Women Leadership in the Era of Globalisation: Opening Doors of Opportunities

Rashila Ramli *

I. Introduction

The world as seen today is full of contradictions and wonders. While the advancement in technology beguiles our imagination, there are women who had to walk for two miles in order to get water for the usage of their family. While there are documented evidences that there is enough production of food, there are children suffering from malnutrition in many parts of the world. While conformity may be condoned in one area, diversity may be glorified in another. Despite these contradictions and wonders that exist side by side, it is important to continue striving forward to make the society that we live in a better place not only or us but also for the future generation.

Aristotle stated that human beings are political animals. In other words, human beings tend to live in communities. Through time, institutions known as states were created and evolved with different governing structures. Within these structures are those who are elected into leadership positions. There are also those who inherited such positions. In most societies, men tend to hold leadership positions. There seem to be an agreement to accept that is it natural for men to be leaders since leadership positions are associated with the public realm. This paper posits that there is nothing natural about this well accepted belief. It posits that women do have leadership abilities and qualities.

Despite having such qualities women are not given due recognition of

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their abilities and qualities. Hence, we see the percentage of women leaders or women policy makers is rather small and in certain countries, very minimal. This paper intends to highlights ways to empower women to actively participate in policy decision-making. More importantly, it will also elaborate on how "ordinary" women can cultivate leadership qualities.

In order to do so, it is necessary to discuss the environment associated with globalization. Second, there is a need to identify sites of decision-making. In the third section, the elaboration will be on the elements and the essentials of leadership, characteristics of effective leaders and the role women can play in their society.

II. The Unsettling Era of Globalization

What kind of environment are we living in? What do we expect for the future? Globalization has been a buzz word since the middle of 1990s. There are many dimensions associated with globalization. There are those who believe that globalization is something new where we have no alternative but to participate in the new technological age. However, there are also those who think that globalization is just a fad, a myth, a hype where it will fizzle out after sometime. These skeptics do not believe that the phenomenon that we are experiencing especially those associated with advancement in technology is something new. From their point of view, the new-found advancement is part of a historical process equivalent to other discoveries such as the printing press, the telephone, and the airplane. These earlier discoveries had made tremendous changes in out lives, may be similar to the extend that the internet is making to the lives of the present generation. There is another group of scholars who believe that is too early to reject the present changes. The transformationalists believe that we are going through a process where there will both agents and victims. This process sees the adjustment that states and regions are making in order to ensure their survival within the economic and social system. The end result of this process is yet to be seen.

III. The Different Dimensions of Globalisation

What do we know about the changes which are taking place in our lives? We realize that technology has changed our way of life in an unprecedented manner. In the urban areas, the availability of appliances has allowed women to accomplish more household associated tasks. Refrigerators, irons, microwaves and vacuums are equipments that have changed ways of household management. Women can store food and plan ahead. Cooking, which tend to be associated as women's work may no longer be a chore for most women. The appliances coupled with the fast food packages have changed the method of food preparation for women. Some of these scenarios may not be true for less developed countries as well as those living in the rural areas. In such areas, technology may not have lifted the burdens of women because women may not have access to them. Two other phenomena are the concept of a borderless world and the creation of virtual spaces that can offer opportunities. Within these two phenomena, there is a sense that the level of interaction among people from different areas, regions and continents has increased in an unprecedented manner. While the actual interaction may not be a physical one, those taking place in cyber spaces present reality for many. Women can make use of this technology to create network of support in facing a very uncertain world.

