Young Women's Leadership – Story Analysis and Findings

SGI Soka Gakkai International

For questions about analysis, findings and/or the material presented
in this report please contact:

Dr. Kristen Ali Eglinton
Email: kae@footageproject.org

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Summary

This report provides a rich qualitative analysis of written stories of leadership shared by 15 women across the world. It forms part of a larger project on fostering young women's leadership conceived and led by Soka Gakkai International (SGI).

The central aim of this report is to build a deeper understanding of what constitutes leadership for the young women: what drives, motivates, and challenges their journeys, the ways in which accomplishments and moments of breakthrough fit into their narratives, and the role self-confidence might play in this process.

The findings, grounded in the lived experiences of these young women, illustrate how leadership was constituted of the qualities that young women enacted and described in their stories: a leader is defined as someone who exhibits courage, has a sense of service, is mission driven, compassionate, self-aware, and has grit.

Linked to this, young women's leadership journeys were made up of interconnected, transformative, and interdependent aspects including: the drive toward service, the importance of identities, the power of challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments, and, the all-pervasive role of self-confidence.

Several ways forward for using this analysis to inspire and cultivate young women's leadership capacity are offered (including, storytelling and mentorship). The most fundamental recommendation is that any potential approaches used or developed based on this report, which seek to nurture young women's leadership potential, are underpinned by, articulate, and advance frameworks prioritizing voice, intersectionality and equity, service and social justice. In addition, that the approaches conceptualize leadership and confidence as contextual, relational, and interdependent.

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1. Introduction and Aim

This report, providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of written stories of leadership shared by 15 women across the world, forms part of a larger project on fostering young women's leadership conceived and led by Soka Gakkai International (SGI).

Over the years, women's participation and leadership have been recognized in various United Nations processes. Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls" includes a target on women's leadership;[1] one of the four pillars of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is women's participation, which identifies the need for women's leadership at all levels of decision-making. Moreover, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted in 1995, includes women in decision-making as one of its 12 critical areas of concern. The BPfA, in particular, specifically identifies the role of young women stating:

"Special measures must be taken to ensure that young women have the life skills necessary for active and effective participation in all levels of social, culture, political and economic leadership." Young women are among those who are often overlooked and an untapped resource with the potential to be change agents and leaders.

Seeking to understand the essential role young women can play in shaping our world, SGI has set out to understand and learn how to better cultivate and catalyze young women's everyday leadership. As part of this process young women across all five UN regions were asked to *"share their personal story of*

1 Target 5.5 states: "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life."

2 In conceiving this project, using evidence from the literature, SGI posited self-confidence will indeed play a role in this process, and in the instruction guide (see Appendix A) informed young women storytellers "We are seeking to understand how young women's personal development and transformations helped them gain confidence, empower themselves and others, and make a difference in their school, work, community or elsewhere."

taking leadership (in whatever capacity—at home, work, school, community or elsewhere)" (see Appendix A for project guide and instructions distributed to young women).

This report presents findings from a qualitative analysis of these stories with the aim of building a richer understanding of what constitutes leadership for these young women, what drives, motivates, and challenges their journeys, the ways in which accomplishments and moments of breakthrough fit into their narratives, and the role self-confidence might play in this process.[2]

In particular, it was argued in the project proposal that confidence is linked to leadership and hoped that by relating stories of young women undergoing their personal transformations of building self-confidence we can inspire and help empower others in their peer group. Through an in-depth analytic exploration of young women's lived experiences of leadership, it is argued that the findings in this report will contribute to SGI's global efforts to inspire and cultivate young women's leadership capacity.

The report is divided into four sections (plus an Appendices) including: 1) Introduction and Aim; 2) Methodology (i.e., sampling and recruitment; storytelling and analytic procedures; final data and demographics; limitations of the research); 3) Findings (i.e., qualities of leadership; motivation, challenges, accomplishments and breakthroughs; self-confidence); 4) The Leadership Journey (i.e., aspects of the journeys; catalysing leadership).

2. Methodology

The following section includes a description of: 1) sampling and recruitment; 2) storytelling procedures; 3) storytelling analysis; 4) final data and demographics; 5) limitations of the research. There is also reference to a survey administered to gain clarity on the possible impact of the storytelling method itself; the results of this survey are included in Appendix B.

2.1   Sampling and recruitment

As is common in qualitative research, a non-probability sampling procedure (i.e. non-random sampling procedure) was used. In this case, purposive and convenience sampling was selected as a way to shine a light on those cases from which we can learn the most.[1] Recruitment including the following:

    i.   For SGI participants, Ivy Koek from the SGI's UN office in New York worked with the Headquarters of SGI for recruitment. The headquarters reached out to the leadership globally in all 5 UN regions[2] and received candidates and distributed recruitment documents.

    ii.   For partner participants (i.e., World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP)): Koek was in contact with the organizational leadership directly for potential candidates. The World YWCA leadership connected Koek directly to the candidates by email, whereas GNWP served as liaison throughout the process.

    iii.   All participants received documents by email, this included: the release form, storytelling guidelines, and story instructions (see Appendix A for guidelines and instructions).

2.2   Storytelling procedures

In total, 17 candidates were approached, 15 of them followed through and submitted

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1 See, for example, Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), The Sage handbook of qualitative research (p. 443–466). Sage Publications Ltd
2 The 5 UN regions include: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Americas, Europe and Central Asia and Middle East.

their release form and story. Eleven stories were from SGI, two from World YWCA and two from GNWP. Creating the final stories included the following steps:

i.   Koek had calls with all SGI participants except one with whom a SGI Japanese colleague was in touch with, due to the language issue and one World YWCA participant (total 12) to follow up on their first draft of stories. The other three participants (one from World YWCA and two from GNWP) plus the SGI Japanese participant received follow-up questions by email from Koek.

ii. Notes collected through the phone conversations and email answers were edited into the story as the 2nd draft. In two cases, there was a 3rd draft, and in one case there was a 2nd call to the participant. The story from Japan was the only story not written in English by the participant but was translated by SGI staff in the Tokyo office.

iii. The 2nd drafts of stories were sent to a copyeditor

iv. Participants were sent the copyedited version of their stories. Once approved, after any revisions or corrections, the final version was uploaded to the SGI's UN office website. Participants were sent the link to an online survey after their stories were uploaded.

v.   Participants were sent the link to an online survey after their stories were uploaded.

2.3 Storytelling analysis

Practical analytic procedures cannot be separated from an understanding of how knowledge is created and represented – as the nature of reality and knowledge underpin and guide analysis. As this analysis sought to gain an understanding of young women's leadership journeys, grounded within the contexts of their lived experiences, and as young women's stories (or voices, perspectives, knowledges) constituted the data, analysis was underpinned by moderate social constructionist framework, which prioritizes voice and supports the idea of knowledge (including what is presented in this report) as continuously produced, shaped by, and created through available cultural resources including, for example, values and beliefs, language, scripts, signs, and the like.[3]

Underpinned by this understanding of the nature of knowledge, all stories subject to a rigorous thematic analysis with a focus on exploring and articulating the qualities or constituents of leadership for these young women, as well as defining motivating factors, challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments, and the possible role of self-confidence in the process. The analytic steps were as follows:

i.   Final stories were sent via email as Word documents to Kristen Ali Eglinton (researcher and report author). The analysis was started with 12 of the 15 stories, with the three final stories being added as they were completed by participants.

ii. Eglinton read the first 12 stories received before to get a feel for emerging themes, commonalities, and differences. The final three stories were also read as soon as they were received and served to reinforce themes and conclusions that were being drawn.

iii. Once stories were read with the research aims guiding analysis, all stories were coded (i.e. attaching meaning or categorizing chunks of data) using the storage, organization, and retrieval capacity of a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) in this case NVivo. Analysis was centrally inductive (i.e. codes emerged from the data), and had aspects of deductive coding (i.e. codes came from the original aims).

iv. All codes were grounded in the data, and were kept open and active throughout the process. Moreover, codes were continuously added and merged in light of other stories. Codes that continued to reappear and could incorporate smaller codes became themes.

v.   Once all of the data were coded, queries were run between themes/sub-themes/ codes (e.g., exploring data coded, for example, for both "self-doubt" and "breakthroughs") and questions were asked of the data. These codes, themes, and sub-themes, as well as raw data supporting findings, are presented in this report.[4]

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3 See, for example, the work of Jerome Bruner (Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning.* Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press) and Michael Cole (Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural Psychology: A Once and future discipline.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press).

