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3-4-2022

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Vivero, Maria; Nabaneh, Satang; Brion, Corinne; and Mawasha, Joann Wright, "Resetting Global Awareness during the Global Pandemic" (2022). *Proceedings: 2022 Global Voices on the University of Dayton Campus*. 9.

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Resetting Global Awareness During the Global Pandemic

*Maria Vivero (moderator); panelists: Satang Nabaneh, Corinne Brion,
Joann Wright Mawasha*

During this session, four female presenters from diverse academic and service backgrounds spoke about the global pandemic of the past two years as a catalyst to raise awareness on global concerns about human rights, education, environment, immigration, and racism. Panelists were Dr. Corinne Brion, a professor in the department of Education; Dr. Satang Nabaneh, Director of Programs at the University of Dayton Human Rights Center; Dr. Joann Wright Mawasha, deputy director at the Dayton Human Relations Council; and Dr. Maria Vivero, a professor in the department of Economics and Finance. Together, they spoke about how the pandemic has revealed the depths of our mutual dependence.

Satang Nabaneh Resetting Global Awareness, Guided by Human Rights

Thank you so much, Maria, for moderating this session, and appreciation to Julius for bringing us together for the Global Voices Symposium on the timely theme of “Africa in Our Century.” Obviously, I am biased. On a personal note, I come to this symposium and this conversation as an African, as someone born and raised in Africa. I am from one of the smallest countries in mainland Africa, The Gambia. I also consider myself a global citizen



Satang Nabaneh

committed to bringing in “othered” voices, fighting injustice and the marginalization of the most vulnerable in society, and recognizing human rights and dignity for all. I also wear two hats, as a legal scholar and as a human rights practitioner and activist. I have been involved in grassroots advocacy virtually my whole life, which led me into academia. I now do this work at the Human Rights Center, which advances UD's commitment to human rights through conducting research-driven, participatory advocacy, educating future practitioners



with Human Rights Studies, and fostering inclusive and reflective dialogue and learning.

My presentation *Resetting global awareness, guided by human rights* focuses on three issues. First, an overview of the COVID-19 pandemic and its interlinkages with human rights; second, the current challenges we face and their implications; and third, the path ahead and what we can do as a global community, as UD and others,

collaborating across global divides. In terms of human rights worldwide, I wanted to start with the following quote from the preamble of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), which states that:

[W]hereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

This is particularly timely, given what is happening in Ukraine and other countries around the world in conflict and facing human rights crises.

First, on the COVID-19 Pandemic. 2020 highlighted, through the coronavirus pandemic, a global interconnectedness that has long been present but often ignored. These past few years prompted unprecedented

social movements in countries such as Belarus, India, Chile, and Sudan. The Black Lives Matter movement, which has existed for years but gained unprecedented momentum after the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020 has had global implications, with protests in countries around the world. The COVID pandemic has also led to human rights being viewed with a vision that speaks to each and every human being and encompasses all rights: economic, social, cultural, civil, and political. However, responses and approaches adopted by governments around the world have significantly harmed the world's most marginalized people. The vaccine development has also largely mirrored the inequities that marked the rest of the pandemic.

Second on the challenges and their implications. Human rights are being threatened by the current social, economic, and political contexts. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated inequality, particularly for women and girls. Half the global population continues to be subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, entrenched inequalities, exclusion, and disempowerment. Gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence against women and girls, is increasing worldwide amid the pandemic, including child and forced marriage. We are all aware that racism, patriarchy, and neocolonial power structures persist in the U.S. and globally. Therefore, there is a need to utilize frameworks that deepen our understanding of the negative impact of coloniality, racism, and the oppressive structures embedded in human rights architecture. These structures continue to disproportionately affect Black people, indigenous communities, and other groups who are racially discriminated against in the U.S. and the global south.

The pandemic has accelerated an already declining democratic global landscape and set back development progress. We have seen increased repression, even within democratically elected governments. To be clear, this is not just an African problem. We have seen the events of January 6 in the U.S. capitol. Evidence also shows the rise of fake news and anti-rights alliances, particularly rooted in white supremacy culture in the U.S. and beyond. Moreover, another key challenge is the growing impact of the climate crisis. Climate change is the biggest threat to our survival as a species and the future, and it has also had a significant impact on human rights. Climate action must be rooted in human rights-based approaches. Other challenges relate to new

technologies and the deterioration of democratic values as they pose serious risks to privacy and human rights, as well as unchecked corporate power.

