

Q&A Questions from participants

—In some countries, including Australia and Japan, there are laws saying that you can take paternal leave, but often the men do not take it. I guess they feel that the workplace is not supportive, and their colleagues are not supportive. There seems to be still a perception that men do not stop working. How did you achieve the cultural change, getting men to take parental leave and take care of the kids more?

Ms. Kristjansdóttir: That issue was the biggest point of debate about these law reforms in Iceland. We allotted three months for the mother, three months for the father, and three months shared. If the father does not use his time he cannot give it to the mother, so the child who could have nine months with his or her parents would only get six.

Imagine a group of Icelandic men about to become fathers, sitting in a pub discussing this. I assure you that none of them would dare say, “I am not going to take paternity leave.” People would say, “Are you serious? You are not going to take leave to be with your newborn child? What could be more important?”

—I am wondering how applicable the Iceland model is to other countries, especially those where SDG 5, gender equality, may not have the highest priority?

Ms. Kristjansdóttir: You are absolutely right. Iceland is a small, close-knit and consensus-minded society, and we did not have to deal with class issues, religious aspects or reproductive rights that may be major obstacles to gender equality in other cultures. I think what other countries can learn from us is

the need for legal reforms. We can advise them about that.

—When we look at the Gender Equality Index, we have some surprise entries in the top 10; there are some African sub-Saharan countries there. What’s your analysis of this unexpected result? Is it just because armed conflicts have caused a shortage of men?

Ms. Kristjansdóttir: That’s right. Some countries, for example Rwanda, are at the top regarding many gender equality issues. There is a high proportion of women involved in politics because those countries have tragically lost so many men.

Of course there are some problems with indicators. For example—and now I think I might be telling an Icelandic secret—we follow all data very closely, and within government we are always working to ensure that we are constantly at the top of every measure.

Those efforts to make the data work for your country may sound cynical, but at least they show a valuing of gender equality. Twenty years ago it was seen as a soft welfare women’s issue. We did not see any economic gain from it, we were not looking at the other indicators.

—Now in Malaysia’s 11th Malaysia Plan there is a 30% quota for women in leadership roles in top management in the public service. Some object to quotas, saying that women are not yet ready to be leaders. Do you think a 30% quota for women in leadership is beneficial?

Ms. Kristjansdóttir: That is an important issue. When I was young, in my twenties, starting to fight for gender equality, I did not believe in quotas. I thought, “I have my abilities. I should not need any extra help to advance.” I even spoke out publicly against quotas.

Now I have completely changed my position on quotas. I do not like the fact that we have to resort to things like quotas, but everything we know about gender equality tells us that if we do not see a group of women in leadership, things will not change. Quotas for women in leadership are not the answer, but they can be useful, as are quotas for representation by region or age group.

—In parliament in Kenya, women seemed not to have access to positions, so they started demonstrating for an increase in the number of women in positions. The male politicians asked why they should hand over their positions to women. Please comment on that.

Ms. Kristjansdóttir: One side of the discussion has for too long focused on the notion that women are taking something from men. It is very important in all of these debates to make sure that men see that gender equality holds benefits for them.

First of all, I think it dramatically changes men if they have the opportunity to spend time as active parents. All along men have not been allowed to take an active part in child rearing. It has been seen as a sign of weakness if a man wants to do that.

For example, if you asked my husband, what were the best six months of his life, he would say, “The time I spent alone with my kids, when I had the chance to be a father the way I wanted to do it, without the mother being the chair of board.”

I believe that men will be happy when they can live the whole spectrum of life. I think we are moving in that direction: even 10 years ago we would not have had the discussions we are having today, and that is a global trend.

PENSÉE

SPECIAL ISSUE

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Speaker

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DO PEOPLE PREFER WOMEN OR MEN AS LEADERS?

Ms. Hanna Birna Kristjansdóttir is Senior Advisor on Women’s Leadership for UN Women and Chair of the Board of Women Political Leaders (WPL). She has been active in Iceland politics for many years, holding positions in both national and local government. She has served as Iceland Minister of the Interior and as the Chair of the Iceland Foreign Affairs Committee. Before her election to parliament, she was the Mayor of Reykjavik and the President of the Reykjavik city council. Ms. Kristjansdóttir has a bachelor of arts in political science from the University of Iceland and a master of science in international and European politics from the University of Edinburgh. She was in Japan in June 2019 for the annual summit of Women Political Leaders (WPL) in Tokyo, and during her visit she gave a GRIPS Forum address titled, ‘Do People Prefer Women or Men as Leaders?’