For our purpose here, globalisation is taken to be a process of transformation in society which is highly aided by technology. In other words, one can argue that there has been an expansion of time and space in the economic, political and socio-cultural dimension.

a. Economic Dimension tends to be associated with liberal trade policies: free trade, limited taxation and subsidies. Lower taxation on goods means lower prices. While these practises may benefit more advanced countries, those countries that are developing will also have to follow such practises. In these countries, on the down side, while consumers may have more choices in terms

of goods, they may not have the necessary cash to buy the goods. Furthermore, young home grown industries will have less opportunities to survive in the face of competition with multinational corporations. How do we equip ourselves and our community with skills and knowledge to ensure that we can sustain our existence in the rather unfriendly economic environment?

b. Socio-cultural Dimension concerns the universalization of certain value systems. Sometimes, these value systems are known as cocacolarization, macdonalization as well as the M-TV culture. In searching for common ground, we see a generation of similarly dressed youngsters and adults in many societies. Similar songs and food are being consumed by these groups of individuals. On the other hand, as a reaction to such universality, or as defence of local cultures, we see a reversal in terms of actions. The resurgence of religious fundamentalism, limited tolerance of diversity and lack of acceptance of certain life styles are binary oppositions against the onslaught of universality.

c. Political Dimension is associated with the issue of democratisation (a process to institute democratic values and practices in the minds and the hearts of the people). In this process, four elements are apparent:
   - opening/closing of political space
   - increase/decrease number of political actors including women politicians
   - experimentation with new electoral systems
   - the usage of different political channels aided by technology

   Globalization has also been associated with the creation of political space, increase numbers of political actors including women politicians, experimentation of new electoral systems and the usage of different political channels aided by technology. However, in the four elements mentioned above, there are also advancement and contradictions. Since countries have greater interaction with one another, external pressure can caused a country to change

certain policies. A case in point is the recent legislation in Kuwait where women are now allowed to vote and to run for office. On the other hand, in the Commonwealth of Independent States, women have less representation under present electoral system compared to the time under Soviet rule. This especially true in the case of Krgystan and Russia.   With respect to formal political representation countries that practised the proportional representation system seem to have better women representation compared to the simple majority system.

As of 1 Jan 1998, there are 40, 822 members of parliaments around the world where 4,004 or 11.4 percent are women for both houses combined (IDEA, 1998). For comparative purposes, below are some figures regarding women in national parliaments based on regional averages. Data from Table 1 indicates that national parliaments in Asia[1] have only 9.7 percent women parliamentarians. This percentage is low compare to the percentage in other regions of the world except the Arab countries.

Table 1
Women in National Parliaments on Jan 1, 1998
Regional Average (%)

REGIONS	SINGLE OR LOWER HOUSE	UPPER HOUSE OR SENATE	BOTH HOUSES COMBINED
Nordic countries	35.9	0.0	35.9
Europe OSCE (Nordic countries included)	14.3	9.0	13.2
Americas	13.5	12.0	13.2
Europe (Nordic countries not included	12.3	9.0	11.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	11.1	14.0	11.3
Pacific	10.8	21.8	12.7
Asia	9.7	9.9	9.7
Arab States	3.7	1.1	3.4

Source: IDEA, 1998: 21.

Thus, it is relevant to address the mechanism for increasing women's representation. How does Malaysia compare to the world?

The Malaysian government practices a bicameral system which consists of the House of Senate and the House of Representatives at the national level. In the 2004 General Election, there are 219 seats in the House of Representatives and 69 seats in the Senate. Table 2 shows the percentage distribution of men and women representatives at the parliamentary level from eleven elections since Independence.

Table 2
Percentages of Women Representatives in Parliament in Malaysia
1959-2004

Year	Men	Women	%Women
1959	101	3	2.90
1964	101	3	2.90
1969	142	2	1.38
1974	149	5	3.25
1978	147	7	4.54
1982	146	8	5.19
1986	170	7	3.85
1990	169	11	6.11
1995	177	15	7.80
1999	173	20	10.36
2004	196	23	10.50

Source: Rashila Ramli, 2005: 217.