4 Please contact Dr. Kristen Ali Eglinton (see contact details in this report) for codes, sub-themes, and themes.

2.4 Final data and demographics

Overall:

- A total of 15 young women participated
- Fifteen stories were generated
- Fifteen stories were subject to analysis
- Ten surveys were completed (post-storytelling; data is still being generated from these surveys; results from the ten surveys collected are included in Appendix B)
- Young women were between the ages of 19-37; from 14 countries including Iceland, United States, United Kingdom, Serbia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of Korea, Haiti, Papua New Guinea, South Sudan, Malaysia, Republic of Moldova, India, Japan and Singapore.

2.5 Limitations of Research

While a specific framework has been used to judge the credibility of the findings presented in this report,[5] qualitative research does come with a number of limitations, two are described here.

- **Generalizations:** The findings presented come from a small, purposefully selected, sample and, therefore, cannot be generalized to a particular group (i.e., all young women). While this does not take away from the credibility of the findings, it does remind us we cannot make general statements about all young women.
- **Triangulation:** Data for this report are from one source only: the young women's stories. The addition of others sources, for example, interviews and surveys focusing on the leadership journeys would provide a more robust data set and possibility for triangulation. However, the findings presented here are part of a larger project and the potential to introduce follow-up methods remains. Further, once young women read and respond to this report, and surveys are reflected upon with respect to the work presented here, an increasingly complex picture will continue to bolster the credibility of findings presented here.

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5 For frameworks see Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research'. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of Qualitative Research, (pp.105-117). London: Sage. Contact Dr. Kristen Ali Eglinton (see contact details in this report) for more information on the criteria used to assess this analysis. Frameworks used are designed for the promises of qualitative inquiry (i.e., the criteria used to evaluate the quality of this research is specific for those working within a particular paradigm).

3. Findings

Findings make up the heart of this report, and are presented as a series of interconnected themes constituting three overarching sections: qualities of leadership; motivation, challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments; and, self-confidence (as a general theme). Findings in this section come directly from the corpus of 15 stories and are presented in a series of tables and bullet-points, with raw data provided throughout.

3.1 Qualities of leadership

Qualities of leadership is the most robust section of the findings; analysis was focused on deeply understanding and being able to describe how young women enacted, constructed, and constituted leadership in their everyday lives. While young women would indeed refer directly to their leadership roles or comment on themselves as "a leader," this section articulates those qualities discussed and/or exhibited throughout all of the narratives, which constitute characteristics leaders possess. These qualities, though often referred to by name, are not mutually exclusive, and are challenging to tease apart.

Courage

The quality of courage was the second *most frequently* referenced theme as both a quality of leadership and in the overall analysis. Courage was spoken about as bravery, risk-taking and pioneering, being an outsider, moving forward despite the odds, not fearing failure or feeling self-doubt and doing it anyway — often staying true to a mission, to service, and/or the greater good.

Courage is made up of the following aspects for young women:

Pioneering

- Being the first to do something (e.g., in career, field of interest, family, socio-culturally).
- Going against the grain of tradition.
- Being an outsider and needing to blaze one's own path.

> *"Even when it was very hard, I kept my dream, and I had faith in it — that one day it would somehow come true. Some people didn't understand me; they told me I should work in a normal 9-to-5 job and live as normal people do. But I am not like other people in that way, and I am so thankful I took the risk and listened to myself. This is only the start of something bigger that is waiting for me."*

Persevering

- Moving ahead with challenges despite the odds.
- Refusing to give up, steadfastness, sticking to a goal or vision.

> *"But every time a hoop beat me down, I got up stronger than before. I needed to be strong enough to keep going, and I think my stubbornness may have kept me going, too."*

(En)couraging others

- Inspiring by example as someone who "never gives up."
- Instilling a sense of bravery in others.
- Supporting others in igniting their own inner-power – focus on empowering others.

"First, I tried to instill courage and self-belief by speaking with each staff member, encouraging them and suggesting ways of making the new format workable and effective."

Taking decisive Action

- Making a decision and taking action despite intense self-doubt, sociocultural values, economic challenges and/or other risks.
- Not waiting around or walking away from a challenge.

"It was with this resolve to live a life that wasn't restricted to societal expectations that I applied to the best journalism schools in the US and decided to follow my heart - be a journalist. It was rather unconventional as it's a profession deemed as low paid, and I was told by relatives and friends alike that it was a waste of my intelligence."

Service

The theme of service was in every narrative as both a quality of leadership as well as a **drive or motivation** throughout the journey. In fact, all of the young women's leadership journeys are characterized by "servitude" where the desire to serve people, society, and/or the planet, expressed as well as ignited, and motivated, their life path.

Service in the young women's stories includes:

Self for others

- Challenging self for the benefit of the greater good.
- Blazing a path – including suffering – for a more inclusive society.
- Giving own skills and time to add value to other people's lives and/or the greater good.
- Leading by example – being of service and inspiring others.

> *"I truly feel that my success is the result of challenging myself for the sake of others. I found ways to face my fears and lack of self-worth, and this, in turn, enabled me to follow my own dreams and reap such wonderful benefits."*

Voice

- Dedicating life to those unheard.
- Using own voice to be the voice for others.
- Driven by the need to elevate voices.

> *"During that process, I learned to stand up and be a spokesperson for the voiceless population I served. I spoke up for the vulnerable and confronted corruption."*

Human rights and justice

- Service to community and the rights of all.
- Driven to stand up for justice, inclusion, to be heard (across identity axes: race, class, gender, and the like).

- In several cases, more specifically, service to women and women's empowerment.

> *"However, I ultimately decided to follow the advice from my educational mentor, my father, and become a lawyer; I knew it would be a career that would enable me to use my voice to fight for the rights of women who are still being violently attacked in South Sudan due to both organized violence and community violence."*

Serving those close to them (e.g. colleagues, team, family)

- Ensuring people are reaching their potential.
- Focus on doing for others.
- Limited hierarchy; the leader is there to serve the team.

> *"When colleagues said they were incapable of certain tasks, I encouraged them to embrace their strengths rather than force their weaknesses. I gave each person a role that would bring out the best in them instead of coercing them into a position that wasn't a good fit."*

Mission / Purpose

All stories include the theme of mission or purpose; that is, all of the young women were driven by a mission and sense of purpose aligning with their values, often capitalizing on their gifts, and driven by a clear "why."

Mission/ purpose in the young women's stories includes:

Purpose focused

- Being intentional, having (and developing) a strong understanding of who they are and where they want to go.
- Using and recognizing their own gifts in forming intentions.

"After this experience, I began working toward women's empowerment and tribal rights with Vasundhara, an internationally famous NGO. Through my work, I saw the poverty and deprivation affecting tribal areas. It strengthened my determination to advocate for forest dwellers. I set a goal to transform the vicious cycle of poverty that dictates forest dwellers' lives."

Goals and targets

- Many of the young women have a larger life goal and smaller targets.
- Working toward a goal or "dream."
- Having clear goals and still being flexible enough to see things differently; understanding that goals can change and they can still be true to their mission or purpose.

"Yet, I persisted. I chose to see all of my misfortunes as challenges and owned them, even though I was suffering. I chose to face them every day, to seek out how to get to the next point, and to stick to my goal. I had to jump through hoops to get there and do my best at each along the way."

Social justice and service

- Underpinning and driving all young women's leadership journeys is the mission of creating a more just world.

   "I joined this program together with more than 2,000 young female activists in the Eastern region of the DRC because, like me, they wanted to change the oppressive status quo."

Compassion

Imbued in all stories, compassion was something that is: 1) practiced by the young women – including a "suffering with" people (in their everyday lives including family and friends as well as with colleagues and organizations they work with), taking action around that suffering, and 2) something that drives and motivates their work, relationships, and communication.