The critical question then is, what is the path ahead? International legal avenues exist, and we need to develop innovative ways of using these platforms to document abuse, provide testimony, and exert political pressure on the government. This has been a useful platform for activists, including racial justice activists. In the case of the U.S., there have been platforms utilized over the past few years such as the Human Rights Council, with George Floyd's brother appearing before them. Related to this is the call to foster and build intersectional solidarity, further underlined by the COVID pandemic. There is a need to dismantle power systems by acknowledging them, continuously educating ourselves, and learning from each other to take powerful collective action. Drawing connections between different struggles and activists can provide hope. This is connected to an engagement in critical self-reflection about human rights, considering its roots in a western framework. Challenges to current practices by the human rights framework can result in a redistribution of power. We need to be actively anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-oppressive in order to rebalance power.

Universities also have a role to play in promoting human rights for their students, their communities, and beyond. The University of Dayton has a unique institutional commitment to human rights. This opens an enormous opportunity for strong interdisciplinary collaboration with other parts of the University and mobilization of the entire university community to leverage power, knowledge, and resources for human rights organizations. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the urgent need for human rights education. That is what we are currently doing at the HRC and the HRS, to provide a foundation for UD students and experiential learning opportunities, including the Moral Courage Project, Malawi Practicum, and our anti-trafficking work through Abolition Ohio, among others. However, it is also acknowledged that it is not just enough to provide human rights education. The call to decolonize human rights education has gained traction in recent years. Increasingly, in the wake of the global social justice and human rights movement, this is an opportune time to reflect on human rights learning and teaching in higher education that incorporates intersectional, anti-racist, and decolonial approaches.

In addition, there is an urgent need to bridge the divide between academia and activism and to identify how collaborative work between academia and social movements/activism can drive social change. That is why we at the HRC are utilizing the social practice of human rights, in which we acknowledge that human rights is not just for experts, lawyers, and professional advocates, but that it is also the everyday lived behaviors and actions of people that bring it into reality. People around the globe are defending and practicing human rights in many different ways.

Finally, we can also work toward ensuring that digital technology is a force for good. Since 2005, we have partnered with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the University's Department of Geology and Environmental Geosciences to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology. We have been providing students with the opportunity to use these applications to investigate human rights violations. This is grounded in the belief that advocacy can only be done "in the real world," so successful advocacy education must be done "in the real world" as well. Experiential learning in education has transformative power. To conclude, I wish to reecho UN Secretary-General António Guterre, who reminds us that:

With the pandemic shining a spotlight on human rights, recovery gives us an opportunity to generate momentum for transformation. Now is the time to reset. To reshape. To rebuild. To recover better, guided by human rights and human dignity for all.

Corinne Brion
Changing Cultural Norms Through Education: Voices from
Ghanaian Women Principals

Introduction/ Conceptual Framework

Giving equitable access to leadership positions and building the leadership capacity of women to execute their roles as leaders does not only benefit the women themselves, but it also transforms societies (Wakahiu & Keller 2011). Wakahiu and Keller assert that women



Corinne Brion

educational leaders in developing nations have a fundamental role to play toward eradicating global poverty. However, in patriarchal societies such as Ghana (Sikweyiya et al. 2020), some persistent cultural mindsets, behaviours and practices seem to undermine the attainment of gender equity. These attitudes are oftentimes extended beyond the communities to schools, where women, both staff and pupils, sometimes experience discrimination simply because they are females and as such are expected to play second fiddle to males. It becomes even more

pronounced when women school leaders, who are supposed to provide strategic direction for schools, also become victims of such actions. Research in sub-Saharan Africa has found that women have traditionally been barred from accessing leadership positions due to the patriarchal cultures and the mindset that male leaders can do the job better than women (Bush 2014; Bush & Glover 2016; Mestry & Schmidt 2012; Moorosi et al. 2018; Ngcobo & Tilky 2010). Consequently, teachers in public schools were more accountable to male elders, such as village chiefs, than to female principals (Moorosi et al. 2018). Women in leadership positions faced challenges in exercising their leadership because they were viewed as invisible if they enacted feminine behaviours and unfeminine if they enacted masculine ones (Debebe 2011), creating for them a dilemma. Additionally, it was not unusual for them to experience microaggressions and sexism (Moorosi et al. 2018).

