

RIVERS OF INSPIRATION, WAVES OF TRANSFORMATION: GENERATIONS OF LOCAL FEMINIST LEADERS FOR GENDER EQUALITY



This publication was launched during the **Local and Regional Governments' Day** held in the framework of the **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** on Thursday, 14 March 2024. It is published on the **UCLG Women** website.

This publication is part of the contribution of Cécile Roth (UCLG World Secretariat), to the series of contributions sharing the stories, activism, and advocacy efforts of the first cohort of 20 **NGO CSW Global Youth Fellows for Gender Equality**.



A JOURNEY TO THE STORIES OF THE WOMEN LEADERS SHAPING THE FEMINIST MUNICIPAL MOVEMENT

Forming large waves and ever-expanding rivers, our journeys and stories as Local Women Leaders embody the history of the global Feminist Municipal Movement, amplifying our shared dedication to realizing gender equality.

Weaving alliances across generations and continents, we come together to create inspiration, courage, and joy, while redefining leadership and nurturing reciprocal empowerment.

In times of global crises and renewed challenges to human rights, especially women's rights, we strive for interconnectedness and solidarity: this is how we cultivate our "response-ability" and prepare a brighter world for future generations.*

*As envisioned by the biologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Donna Haraway.



SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

Uncovering the voices of previous generations of women who have resisted injustices, reclaiming their stories shines a light on their resilience and expands their legacy.

With the stories of:

FATIMETOU ABDEL MALICK

(Region of Nouakchott, Mauritania)

CAROLA GUNNARSON (Sala, Sweden)

ANA FALÚ (UCLG UBUNTU Advisor)

KATHY JEFFERY (Collingwood, Canada)

NADINE GASMAN (Global Alliance for Care)

LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT

In turbulent times of crises, women and feminist leaders stand as beacons of hope and resilience, cultivating response-ability within our movements and communities.

With the stories of:

EMILIA SAIZ (UCLG Secretary General)

MARIA FERNANDA ESPINOSA

(UCLG UBUNTU Advisor)

TANEEN RUDYK (Vegreville, Canada)

TANIA VERGE (Catalunya, Spain)

MARIA SOLEDAD CISTERNAS REYES (Chile)



WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH

Reinforcing the participation of women in decision-making processes opens political life to inclusion and equity, and allows us to articulate caring for one another and caring for our planet.

With the stories of:

ROHEYATOU MALICK LOWE

(Banjul, The Gambia)

PAOLA PABÓN

(Pichincha Province, Ecuador)

PATRICIA MORLA

(Villa Carlos Paz, Argentina)

HANAN KAOUD (Ramallah, Palestine)

MARIAM DJIMET IBET (N'djamena, Chad)

NEW GENERATIONS REVITALIZING OUR CAPACITIES AND POWER FOR RADICAL IMAGINATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

New generations, infused with a spirit of radical imagination, breathe new life into our collective efforts, revitalizing our capacities and power to create lasting change.

With the stories of:

ANTOINETTE DE LONDON ATAYI MEPAS

(Owendo, Gabon)

FETHIYE KIZAK (Bodrum, Türkiye)

VIVIANE OGOU (UCLG Youth Caucus)

CÉCILE ROTH (UCLG)

Together, the stories of
LOCAL FEMINIST LEADERS
guide us forward on a
movement towards collective
liberation, where each ripple
of empowerment contributes
to the formation of large
waves of positive change:
for **A MORE JUST, EQUITABLE,**
and **SUSTAINABLE WORLD.**

SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

FATIMETOU ABDEL MALICK

President of the Nouakchott Region (Mauritania)

Chair of the UCLG Standing Committee on Gender Equality

Co-President of UCLG

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

I grew up in a family environment of learning and education, and I was deeply influenced by the activism of Mauritanian political movements in the 1970s, with my sisters prominently involved at the forefront. These movements championed various causes, including the fight against slavery, feudalism, injustices against women, and social inequalities. **Thanks to the tireless efforts of these movements, Mauritanian women have made significant strides and solidified their roles** in a society that often espouses misogyny. It's a society that has historically marginalized women from development processes and political initiatives.

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

Perhaps what is most inspiring about my story is the decision to enter politics as a woman in a conservative society, carving out a space for myself in an environment often hostile to women's emergence and development.