Based on the 1999 election, the result shows that women's representation at the national level has increased from 7.8 percent to 10.36 percent. Out of the twenty women MPs, four are in the Opposition team. Another interesting feature to note is the fact that all women MPs won with their majority votes being greater than the number of spoilt votes. All except one obtained more than 1000 majority votes. In the 2004 election, there was an increase in the total number of parliamentary seats. i.e. from 193 to 219. A total of 36 women candidates ran for elections. Only 23 women won. Thus, there was only a slight increase in the percentage representation (Rashila Ramli, 2004)

What does this mean? It is assumed that political representation is the formal representation of the voices of voters. Are women representatives voicing out women issues? In some cases yes, but in other cases, women issues are considered to be another item on the political agenda, and will be treated as

such. Thus, while political participation in the formal channel can be desirable, it may be more appropriate to look at other sites where decisions are made, where women can exercise as well as hone their leadership skills. Then, the essentials of leadership will be elaborated for adaptation at various sites of action.

IV. Sites of Opportunities

There are many sites where women can exercise leadership skills. Sites of opportunities can found both in the public and private spheres. The private sphere tends to be associated with the household, whereas the realms outside the household such as the community, or at the state, and the international levels tend to be considered as the public sphere.

Household unit: In the era of globalization, a household unit is not so easily defined. Are people living as a nuclear family or are there more long distance parenting taking place through the internet and the Short Message System (SMS)? Who is the head of household? As divorce rate increases, more and more women become heads of household. This fact needs our attention too. What kind of household units are we look at? Are there enough rooms within a low cost house to house a family of 6? These questions will impact on the kind of leadership skills that women must have in order to deal with changes in the globalized era.

Community: This is another interesting site of opportunity. It is interesting because this is where households are located. Most family activities may be located within a community area. Thus, the issue of community development is very important in order to ensure that the living environment is conducive for the well being of a family. How does one develop a community? A community grows with the growth of its inhabitants. The inhabitants, in the case of a human habitat are the homo-sapiens. Thus, the homo-sapiens better known as human species can be considered as the most important software for community

development. Community development entails two important features: participation and the empowerment of community members in order to improve their well being in term of employment, health, education and security to a sustainable level (Junaenah Sulchan, 2005). In the era of globalization, where the pursuit for material well being seem to be dominant, community development may lag behind if the governing structure does not place enough emphasis on it. It is in the hands of community members especially women to ensure that community members are participating in decision-making processes affecting their daily existence, and are empowered to do so. Within a community also, there are many other venues for participation and empowerment. The existence of non-profit organizations provides good sites for leadership training. This venue must be identified in each community.

State: A state is created by human beings. One of the first documentation of a state is the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Prior to that, human beings form societies by pledging loyalty and allegiance to a higher authority, may it be a king, a warlord or a village head. Through the centuries, a state has been an entity with recognized properties such as a boundary, population, a governing structure as well as natural resources. Within a state, there are many organizations functioning based on the stipulation of the state. Some are private enterprises, units of state bureaucracies, public holdings and non-governmental organizations. Decision-making takes place in all these sites. Furthermore, policy-making takes place in many governmental organizations that have tremendous impacts on the lives of the people. Governance of a state takes many forms. Issues of representation and resource allocation become focus of discussion. This is where gender budgeting should also occur in order to ensure that all groups especially the needs of women and children are given proper emphasis for by the state.

Regional and Global Organizations: The regional and global level organizations provide different forms of opportunities for women in decision-making

position. One can be representing the government of one's country or one can be participating in an individual capacity through an NGO or other agencies. The issues that one deal with will be broader and will generally have a policy orientation. Sometimes, it will be harder to see the results of decision taken due to the multi layered nature of policy implementation. The biggest challenge at this level will be the need to negotiate from a multi-interest perspective. Multi-interest means the need to recognize individual versus organization needs as well as the needs of the state. If the interests are compatible, then decision-making will not be difficult. On the other hand, if they are competing, one has to reconcile the different interests by prioritizing them. However, what will be the criterion for prioritization? An individual will have to decide based on the goals that one would like to achieve in the end.

Thus, by looking at these sites of opportunity with the understanding that we are undergoing the process of globalization, as with the belief that we can be agents of change instead of victims, it is now appropriate to discuss the essentials of leadership that women should have.