I am the Chair of Women Political Leaders, and we are hosting our annual summit here in Tokyo, bringing together over 350 women from around 90 countries. All members of their countries’ governments, they have come together to discuss politics and more fundamentally, to explore ways in which we can advance society by improving gender equality.

I got involved in politics when I was quite young; that’s rather typical of women in politics today. I went into politics because of my interest in gender equality. I remember watching TV and asking my parents again and again, “Why aren’t there any women there? Why are there only men discussing our future and how we are supposed to live our lives?” I was in politics for 20 years, first as the Mayor of Reykjavik and later as a Minister in the government of Iceland.

Then I had the great opportunity to become involved in gender equality issues on the international level, as the Chair of Women Political Leaders, so I left politics. I am now the Chair of WPL, and I also serve as the Senior Advisor on Women’s Leadership for UN Women.

The theme for today is, ‘Do People Prefer Women or Men as Leaders?’ I am not going to pretend that I have a simple answer to that question, because there are many ways to approach it, and each would give a different answer. Today I am going to show you why I think gender equality makes the world a better place.

I chose this title because the world constantly tells us that people do prefer men as leaders. The world tells us, again and again, that that’s the way things work and the male-dominated situation we see is an indicator of a general sentiment.

Four Issues

I want to focus on four issues here. First, ‘what.’ What is gender inequality? What kind of phenomenon is it? Second, ‘why.’ Why is there gender inequality? Third, ‘how.’ How can we make a difference when it comes to gender equality? I’ll use the case of Iceland as a starting point for answering that question.

Finally, I will talk about a fourth issue, another ‘what’: what are the benefits of achieving gender

COLUMN

“No women left behind” will lead to “No one left behind”



Once a year the Women Political Leaders (WPL) Summit, an international gathering, is held with the aim of increasing the number of women in politics and enhancing their influence there. In June 2019 the summit was held in Japan, the first time in Asia. The summit theme was “Taking Actions to Advance Society through SDGs.” During the two-day summit, 422 participants including female politicians from 87 countries came



together to discuss actions towards the resolution of issues pertaining to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in areas including economics, employment, health and health care, the environment, education, and female leadership.

One of the key issues discussed was the importance of applying gender perspectives to such policy work through the several stages of the legislative process. An increase in the number of women undertaking political decision-making can effect policy prioritization and lead to consideration of a wider range of policy options. Summit discussions highlighted the fact that women’s leadership in efforts towards achievement of the SDGs is required for the creation of a diverse and inclusive society. Throughout the summit, female political leaders from around the world forged a global network by sharing their experiences and best practices in the context of meeting global challenges.



GRIPS provided enabling cooperation in the holding of this summit, from the planning phase onward, as an initiative contributing to the achievement of SDG 5: To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. GRIPS Executive Advisor to the President Prof. Atsushi Sunami acted as moderator of the session entitled, “Society 5.0 Bringing About a Society of Abundance.”

Text by Izumi Suzuki, GRIPS SciREX Program Specialist

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Senior Advisor on Women's Leadership for UN Women
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SPECIAL LECTURE

HANNA BIRNA KRISTJÁNSDÓTTIR



equality? Far too often in discussions of gender equality issues, people think that it is just about us women having it better in life. It is not just about that. I will show you that there is more to gender equality: yes, it is about the welfare of girls and women, but it is also about the welfare of boys and men and in general about the better life that arises when we live together in a balanced society.

What is the Status of Gender Equality Today?

At state gatherings like the G20, we usually see 18 to 20 men and two or three women. I am sure that the G20 group photos taken here in Tokyo will look similar, because the numbers have not changed. It is still the case that women in power are few and far between.

I want to remind you of the fact that in the world today, the gender balance in the population is half and half. 49% of the world's population are women and 51% are men. A key point for discussion, and I'm sure you'll agree, is that we are 'using' the 51%, the males, far more intensively than the other half of the population, the women.

Keep in mind that when you see the world leaders all together, they are supposed to represent that 50:50 world. But this is not the case. The fact is that among heads of state in the world today, presidents and prime ministers, 6.5% are women, 93.5% are men. Sadly, this has not changed in recent years. The figures I just mentioned are approximately the same as 10 years ago.

We have made a bit of progress as far as female government ministers. In the world today ministers in government are 18% women and 82% men, still far from half and half. Not only that: those 18% often hold positions in what are called softer issues in politics: education, health, social welfare, and the like. We have yet to see a significant number of women finance ministers, foreign ministers, interior ministers, defense ministers.