This required immense patience, determination, and willpower. My career initially began as a computer engineer, later transitioning into senior administrative roles within the Mauritanian government. In 2001, I embarked on my political journey, becoming the **first female mayor** in Mauritania. I was re-elected in 2008 and 2013, solidifying my commitment to public service. In 2018, I achieved a significant milestone by becoming the **first and only female president of a region** in Mauritania, specifically the Nouakchott Region, the capital of Mauritania. Additionally, I was co-opted as the head of the Mauritanian Association of Regions and was re-elected to both positions in 2023. One of the most notable aspects of this political experience is overcoming formidable opponents from parties with strong Islamic affiliations in each election. Despite these challenges, I persevered and emerged victorious.

My primary focus has been on **representing the interests of women globally, with a particular emphasis on African women.** This dedication to advocacy has yielded tangible results. I have held various prominent positions, including the presidency of UCLG Africa, co-presidency of UCLG, and vice-president of the International Association of French-speaking Mayors. Currently, I also serve as **co-chair of the Advisory Group of the United Nations Secretary General on Local and Regional Governments.** In addition, I have received numerous medals and awards, including the FAO medal in 2005, named Champion of Resilience by the United Nations in 2012, Knight of the Order of Honor in 2013 from Congo Brazzaville, Medal of Governance of Cities UCLG Africa in 2015, Knight of the National Order of Merit of Mauritania in 2020 and Knight of the Legion of Honor of France in 2021.

SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

CAROLA GUNNARSSON

City Councillor of Sala

UCLG Special Envoy for Freedom, Solidarity and
Fighting Violence Against Local Political Leaders
Vice-President of UCLG for Europe



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

All around the world, there are so many women who show us all strength and commitment to make a change. They are fighting for peace, for human rights, for gender equality, for the right to vote and to become a part of the decision-making system, for a better life for girls and women and for a better life for their children. One woman who has inspired me is the advocate and congresswomen Shirley Chisholm who said, **"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair"**. Another inspiring woman is the winner of the Nobel peace prize, Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan. She was shot by the Taliban because of her fight for the right to education for girls. She said "Some people only ask others to do something. I believe that, why should I wait for someone else? Why don't I take a step forward?"

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

My long-lasting involvement in politics and non-governmental organizations has taught me that you must never take no for an answer. I have also always accepted when somebody has offered me a position of responsibility in politics or an NGO. Even if it has sometimes been frightening, and if some people have told me that I will not manage the situation, I know that I will learn how to handle it. **Don't be afraid of making a mistake: we all do. You must believe in yourself and in your skills.** For many years I had a mentor whom I could reach out to and discuss difficult things with. My mentor also helped me to "open many doors". It has been very valuable and useful for me. Now I'm an informal mentor to young female politicians myself.


SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

ANA FALÚ

UCLG UBUNTU Advisor


CICSCA, University of Cordoba (Argentina)

Emeritus Professor



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

So many stories, individual and collective, have inspired me. The decisive political participation of women, installing a growing recognition of their contributions to society, politics, development, the economy, even with personal costs to their lives. We learned that the **"personal is political"**. Recognize that **we are nurtured by giantesses, that history does not begin with us**, to recognize the leadership and at the same time, the collective, massive configurations that **weave multiple, intergenerational alliances for their rights: to generational alliances, for their rights**: to a life without violence, to recognize care, to a political life; questioning the persistence of the political life; questioning the persistence of an androcentric patriarchy which universalizes one subject: the male, white, young, productive and heterosexual, which leaves out many men and almost all women. It is these stories -individual and collective, courageous, that challenge the traditions of doing politics, of exercising power in local territories, inaugurating new practices and narratives, not exempt of tensions, and are the great inspiration.




What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

The stories themselves are the repository of collective construction, this is what makes feminism transformative: **waves of women, piercing the rocks of patriarchy**. I have combined in my life, as a juggler, profession, activism, management, motherhood, as we women do. As Director of UN Women in Brasilia, we developed the **"portrait of inequalities"**. In a country with a "portrait of inequalities", a photograph of racism and its derivatives, in a country with a 49% (IBGE) black or brown population, there were no black women in the UN team. So I defined an affirmative action: for equal training, a black woman would be hired, and if they did not know English, a teacher would be hired. After four years, we had a team of black women. Today one of those young women heads the Brazil office. Trying out pedagogies, to value what is different, to question inequalities, to break down barriers of resistance. **Integrating feminism into territorial policies, valuing women in their differences**. It was not easy: **it was challenging, painful and precious**.

SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

KATHY JEFFERY

Councillor, Town of Collingwood (Canada)
Director, Board of Directors of the Federation
of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)

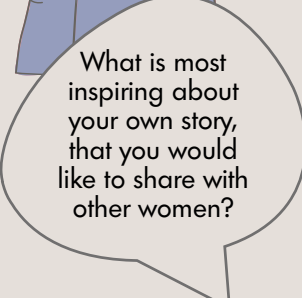



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of the Women's District Caucus of the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) are of **determination and bravery**. For the first time, the Caucus members are opening new horizons for the women of Ghana by **strategically charting their own course to achieve an increased and truly representative number of women elected officials** in their country. The Caucus members, one each from the 16 Regions of Ghana, have been networking since 2021 to identify their priorities, finalize a strategic plan and continue capacity strengthening to implement that plan.

Resources provided through FCM PMI-WILL and Global Affairs Canada, including training specific to an Advocacy Implementation Plan, lobbying techniques, and mobilization of resources, will help to accelerate women's participation – currently under 10%.

The women traveled up to 12 hours to participate in the sessions and appreciated the access they were afforded to the professional and cost-effective sessions.



What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

My early professional experience afforded me numerous opportunities to lead and learn. Then I entered politics. As a fifth-term Councillor in my 17th year of public service, there have been many challenges. Early on, a few men strategized to knock me off Council votes via concocted conflicts – basically bullying me. **It was uncomfortable and scary but just made me more determined to rise above that behavior.**

In 2005 I founded the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and benefited from the role models, women and men, involved in FCM's leadership. My work at FCM has taught me much. **It was a woman President who appointed me as Standing Committee Vice-Chair in 2006 and paved the way for mentorship and leadership opportunities.**

It is such an honor for me to pay forward that investment for women at home and abroad in my continuing tenures as an FCM Board member and appointments in FCM International programs in Jordan previously and currently in Ghana.

SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

NADINE GASMAN

President of Inmujeres (Mexico)
Global Alliance for Care



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

Throughout my life, I have met many inspiring women for their way of being, living, and thinking, in different contexts and stages. However, I can say that **they have all taught me something and have contributed to who I am as a daughter, mother, wife, friend, doctor, feminist, and public servant.** Moreover, the fact of having worked in other countries has made me more aware of the different realities that we face as women, so approaching the collectives of indigenous women in Guatemala and Mexico, the black women of Brazil, or the diverse women who, from their resistance, in different geographies struggle to be free and recognized, makes me **remember why I am a fighter;** makes me remember why I am a social fighter, and because of that, I am convinced that working every day for and with women is a personal conviction, because I believe in the value of freedom, equality, respect, mutual support and tenacity, which I have learned from all the women who are part of my path.

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

I would like to share with the new generations and, in fact, with all women who fight for equality and respect for our rights, that to **achieve the ideals of a feminist agenda we all need one another,** that only together we can achieve our goals, that working organized, **weaving alliances and building bridges is the key to progress.** Experience has taught me, and from the different trenches in which I have collaborated (public, private, civil society, academia), that listening is an empathetic way to resolve differences and that opening the mind means accepting diversity; that leadership is strengthened when there is a real team; that being a feminist is not rooting struggles or hatred, but a conviction to respect women's rights, to promote us as subjects of the same opportunities, benefits or conditions. **Let us not lose the compass of fighting for equality under false individualistic yearnings.** Together we move forward and together we need each other.

LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT

EMILIA SAIZ
UCLG Secretary General

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

My maternal grandmother's family was a family of women with five sisters and a brother (raised in war, heirs of a strong Cantabrian matriarchy). All of them different and very present in my childhood. From the one who took the habits to be able to continue studying or the one who learned by accompanying her own daughter in her studies; to my self-taught grandmother who became a great reader. She cooked in other people's homes until she was able to take over a janitor's office and help the rest of the family. **Her stories and those of the women in my books always made me feel that I could define the role I wanted to play.** I was fortunate to grow up in an environment where relationships empower, where politics was believed in and where associationism was understood as a key instrument of change. For a moment I came to think that these veterans had broken ceilings for me. Glass came into my professional life in a subtle way. **It has been the sorority of elected women from all over the planet, their struggle and their hope that has helped me to take clearer and more decisive steps to defend feminism as a great transforming engine towards a more inclusive and happier world.**

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

My path has been simple, rather I hope that my actions will help those who want to take one more step to break the glass ceilings and facilitate true inclusion. My greatest hope is not that my story will inspire, but to empower more and more of us to break through. **I would love for boys and men to identify with the need for a world that values the happiness of the many more than the success of the few.** A world where security is guaranteed with dignity and respect. Where all girls go to school, **where gender is not a weapon** and individual and collective aspirations are united in an agenda of empowered creative people alike. I look forward to inspiring a new generation of women mayors who can shape territories that care for equality, justice and dignity.

LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT



MARIA FERNANDA ESPINOSA

UCLG UBUNTU Advisor

Executive Director of Global Women Leaders for Change and Inclusion (GWLvoices)

Former President of the UN General Assembly

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense of Ecuador

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of indigenous women with whom I have had the privilege of collaborating have been a source of permanent inspiration. Their wisdom, strength and resilience have shaped my perception and understanding of the world.

These women, with their extraordinary ability to mobilize communities, defend rights, preserve cultures and territories, exemplify leadership that transcends the well-being of their families and communities, impacting

global spaces. Prominent figures such as Nemonte Nenquimo and other Huaorani women from my country have transformed the climate discussion. Her fight for social justice, and her love and respect for nature, have taught me the value of perseverance and the importance of listening to and valuing all voices. The way they face adversity and violence has marked my commitment to equality and the ability to dream to transform. Her example reminds me that **feminist leadership arises from courage, empathy and collaboration.**

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

Reflecting on my more than thirty years in international politics, I recognize that the road is not easy. Discrimination, gender stereotypes, fighting for space in decision-making and building legitimacy have been a constant task. However, progress is not incremental; we must be vigilant against setbacks in women's rights.

As former president of the UN General Assembly, I understood the value of collective action and diplomacy for dialogue and management of differences. Regardless of position, we must focus on the common good as our ultimate goal. Our purpose in politics must be to transform and make a difference, which requires strength, perseverance, hard work, and the conviction that nothing is achieved alone. **It is essential to forge alliances, co-create, listen and be empathetic – feminine leadership.** There is no magic, or rather, the only magic is not losing the ability to dream, creativity and imagination.

LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT

TANEEN RUDYK

Councillor, Town of Vegreville (Canada)
Past President of the Federation
of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)

What stories of
women have
inspired you for
your path and
leadership?

I thank my mom and my sister for being both supportive and challenging me to seek higher and dream bigger and not being surprised when I do. I learned from teachers Jeanette and Lisa to value my mind and trust my heart and expect excellence when the effort is expended. I appreciate my councilmates Jenny and Natalia for demonstrating the value of doing the research and working tirelessly. I value Lisa and Bev for seeing in me what I needed to be reminded of that my perspective was worth sharing. I respect Carole and Rebecca for **leading with their hearts and their minds, embodying transformative leadership**. And I love my three daughters for **being kind and tenacious and trusting their own voice** to lead them on their journey.

What is most
inspiring about
your own story,
that you would
like to share with
other women?


Being asked to provide leadership has happened when I've been confronted with major life events, most notably when I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. My neurologist advised I should rest and avoid stress as much as possible... So I decided that I should run for Council: a decision that has changed the trajectory of my life. I wanted to burn brightly with all the time that I had and **ensure that I shared my gifts, learned new lessons, and found joy in places and at tables I had not joined yet**. And thank goodness I did.



LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT

TANIA VERGE

**Minister for Equality and Feminisms,
Generalitat de Catalunya (Spain)**



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of the feminist activists who in the '70s and '80s lit the fuse of the feminist movement in Catalonia and exercised civil disobedience to challenge the current legislation and the judicial system, opening new horizons on the right to free abortion, contraception or sex education. This combative spirit of the feminist movement in Catalonia is what gestated, on the occasion of International Women's Day, the feminist general strikes in the fields of labor, education and care, with the slogan **'If we women stop, the world stops'**, which have taken place in various years since 2016. We are because others were. And if today there are structures of equality in governments and feminist public policies, it is thanks to this collective struggle of women, an inspiring struggle that is increasingly intergenerational and more intersectional.

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

I hope that my story will inspire fellow women leaders around the world in the vital commitment to the feminist struggle from all spheres. From grassroots activism, to influence the political and social agenda. From university teaching and research with a gender perspective, to create critical awareness in students and shed light on the causes and consequences of inequalities. From consulting to public institutions to accompany the design or implementation of feminist public policies. Or more recently from the government, as the first Minister of Equality and Feminisms, **leading the feminist transformation of the country, with equality policies that respond to both immediate needs and structural issues** that impact the lives of women, with an intersectional approach, in alliance with the feminist movement. Because together we are stronger.

LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT

MARIA SOLEDAD CISTERNAS REYES

Former Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility for
the United Nations

What stories of
women have
inspired you for
your path and
leadership?

As the song says, **"I've been moved by a lot of women, women of fire, women of snow..."** My mother, María Ester, and my grandmothers, Carmen and Griselda, were powerful inspirations in perseverance, capacity for dedication, and hard work. Then, my elementary school teachers: Marcela, Nelly, and Zita María, impressed me with their thoughts, charisma, and love of teaching. Angélica, a friend's mother, has been a teacher in fortitude for daily life with joy and tenderness. My daughters, Javiera and Michelle, have been the very embodiment of love in diversity. Throughout life, **many women, especially women with disabilities and older women, have contributed to my spirit by seeing them overcome barriers and creating new realities of love and peace.** I am grateful to all of them for contributing to my integral development as a human rights advocate.

What is most
inspiring about
your own story,
that you would
like to share with
other women?

Since childhood, **my inspiration and "navigation chart" have been the value of justice**, and I have fought to achieve it in various fields. Constant study and analytical deepening, always in connection with civil society, are the key to the sphere of **human rights**, where creation is constant. Conviction and commitment are required, allowing one to rise when facing difficult moments. Being ethically correct is decisive in facing different crossroads. These experiences have surprised me in terms of what I can do myself to contribute to the world I live in and improve the condition of many women, especially those who are invisible. Thus, as a product of the public education system of my country and based on my principles, I became the **President of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the United Nations**, combining my professional expertise with my condition as a blind woman.



WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH

ROHEYATOU MALICK LOWE

Mayor of Banjul (The Gambia)

President of the Network of Local Elected
Women of Africa (REFELA)



What stories of
women have
inspired you for
your path and
leadership?

The commitment of women and girls to fostering gender equality in their respective communities and governing their territories in Africa represents a critical aspect of social, economic, and political development across the continent. This dedication manifests in various forms, from grassroots activism to participation in political processes, and **plays a significant role in challenging and changing gender norms and policies**. The Local Elected Women's Network of Africa (REFELA) plays a key role in building the capacity of African women and strengthens their resolve to the struggle for gender equality.

Women and girls across Africa are leading and participating in initiatives aimed at addressing **gender-based violence, advocating for girls' education, and promoting women's economic empowerment**. In the realm of governance, there has been a notable **increase in the number of women holding political office**, though the numbers still fall short of gender parity. Women politicians and leaders advocate for policies and legislation that promote gender equality, protect women's rights, and address issues such as domestic violence, child marriage, and access to healthcare and education.

Women's and girls' advocacy groups play a pivotal role in influencing policy at both national and regional levels. Education is a key area of focus for women and girls committed to gender equality. This includes advocating for girls' right to education, working to ensure that educational environments are safe, inclusive, and free from discrimination. Economic empowerment is equally critical. This includes initiatives aimed at **improving women's access to financial resources, training, and markets**, and advocating for policies that support women entrepreneurs. Women's economic empowerment is key to reducing poverty and promoting gender equality at the community and national levels and their efforts are critical to achieving sustainable development and a more equitable future for all.

WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH


PAOLA PABÓN

Prefect of Pichincha (Ecuador)

President of the Consortium of Provincial


Autonomous Governments from Ecuador (CONGOPE)

Vice-President of UCLG for the Forum of Regions



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of the popular feminist women of the Province of Pichincha have inspired my career and leadership. They are women who follow the legacy of struggle and dignity of Dolores Cacuangó and Tránsito Amaguaña, two Ecuadorian indigenous leaders who deserve global recognition for having promoted bilingual intercultural education, the fight for land and the participation of women from indigenous peoples and nationalities. **The political work to eradicate gender violence, defeat patriarchy, and achieve social justice for rural and indigenous women occurs under extremely difficult conditions.** They take the time to train, organize, work and care for the land, train other women, and in conditions of time poverty and material deprivation, they are fighting against social inequalities, the accumulation of wealth, corruption, and at the same time, they are driving attention to political inequalities, gender violence, racism, and discrimination.