Currently, the majority of empirical work on the experiences of women educational leaders coming out of the African continent is from South Africa (Diko 2014; Mestry & Schmidt 2012; Moorosi 2010). In Ghana, quantitative studies have focused on factors accounting for gender disparity in educational leadership in specific districts (Segkulu & Gyimah 2016) and stereotypical perceptions of women principals (Pwadura 2016). However, there are a limited number of qualitative studies that explore the experiences of women principals. This study is designed to contribute to addressing this knowledge gap by employing a qualitative design to explore the experiences of twelve women school principals located in the Komenda Edina Eguafo Abrem (KEEA) municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. Thus, the gap in knowledge that this study seeks to bridge is both methodological, in terms of the use of a qualitative approach, and topical, in terms of exploring the experiences of female principals. This study is significant because it provides an understanding of how women principals navigate stereotypical cultural norms which seem to undermine their leadership in schools. Additionally, this research contributes to the literature on women educational leaders in Ghana because, to date, the literature is scant on the experiences of Ghanaian women educational leaders.

Given that this study aimed at understanding the experiences of women leaders in a patriarchal society, using a conceptual framework on national culture seemed appropriate to analyse the data. The researchers chose the Hofstede et al. (2010) model of national culture (6D) because it is widely accepted and studied. These authors defined culture as the collective mental programming of the human mind which distinguishes one group of people from another. This programming influences patterns of thinking which are reflected in the meaning people attach to various aspects of life and become crystallised in the society's institutions. National culture is about the value differences between groups of nations (Hofstede et al. 2010). The cultural dimensions in the Hofstede et al. model represent independent preferences for one state of affairs over another which distinguish countries (rather than individuals) from each other. The six dimensions of the cultural model include: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation, and indulgence. The countries' positions on these dimensions are

expressed in a score on a 100-point scale, with zero being the lowest possible score (Table 1).

Table 1: Ghana's Scores on the 6D model of national culture

| Cultural Dimension | Ghana |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Power Distance | 80 |
| Individualism/Collectivism | 15 |
| Masculinity | 40 |
| Uncertainty Avoidance | 65 |
| Long-Term Orientation | 4 |
| Indulgence | 72 |

Methods

The study was guided by the following research questions: What are the experiences of women principals in Ghanaian K-12 public schools? What challenges do these women encounter in their work as principals? What support exists for these women to effectively execute their leadership roles? This study used a qualitative design and a phenomenological approach to understand the perspectives of women school principals. The phenomenological approach is represented in cultural and social experiences. It enables researchers to describe the meaning of individuals’ experiences (Creswell 2007). In this case, the experiences pertained to the practice of principalship. This approach also allowed the investigators to understand the meaning participants attached to those experiences. Data collection included twelve individual interviews and document analysis. Multiple in-depth semi-structured individual interviews allowed the researchers to understand the participants’ perspectives of what challenges women leaders faced and what support they received to help them in their leadership roles. The researchers engaged in document analysis by examining school records, including minutes of staff meetings, Parent-Teacher Association meetings, and School Management Committee meetings to understand the issues under study. The researchers also kept a journal and wrote field notes and memos after each day that data collection took place. The researchers analyzed the data using Hofstede et al. (2010) 6D and two

cycles of coding in order for robust themes to arise (Saldaña 2009). Trustworthiness of the analysis was achieved by using two sources of data, having multiple researchers, and engaging in member checking.

Findings

Women in this study talked about their experiences in both positive and negative terms. They related their positive experiences to the support they received and the collectivistic society and negative experiences to challenges. All participants had support systems in common. Several talked about the “supportive role of family members.” Others talked about the support of friends. They all found the strength to do the work because of the passion they had for children. All twelve participants found their deepest and strongest form of support in God. The women spoke about challenges related to gender and culture in terms of power distance, long term orientation, and uncertainty avoidance. They talked about the “Wife Homework.” Women shared that the biggest challenge was “having to do their house chores: raise children, be a wife, auntie, and daughter as well as lead schools.” They also mentioned that many people viewed women as weaker and less able to discipline children. Hence, some parents disrespected them because “they were women principals and were supposed to stay home to cook and raise the family.” Another challenge had to do with lacking educational resources for the teachers and children.

Despite the adversities, the women leaders succeeded in changing mindsets using their own unique leadership styles.

Conclusions/Implications

Given the global call to promote equity in all aspects of social, economic, and public life, the question is not whether we should support women educational leaders but rather how we can better support these professionals as they navigate cultural norms which are embedded in patriarchal and traditional societies. The relevance of the research is two-fold: (1) At the global level, this study promotes the empowerment of women leaders. Additionally, this study offers recommendations for current and sound policies to ensure the promotion of gender equity in educational leadership; (2) This research will contribute to the body of

literature on leadership in Ghana by documenting the perspectives of women leaders in the Central Region of Ghana. Even though the data was collected in a specific region of Ghana, the findings and recommendations may apply to other regions and countries with similar cultural circumstances.