Compassion in the young women's stories includes:

Self-compassion

- Gentleness toward self, and a forgiveness of self.
- Learning from own mistakes.
- Seeing and understanding own limitations as well as gifts and talents.
- Taking time for self, including knowing when to say no, knowing yourself and what you need to survive and thrive to help others.

> *"I changed my way of living completely, I began to look at my life differently, and, most importantly, I finally learned to listen to myself."*

Empathy

- Aiming to understand what people are going through; understanding struggles of people based on own understanding of self and own struggles.
- Continuously putting yourself in someone's shoes; reminding yourself to do this based on your own past.

> *"When I think back to the day when that devastating earthquake and tsunami hit my town, I could never have known what an impact it would have on me. But now I realize that watching the people here in Tohoku overcome their hardships and survive the disaster inspired me and*

helped me find my calling helping others as a caretaker. No matter where my future takes me, I know I will use my experiences to continue to grow as a leader, putting others first with empathy and kindness."

Communication

- Deep listening and communicating with self and other from a place of empathy.
- Treating people with dignity in communication and relationships.
- Being open and honest in all relationships and communicating about needs for self and other.

"When I didn't understand something or found an issue to be too complicated, I found the best solution was just to be honest about it and ask others for help."

Compassionate action

- Supporting and caring for people.
- Moving beyond empathy (being in someone's shoes) into action through service.
- Creating and building a life and projects that transform spaces in the world.

"The legacy he [her father] gave me was that we are all here because we have a mission. For me, that mission was to go beyond my qualifications to promote human rights through my actions by empathizing with others and being a compassionate person."

Self-awareness

All young women had a high degree of self-awareness, which appeared to play a major role in their leadership journey. Self-awareness included self-reflection and intersected with all of the themes thus far discussed. It was also part of self-confidence discussed in section 2.3.

Self-awareness in the young women's stories includes:

Self-reflection and regulation

- Thinking on and understanding one's feelings and emotions. Monitoring and being able to observe emotions and feelings.
- Understanding where you want to go, your mission, and how to regulate your thoughts, feelings, and actions to get there.
- Knowing your own values and adjusting actions toward goals match.
- Understanding the role of faith in their journeys.
- Checking where you are on your path to goals.

"To put it into action, I observed how some of my senior colleagues interacted with others. I also read numerous books and spoke with other student leaders, which helped me see that my efforts would be worth it. Gradually, I realized that I was capable of empathizing with other people, just as they were."

Meta-cognition

- Understanding your own thinking and learning style.
- Understanding strategies to use to solve particular issues or challenges.
- Seeking situations where your talent and gifts can be used.

"As the project progressed and we started implementing and delivering more activities across the world, I realized that my work as the administrator was crucial to the success of each activity and the project as a whole. This depended on me being the best I could be in my role, not someone else. It finally struck me then that I didn't have to necessarily be on the "front lines" to make a difference."

Learning from the past

- Looking at past journeys of self and others, and seeing how it impacts the present.
- Learning and growing from past mistakes.
- Seeing where you were and where you want to go.

"I think of the strong women in my family who persevered against their patriarchal societies. Their stories keep me going, and when I accomplish my tasks as well as my male coworkers, it's empowering."

Grit

Young women demonstrated "grit" – or both the passion and perseverance to see things through.[1] Young women's grit was demonstrated through their steadfastness, their passion for their mission, sense of purpose, high self-awareness, their ability to bounce back and/or to reimagine obstacles as opportunities and so-called failures as opening up new pathways.

Grit in young women's stories includes:

Determination

- This includes tenacity and perseverance, to continue no matter what stands in their way.
- A sense of purpose and mission, needing to see things through.

> *"Honestly, I cannot proclaim to have the answer towards creating more humanistic news organizations. All I can offer is determination and heart to make that happen somehow."*

Resilience

- A bouncing back from setbacks.

- Are in charge of and responsible for their own lives.
- Creatively thinking through obstacles and setbacks, creative solutions.

> *"After the interview, I felt that I had already won, regardless of my interviewers' decision. I had had the spirit to never give up when faced with the most discouraging obstacles, and that would have been enough for me. But the following morning, I learned that out of 1,300 applicants, I was chosen for the fellowship!"*

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1 See the work of Angela Duckworth (Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance.* Scribner/Simon & Schuster).

Obstacles as opportunities

- Obstacles are not setbacks, but exciting challenges.
- Obstacles offer opportunities for growth, to move down new paths, as part of the bigger picture.

> *"I've persevered. I have taken every challenge as a new beginning while learning from my parents' teachings and the forest dwellers' lives."*

Growth mindset

- Knowledge that your personality and skills are not fixed – that you could learn new skills, develop new aspects of your personality.
- Continuous movement in the direction of your goals through self-awareness, learning, and growth.

> *"It was a great opportunity for me, as I not only was able to branch out of my comfort zone and explore the more technical side of the project, but I was also able to see first-hand the impact of what I was organizing. Instead of questioning my strengths, I confidently brought my organizational skills, my previous experience, and my attitude to keep striving for improvement to the role."*

3.2 Motivation, challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments

All young women's narratives included discussion of motivational factors, sources of inspiration, challenges (sometimes also considered motivational) as well as breakthroughs and accomplishments. In the following section these interconnected themes are highlighted through a series of questions: 1) What motivates and inspires young women to exhibit these leadership qualities, achieve their goals and/or persevere in their lives? 2) What challenges did young women encounter in achieving their goals and/or in persevering in their lives? 3) How did young women define breakthroughs and accomplishments?

i. What motivates and inspires young women to exhibit these leadership qualities, achieve their goals and/or persevere in their lives?

Motivation and inspirationare challenging to parse into categories. For analytic and practical purposes here they are split among three deeply interconnected sources: internal, external, and a combination of the two.

> ### Internal sources of motivation and inspiration
>
> "The best advice I ever received was from my mother, who told me, "When you are afraid to follow your dreams, help others. That will give you the energy and courage to accomplish anything."

- **Mission and purpose:** Young women's deep sense of purpose and intention, as well as a driving mission present in all of their stories, served as a continuous source of motivation. Young women had a consistent "why" for their journeys.
- **Talent and gifts:** In 75% of stories young women's understanding of their gifts and talents were a driving force for their own success. Young women often capitalized on their gifts and used them for the greater good.
- **Service and the welfare of others:** Being of service and working to make the world a better place – often using natural talents – connected to mission and purpose and catalysed their work.
- **Identity factors:** Young women's race, socioeconomic status, cultural identity and other identity factors served as a catalyst as well as a continuous motivation for working toward goals and as part of their narratives.

External sources of motivation and inspiration

"When I facilitate workshops, design programs for young women, and attend sessions at the United Nations, I recall the young women and girls from the community I grew up in, including my own sisters. I know the importance and impact of my work, and I realize that from there, I have made it here, doing what I love —empowering other young women and girls around the world to lead transformational change."

- **Role models:** Several young women cited a role model (could be someone they never met or someone they knew closely such as a family member) as source of inspiration.
- **Mentors:** Similar to a role model at least four of the young women spoke about the instrumental role of a mentor specifically.
- **Family:** Family often served as a source of motivation and inspiration, this included the range from family support, to family crisis, to growing up in a particular family connected to their identity, traditions and past.
- **Human rights:** Being moved to act, to persevere, to never give up was inspired through human right's contexts such as human right's violations including gender-based violence, as well as, for example, exclusion of groups of people.

"At this low point in my life, my Buddhist practice helped give me the confidence to start sowing hope-filled seeds. I felt a strong inner voice encouraging me to pursue a Master's in music composition."

- **Faith and religion:** Many of the young women had a deep sense of faith, turning to their Buddhist practices, drawing on wisdom either at points or throughout their journeys as a source of motivation and inspiration.
- **Social justice:** Young women described a deep sense of social justice, wanting people to be heard – this came from both external circumstances mixed with their own personal values and missions.
- **Identity and childhood crises:** Being an outsider (growing up), being bullied, and/or other family crises often served as inspiration for young women to start or continue on their journey.
- **Specific challenges:** Young women cited specific challenges, which provided sources of motivation and inspiration (see below).

ii. What challenges did young women encounter in achieving their goals and/or in persevering in their lives?