We are often told that there has been a dramatic change in gender equality in government, and indeed there have been impressive changes in some societies. For example, in my country, Iceland, and in the Nordic countries in general, there has been a dramatic change. But when we look at the average we are still not there: 24% women and 76% men—and these figures include some parliaments that use quotas or other methods to make sure that the number is higher. Of course, there is no quota for cabinet members or heads of state.

Women Political Leaders, the organizational network that I am chairing, has only one mission: to increase the number of women in parliaments and increase their power there. Recent surveys show that if we wait without doing anything, parliaments will have the same male-female balance 107 years from now.

Even in Iceland, which has been ranked number one in gender equality for 10 years in a row, being a woman in a leadership position in politics is still like being a guest. You might wonder, "How on Earth can you say that, in a country that is constantly focusing on gender equality, where

women are way more politically active than in most countries?" It's because politics is still the game of the guys; it has been that way for a long, long time. All the traditions, all the rules, how the network operates, how things are done, it's done the way it's been done for hundreds of years.

That is why I say women are still guests. We are allowed to be at the table but we are not allowed to lead the game. I would say it should not be like that. Politics desperately needs a change and it needs the change that women can offer. I have often used the phrase, 'feminize politics' and I would like to see that happen—I believe it would change the world for the better, for both men and women.

You might think that in other sectors women leaders must be doing far better, but that is not the case. It's true that women have become way more active in the workforce everywhere; many are highly educated; in most parts of the world they are as well educated as men. However, in terms of leadership roles in the workforce in general, women still account for only 20% of the positions.

Look at the issues related to running companies, making big decisions. In my country we were hit traumatically hard by the crisis of 2007 and 2008. If we look back at that time we might well ask, "What should we learn from that time?"

My first answer is that we need more diversity. The finance business was run by a group of men who for the most part knew each other; there was a need for more diversity in dimensions including age, gender, race. This should be reflected in seats on boards of directors. Still, worldwide, only 15% of director seats are filled by women, 85% by men. When we look at ambassadors—people in positions which are representative of their countries—who are working to ensure that there is no gender bias, the balance is still 15% women and 85% men.

Why Don't Women in 2019 Have Equal Opportunity?

Recently we looked at the statistics for women my age, and it was really shocking, almost depressing. You would think that progress towards gender equity would be moving faster now, but in 2019, we are still faced with the fact that women do not have the same opportunities as men.

Picture a leader, just form a mind's eye view of a leader. Tell me in all honesty, what comes to mind when you picture a leader? I could say without a doubt, since so many studies of the young generation would support my view, that 80% of you in the room, or even more, would picture a man. And it would be a middle-aged white man, dressed in a dark suit, with a special kind of deep voice.

Prospects for Gender Equality

WPL has been working with a research company called Kantar to develop what we call the Reykjavik Index. To create the index, we did not ask people directly about gender matters. If I were to ask you directly if you thought that women should have the same opportunity as men when it comes to leadership, most of you would say yes, because that is the politically correct answer and because in the ideal world we want that.

Here are the scores from the Index study of the G7 countries. At present we are studying a bigger group of countries.

Let me explain: 100% of the time, a male would be seen as a leader in the perception of the public, whereas in the G7 countries, a female would be seen as a leader only 66% of the time. Perhaps the strangest thing here is that Germany, which has been led by a woman for a really long time, still has a very low Index figure.

The G7 Reykjavik Index for Leadership Findings:

Country	R.I.
UK	72
France	71
Canada	71
USA	70
G7 average	66
Japan	61
Germany	59
Italy	57

This does not indicate that our minds are filled with prejudice, rather it indicates that in the traditional norms the image of leader fits way better with men than it does with women. But that perception is not the only 'Why' in the room. You cannot explain everything by saying, "Oh, that's the perception; we are not very open to women as leaders."

If you feel that we have been doing fairly well when it comes to gender equality, consider this: if we move at the pace that we have been moving in recent years, we will only achieve gender parity in 2236. That means it will take us at least 270 more years to have a society in which women have (among other things) the same rights, opportunities, and basic legal protection as men.

In my opinion this is by far the most important set of issues because we are talking about global trends. Women have fewer rights and less protection under law. When I was born, the boy that was born in the next room had more rights under the law than I did. This is still the case in most parts of the world. 2.5 billion women and girls today are affected by discriminatory laws, and no country in the world, not even Iceland, has no discriminatory elements in its laws or in its constitution. No country.

Women's pay, for doing the same work as men, is lower than that of men. For every dollar a man earns, on average, a woman is paid 54 cents. And then she goes home from work and she has more work to do, caring for children, caring for the elderly, and much more. This is the 'why' question: why are women not on an equal footing?