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Joann Wright Mawasha
Creating Awareness of Systemic Economic
Inequalities in the City of Dayton

Unlike the other presentations in this panel, Dr. Wright Mawasha's talk centered around the effects of the pandemic at the regional and local levels. Dr. Wright Mawasha leads the Dayton Human Relations Council, which was created in 1962 to protect the civil rights of the city's residents through fair housing, non-discrimination in employment and credit card transactions, and making sure that every contract awarded by the city has representation of women, minorities, and small businesses, to ensure that there is equity in government contracting. The council is also committed to fostering good relationships between the community and Dayton police and has been actively involved in police reform. Finally, the council does extensive work to integrate immigrants through outreach efforts and education on topics such as health exchanges, employment, schooling, arts, and justice.

During the early months of the pandemic, one of the main concerns was the possibility that many families might not be able to make rent and therefore might face eviction from their homes. The Human Rights Council obtained resources through the CARES act to cover rent payments to ensure that everyone could stay in their homes during the lockdowns. Following CDC guidelines, an eviction moratorium was put into place. The city adopted a stay in place ordinance, which meant that no one could be evicted from their homes while the ordinance was in effect. When the ordinance was lifted, many eviction holdups created an administrative backlog which slowed the provision of funds to landlords to stop evictions. Landlords became impatient because they were not being paid, and this gave way to a Catch-22 type situation: the money to pay the landlords was there, but it was not allocated quickly enough because of high administrative backlog. Once the ordinance was lifted, many landlords resorted to eviction court.

Another phenomenon that could be clearly observed early in the pandemic was a wide digital divide between families with access to the internet and families without, which really impacted residents of marginalized communities. Early in the pandemic, many low-income households could not connect to the internet to continue with their daily lives. Children were not able to continue attending school on an ongoing basis, which further increased the education gap. More than creating new problems, the pandemic exacerbated problems that already existed in marginalized communities across Ohio. A lesson for the future is the need for having a plan to deploy additional resources for rent support and internet access if an emergency like this one were to happen again.

The city of Dayton experienced a steep economic decline during the first months of the pandemic. Small businesses and mom and pop stores were the most seriously affected. Many of these businesses, unable to pay their bills and their employees, had to close shop. Fortunately, the Federal Government provided some funds via PPP loans and payment protection plans to help keep some of these businesses open. However, these resources were not enough for some business that were already lagging behind and were vulnerable to adverse shocks to their cash flows. These failing businesses were usually part of communities that already struggled before the pandemic, widening the already existing inequalities across communities in the region.

The pandemic was particularly difficult to navigate for immigrants, as much of the information that was being disseminated by the health and civil authorities was not translated. This meant that refugees and immigrants that do not speak English did not have access to important information on a timely basis. Again, the lack of access of information to non-English-speaking residents impacted marginalized communities the most. The digital divide and lack of language access had a major effect on the most vulnerable families. It made it very difficult for some parents to help with their children's schooling.

Unlike what has been documented for other parts of the world, the United States and the city of Dayton did not see an increase in domestic violence during the pandemic. The United States documented a decrease in calls for protection from domestic violence.

Another key issue to manage a public health emergency is addressing mental health. Mental health was and will always be a part of our lives, but the pandemic highlighted the importance of seeking help, as mental health issues became more prevalent and widespread. In general, people in black and brown communities tend to refrain from seeking help when they are dealing with mental health issues. It is important for them to know that there are resources available and to emphasize that people should have confidence to seek help.

During the pandemic, marginalized communities became even more marginalized. This increased the need for communities to become organized and resourceful. The Human Rights council gathered around seventy community organizations to seek funding from the department of housing to overcome the eviction crisis in the city; in addition to seeking help, these organizations also started sharing information with one another. The pandemic has forced local communities to find ways to collaborate and pool resources. Now we have an opportunity to acknowledge honestly what has been going on in our communities since before the pandemic.

