

# LEADERSHIP AND POWER IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# LEADERSHIP AND POWER IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Navigating the Intersections of  
Gender, Culture, Context, and  
Sustainability

Edited by

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**Nila Wardani** has over 20 years of expertise in gender and social inclusion, capacity building, participatory qualitative research and analysis, facilitation, designing, and delivering participatory training. Using her expertise in grass-roots facilitation, she established her own women's empowerment NGO. She has additional experience with a variety of international donors, local government, and INGOs. She holds a Master degree in Rural Development with a focus on social capital issues from the University of Sussex, UK.

**Gordon A. Zook** earned a BS in Food Systems Economics and Management from Michigan State University, an MS in Agriculture Economics from Cornell University, and more recently a PhD in Organizational Leadership from Eastern University. He has worked for Mennonite Central Committee for 18 years in Bangladesh, Haiti, and India along with his wife Carol, primarily in country program leadership. His primary interest focuses on assessing and improving organizational effectiveness, particularly for international NGOs.

# PREFACE

*We talk about Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which for me is excellent! As individuals working in international development, have we taken the time to think and talk about our Personal Development Goals (PDGs)? Do we demonstrate on a daily basis how our day-to-day activities contribute to the achievement of the SDGs? Be the change you want to see in the global space? Let us build our personal capacities for global action!*

Benjamin Kofi Quansah<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations' call in 2015 to work together to achieve 17 sustainable development goals by 2030 has reignited the global discussion regarding the need to continue to improve the lives of a large part of the developing world. Leaders in international development face an enormous challenge to coordinate their actions, bring resources to bear, and determine the most successful approach to achieve the vision implied by the SDGs. How leaders should best lead becomes a critical question.

We decided to pursue this volume because we saw a gap in the leadership literature related to leaders in international development. Such leaders have been included in the literature on project management to a certain extent, but we believe that their leadership extends far beyond the realm of projects. We also believe that leaders in international development, as significant as they are in determining the future of the global order, have not been acknowledged adequately in the academic, practitioner, or public milieus.

Based on our belief that models and theories of leadership should be built up by practice and that personal reflection is a powerful approach to understanding practice, we put out a call for proposals that asked contributors to write their leadership stories. Furthermore, we asked authors to highlight particular leadership moments and examine those moments in terms of four factors which we determined were key in this profession: gender, context, culture, and sustainability. We were interested to determine whether their

gender influenced their leadership, especially since leaders in this profession encounter a wide divergence of attitudes toward gender in the countries in which they work. We wondered whether the social, economic, political, or personal context in which they lead impacted their leadership. Culture, of course, is a huge factor in international development leadership and we wanted contributors to reflect on how they adapt their leadership to different cultures and how they cross borders and develop agility to move from one culture to another. Lastly, since a key focus for international development currently is on sustainable development, we wanted leaders to inform us how this focus has impacted their leadership.

Of the many proposals submitted by international development leaders in response to our call for chapters, we selected 18 leaders based on their extensive and sustained work in the international development field. The 14 women and four men originate from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America, and they represent a diverse array of cultures, leadership histories, and perspectives. Their leadership roles differ and include a former senior-level government official from a developing country; a humanitarian aid worker; a policy maker in influential donor organizations and the United Nations; leaders in faith-based organizations; project implementers in bilateral aid organizations, non-government organizations, and corporations; university professors; a physician; an interculturalist; and an HR executive in a development organization. The diversity of the authors has provided a kaleidoscope of perspectives that together offer a comprehensive view of leadership in international development. Some surprises emerged such as the need for leaders in international development to challenge culture, not only adapt to it. These leaders had to decide to work with existing power structures or try to change them. Expatriate women as a sort-of “third gender” in some countries and the paradoxes that are a constant reality for leaders in this profession, were among another surprise.

From the rich stories of the complexities, uncertainties, pressures, and victories of the authors, we closely reviewed each chapter in a comparative manner to identify commonalities, differences, themes, and patterns. The process we used bridges the practitioner/scholar divide by offering a tentative framework for leading in international development based on actual practitioner stories from the field. Typical qualitative research data analysis methods were used, including the use of qualitative data analysis software and modified grounded theory methods. The result is the presentation, in

Chapter 1, of a tentative model or theory of leading in international development contexts.

Our intention and hope is that this volume will initiate a new dialogue between practitioners and scholars in this important area of leadership and that both emerging and veteran leaders in this profession will gain valuable insights from the chapters.

Randal Joy Thompson  
Julia Storberg-Walker  
*Editors*

#### NOTE

1. Benjamin Kofi Quansah, CGMS, is a Ghanaian leader in international development. In 2017, he was awarded the prestigious 2017 Newton award from the US National Grants Management Association for his outstanding contribution and performance in the field of grants management. This quote was retrieved from: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/international-development>.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF THE EDITORS

The journey of putting together this volume has been made possible and immeasurably more enriched by the support and commitment of a number of individuals to whom we are deeply indebted. The honest self-reflection and commitment to the betterment of the world of the chapter authors have made this book both possible and promising. We as editors have benefitted from a life-enhancing learning process catalyzed by the leadership stories of these contributors.

The editors also owe a huge debt of eternal gratitude to Debra DeRuyver, Communications Director of the International Leadership Association (ILA). Debra was with us every step of the way, offering sound advice and guidance based on her many years of experience. We also would like to thank the staff of ILA for their faith in us and support for our work. We hope we met the expectations of Cynthia Cherry, CEO, who announced our book at the 2017 ILA Conference in Brussels. We are ever thankful to Shelly Wilsey, COO, for her wordsmithing and Bridget Chisholm, Director of Conferences. They and the rest of the ILA staff provided the foundation for making this book possible and providing us with the opportunity to make an impact.

We would also like to acknowledge all the readers of this volume who we invite to join us on this journey of exploration of leadership in international development. We look forward to engaging in a dialogue with all of you and in advancing our understanding of the factors influencing leadership in this profession as well as the values, principles, and competences that will help us all work together for a better world.

## ABOUT THE EDITORS

Randal Joy Thompson is an International Development Professional and Founder and Principal of the consulting company Excellence, Equity, and Empowerment. As a US Foreign Service Officer for 28 years, she advised senior government officials on policy changes and helped to change systems to improve health, child welfare, education, social science research, and program evaluation in all regions of the world. As a Certified Performance Technologist, she has also worked to improve organizational and human performance. She has chapters in *Breaking the Zero-Sum Game: Transforming Societies Through Inclusive Leadership*; *Grassroots Leadership and the Arts for Social Change*; *Theorizing Women & Leadership: New Insights & Contributions from Multiple Perspectives*; and *Women and Leadership Around the World* and many academic journals and books.

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# DEDICATIONS

To all my Colleagues and Friends in International Development who have dedicated their lives to creating a better world and to those I worked with who were murdered doing so, including James Foley and  
Lisa Marie Akbari.

And to my sons Devin and Patrick who grew up around the world, are true survivors – Devin of an attempted coup in Cameroon and Patrick of an attempted murder in Ukraine – and are leaders in their own right, working toward justice and equality.

*Randal Joy*

I dedicate this book to all of the leaders who get up every day in the name of peace and equality. “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” – Gandhi

*Julia*