Gender Bias and Stereotypes Impact on Men Too

The story of the 'Why' is pretty clear. Everything that falls under gender issues is biased by stereotypes. You may be under the impression that current stereotyping is only a problem for women, but it is also bad for men. In the school system, for example, we expect girls to do certain things and we expect them to be certain things. We do the same with boys. We demand certain things of boys that do not necessarily sit well with them. At least where I come from, the crime rate, the suicide rate, the rate of depression, the proportion of people who feel socially isolated, when it comes to all of these issues, men rank far higher than women.

Perhaps the way we treat males at an early age, teaching them that they should not cry, they should not feel bad, they should not be vulnerable, they should not be caring, they should be tough, they should be strong—maybe all that is as harmful for males as the stereotyping of women is for them. In the end, it is harmful for society as a whole.

How Can We Turn Things Around?

Iceland is small. There are only 350,000 of us. We

feel that Iceland is the place that does everything right, and that everybody should be looking at what we have been doing. Of course, it is easy to say, "Well, we have done it. We have done gender equality and we are doing really well." However, it may not be fair to compare with others.

In 1975, statistics started to be available and they raised issues that people discussed and debated. Icelandic women noticed that they were being paid way less than the men that they were working. They said, "Enough is enough. We are leaving the offices, the factories, wherever we are working with." They all walked out. Now at that time, nothing was happening about gender equality in Iceland. When the women stopped working, things started to move.



That story is a hint at an answer to the 'how' question. Admit that there is a situation, but don't dwell on the reasons for it. Ask what can be done about it.

All of us who live in Iceland know the political history of that change. To put it into a personal perspective, take the story of my mother. She was born in 1945 and grew up on an ordinary farm in the countryside. The most popular book at that time had a title something like, 'How to Make Sure That You are a Nice Wife for Your Husband.' When my mother was young, there was not one woman in the parliament of Iceland. In

It is not about just girls, it is about society as a whole.

By the time my children were born, there was more or less gender parity in parliament.

Perceptions Have Changed

Let me show you how perceptions have changed: if you were to ask my daughters, "Do you think women should be leaders as well as men?" they simply would not understand the question. For them, it is very much the way things are, so it doesn't appear to be a question to them.

Let me give you another view: if you arrive in Iceland and take a cab from the airport, and you ask the cab driver to tell you what he—it is usually a he—is most proud of in Iceland, he would mention gender equality. We think gender equality is a great hallmark and everybody is really proud of it. I think that the fact that this can be achieved in one lifetime shows that other countries can do it too.

But how did Iceland do it? Most importantly, Iceland had strong female role models, such as Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the first multi-term democratically elected female president in the world. Research shows again and again that if women see women in leadership positions, the number of women in leadership positions will increase.

The Need for Progressive Legal Reforms

We were working hard to make sure that Iceland's laws and structures were fair—but I was utterly

shocked when some World Bank research came out and said that Iceland had flaws in its laws when it came to gender equality. No one could believe it.

One of the most progressive legal reforms that has been made in Iceland is to do with paternity leave. Both the mother and the father are allowed to take leave from work when their child is born. The mother gets three months, the father gets three months, and there is another three months to share between them. This single reform has made a dramatic change in terms of equal pay and also gender equality as a whole.

The one way I knew in my personal life that I was living in a place where gender equality was fully in place was when my kids woke up in the middle of the night, and they were just as likely to call out for their father as for me. Then you know that things have changed dramatically.

Another important legal reform is related to dealing with violence against women. We have placed a harsh legal framework around domestic violence.

Political Consensus: It Can Be Achieved

It seems that many people think gender equality is more of a left-wing political issue than a right-wing one. That may be the case in some countries, but it is not the case in Iceland. Across political lines, no matter what government is in place, no matter the slant of parliament, there is always consensus on gender equality in Iceland. There is that kind of support for progressive law reforms. There is a strong political consensus that has ensured that gender equality happens in Iceland.



Making a Better World

Gender equality work is about making the world a better place. It is not about me as a female individual. It is not just about all of the women I know. It is not about just girls, it is also about boys and men and it is about society as a whole.

Research has shown that achievements in gender equality will generate lots of other social improvements. I encourage you to look at the research; it shows that the people in the countries that are on the top in terms of gender equality are happier than the people living in traditional gender settings. With equality, people feel that their potential is being used, that they have the same opportunities, that they are not discriminated against; in short, they are happier, including the males.

Gender-equal nations are wealthier too. Recent surveys show that we can increase the GDP of the world by 25% by 2025 if we make use of the power and potential of the women who have been denied opportunity. Also, some studies have shown that gender-equal people feel more secure and live longer.