Maria Vivero

The Global Pandemic and Its Implications for Understanding Economic Inequalities

Maria Vivero spoke about how the pandemic helped raise awareness on the state of economic inequalities in the United States and around the world. She started by sharing statistical information on the impact of the



Maria Vivero

pandemic on human lives since its start in March of 2020. Worldwide, there have been around 427 million people who have contracted COVID, of which close to 6 million have died. There have been six waves of the disease, with the most recent wave being the most severe in terms of the number of cases, but not the number of deaths, thanks to the effect of vaccines in reducing the severity of the disease and the chance of hospitalization and death. The

deadliest wave of the disease happened at the end of 2020, when most of the world's population was not yet vaccinated. In the U.S., about 80 million people have contracted COVID, and almost one million have died.

Then Dr. Vivero shared information on the economic effects of the pandemic, which reached its low point in April of 2020. The pandemic has worked as a magnifying glass to point up issues that already existed in society and the economy but that now can be seen with more clarity. The U.S. economy suffered greatly in terms of employment and economic output during the first two quarters of 2020, but indicators started to recover when the government deployed a strong fiscal policy to sustain households and businesses over the lockdown periods.

Unlike the situation during the Great Depression, when economic output declined for thirteen straight quarters, output during the pandemic fell for two consecutive quarters before starting to show signs of recovery. This pattern can be observed in several key areas such as employment, small business revenue, and personal savings. For instance, COVID-19-related job losses wiped out 113 straight months of job growth, with total nonfarm employment falling by 20.5 million jobs in April of 2020. These losses were greater for women, non-white workers,

lower-wage earners, and those with less education. These groups have seen their jobs continue to disappear and their savings dwindle even as the finances of other households show signs of improvement. Areas in which the recovery has been unequal are access to food, financial fragility, and the ability to make rent.

While the pandemic has shed light on how unequal U.S. and world societies really are, wealth inequality is not a new phenomenon. Over the past fifty years, the highest-earning 20 percent of U.S. households have steadily brought in an ever-increasing share of the country's total income. According to the Pew Research Institute, the wealth gap between America's richest and poorest families more than doubled from 1989 to 2016. This trend has been observed in most developed countries, but it is more severe in the U.S. As a result, income inequality in the U.S. is now the highest of all the G7 nations.

Dr. Vivero suggested that rising inequality in the U.S. economy at large is a problem that affects all society, regardless of income, because it reduces competitiveness in several important ways. For starters, inequality limits educational opportunities for children from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, lowering social mobility and hampering skills development. This makes the labor force less competitive compared to other countries. In addition, inequality depresses economic growth because of lower aggregate demand. Lower skill development means lower wages and lower aggregate demand. During the time in which U.S. inequality has risen, U.S. aggregate demand has fallen in relation to other countries. Finally, inequality is tied to criminal behavior. The high cost of policing and incarceration in the U.S. is linked to resource misallocation, because it leaves fewer resources for other needs such as health, education, infrastructure, and R&D.

Dr. Vivero posited that economic inequality in the U.S. has had a negative effect on the COVID-19 crisis. The unequal access to healthcare made testing and treatment unequal, leaving large segments of society vulnerable to contagion. A higher rate of pre-existing conditions among low-income families increased the likelihood of dying from the COVID-19 relative to households with healthy members. Also, an unequal access to education on the importance of sanitation, social distancing, and vaccination increased the likelihood of contracting the virus, especially among multi-generational households. Finally, the financial fragility of

certain households made them unable to “shelter in place,” even if they wanted to.

Despite all these challenges, Dr. Vivero suggested that the pandemic could be seen as an opportunity to mitigate inequality, because besides wars, pandemics have been the historical events with the biggest impact on wealth inequality. According to historian Yuval Noah Harari, emergencies can provide opportunities for social change because they accelerate historical processes: “What happens when everybody works from home and communicates only at a distance? What happens when entire schools and universities go online? In normal times, governments, businesses, and educational boards would never agree to conduct such experiments. But these aren’t normal times.”¹

Dr. Vivero finished her talk by pointing at three areas in which the experiences from the past two years could provide opportunities to reduce inequality: transportation, education, and health. In the area of transportation, telecommuting has become a widely acceptable work practice which has reduced commuter times and rerouted population patterns from large cities to suburbs, smaller cities, and rural areas. Lower infrastructure costs could result in more resources being allocated to local economies. In education, the now wide acceptance of online or hybrid teaching could substantially reduce the costs of higher education, particularly for immigrants and first-generation families. This opens new opportunities to teach children and adults at all levels of education. Finally, effects of COVID-19 could transform health access in the U.S. and could be an opportunity to push for broader access to basic healthcare for everyone as a matter of public health and economic stability.

¹ “The World After Coronavirus.” *Financial Times*, March 20, 2020.