What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

My roots are popular, and I am a feminist. For popular feminist women, exercising power means recovering the agenda that seeks to transform patriarchy and promote social justice. Elections allow us to place ourselves as women in the public sphere in a visible way. We can have a voice, we can have discourse and we have a whole historical baggage – which comes from the historical struggle of feminism – that gives us the possibility of addressing the practical needs and gender interests of the large majorities. If we have a democratic vision of government, we can step by step with feminist collectives and organizations, dismantle the patriarchal structures of ethnic and social domination and combat with policies and services the advance of the extreme right and the anti-rights ideologies. We can carry out inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable management in government. **From public management, we can lead processes of change.**

WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH

PATRICIA MORLA

Vice President of the Municipal Court of
Accounts, Villa Carlos Paz (Argentina)

What stories of
women have
inspired you for
your path and
leadership?

The stories of many women in my family, in politics, in civil associations, in science have left their mark on my life, but I especially want to pass on the stories of two **women from history who influenced me and guided my work**: Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller. Their story forged my vision in the struggle for rights because thanks to Anne's courage, initiative, passion, vitality, talent and generosity - a teacher who was the only one able to give a child with a disability a chance - Helen managed to establish contact with the outside world and was the first deaf-blind person to get a university degree, developing her professional career as a successful writer and political activist, hand in hand with Anne, **advocating for the rights of women and vulnerable people and fighting for world peace, opening new horizons on true inclusion.**

What is most
inspiring about
your own story,
that you would
like to share with
other women?

My social and community work, mainly linked to the **defense of the rights of persons with disabilities**, has given me the tenacity, perseverance and dedication to achieve objectives in the spaces I have had the opportunity to lead. We women have virtues that we must develop because we know how to listen, we are empathetic, **we know how to put ourselves in the shoes of others to collectively search for solutions.** These virtues were the ones I put into practice in my work and which led me to public positions as a municipal official and later as an elected official. In a world accustomed to the fact that political and social decisions are made by men, it is essential to empower ourselves. **To reclaim our space** by capacitating ourselves, establishing strategies and with clear objectives is the way to break down stereotypes. I hope that my words will inspire fellow women leaders around the world in the struggle and perseverance of egalitarian spaces.




WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH

HANAN KAUD


Councillor, Ramallah (Palestine)

Member of the UCLG Standing Committee on Gender Equality



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of Ms. Janet Michael's electoral win as the first Mayor of Ramallah in 2005 marked an inspiring milestone in feminist governance and ecological responsibility within a colonial context in Palestine. Her establishment of the Environmental Department in 2008 aimed to green Ramallah by **expanding green spaces, drawing on indigenous knowledge and practices, and signifying a movement to culturally care and re-establish relationships with our land**. The successive municipal councils advanced this commitment by empowering its departments through shared experiences and participation in international conferences, all while blending arts, music, and ecology into community life, enhancing women's leadership roles within the municipality and at the community level. The cultural department, led by women leadership, ensures active engagement of women and youth in cultural, artistic, and economic empowerment. The Children's Municipal Council is **a testament to this inclusive, progressive vision, empowering young people in governance** and nurturing an eco-conscious future generation. This strategy not only strengthens community steadfastness but also supports the Palestinian self-determination movement.



What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

My story aims to inspire global leaders, emphasizing the profound impact of education and leadership in advancing community participation and transformative democracy in governance. Dreaming of council membership in Ramallah since childhood, **I recognized education's pivotal role** in connecting across sectors. This journey is deeply rooted in feminist and anti-colonial beliefs, where love and care for people and land are inseparable from our quest for justice and liberation. My contribution to establishing the 'Community Participation' department within Ramallah Municipality was a step towards actualizing these values in governance, fostering a space where voices, especially those marginalized by colonization and systemic barriers, are heard and valued. **Amidst the recent war on Gaza, my commitment to these principles has only deepened, driving efforts to integrate environmental conservation with social justice, integrity, and liberation.**

WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH

MARIAM DJIMET IBET

Municipal Councilor, Ndjamena (Chad)

President of the Chad section of the Network of Local
Elected Women of Africa (REFELAT)

What stories of
women have
inspired you for
your path and
leadership?

The story of the defamation of a group of women activists from the political party in power by a group from another party to discourage them. **This defamation united them until they won their case.** Since then, when there is an action to be taken, I make a good number of people aware of it before I act, to ensure the success of the action.