V. Leadership and its essentials

In order for a society to progress, usually some forms of organization are necessary. In an organization, there are those who lead and those who follow. At one time, one can be leader, in another situation, one can be lead by others. In both capacities, it is important to know the essentials in order for us to be prepared when the time comes for us to assume a leadership position.

There are many models of leadership. There are many definitions of leadership. After careful examination of the tenets and nuances associated with leadership, I would say that leadership could be seen as a process of inducing people to take initiatives/ steps that would lead toward achieving a common goal. It can be viewed as a continuous process that is not static in form.

There are five elements of leadership. First, there is a person who functions as a leader, and known as a leader. Second, there is a group of followers. Third, there are actions taken by a leader to motivate people by influencing their thoughts, emotions and behaviour. Four, there is a certain objective to be reached either in a systematic manner or in an ad-hoc situation. Fifth, a transformation takes place within the followers who then begin to share the vision of the leader. These five elements describe the nuances related to leadership. Before elaborating on the essentials of leadership, it is appropriate to differentiate between leadership and management. The main difference between a leader and a manager is that a leader must have a vision with a strategic plan in order to reach a specific goal. The function of a manager is to implement strategic plan based on the vision set by the leader. Thus, there may be some overlap between the two functions, but the emphasis here is on vision and implementation.

The essentials of leadership can be classified into four components: motives and traits; knowledgeable, personable and able; vision formulation and articulation, and vision Implementation (Locke, 1991). These four essentials of leadership provide the foundation for an effective leadership in any organizational unit. The size of the organization does not matter. It is important to have an understanding of the four essentials.

The first essential of leadership has two components: *motives and traits*. What are the motives of an effective leader? In general, they are ambitious, full of initiative and energetic. They are proactive and their efforts to meet their targets. They have the desire to lead. This is important. While some people may have the traits, they may not have the desire, or they may be pushed into leadership position rather against their will. Traits that are compatible with the motives of effective leaders are associated with integrity and high level of confidence about their leadership ability, creativity, flexibility and charismatic.

The second essential of leadership is the component consisting of

knowledgeable, personable and able.   A leader must have the knowledge with regard to the environment or issues that s(he) is involved in. Knowledge can be accumulated through formal learning. However, knowledge acquired through years of experience can account for lack of formal knowledge. Personable accounts for the interpersonal skills, also known as people skills while the concept able relates to cognitive ability to in processing tremendous amount of information and making a generalization from such an exercise.

Vision Formulation/Articulation constitutes the third essential of leadership while the fourth essential is Vision Implementation. Why do we split the components? The ability to formulate and articulate a vision separates a leader from a manager. A leader must be able to visualize the goals of an organization. Then s(he) sets the direction (through strategic planning) of an organization by articulating the vision in an easily understood manner. *Vision implementation* is the final step of a successful leadership. With the help of other members of the organization, a leader will move forth with concrete plans to ensure that steps are taken toward the realization of the vision.