Challenges were also a central motivating force for young women; many of the issues that were encountered by young women turned into opportunities and/or were used to fuel their motivation. As one young woman summarized:

"As I look back on the setbacks and obstacles I've faced to get here, I realize that they have made me blossom into an independent young woman, just like the women of my family. They have given me a purpose and a fire to keep fighting for women's rights and striving to break down the power structures that perpetuate gender inequality. Because I have seen other women succeed in spite of great hardship, I know that I, too, am capable of overcoming whatever difficulties I will face."

Central challenges included:

- **Contextual:** Including issues in the place or geography such as conflict / war; poverty; isolation and community issues.
- **Identity:** Including being an outsider, having to work harder.
- **Wellbeing:** Both mental and physical health crises including those of the young women themselves and/or of family / friends / community.
- **Opportunity:** This includes a lack of opportunity in particular places, as well as seeing challenges as opportunities.
- **Tradition and society:** Including needing to "go against the grain" or being a pioneer, having to move against tradition.
- **Self-doubt:** Young women described aspects of their personality, feelings of not being good enough and imposter syndrome.

Describing intersectional challenges a young woman writes:

> *"However, even after completing my university degree, I still felt like a complete outsider within the classical music scene. I was the only black person on the course and didn't feel I could be my true self. On top of that, I also doubted my capabilities as a musician."*

iii. How did young women define breakthroughs and accomplishments?

Breakthroughs and accomplishments, used interchangeably with achievements and victories, are included in this section as they often mirrored challenges and motivation. Suggested in every story (i.e., not all stories used any of these exact terms), breakthroughs and accomplishments had the highest number of references (cited over 54 times) in stories followed by the theme of courage (cited 53 times; see section 3.1).

Breakthroughs and accomplishments were central to young women's journeys. One young woman wrote:

> *"I aspire to be a humanistic educator and researcher in my current role and at whatever institutes I may join in the future. I want to live by the words of Marie Curie and continue to improve myself so that I can use my expertise to engage in research for the sake of humanity. I am looking forward to the future, and I'm filled with determination to create many breakthroughs and victories in my research, my career, and my life!"*

Young women constructed breakthroughs and accomplishments in the following ways:

- **As stepping-stones:** Young women did not always describe breakthroughs or accomplishments as the completion of major goals, but rather as small steps (which were in themselves outcomes or achievements) in their ways to larger goals. These smaller outcomes became their path to increasing success.
- **As outcomes:** Regardless of how big or small, accomplishments or breakthroughs were outcomes on a path. Each one built the confidence of young women, added to their experience, and became part of their narrative.
- **As spaces of wisdom:** Overcoming any obstacle appeared to be a way to gain not only knowledge, but also wisdom or the application of knowledge through the experience.
- **As resilience and determination:** Young women described never giving up as a victory. Breakthroughs are indeed accomplishments and could be thought of as meeting and getting to the other side of an obstacle or challenge – and to be met with a sense of victory.

Breakthroughs and accomplishments could be grouped into the following:

External

- **Educational and career:** Including completing education, receiving awards or titles, going back to school.
- **Career:** Including getting a job, making a career choice, starting something on your own, seeing or understanding your path.
- **Reaching a target or goal:** In addition to reaching a smaller goal and/or overcoming an obstacle this included more larger targets such as opening a clinic, starting a non-profit.

Internal

- **Interpersonal:** Helping others, leading a team, learning through relationships, also taking risks in relationships.
- **Shift in identity:** Expanding who you are and what you thought you were capable of, branching out of your comfort zone or doing something different.
- **Gaining confidence:** Feeling more confident, overcoming self-doubt, gaining self-belief.
- **Health and wellbeing:** Overcoming mental and/or physical health issues; family or friends overcoming health challenges.
- **Overcoming a major challenge:** From quitting jobs and being lost, to finding your way after the death of a loved one.
- **Overcoming smaller challenges:** For example, learning how to stand up for yourself when you are not being treated well at work, feeling worried about your skill set and learning new ones, learning how to ask questions.
- **Gaining wisdom / learning something:** Learning from experience was an accomplishment or breakthrough for young women.

Bringing together the myriad roles as well as the external and internal nature of accomplishments and breakthroughs, a young woman wrote:

> *"In grade 10, I was actually nominated as a school prefect — a member to the Student Representative Council. I was ecstatic; I never thought someone as poor as me could achieve such a role. My family, too, was so happy when they heard the news. This boosted my confidence and helped me see that, poor or not, I could become who I wanted to be."*

3.3 Self-confidence

The final theme discussed, self-confidence, was threaded throughout young women's stories. In fact, self confidence was discussed in 14 of the 15 stories; 13 of the 14 stories featured, noted, and/or alluded to challenges with self-confidence (however, young women did not always use the word "confidence"); while one of the 14 young women did mention confidence as something she "never had an issue with."

Self-confidence was connected to almost every other theme described in these findings – from the qualities of leadership (including, most profoundly, self-reflection) to motivation, challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments. The role of self-confidence in young women's leadership journeys is expanded upon in the final section of this report. Highlighted here are several of the components of self-confidence for young women including self-belief, self-doubt, and empowerment.

Self-confidence as a theme included the following sub-themes:

Self-belief

Described in various ways including as central to the leadership journey. Self-belief was written about in terms of:

- **Lacking:** Something as missing and something the young women needed to find if they are to be successful.
- **Growing:** Something young women needed to cultivate and something they described as growing through their experience.
- **Having:** As something they always had: some young women saw this belief as instilled in them at birth.
- **Connected to faith:** Many young women turned to their faith for self-belief – to find those innate seeds.
- **Understanding it was central:** With self-belief there was an understanding all young women had on the importance of it – young women noticed when it was lacking and needed to be cultivated.

"My Buddhist practice also inspires me a lot and made me realize that strong determination is the key to victory. I want to be a young female leader who removes misery from the world, and I'm determined to do that in Odisha. It has given me hope, belief in my heart, and belief in my contribution as a young woman."
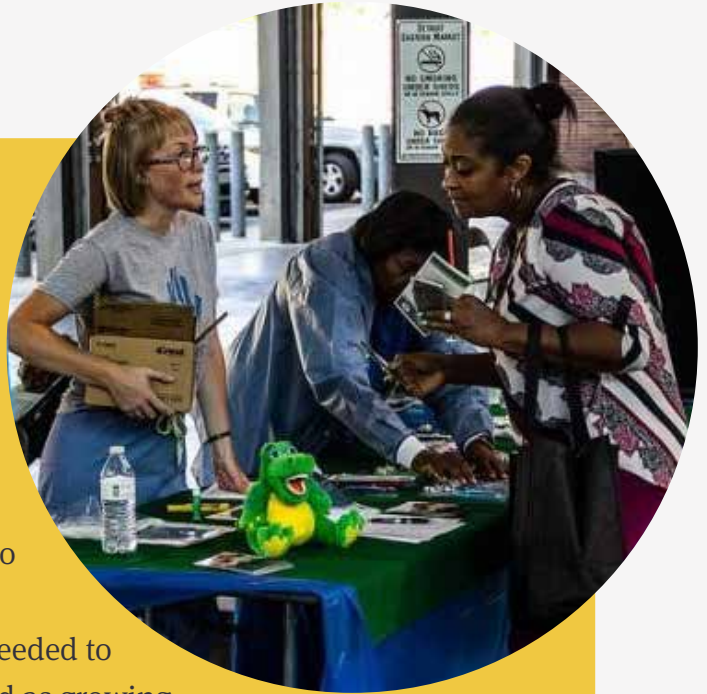
Self-Doubt

Threaded through almost every story, at some point in the narrative arc was self-doubt. Including:

- **Being an imposter:** Several stories cited imposter syndrome (two used the word imposter) particularly when young women were in certain jobs or had particular responsibilities. Young women still continued however despite imposter syndrome.
- **Based on experience:** Young women doubted themselves based on where they went to school, jobs they had in the past, when they were doing something new or innovative.
- **Based on identity:** There was sometimes a self-doubt when young women looked at their educational, class, or racial background.
- **As overcoming:** In all stories that included self-doubt there is an element of overcoming it. Self-doubt formed part of the narrative arc for many young women.

