

PROFESSORS WITHOUT BORDERS



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Conference Report

Women, Development and Higher Education

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Without Borders

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"I was deeply appreciative of such an opportunity for voicing out opinions regarding the significant issue of women's role and development in higher education, particularly in Asia. Moreover, in my capacity as the head of an academic department of over 2000 students, of which 90% are females, I must say that the conference with such a theme has served as a wake-up call to highlight the issue of the role and development of women in higher education. And it is time to relate to a recent development in higher education."

- Dr Li-ying Wu

1.0 Introduction

On 2 July 2019, Professors Without Borders hosted a conference on Women, Development, and Higher Education in Bangkok, Thailand. In partnership with Srinakharinwirot University, LSEIdeas and the Gulf Futures Center, this conference brought together stakeholders from education, NGOs, businesses and policymakers. Through three panel discussions, participants addressed the demanding issues of reaching gender parity and the role that higher education has in achieving this goal. Women, Development and Higher Education was inspired by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of quality education and gender equality.

Special thanks to all panelists who have assisted in drafting the conference report, Tessy De Nassau, Chitpas Kridakorn, Assistant Prof. Dr.Pijitra Tsukamoto, Lorna Johnson, Pannika Wanich, Dr.Li-ying Wu, Brittani Barger, and Rachel Warnick. Their participation in "Women, Development, and Higher Education" conference was central to its success.

2.0 Panel 1: How to Achieve Gender Parity in Higher Education

Moderator:

- Dr Varintra Sirisuthikul, Faculty of Business Administration, Srinakharinwirot University

Panelists:

- Chitpas Tant Kridakorn, Member of the House of Representative and Deputy Secretary-General of Democrat Party
- Tessy de Nassau (HRH Princess Tessy de Luxembourg), Co-Founder of Professors Without Borders
- Dr Sipim Sornbalang, Head Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Srinakharinwirot University

Dr Sipim Sornbalang, Head Department of Political Science at Srinakharinwirot University, began the panel by discussing gender equality in higher education. She stated that gender equality applies to all individuals regardless of gender. She defined gender equality in education as equal opportunity for women, men or members of the LGBTQ community. Sornbalang stressed that all human-beings are rightfully entitled to have access to education from primary school to higher education; therefore, one's gender must not be a factor in an individual's right to education. She also added that in order to reach gender equality within educational institutions, those institutions must allow all genders to participate equally. Therefore, inside the classroom, everyone ought to show mutual respect to their lecturers and classmates without gender bias. Sornbalang believes that we can reach gender parity outside the classroom as well if society accepts the principle of human rights that all humans are born equal regardless of gender. Nevertheless, she accepts that in Thailand, women struggle to achieve gender parity as they may be viewed as weaker and less capable than men. Sornbalang concluded by suggesting that living in an ageing society adds a new challenge to gender partiality.

Tessy de Nassau, Co-Founder of Professors Without Borders, agreed that within an ageing society, women must think about effective self-reliant tools. She suggested that women should encourage and support one another while keeping an open mind to new opportunities. De Nassau stated that although the number of women surpasses men in most educational institutions, this figure does not reflect gender equality. She explained that as students enter the labour market, male students have greater job opportunities and better chances in climbing the career ladder. Moreover, within the field of academia, there is an obvious gap between publications by men and women. De Nassau, emphasised that female academics must prioritise bridging this gap by creating channels and networks to support each other. Nonetheless, de Nassau acknowledged that women may face gender stereotyping in their daily life that can reflect negatively on their professional life.

Chiptas Kridakorn, MP of Democrat Party in Thailand, focused on the need to increase access to higher education for women. She proposed that actors in the private sectors can assist universities by providing funds and developing activities with universities that enhance women's professional skills. Kridakorn added that higher education is vital not only in expanding students' academic knowledge but also for promoting gender equality. She emphasised the significance for professors to teach their students about the meaning of true equality concluding that this is especially important, so that when individuals enter the job market they will understand and respect each other.