The fours essentials of leadership espoused by Edwin Locke and Associates provide a time tested model of leadership. This is exemplified by the management of Johnson & Johnson a well-known company that has been in existence since 1955.   The vision of "General" Johnson was realized through the years with successes in sales, as well in upholding its social responsibility. This is not to say that the company did not experience hardship (Hartman, 2005). As stated earlier, leadership is a continuous process of inducing people to take initiatives/ steps that would lead toward achieving a common goal. In order to maintain the momentum of leadership, studies have also identified characteristics of leaders. One of the most comprehensive discussions was by Stephen Covey. He identified seven characteristics of Principle-Centred Leaders. A principle-centred leader is a person who places importance on people and relationships. Figure 1 shows the 4 major principles: trustworthiness, trust, empowerment,
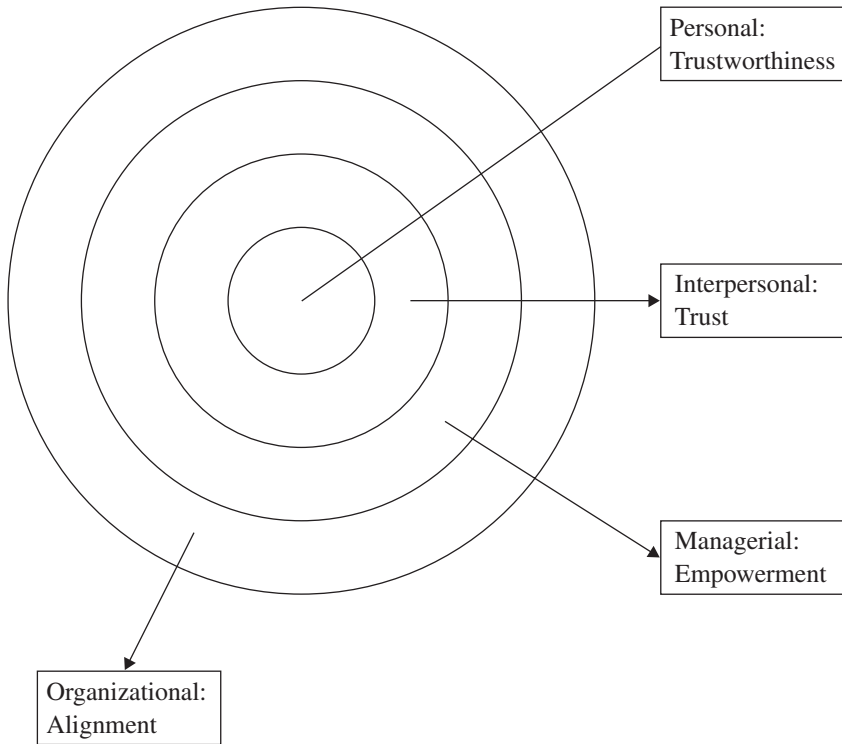
and alignment taking place at the personal, interpersonal, managerial and organizational levels respectively. The principles associated with each level are applicable to any situation of leadership. I believe it can be used by both women and men. Covey also identified characteristics of leaders. Principle-centred leaders have these characteristics:

- They are continually learning
- They are service-oriented
- They radiate positive energy
- They believe in other people
- They lead balanced lives
- They see life as an adventure
- They are synergistic
- They exercise for self-renewal (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual)

The above characteristics describe the traits of an effective leader. Locke and Covey converge on a number of the traits. However, from a gender perspective, I believe it is necessary to add two more characteristics for effective leadership:

- They believe in participatory decision-making
- They are multi-tasking

Figure 1

Personal:
Trustworthiness

Interpersonal:
Trust

Managerial:
Empowerment

Organizational:
Alignment

Source: Covey, 2003: 28 (modified)

These two characteristics are very much associated with the style of leadership associated with women. Participatory decision-making approach tends to be bottom-up where intensive consultation takes place in order to try and reach a consensus. The main draw back to this approach is the fact that it can be time consuming. On the other hand, a shared decision places a sense of ownership all parties. Multi-tasking is the ability to do many things simultaneously. It is argued that women tend to be multi-tasking because of the need to balance both work outside and inside the household. The productive and reproductive work are both demanding, thus acquiring women to develop skills. Other studies such as those by Sally Helgesen (1995) and Deborah Rhode (2003)

indicate that women exhibit a high level of caring, prefer a horizontal structure of an organization, and ensure that the bottom line remains at the bottom.

VI. To Lead or Not to Lead?

Now that we have discuss the elements, the essentials and the principles of leadership, we need to address the third part of this paper: what are the ways women can participate actively in policy decision making? And how ordinary women also cultivate these leadership qualities?

In the earlier part of this paper, four sites of opportunities have been identified where decision-making takes place: household, community, state and the region. All these sites are sites where policies are created and implemented. Thus, women can become active participants at all of these sites. However, before becoming actives participants, women need to equip themselves with the essential knowledge regarding a site of interest.