"I started my fellowship in September 2018. I've still suffered from imposter syndrome, but I have approached it as a chance to show others that I can do my work well despite self-doubt. My deep wish is that my experience of achieving my "impossible" dream will encourage other capable young people to dare to take the first step toward their own dreams. After all of the ups and downs of my life, I've realized that touching people's lives and fostering true connection, regardless of recognition, will always be more impressive than power or prestige."

Empowerment

While empowerment, including empowering others, is threaded throughout many of the stories, with reference to self-confidence, empowerment included: self-empowerment, empowerment as a process, empowering others. Including:

- **Self-empowerment:** Young women referred to self-confidence as a kind of growing empowerment – finding the seeds within and increasing in their own power.
- **As a process:** Empowerment as self-confidence was a process for young women and part and parcel of the leadership journey – increasing as self-doubt faded.
- **Empowering others:** Young women referred to gaining confidence so they could empower others. In this case self-confidence was something they knew they needed and to empower themselves, so they could empower others.

"My four-year term was really hard work. While holding my political post, I still had to balance being a single mom, writing, working a full-time job, and volunteering for the Buddhist group in which I'm involved. I made it work, but it took a lot more than just good organizational skills; it had more to do with self-empowerment and actively challenging my fears — failure, attention, not being good enough, and making mistakes."

4. The Leadership Journey

The final section of this report highlights selected themes, which at once cut across, connect, and/or thread through all of the findings, as well as help to articulate elements of broader leadership journeys. After describing these elements, this section concludes by offering several practical suggestions for inspiring and cultivating young women's leadership capacity.

Before describing selected elements of the young women's journeys, a definition of leadership is discussed. Specifically, leadership has hundreds of definitions[1] from authority and power to turning vision into reality.[2] In this report, leadership is defined by the young women. That is, it is grounded in their lived experiences and includes the qualities of leadership described in the findings – those qualities exhibited, enacted, and embodied by young women. A leader is defined as someone who exhibits courage, has a sense of service, is mission driven, compassionate, self-aware, and has grit. Also included in this definition are the constituent parts of these qualities including, for example, one that empowers others, prioritizes human rights and social justice, is pioneering, and resilient.

While the definition of leadership was grounded in the stories, it is significant to highlight that many of the qualities young women enact and embody – for instance, empathy and compassion, the empowerment of others, a sense of service

and mission, self-awareness and reflection –are cited as those characteristics which constitute "21st century leadership" or a 21st century leadership perspective. This perspective argues that collaboration, empathy, authenticity, service, empowerment, among other skills and characteristics are essential to the ways in which we conceptualize leadership in the 21st century.[3]

Indeed, the young women and their stories, which sit at the center of this report, provide exemplar leadership journeys as they enact, embody, and employ these characteristics, not only in their careers, but in all aspects of their lives: from their families, to education, to interpersonal relations. As exemplars, what conclusions can be drawn? In the remainder of this section, findings are brought together, and four areas are discussed including: service; identities; challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments; and, the role of self-confidence, before ways forward are offered.

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1 See, for example, Silva, A. (2016). What is leadership? Journal of Business Studies Quarterly, 8(1), 1-5.
2 As leadership scholar Warren Bennis writes: "Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality."
3 There are myriad definitions of 21st century leadership and numerous characteristics cited with community, service collaboration as key. See, for example, Sandmann, L. R., & Vandenberg, L. (1995). A framework for 21st century leadership. Journal of Extension, 33, 1-9. And, online, for example, https://hbr.org/2010/04/the-new-21st-century-leaders-1.html

4.1 The power of service

At the intersection of all findings is *service* – service is both a quality of leadership as well as a motivational force. Arguably, service appears to be a key to unlocking, inspiring and bringing out the qualities of leadership. Being of "service" as both a verb (to serve) and a noun (providing a service) was included in every story, it was a powerful motivational force seeded in each narrative and part and parcel of all young women's driving missions. As young women are of service, they create leadership.

Service was embedded in both their leadership style and in their chosen work. In fact, service, and being of service, unlocked leadership qualities and constituent parts. For example, looking at courage and an aspect of courage including pioneering – almost every story describes breaking a barrier (individual and/or societal). For example, being one of the only young women in the community to attend school, and then bringing that knowledge back to others in the community. As this young woman recounts, "I was the only girl who went to school, so when the girls and women would meet at the river to bathe, I would tell them about books, movies, and stories to educate and inspire them." Service also unlocked the mission or the young women's sense of "why" as they shaped their narratives around their value of service. Service was tied directly to the quality of compassion, or a "suffering with" which underpinned, characterized, and also drove young women's journeys. Compassion, another leadership characteristic, could be considered "service in action" as young women practiced compassion and empathy with those they work with and for –whether it be with the most impoverished communities in India or with women whose rights have

been violated in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Service also inspired the qualities of self-awareness and grit: in having the goal of service young women sought to understand themselves better, transform themselves, and overcome challenges for a purpose greater than themselves. As one young woman writes of her service to others, "I truly feel that my success is the result of challenging myself for the sake of others. I found ways to face my fears and lack of self-worth, and this, in turn, enabled me to follow my own dreams and reap such wonderful benefits."

Service is the journey, the outcome, and a driver. Indeed, young women are what could be termed "servant leaders" embodying many of the skills described in the literature on servant leadership including: empathy, empowering others, putting the needs of others first.[1] Young women are wholly motivated by service, from helping people after a natural disaster, to ensuring the most voiceless have proper care, to supporting their team in being the best they can by capitalizing on their natural talents, to being a role model so others know what is possible (and, hence, they are themselves a motivational factor for more young women leaders).

4.2 Considering Identity

Young women's identities cannot be considered separate from their leadership stories. Identities (more precisely aspects of the young women's identities within particular sociocultural contexts)

variously provided challenges, inspiration and motivation. Ethnicity, race, class, socioeconomic status, ability, religious affiliation, and geography, for example, as well as family histories, traditions, and beliefs intersected with their journeys, just as they intersect with structural in/equalities. Who young women could and could not be, what would be considered impossible were cited as central challenges that could hinder, inspire and/or activate leadership qualities. As young women's identities are unquestionably linked to equity and opportunity it is only through the lens of "intersectionality" that they can be understood and explored in relation to cultivating leadership.

Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989, and her work has since been widely applied across disciplines, scholarship, and public conversations particularly with respect to racial and social justice.[2] Intersectionality, while originally focused on the intersection of race and sex (specifically, the experience of Black women), in an interview Crenshaw more recently described it as "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects." Intersectionality is used as a theory for understanding the multiple oppressions and disadvantages faced by particular individuals and groups and helps articulate and expose the myriad injustices experienced by specific identities. Young women's identities can only be seen through this intersectional lens as they specifically wrote about how their class, race,

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1 There is a vast literature on servant leadership. See, for example, Greenleaf's work for instance, Greenleaf, R. K., Spears, L., & Covey, S. (2002). Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness. New York: Paulist Press, 37.
2 Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Available at: http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

and/or, for example, ability presented them with multiple challenges. Young women reflected on their identities and the structural inequities they, or those they served, lived in and through in their particular geographies. These inequities, these challenges, became spaces of leadership for young women, and were often used as opportunities to build confidence and courage. Inspiring the quality of self-awareness, young women reflected deeply on their identities, where they belonged, felt like outsiders, and where they had to blaze a new path. And while some might have been defeated, the young women leaders persevered, often in service, and for the benefit of others. Reflecting on her identity, one young woman, early on in her story wrote, "However, even after completing my university degree, I still felt like a complete outsider within the classical music scene. I was the only black person on the course and didn't feel I could be my true self." This same young woman concluded her story with the following:

> *"Deep in my heart, though, I know I want to work in musical higher education. Even though I still feel like an imposter, I have realized that in order for the classical music scene to change and be a more inclusive place than it was for me, I need to remain there to show others from diverse and working-class backgrounds that it is a space where they can flourish, too. The field of classical music may be facing a lot of challenges, but I can see its potential and feel compelled to be part of a positive change for future generations."*

4.3 Challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments as frameworks

While young women cited the challenges outlined in the findings as obstacles, challenges were also a central motivating force for young women. Bringing challenges into concert with the qualities of leadership, many of the issues encountered, including systemic or institutionalized inequities, were transformed by young women into opportunities and/or used to fuel their motivation. As such, young women, for example, used challenges as springboards for their own growth. Challenges igniting almost every leadership quality: for example, challenges with identity called for courage, self-doubt ignited deep self-reflection, wellbeing inspired compassion, lack of opportunity demanded grit and determination -- to name a few. Challenges and obstacles were stepping-stones or, in some cases, scaffolds to growth, empowerment, wisdom and self-confidence. Reworking her challenges into a path of growth, service, and leadership one young woman wrote,

> *"During my undergraduate studies, I shared a place with five others. Unlike my roommates, I could not afford to buy readymade clothes, see movies, or go out. There were times when I had to skip my lunch and breakfast. But it was because of all these difficulties that I began my journey working with forest dwellers,*

the most marginalized community in India. I could relate to their poverty and hunger from my heart."

