



Op-Ed Series

What COVID-19 Teaches Us About Female Leadership?

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In this short article, my sole purpose is to convince you that we need more female leadership to combat the Covid-19 crisis and other challenges. This argument is purely influenced by my own instinct, based on personal and professional leadership experience over the last 10 years.

As a human being, we can sense and understand each other. Even though I am a man, I was born and raised by my caring and compassionate mother while my father only played a secondary role. I grew up with a lot of my female friends which may be the case for all men. I get married with my wonderful wife. I work with a lot of intelligent female colleagues. Based on this experience, I believe I may have a few humble opinions about this very important topic.

There is no doubt that the Covid-19 has caused serious damage to many areas – financial, spiritual, educational, personal, etc. Combating this deadly virus has been the top priority for all governments around the world.

One of the trends that is emerging during this crisis is the limelight of female leadership. The [success examples](#) of female leadership in combating the virus in countries such as Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Taiwan, and New Zealand have made headlines. [Key characteristics](#) about their successful practices include “[r]esilience, pragmatism, benevolence, trust in collective common sense, mutual aid, and humility”.

Back home in Cambodia, the battle against the Covid-19 is somewhat robust. The emerging figure is Her Excellency Or Vandine, who has taken a leading role in fighting this deadly virus. My observation of her work is that she can grasp full information about the virus and intelligently and meticulously disseminate that information to the public. As a spokesperson for the Ministry of Health, she has regularly held press conferences to keep the public informed while, at the same time, providing safety guidelines to ensure that the people can protect themselves.

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Her Excellency Or Vandine is a Secretary of State and Spokesperson for the Ministry of Health in Cambodia. Source: <https://www.information.gov.kh/detail/429582>

By highlighting these examples, I am not arguing that female leaders are doing a better job than their male counterparts. The pattern here is that whenever we integrate more women in decision-making processes, we tend to have better results. [The female assembly in Kosovo](#) who led the successful fight against the Covid-19 said: “When women participate in high-ranking political and state level circles they contribute to more balanced, gender-sensitive, environmentally considerate and forward-looking policies.” Female participants will bring their unique female perspectives on how they see the world around them and respond to it in their own way. For instance, like all societies around the world, women seem to know more about the household issues than men. This means that they know when and how to shop safely during the pandemic.

Even though there are both clear and assumed benefits female leaders could bring to society, they continue to face formidable challenges. They come from both within and without.

From within, some women do not seem to be bold enough to take leadership position. This may be a culture that they grow up in. In the Cambodian culture in which husband is usually the one who makes most decisions, it consciously or unconsciously instils a belief that men should always be the leader. Wives have only limited freedom of making their own decision that is given to them. In this modern era, I am fully aware that this is not the case for some people and each family may have different ways of setting up family norms and rules. This practice in many families have significant psychological and cultural examples for their female offspring.

Externally, most men do not accept female leadership based on a simple psychological reason: the maintenance of male supremacy. Men tend to have a psychological blind spot and bias about females. First, the idea that women are soft and weak remains an ingrained conception. Second, if women are on the march to become leaders, men tend to block this path. One simple anxiety is that female leaders will only gather and support their own female peers. Third, even some women themselves tend to have a tendency to support men, rather than their peers.

In the 21st century, women have taken bold steps to strive for leadership in various government and private sectors and there are various social feminine movements to promote female leadership. This is a celebratory sign that should be further encouraged. Men themselves should also realize that by integrating women in their own circle will benefit the society they intend to serve. Putting their male ego aside and paving the way for women to take leadership space should be a priority.

All in all, reading this article may raise a lot of questions and criticisms. One anticipated criticism will be that my observation is exaggerated, and it does not represent the view of men. I think this criticism is fair enough.

However, my only intention is to raise the inconvenience for a better social change and to advocate for more female leadership. It may be against the odds, but it is better to do so than doing nothing.

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