What is most
inspiring about
your own story,
that you would
like to share with
other women?

What inspires me the most is that I married and had children early, but even while they were very young, I was able to continue my studies and make a success of my life. Although there is now a law prohibiting child marriage, it still exists. The lesson to share with children and young people is: if you want to succeed, you need a goal, an objective, and a firm will. **Women can reconcile caring for a household and children, and work.**



NEW GENERATIONS REVITALIZING OUR CAPACITIES AND POWER FOR RADICAL IMAGINATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION



ANTOINETTE DE LONDON
ATAYI MEPAS
(Owendo, Gabon)

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

At the top of the list of women who have inspired my career and my leadership is my late mother. Orphaned at the age of 17, before she left this world, this woman forged my character and passed on values that to this day guide my steps and direct my decisions as a social and political actor. In the political arena, I was influenced by two **leaders who shaped my vision of political women.** Firstly, the late Edith Lucie Bongo Ondimba, former First Lady of Gabon, spared no effort for the well-being of orphans, persons living with HIV AIDS and children living with disabilities. Through OPDAS, an organization of Central African First Ladies committed to the fight against HIV/AIDS, she left her mark. In the same vein, Jeanne Mbagou, former Mayor of the municipality of Owendo, was also a role model for me, through **her ability to listen, her closeness to her colleagues and her capacity for courageous decision-making.** As a native of Owendo, she is a person from whom I have learned a great deal, and with whom I was lucky enough to take my first steps in politics as a young elected official. I can't finish without mentioning Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first woman President of an African state, Liberia. As a young woman in a man's world and a patriarchal Africa, she was an inspiration to me.

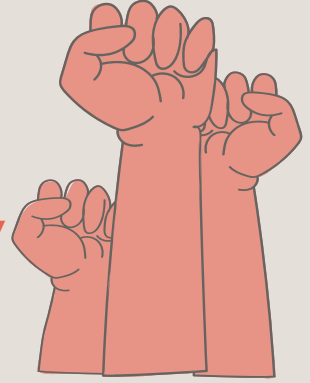
What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

The most inspiring story I would like to share with others is undoubtedly the election that made me **one of the three youngest elected women in my country,** Gabon, at the time of my election in 2018. Although there was some **skepticism about my presence on the list of my political party, due to my youth,** during the campaign phase, I never stopped believing in myself and telling myself that the paradigm could change, that young people, and particularly **young women now have their part to play in the political arena,** and that it was only on this condition that the issues we face could be taken into account. For days on end, we had to meet people, talk to them, and present them with our vision as young people committed to the development of our beautiful municipality. Through initiatives and personality, I was able to convince people (even within my own political family) and this enabled me to be promoted to Deputy Mayor of the 2nd arrondissement of Owendo. This story reminds me that, **as women, we must aspire to the possible and even the impossible,** provided we give ourselves the means and work towards our dreams and projects.

NEW GENERATIONS REVITALIZING OUR CAPACITIES AND POWER FOR RADICAL IMAGINATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

FETHIYE KIZAK

Responsible for the Gender Equality Unit,
Directorate of Women and Family Services,
Bodrum Municipality (Türkiye)



What is most
inspiring about
your own story,
that you would
like to share with
other women?

I have a dream of an equal world and I will continue to work for the implementation of policies that will eliminate the gendered division of labor. **We women come together not because we are oppressed in the same way, but to change the world with a similar perspective.** Feminism is very real and important because it offers this opportunity. We want to change the gender regime not because we are subjected to common discrimination, but because we dream of a common world, because the gender regime exposes us to discrimination no matter where we are in this system. Feminism is about the will to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

Today, Bodrum Municipality has a Gender Equality Commission, a Directorate of Women and Family Services, a Women's Counseling Center, a Women's Shelter, a Local Equality Action Plan, and a Violence Attitude Document. And the feminist mentors who stand by Bodrum Municipality and their radical imagination and transformative power of action have been and continue to be instrumental in this.

Feminist activists, with whom we have walked and will continue to walk together, so glad I have you... I am so glad we exist. **I have experienced how to get stronger, how to increase my capabilities, and how dreaming makes it easier to continue on the road by walking the road with women.** Long Live Our Feminist Struggle!