Breakthroughs and accomplishments were tied directly to challenges: as challenges were fertile spaces for potential breakthroughs and accomplishments. Sheparding young women through challenges were the qualities of leadership described, the internal and/or external motivations cited in the findings, as well as the challenges themselves (as motivation) – all underpinned by a deep sense of service and purpose. Bringing threads together, breakthroughs and accomplishments with specific challenges, often formed the framework and/or the narrative arc for young women's stories. Young women would often cite the crisis or challenge, and then move on to discuss the specific breakthrough and/or accomplishment, followed by lessons learned. Lastly, the lived experiences of challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments built wisdom, a sense of determination, and were always connected to aspects of self-confidence, which is the final piece explored in the leadership journey.

4.4 The role of self-confidence

A 2017 literature review mapping obstacles to leadership for women across healthcare, academia, and business, found that lack of confidence was a major barrier for women across these sectors.[1] In fact, lack of confidence was listed in the top 10 of the 26 barriers found in this extensive review.

1 Kalaitzi, S., Czabanowska, K., Fowler-David, S., and Brand, H. (2017). Women leadership barriers in healthcare, academia and business. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 36 (5), 457-474.

Lack of self-confidence for young women included, for example, self-doubt, and underrating abilities. Self-confidence was a thread throughout all stories, deeply linked to identities and, as discussed, challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments. their abilities. Self-confidence was a thread throughout all stories, deeply linked to identities and, as discussed, challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments.

Self-confidence is defined generally as *a feeling of trust in one's abilities, qualities, and judgment.*[2] And for the young women, as described in the findings, it was conceptualized as something that was growing – for example, growing in certainty about their skills, growing their belief in themselves, growing with every breakthrough, a growing sense of empowerment coming from within, a growing of a trust in themselves. What is more, in all but one story highlighting self-confidence, self-confidence was something almost every young woman not only struggled with, but was a cornerstone of their narrative –an underpinning current that was, at times, the central challenge or obstacle. Indeed, there was a deep intertwined relationship between young women as leaders (or considering themselves as leaders in retrospect) and self-confidence, with challenges, and breakthroughs and accomplishments, as the space for germinating the seeds of confidence.

2 This is a general dictionary definition that comes up in most online searches.

Self-confidence was intertwined with all aspects of the findings and cannot be decontextualized from the entire leadership journey. Self-confidence was both a driver and outcome: its deep connection to qualities of leadership, as well as to breakthroughs and accomplishments, points to it as a major factor in cultivating and catalyzing leadership –and not just any kind of leadership–the everyday leadership that these young women are displaying – a kind of 21st century leadership which, as discussed previously, is needed right now.

Bringing threads together: self-confidence and leadership (defined as the qualities articulated in the findings) were, in many ways, positively correlated. As qualities increased so too did confidence (or aspects of confidence for example self-belief) – with each challenge serving as an opportunity, each breakthrough or accomplishment, regardless of the size, increasing self-confidence and, likewise, as confidence grew so too did leadership qualities. Moreover, fuelling this (often non-directional) cycle was a sense of service and purpose, as well as motivational sources (including those both inside and outside of themselves such as a sense of faith and faith-based practices, wisdom, and, for example, their drive toward social justice). All of this at the intersection of their own life circumstances, their intersectional

Challenges

Self-confidence

Qualities of leadership

Breakthrough or accomplishment

identities and oppressions they faced, and the sociocultural landscapes and geographies they inhabited. One young woman, reflecting on her journey, wrote:

"Although what my colleagues and I are working toward—stopping climate change—will not happen overnight, the little steps that we take make a difference. They can start conversations and plant seeds that, over time, will gather momentum and sprout. This profoundly altered perspective has only become possible for me through my experience. I have gained more confidence in my ability to make a difference, and I honestly believe my colleagues and I have achieved everything we have because we are united as a team and we have each taken leadership in our respective roles. Most of all, I've realized that I am important and that I have something of value to contribute. We don't always have to be in the limelight to make a difference, because I truly believe that when we realize that small changes can make a big impact, we can all be leaders in our own rights."

Each of the interconnected components in this discussion – from service to self-confidence – are a vital part of young women's journeys: where service can be considered the why, and the qualities of leadership, the how and the what; where challenges, breakthroughs and accomplishments are building blocks, paths, and scaffolds, and motivational factors accompany the journey; and, where self-confidence, acts variously as motivation, a challenge, a quality, a cause, an effect, something changed by the journey and something that changes the journey. As such, each component must be considered when using the findings to cultivate young women's leadership capacity. The final part of this section, offers several practical ways forward.

4.5 Catalyzing leadership

In the tables below several interconnected ways forward are briefly touched upon. While it is almost impossible to tease apart the suggestions – as difficult as it is to tease apart the components of the leadership journeys for young women – it is important to note that the first and most robust suggestion (i.e., stating the need to underpin all approaches with specific frameworks), is not only the most essential, it serves as the basis for all suggestions.

1. Essential underpinning frameworks: Derived wholly from the findings and discussion above, it is strongly suggested that all practical approaches designed and implemented based on this report, are underpinned by frameworks prioritizing voice, intersectionality and equity, service and social justice, and a contextualized construction of leadership and confidence.

Voice:
This includes placing the needs, lived experiences, perspectives, and, for instance, hopes at the center of all interventions and programming. This empowering participatory stance ensures all approaches and strategies start with, and are grounded in, the real lives of the young women they are meant to impact.

Intersectionality & Equity:
This responds to the challenges and limitations faced by young women – challenges which were part of the structural and institutionalized inequities built into the landscapes they lived in and through. As such, an intersectional and equity lens must be applied to, and underpin, all strategies and approaches.

Service & Social Justice:
This includes approaches and strategies built on a mind-set, which foregrounds and prioritizes social justice, equity, and inclusion as well as which frames leadership as service, as transformational, as compassionate, and purpose driven.

Contextualized Leadership & Confidence:
Leadership and confidence cannot be decontextualized and/or understood apart from the everyday contexts, identities, and challenges (including structural inequities) that young women live in and through daily. Any program or approach aiming to cultivate leadership and confidence must employ a contextual relational stance, taking in all interconnected aspects of the journeys.

2. Storytelling: The power of story in transforming, inspiring, and changing lives is well-documented.[1] We make our worlds through story; story has the power to transform the teller as well as the listener. For the storyteller, for example, there is the beneficial process of re-cognizing their own resilience, power, and grit. As they reflect back on their own strength, confidence increases and their qualities of leadership are amplified. For the listener there are multiple benefits including, for instance, feeling less alone (they might share some of the vulnerabilities of the storyteller), learning about leadership, seeing where they are being leaders, and re-cognizing themselves in light of others. Storytelling can be implemented in dozens of ways, including as the basis of a curriculum or leadership programming. Three immediate ways of using story include:

- Create a simple discussion guide based on the findings of this report and on the stories on the SGI website; prompt online and in-person dialogue with young women — discussion guides can include a focus on: what resonates for them? How does it relate to their own lives? Where do their intersectional identities fit into how they related to the stories?
- Use story to cultivate leadership qualities by encouraging young women who visit the website to share a short story from their own life based on one of the quality that resonates with them the most.
- Create and open up a moderated forum for young women to respond to the stories on the website. Comments and questions can be directed at storytellers, creating informal opportunities for mentorship and peer-to-peer learning.

