversity in leadership, women’s leadership seeks a relationship among political equals. Taking into account all of these variances helps us to see a bigger picture of leadership and that is essential for framing the discussion on women’s leadership.

### **When leadership is Invisible**

Much of women’s leadership over the centuries has been invisible because the question of leadership has been viewed through gender-biased lenses. The overriding assumption about what was important and where leadership was happening excluded places where women have always provided leadership. Often women are leading in ensuring that families function well and have necessities for development. Women are running the “Caring Industry,” by managing the well being of the sick, the children and the elderly etc. Women are resolving conflict and finding solutions for issues in communities, whether it is getting clean water in a village or a streetlight fixed to prevent children and pedestrians from being knocked down by cars. Women throughout history have always been making priorities, budgets, and action plans. Women have always been pulling together to make something happen, but all of these have been viewed as ordinary and domestic work, performed in the private sphere that did not qualify for leadership. So the first challenge is to make women’s leadership visible.

### **Making Women leadership Visible**

A gender sensitive stand on leadership begins concurrently by making women’s leadership visible and valuable and also affirming multiple ways that leadership can be exercised. This requires strategic thinking so that we do not fall into the trap confining women to places already defined for them by simply affirming women in particular prescribed roles. Rather, we make women’s leadership visible by expanding the recognition of women’s contribution to leadership to cover both the so-called private and public spheres. The important task here is to eliminate the dualistic thing that separates domestic life from public life and devalues the most important life giving and life forming necessities that go with care and nurture activities. Not to value early childhood development or loving care for the sick and elderly is simply ignorance and at worst a primitive way of thinking.

There are several steps to take for making women's leadership visible. The first step is to find the missing women in leadership by looking for them in the right places. The second is to affirm them by acknowledging that what women are doing is invaluable and central to making the world a better place. That recognition becomes the foundation on which to build an argument that women's experience in leadership can affect positive change in areas where women are relative newcomers and are still few- for example in world political leadership. The third step is to move the learning and experience that women have as managers of families and communities to the management of our nations, our businesses, religious institutions and our world. This is about making the personal public and the private political. It is about tearing down the walls of dualism and discrimination. Negotiating to ensure that women are in positions at every level of public governance beginning from kindergarten through parliaments, businesses all the way to the United Nations require strong women-led politically-motivated civil societies to support their leaders and hold them accountable. For women to be present everywhere, we must work on the barriers that limit, confine and marginalize women. Some of the barriers are cultural and social. Advocacy work must show that both women and men must work together for common good. Education and awareness raising is vital and therefore working on gender biases that keep girls away from school or make girls abandon school is vital. Promoting gender equality has to go hand in glove with empowering women and girls to take up their place in the world without discriminating themselves or being discriminated by others. Women's empowerment comes in many forms.

Some of them include working with international instruments developed at the UN and conceptualising them for use at local level. Among such instruments is the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination (CEDAW) adapted in 1979 by UN member states. A more recent tool is the Beijing Platform for action (1995) and another is the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) adapted at the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York in 2000. The MDGs have 2015 as the target for correcting some of the most pervasive injustices in our world today. One of the goals is to achieve gender equality by 2015. These tools are good for mobilizing support through campaigns. Campaigns are good because they carry elements of education, advocacy and solidarity all packaged together. The women's advocacy movement of which YWCAs are a part keep these issues alive on the tables of millions of people. That is why we are here today to ask you in your own way to help bridge gender inequality beginning from claiming your own place in leadership and to scaling that up to significant numbers by finding the missing women and making women's leadership visible.

### **Patriarchal Lenses- You probably needs new lenses**

Patriarchy literally means rule by fathers- the patriarchs. Gender Biased lenses see leadership as happening in the "public sphere," which was for generations, and still is to an extent, the domain of men. Ironically, even women have and still reinforce this bias, which is an indication that the way we are socialized determines how we think and act. A very big challenge is becoming aware that we need new lenses that will make us see things differently.

Patriarchal leadership is identified with domination, authoritarianism, and absolute power. In this system, the final answer is vested in one person who is considered beyond question. This person is the ultimate leader, whether in a family or an organization. How often do mothers threaten their children to obey or else they will tell dad about their behaviour? In organizations some leadership styles considered effective include enforcing order through sustained fear of the boss's power to hire and fire at will.