NEW GENERATIONS REVITALIZING OUR CAPACITIES AND POWER FOR RADICAL IMAGINATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

VIVIANE OGOU

UCLG Youth Caucus

**Founder of La Puerta de África –
Think-and-do Tank Juvenil**

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of my grandmother and mother highlight their roles as feminist trailblazers. My grandmother was among the first women to pursue a divorce in Spain after the transition. After nearly three decades as a housewife, she re-entered the workforce and, upon retirement, embarked on solo travels around the world. Similarly, my mother displayed remarkable courage by moving to Côte d'Ivoire alone, initiating a grassroots cooperation project focused on health. **A rebel against injustice, she utilized her influence to bring visibility to the most vulnerable.**

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

I aspire to inspire my fellow sisters and women leaders worldwide with my own journey of perseverance and dedication to humanity. From a young age, I stood against injustice, even staging a (brief) hunger strike at the age of seven. **My activism began at 14, and by 25, I ran in national elections to advocate for the rights of migrants and youth.** Presently, I leverage my influence to bring visibility to the cause of Black people.



NEW GENERATIONS REVITALIZING OUR CAPACITIES AND POWER FOR RADICAL IMAGINATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

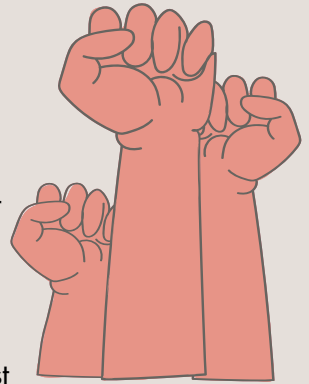
CÉCILE ROTH

Partnerships, Policy and Research Officer, UCLG

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

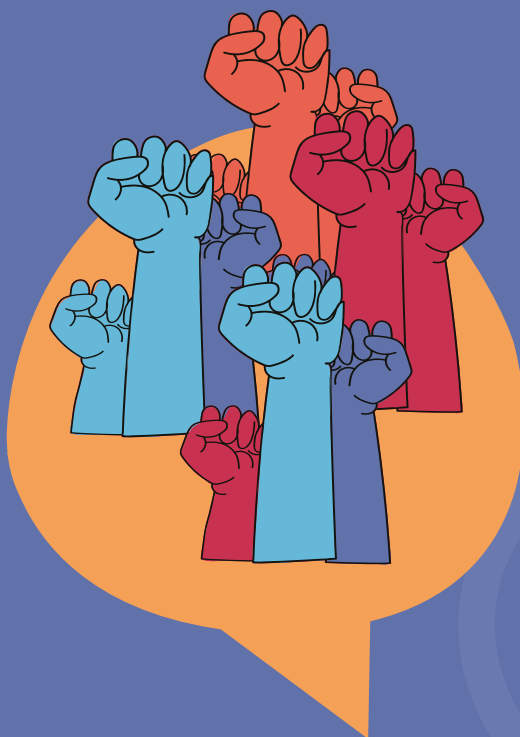
The women who guide my dreams are our ancient and present witches, the wise women who nurture

sisterhood and care for plants, animals, and the landscapes of our hometowns around the world. They are the healers of our bodies and souls, the ecofeminist activists, old and young, (re) known and forgotten. They are the local women leaders, the mayors, the workers in local public services, and the community organizers, who offer us the legacy and the future of the Feminist Municipal Movement. They are the writers, the poets, the historians, the lawyers, and the singers, who open the world wide with their words of courage. The artists and the dancers who sculpt our imaginations towards resistance. **And all the women who for generations and generations have nourished powerful anger against injustices and cultivated love and joy in making our world livable.**



What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

So far, my story connects heritages in France and Finland, a childhood in the colors of wild rivers and the Caribbean Sea, and a profound dedication to uncovering the forms inequalities take across urban spaces, territories, and regions – with dreams of contributing to local and global movements for social justice and equality. **Echoing the courage to which I aspire, I hope we expand our collective capacities to travel beyond fear and frontiers, and widen our aspirations and imagination.** I hope we facilitate deep social and political transformations, and inspire other young women and local leaders to dare to travel across identities, languages, social classes, professions, passions. To travel across mountains and seas, across ideas, organizations, and practices. To travel together through life and this world with solidarity and generosity. To travel to make ourselves free, while nurturing trust in our leadership and immense hope in our power for transformation.



UCLG

United Cities
and Local Governments



**UCLG
WOMEN**

An Equality
Driven Movement



**GENERATION
EQUALITY**

REALIZING
WOMEN'S
RIGHTS FOR AN
EQUAL FUTURE

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