3. Mentorship: Mentorship and/or peer-to-peer learning support storytelling initiatives and, in themselves, are spaces of leadership for all involved. Mentorship can be both virtual and in-person, it can be both formal and informal and can be driven by, and amplify, the findings in this report. For example:

- Focus on supporting mentees in, as Simon Sinek writes, "finding their why" highlighting the role of service, mission, purpose, and social justice.[2]
- Mentors and peer leaders can use story to support young women mentees in, for example, articulating their purpose and/or focusing on simply recounting one challenge they have overcome, how is the leadership journey embedded in that one obstacle?
- Scale all programming developed with peer leaders and mentors; grow leadership qualities and confidence through mentorship.
- Imagine mentors (again, formal and informal; virtual or in-person) as living stories — inspiring, changing, and catalyzing leadership and confidence in every young woman's life they touch. Develop mentorship training, which helps them understand the underpinning frameworks of, for example, voice, service and social justice, and in recognizing their roles and/or their potential.

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1 Across the social sciences story has been used in clinical settings as well as in humanitarian crises settings to ignite change in participant's lives. Contact the author Dr. Kristen Ali Eglinton for research on story science.

2 See Simon Sinek's leadership work here: https://simonsinek.com/

4. Evidence-based curricula / programming: Developing and/or employing evidence-based curricula and/or programming that brings together the underpinning frameworks as well as storytelling and mentorship. While there are countless ways forward, essential points include:

- Build curricula around servant and 21st century leadership perspectives.
- Build curricula that begins to change the discourse around leadership from a more traditional understanding based on hierarchy to one based on relationality, context, lived experiences, participation, and voice.
- Programming must take a relational perspective with a focus on self-confidence, leadership, and identities working in unison at the core.
- Ensure the science and power of storytelling is at the center of all programming.
- Create a theory of change and impact strategy for programming based on underpinning frameworks and components of the leadership journeys described in this report.
- Have a fully participatory approach starting with this report and building out curriculum with and for young women, have all programming piloted, adapted, and led by young women and their lived experiences.

Concluding thought:

Leadership is a social construction: continuously re-constructed and re-made through our actions, discourses, values, circumstances, and the like. In this case, leadership was constituted of the qualities that young women enacted and described in their stories. Linked to this, their journeys were made up of interconnected, transformative, and interdependent aspects including their identities, experiences, geographies, and unique challenges – framed by breakthroughs and accomplishments and propelled by service. This report presented findings from a qualitative analysis of the stories of these young women, and, while the central aim was to provide an in-depth understanding of young women's leadership, there is an expectation that analysis might begin to offer a potential blueprint for the ways in which young women's leadership practices and capacity can be further inspired and cultivated. In an effort to begin sketching this blueprint, though literally hundreds of practice-based suggestions could be offered, it is essential that the way leadership is truly framed, fuelled, created, and constituted in and through the everyday realities of these young women, guides all approaches. Specifically, that any potential approaches (including methods and programs) and discussions – seeking to cultivate young women's leadership and potential – articulate

and advance frameworks prioritizing voice, intersectionality and equity, service and social justice, and which conceptualize leadership and confidence as contextual, relational, and interdependent.

All young women, in fact all humans, possess the qualities of leadership described, and all are on a journey. It is a matter of meeting young women where they are on that journey, providing tools and maps they recognize, and knowing that – as the young women highlighted – all have within them the seeds to transform our world. As one young woman summarized at the end of her moving story:

"My goal may seem too idealistic to some, but I believe it is possible if every person actively tries to lead the world for good. I hope we can all open our minds to the endless possibilities and become leaders of our own lives, creating a great future together."

Appendices

YOUNG WOMEN'S STORIES – FOSTERING LEADERSHIP
Storytelling Guide

Writing is not always an easy task, indeed some people can find it quite challenging. To support you in sharing your story we have created the following guide.

Ideas for getting started

1. **Free writing:** Think about the areas we asked you to consider around victories/ breakthroughs and leadership, and simply begin by answering some of the questions on a paper. Write as much as you want, without thinking about grammar or audience. When you feel you have written all you can, read it through and ask: is there a story line in here? Is there something here I want to elaborate on for my story? Usually your story will be in the free writing.
2. **Interview yourself:** Think about your ideas on leadership and victories/breakthroughs as a journalist would: are there specific events, feelings or moments? Write briefly about who, what, why, when, where and how of the event, feeling or moment. Can what you wrote now be shaped into a story?
3. **Use mind maps:** Think about the areas you are asked to consider on leadership and victories/ breakthroughs, write them by hand on paper and draw a circle around each, then begin to map feelings, ideas, thoughts that come up for each of the areas drawing lines and links between ideas. From there, select 2-3 of the ideas and begin a free writing process (see idea 1 above).

Consider story structure

Before you begin, as a way to get started, and/or in the process of writing, consider the story structure. Ask: what is the basic framework of my story? While there are many possibilities, here are a few ideas:

- Will your story revolve around one event or moment?
- Will your story be one with many events, but a continuous growing forward movement?
- Will your story feature one or multiple challenges you have overcome?
- Will your story start in the present, past, future?

During the Process
- If you have been doing free writing as a way to begin, continue to hone what you have, getting rid of excess, adding new detail, considering your structure and framing your writing. Watch the story emerge from here.
- Throughout writing use free writing to add description and life to your story.
- Throughout, think like a journalist to flesh out facts, ask: who, what, when, why, how?
- Make it personal: The more of your voice, your experience, your feelings you are able to capture in your story, the closer people will feel to it.
- Throughout, write for as long as you need, don't stop yourself; however, the final version should be approximately 700 words (under 1,000 words)
- Once you have a draft of your story, ask yourself: is this my story of leadership? Is there something I want to add; something that does not need to be here? Am I happy for others to read this? Do I want to share this with the public?

YOUNG WOMEN'S STORIES – FOSTERING LEADERSHIP
Project Background

Thank you for taking part in this new project. We are seeking to understand how young women's personal development and transformations helped them gain confidence, empower themselves and others, and make a difference in their school, work, community or elsewhere. SGI works on various issue areas at the United Nations, one of which is gender equality and women's empowerment. This project can serve to contribute to UN Women's Youth and Gender Equality Strategy to strengthen young women's leadership. It consists of sharing young women's stories of fostering leadership which will be posted on the project's webpage and made available to the public.

Writing your Story

The aim is to: share your personal story of taking leadership (in whatever capacity—at home, work, school, community or elsewhere). Please consider the following areas listed below when writing, understanding that the emphasis is on your victories/breakthroughs and its connection to leadership. Keep in mind the guidelines in the box. If you get stuck, we have created a "Storytelling Guide" (attached) to help you through the process.

i. Leadership

- What does taking leadership mean to you? What qualities does a leader possess?

ii. Victories/Breakthroughs

- Consider the many victories/breakthroughs throughout the course of your life – these can include a wide range of experiences
- Consider your feelings before these victories/ breakthroughs. Why was the victory / breakthrough significant for you? What fears and obstacles did you face and how did you overcome them?
- Consider your feelings after these victories/ breakthroughs. For example, did your feelings about yourself change?

iii. Leadership and victories/breakthroughs

- Think about yourself as a leader (or a person who has the confidence to make a difference). Do your victories/ breakthroughs in any way contribute to your own leadership development or confidence to make a difference? How?

We are so grateful to you for sharing your story and taking part in this new project. We will be in touch with you throughout the duration of this project.

Please email Ivy Koek at the SGI Office for UN Affairs at **ywstories@sgi-ouna.org to submit your stories and pictures** or if you have any questions or concerns. We are happy to hear from you.

Guidelines

- **Keep your story between 700 to 1,000 words.** All stories will be reviewed and potentially edited. Before any story is published online, the final version of your story will be sent to you for approval.