3.0 Panel 2: Tools, Technologies and Techniques: How to Enhance Education Experiences for Women

Moderator:

- Rungchai Yensabai, Department of Political Science Faculty of Social Sciences, Srinakharinwirot University

Panellists:

- Lorna Johnson, Democratic National Committee (DNC) Assistant Treasurer and Honorary Consul for Jamaica in Los Angeles and the Founder and CFO of the Advanced Family Care Medical Group Inc
- Assistant Prof. Dr Pijitra Tsukamoto, Facebook Steering Committee for Digital Citizenship Asia Pacific and Head Department of Journalism, Chulalongkorn University and Director of Thai Media Policy Research (Thai MPR)
- Pannika Wanich, Member of the House of Representative and Spokesperson of Future Forward Party

Lorna Johnson, a Democratic National Committee (DNC) Assistant Treasurer and Honorary Consul for Jamaica in Los Angeles and the Founder and CFO of the Advanced Family Care Medical Group Inc, stated that currently the speed of innovation is at an all-time high. Johnson explained that as new technologies and discoveries are being introduced to the market at a rapid pace, information processing can be done 100 times faster and more efficiently than ever before. Johnson stressed that since technology has changed our life and daily interactions, education must be altered to suit the current needs of society. Johnson added that women tend to be marginalised within education systems and institutions can utilise new technologies to support women in education. To do this, Johnson recommended that institutions and firms give women knowledge and access to mentorship-based networks online that enhance their learning experience and highlight experiences of women in education through social media platforms. She argued that this method is effective because women can learn from each other's experiences and problem-solve efficiently. Johnson concluded that women need more choices within education to accommodate their wants and needs.

Dr Pijitra Tsukamoto, a member of Facebook Steering Committee for Digital Citizenship Asia Pacific and Head Department of Journalism, Chulalongkorn University and Director of Thai Media Policy Research, agreed with Johnson. She added that while women have played certain leading roles in world history, digital technologies have empowered women with a new type of social connection. Tsukamoto referenced several statistics that demonstrate that women are more active than men in social media and play a vitally important role in e-commerce and online shopping. Moreover, she shared her own experience on digital platforms that supported her professionally and gave her an opportunity to connect with talented women across the globe. Tsukamoto identified websites such as YouTube, LINE or Facebook that are commonly used platforms that individuals tend to utilise for multiple activities and suggested that the platforms provide a one-stop service that is user-friendly to women of all ages. Digital technologies bridge the gap between women as they can be used quickly and remotely. Tsukamoto concluded by expressing that she was thankful for the digital disruption that shook up the world and challenged the status quo to create new opportunities for women.

Pannika Wanich, The Future Forward Party's MP and spokesperson, stated that education must start with primary socialisation at home. She explained that education has surpassed the classroom as easy access to the internet and mobile technology allowed students to learn anytime and anywhere. Wanich arguing that the world has gone through a phase of media liberalisation where all people can voice their opinions and knowledge through social media globally. She emphasised the use of hashtags within those platforms. referred to them as 'online gatherings' and stressed that the use of hashtags empower people to become more engaged in politics. Furthermore, she argued that people are able to put pressure on governments without having to join street protests, which paved the way for those fighting for equality and diversity. Wanich concluded by citing one limitation of online movements—the inability to change society by the push of a button. She stressed that active individuals must utilise them as tools to transform online gatherings into physical and impactful movements.

4.0 Panel 3: Beyond Teaching: Mentoring, Networking and Recruiting Women

Moderator:

- Dr Asamaporn Sitthi, Department of Geography Faculty of Social Sciences, Srinakharinwirot University

Panellists:

- Brittani Barger, Deputy Editor of Royal Central
- Rachel Warnick MSc, Educator and Facilitator; PROWIBO volunteer
- Dr Li-ying Wu, Head of English Department, Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages Khaosaiyong, Taiwan