People today question this kind of hierarchy and in fact resent the style of leadership that has these characteristics. Domination as a leadership style is becoming less and less popular. There is a new growing appreciation of the traits more often considered to belong to female persons, those traits that women use to keep families together and to organize volunteers to unite and make change in the shared life of communities. These newly admired leadership qualities of shared leadership; nurturance and doing good for others are today not only sought after but also indeed needed to make a difference in the world in which we live today. This is a world where a tsunami happens and in a matter of minutes, all persons are reduced to the same level by the death. In other circumstances even in death we still sustain differences, with graveyards for particular social economic status or religious, ethnic or race groups. AIDS, tsunami and forces of mass destructions tell us that we must value common humanity. This call is urgent because our world is erupting like an angry volcano. Consider for example, that every 16 seconds a woman is infected with HIV virus and every 29 seconds: a woman dies from AIDS related illness. This is a world in which 20 million women are now living with HIV Virus and every day another 7000 get infected. This is a world in which poor people are nothing but statistics and apathy at the reality that surrounds us is pathetic. Women continue to be carers and nurturers and this is an opportune time to make their leadership visible.

## **Women Style of leadership**

A feminine way of leading includes helping the world to understand and be principled about values that really matter. High on the agenda is making sure that women are in the so called public decision-making positions in large numbers so that those places can be influenced by some of these values that have for generations resided in the places where women lead. A single woman or a few women in high places are simply token appreciation of women leaders. Many women scattered all over the place but with no critical mass in one single place is not good enough either. Tokenism places women in compromising situations and often makes women give up their indigenous values in order to fit in with the boys and be appreciated as one of them. There has to be a critical mass of women in leadership so that they can be companions with each other and allow themselves to be what they want or be allowed to be themselves and not to prove themselves.

This means that advocating for doors to be opened for those who are ready to take on positions in leadership is one of the most urgent challenges of our times. Even for people who have natural instincts for leadership, preparing and equipping people for leadership is essential for quality leadership. Leadership is a matter of abilities and skills that are learned and that is why the World YWCA invests in leadership development of women and girls. Young women and girls leadership training is a key to recognizing, affirming and promoting the leadership of women and ensuring leadership succession.

The surest way to develop people is to include them in the practice of leadership. When included there is peer learning and mentoring that no other form of education is able to give. In the YWCA we also aspire to make girls and young women's leadership visible by having policies, which include them in leadership today. We believe that the youth are leaders of today and advocate against those who propagate the old cliché that youth are leaders of tomorrow and by so doing make young people leadership invisible.

Women's leadership values youth leadership and makes it an integral part of correcting the global gender and generation injustice of exclusion and trivialization of women, the elderly, young people and children.

## **Creating Success**

The first sign of success is when the women pioneers in leadership have space and voice to be visible on their own terms and to practice their leadership in positions commensurate with their skills. It is common to hear people debate whether women in leadership are any different from men. A majority of women see their leadership as being significantly different. In my leadership I have found many of the claims made by other women true to me as well. For example, I am extremely involved in process management. It is not enough for me to have democratic decisions without clarity on the terms on which those decisions are made. Equally important to many women is what some call participatory management and I call shared leadership. Shared leadership is one that recognizes that leadership is not static and we are wiser together than alone. Leadership roles often change with the function. In an organization, the CEO is the leader when it comes to being the recognized manager of that organization, but roles change and the finance person becomes the leader when it comes to accounting and budgets. Shared leadership is also about sharing information, listening to other voices including dissenting ones and managing diversity. I think that where women have space to experiment with female leadership including the skills that mothers use to manage sibling fights there will be possibilities for new beginnings.

Indicators to success must include peace, commitment, friendship and cooperation rather than competition. These are the qualities that are needed to run a world without wars and

greed. These qualities are what women bring to leadership. When women work in an environment, which is not conducive to nurturing these qualities, they have no chance to be authentic and will tend to assume the patriarchal styles and even perfect them to extremes so as to be accepted by the system. This is an ongoing challenge and one that invites us all to continue to be awake and diligent in supporting women and organizations that continually keep these agendas alive and visible. The YWCA leadership programmes are connected to real issues such as advocacy about violence against women, or HIV and AIDS or empowering programmes such as micro credit, literacy, clean water etc. To be in the YWCA is to grow in personal leadership and to enable others to grow. To support the vision of the YWCA translates into wise investment, because it is investing in a good stock- the women, girls, children and communities without borders. This is why I personally invest my time and passion and compassion in the YWCA. I invite you to consider joining me and 25 million girls and women. I now move forward to your questions so that I can address things you want to hear and also learn about your own views and involvement in leadership.

Thank You.