- **Submit two up-to-date photos of yourself:**
  1. 1 headshot
  2. 1 other photo of your choice (best if it reflects you doing something as an empowered young woman or leader).

Appendix B: Storytelling survey results (from 10 of the 15 participants)

Question 1
During the process of writing your story, did you learn something about yourself?

YES	**9 (90%)**
SOMEWHAT	**1 (10%)**
NO	**0**

- As I continued to write this story, I realized that all the events were linked to my present self. There was no waste in what I had experienced, and I felt that these experiences could help people suffering from the same struggles.
- I thought it would take me days to write and kept delaying but when I began writing I realized it took me just a few hours as it was my story and I actually knew how and what to write down. My take away was , don't over think it just write it as how you would verbally narrate it.
- I learned about my career ambitions.
- I learn that I was did big thing for me in my life, and I change it. I didn't think about that before. I was just flow.
- Although I was writing what I already knew about myself, having to sit and ruminate through the entire thought process made me realize how I've changed and grown over the years. It also contributed to forming a sense of self confidence towards my own being, and be less doubtful over my abilities as an individual.
- I realized my story inspires others from across, my story resonated other similar stories of young women from conflict affected countries. I have appreciated how far I have come.
- I have learnt a lot about myself only .Struggles which i have crossed and what i have learnt in life during writing my story it was a flash back and a wonderful learning .
- It was very interesting to reflect on my own story like that.
- I learned that I had a lot of potential that I did not take into consideration such as the leadership that I had in me from a young age.
- I learned how I had become a leader. I uncovered the traits that a leader exemplifies.

Question 2
Did writing your story make you want to change something about yourself?

YES	5 (50%)
SOMEWHAT	2 (20%)
NO	3 (30%)

- I'm not a very positive person. Also, I couldn't have confidence in my writing, so I wanted to change my lack of confidence.
- I'm grateful for my journey and I would never change anything about myself. It made me who I am today.
- To be more confident.
- Everything was like it should to be.
- I believe that this was already in my subconscious and in some ways I knew what I needed to change but did not have the courage to do so. Writing this piece was part of that process or journey among other things that transpired in my life over the past year that gave me the push I needed to make bold but necessary changes.
- Yes to continue and increase my advocacy skill, and to interacted more with young women, older solve and girls from my country, and share stories of hope.
- Writing story motivated me to move ahead in life with more renewed determination to work for marginalized community.
- Just happy about my life.
- increase my desire to do better and to impact the world around me
- I want to continue to blossom as an important part of my community and in my field of Public Health Dentistry. That hard work, diligence, and faith really pay off.

Question 3
Was the process of telling/coming up with your story itself difficult/challenging?

YES	2 (20%)
SOMEWHAT	4 (40%)
NO	4 (40%)

- My memory of those days was vague, so it was very difficult for me to recall the memory. I feel that the story could not have been completed without my mother.
- No
- Difficult part was to telling about my death of my father.
- The end result was fairly different from the original theme and instruction given. The topic that the editor eventually settled on was also a personally tough topic for me as it deals a lot with the death of a loved one and its impact a decade later on my life.
- I felt the process was not challenging but sharing at times thinking deeply about own life and pen down our own struggle gives us a surprise .Like i felt ohh woh i have crossed many challenges which i forgot ,but writing made it possible through this story.

- Challenging in a good way. Over coming doubts that what I had to say was interesting enough :)
- because it was something I hadn't experienced before

Question 4

Would you tell a different story today?

YES	**2 (20%)**
MAYBE	**0**
NO	**8 (80%)**

- I've written everything I've experienced, so there is nothing I want to change.
- I do have a lot of stories in my journey but I think this was the most pivotal moment of my life that I had shared. So for that no I wouldn't tell a different story.
- The story remains the same, I wish to achieve the goals I mentioned in the experience.
- Some other story yes, because that story was in that moment good. And it was just first part of following things that happened later.
- I will keep the story as is. However, we must all continue to create progress in our lives as people in order to not lapse into inertia. As such, I would think that rather than writing a different story, a follow up would be better served.
- Story of success after my struggle and becoming professional. I believe there is more to tell yo inspire others who are experiencing my previous life when I grew in displace camps.
- I like to story I told. I am proud of it.
- with the experiences that I have acquired.
- I am only building on my story. It is great to look back on the various stages of becoming who I am today and know I am still using these vital leadership skills provided to me by my mentor, Daisaku Ikeda.

Question 5

How did you feel once your story was uploaded? (Pick the one that describes your primary feeling or fill in how you felt)

PROUD	**4 (40%)**
HONORED	**3 (30%)**
EMBARASSED	**0**
OTHER	**3 (30%)**

- I had mixed feelings honestly. I was excited when it was live on the website but started becoming embarrassed and scared when it was being shared over a thousand times by people in my country and elsewhere in social media platforms. I felt that way because of the fear of being judged or told I was looking for attention or so. And mostly because I am not someone who blows my own horn for people to know about me and what I do.
- both Proud and Honored
- I had mixed feelings. While friends around me are aware of my family's history, the wider masses isn't. It felt in some ways stripping my emotions bare for all to see. But I was also glad I did it. If it provided hope and encouragement to others who went through similar experiences, then I would consider this a job well done.

Question 6
What future action might you take having participated in this project? (Select up to two)

Start my own neighborhood or community storytelling project	**4 (40%)**
Share the project with people I know including family and friends	**6 (60%)**
Take part in a workshop or event to share my story	**5 (50%)**
Other	**1 (10%)**

- Other: Carve out a career in Higher Education

Question 7
Please describe the most difficult part of the process and explain briefly why.

- I was wondering what I should do to express my memory. I tried to explain the days as simple as possible so that everyone can understand my story easily.
- I think the most difficult for me was when I went online to see my name mentioned and my story posted, shared and re-shared on all social media platforms. I was honestly stressed for 3 days and did not know what to make of it.
- Devoting time for myself was difficult for me. I was working a lot and was very busy. It was hard for me at the time to write and respond for this project. But it was well worth it!
- the great difficulty I have experienced in the leadership process is when some people don't want to be convinced of what I am saying because of my legal status. They do not consider the voice of youth
- overcoming self doubt, that what I was writing was interesting enough. But mainly I just really enjoyed the whole thing.
- I dont think the process was difficult at all .Rather concerned officer helped a lot to clarify things which made the process much easier .
- Precisely wording as I was not able to make short story, I was overwhelmed

- The toughest was having to write about my brother's illness, our struggles as a family and his eventual death. Although a decade has passed, one never forgets the pain. The entire process was akin to digging back out buried feelings and having raw emotions surface again.
- To encourage people to be brave to change something in their life.
- Being so vulnerable

Question 8
Please describe the best part of the process and explain briefly why.

- Without this project, it would not have happened in my life to talk and think about the earthquake and reconstruction with people from the SGI OUNA and the SG HQ. This is what I think was the best.
- I thought I was going to be judged but instead, I received nothing but praise, admiration and gratitude for being an inspiration. So many young women and parents reached out to connect and asked to share my story as an inspiration to their daughters or students in school. I'm happy I got to share my story and to see that it has inspired so many.
- Working collaboratively to share a deep and personal journey and seeing the stories come out on young women from all over the world.
- the best time is when we see a total change of young people in the way of thinking and starting to take places in decision-making positions
- the editing process. I liked seeing the story get better with suggestions, seeing it getting more focused, clearer and finding the core point together.
- The best part of the process are below; a.Writing my own story empowered me a lot and gives a sense of satisfaction . b.My story comes with many other youngsters specially young women across world gives a sense of unity in diversity . c.While discussing my story with IVY i felt someone from such distance connected me which creates a unconditional friendship and bond . May be this was a just a project but this creates friendship and gave me an opportunity to learn about others member's struggle and vicories .
- The final version, it was both agreed that my story become natural. Tell it the exact way it's.
- The best part of the process was to see the final result published and shared among a wider audience. Then having people encouraged by these stories and hopefully it inspires them to keep going amidst whatever challenges they're facing in their lives.
- Best part that everything is possible, and with my example I can help to someone.
- Reflecting on the achievements.