Rachel Warnick, an Educator and Facilitator at Professors Without Borders opened the panel by citing the various benefits of networking and mentorship. She suggested that one must 'shop around' to find a mentor that best fits one's personal and professional needs and that trust, respect and comfort are fundamental within this relationship as the mentee will share professional vulnerabilities. Finding a good fit is essential and sometimes after working with a mentor, a mentee may realise this is not what they need. If a mentee decides that a mentor does not fit their needs it is important to discuss this matter or find a new mentor as time is a valuable commodity for both parties. The mentor and the mentee must have a mutual understanding of the knowledge, skills and time they can share in this process. A mentee must seek a complimentary mentor to gain an alternative perspective, strengths and new skill sets. A mentorship is not effective if both individuals have a similar set of skills and outlook on life. Warnick stated that a mentee can have multiple mentors each providing varied means of improvement. For example, a mentee can have a mentor who is an information and skills expert, another who is an expert in the field in which they wish to excel and a friend or a sibling for emotional support. Moreover, the mentee has the opportunity to provide 'reverse mentoring'. Where the mentee shares their own perspective, experience and skills with an older or more senior mentor. A mentee should remember that this is a two-way street if their mentor is open to it.

Warnick stated that networking is a useful tool when finding a mentor. She suggested that if a mentee is shy in approaching a potential mentor they should prepare a 15-second 'elevator pitch' to introduce themselves to the potential mentor. Furthermore, when seeking to build a network one must be direct and proactive. Warnick highlighted the importance of facilitating introductions for others and helping them to build a network. She concluded by emphasising that an individual can not only reach out to members of their network when in need but should also seek to add to those individuals' lives if they can.

Dr Li-ying Wu, Head of English Department at the Wenzao Ursuline University agreed with Warnick's advice for finding a mentor and viewed networking as a useful tool for personal and professional success. She claimed that current developments in the field of higher education had led to the internationalisation of universities. When a university is internationalised, there is greater opportunity for networking and mentoring as students and professors have varied cultural backgrounds. Wu quoted John Donne, the 17th English poet, saying 'no man is an island' and suggested the utilisation of educational resources to train students on how to network and find mentors. Therefore, higher education institutes from different regions and continents must collaborate in delivering networking and mentoring programmes. This would enhance students' awareness of self-values and networking whether in academia or beyond.

Wu concluded by stating that the ultimate goal is to improve the quality of higher education and this process will assist students as they gradually build a network that they can utilise when entering the job market.

Brittani Barger, Deputy Editor of Royal Central, pointed out that mentors are important figures who support and help their mentees mature physically and mentally. She suggested if a person admires someone they could ask them to become their mentor. For example, a student could ask a professor who has corresponding ideas. Barger emphasised Warnick's advice about growing confidence when approaching a potential mentor. From her viewpoint, having mentors and networking would help strengthen women's skills. She added that the best way is to create a system for women in order to show support for each other and try to attract those who are still reluctant to join. Barger mentioned an example of a one of a kind mentoring organisation for girls in education called *Let Girls Learn Initiative* led by former U.S. first-lady Michelle Obama. Barger contributed to the organisation and worked alongside Queen Letizia Ortiz Rocasolano of Spain. The Queen's view of working to change the culture globally for women and girls inspired Barger. To change the culture, Barger argued, the expectations and standards for women must be challenged. She agreed with Warnick and Wu about the challenges and fears of women when networking but stated that it is a hurdle women need to overcome for success. Barger mentioned the advantages of networking in overcoming fear such as stage fright. She also emphasised the importance of mentorship for women and suggested that in order to achieve success, women will need both a mentor and a strong network. Those methods would be key in diversifying different fields in both academia and the job market to be inclusive of women. For the world to succeed, we need more educated women in various fields. Barger concluded with an African proverb "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation" and added, "it is not only you who educate a nation, but it is you who educate the world".

5.0 Conclusion

Women, Development and Higher Education was organised by Professors Without Borders and hosted in Bangkok, Thailand in collaboration with Srinakharinwirot University, the Gulf Futures Center and LSE Ideas. Professors Without Borders and its think tank, Thinktank Without Borders, have published this report and conference highlights. These materials are free and available to the public in order to promote future discussions on how to achieve gender parity in higher education. Professors Without Borders in its commitment to empowerment and gender equality will continue to examine inequalities in higher education in future conference and through its Women in Higher Education Initiative.