Let us look at a community that is concerned with the future of our youth. Youth of today face many more new challenges than their forefathers. They also have more choices and information. Generally, they enjoy at a higher level of affluence and tend to be technologically savvy. However, while this profile may fit the urban youth, there is a large segment of rural youth in Asia whose basic needs are not met. The problems of drug and substance abuse, human trafficking, and pornography are closely associated with youth, both in the urban and rural areas. The transition faced by youth is a concern to many actors, especially governments and non-governmental organizations. With globalization, youth in a community may be easily influenced by counterparts from all over the world: dressing, music, behaviour, food and worldview. As a woman who is interested policy decision-making at a community level, some of the questions that she could ask:

• What are the problems faced by youth in the community?
• What does the community need to nurture responsible youth?

- Can my skills and ability contribute in some way to make life better for the community?
- Who makes decision in the community?
- More importantly, women need to ask themselves, do I want to get involve? And if I do, what will it entail?

The last question is important because it deals with the mindset of a person. In my opinion, there are no ordinary women in the world. All women are special and each one has her potentials. At one point or another, women will find themselves in leadership positions, sometimes by choice, but most of the time by circumstances. Through time, women have always been doing extra ordinary things in order to get ahead since we do recognize that in most part of the world, we are living in a patriarchal system. Male dominance is prevalent under most circumstances. Be as it may, a woman always have to put in extra effort in any environment that if she wants to succeed. This is especially true when the measurement of success is being based on standards set by male counterparts. Furthermore, women are sometimes handicapped by their socialization process where they have been told that they are to play secondary role to their husbands /men. Gender construction in most societies places women in the private sphere. The emphasis on women's role as nurturers becomes ingrained in the mind of a woman. Thus, first of all, it is important for the mind-set to be changed. It is up to the individual to make these changes. In order to participate actively in policy decision-making, one must believe that it is one's right to have a say in decision-making. One cannot afford to be complacent because of one's achievement or status in society. Once the mindset is reset, then one has to see whether one has some basic training requirements in order to have the essentials of leadership:

1. Building self confidence
2. Problem solving capacity
3. Public speaking skills
4. Public relations/ becoming media savvy

5. Organizing skills/ including financial management

6. Networking for Resources

The above skills can be developed as one gain more experience at the sites of opportunities that one is active in. At all sites, it is important to remember the principle-centred leadership, i.e., the four levels of interaction with the four major principles.

VII. Conclusion

In the age where great transformation is taking place in our lives, it is important to assess the situation of women's lives in different parts of the world. While great strides may be made in some countries, others are still struggling in making sure that basic needs are met. In this respect, women are making contribution at levels of societies. Contribution as leaders is important especially in policies that can impact the livelihood of women and children.

This paper looks at the elements, the essentials and the characteristics of effective leadership. It also identifies skills and the sites of opportunities for women to actively participate policy decision-making. In doing so, it is hope that more women will have the mind-set and the will to become leaders in their community and their country, subsequently at the regional and the international level.

* This paper was originally presented at the Asia Country Women World Conference held in Sarawak, Malaysia on July 1-5, 2005.

Note

(1) The geographical are of Asia covers countries such as China, Japan, the Southeast Asia region, the south Asia region (Indian, Pakistan , and Sri Lanka), as well as the central Asian states such as states which were part of the former Soviet Union.

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<Summary>

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In any democratic society, leaders are selected or appointed through various mechanisms. Within these structures there are those who are elected into leadership positions. There are also those who inherited such positions. In most societies, men tend to hold leadership positions. There seem to be an agreement to accept that is it natural for men to be leaders since leadership positions are associated with the public realm. This paper posits that there is nothing natural about this well accepted belief. It posits that women do have leadership abilities and qualities. However, despite having such qualities women are not given due recognition of their abilities and qualities. Hence, we see the percentage of women leaders or women policy makers is rather small and in certain countries, very minimal. This paper highlights ways to empower women to actively participate in policy decision-making. More importantly, it will also elaborate on how "ordinary" women can cultivate leadership qualities. In order to do so, a discussion on leadership and its essentials, as well as an identification of sites of opportunities are included.