



## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

### **Our Actions Are Our Only True Belongings<sup>1</sup>**

Who we are as leaders is reflected in our actions and, ultimately, in the results we achieve. We now have 81 Women Leaders for the World (WLW) graduates in 27 countries around the world. Each day, their actions (particularly their "listening for the gold" in others) are changing our world.

For example, we recently heard from Urszula Doroszewska (WLW 2006) of Poland. She was recently appointed ambassador to Georgia - a troubled part of the world. We wish her the best with this important position and look forward to hearing from her again as she completes her transition.

Another recent example is Sizani Ngubane (WLW 2008) of South Africa. Sizani is helping to complete the building of 380 homes for women on 180 hectares of land donated by a generous farmer. Her organization is in partnership with Habitat for Humanity to ensure that each and every household has a vegetable garden and other sustaining projects.

Speaking of WLW 2008, sadly for all of us, this year's graduates are approaching the end of their three months of coaching. I found a recent email written by Julia Dederer, one of our WLW coaches, to provide some food for thought for all of us.

"You are not cemented to any promise you make or any outcome you seek. As you travel on the road, you may get new information that allows you to see new possibilities, new horizons. You can revoke a promise and make a new one. This is different from just not fulfilling a promise and hoping it goes unnoticed.

"It is helpful to make your promises known to someone who has agreed to keep that promise in existence with you, so you (and they) can hold you accountable for producing that outcome. Choose someone who will keep in communication with you as you take actions to fulfill your promise.

"I see that you are clear that continuing to share your vision is the critical piece in actualizing that vision. It gives you a space, a field so to speak, in which to be more powerful. Always remember when you share your vision that it is not *your* vision. You can only have a vision that you have heard from hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people. It is a shared vision that you are inspired and passionate to bring forward by developing yourself to articulate it in more and more inclusive and clearer ways that invite wider and wider participation. When you share this vision, you can address others as partners, not people you have to convince. That way, people will hear *themselves* in the vision."

Many people do not think of their speaking and listening as actions. Yet these actions are some of the most powerful ones that we can engage.

I encourage you to read the article in this newsletter about Sandhya Puchalapalli of India, a recent WLW graduate. You are sure to be inspired. As you walk through life, please take a few minutes to reflect on your own accomplishments as a woman, a man, a leader, and a global citizen. The more we see and recognize our own good work (and, hopefully, share it with others), the more everyone will be inspired to focus their own actions towards igniting a new future for humanity.

I would like to acknowledge Textron for their recent generous contribution to GWLN as an honorarium for my speech to their Women Engineers Conference in Fort Worth, Texas. Thank you, and I hope that many of your participants become official members of our network.

---

<sup>1</sup>Thich Nhat Hanh



## Featured WLW Graduates

### Changing the World Girl by Girl

*By Ellen Boneparth, GWLN Advisory Board Member*

In Sandhya Puchalapalli's words, "The dehumanization and marginalization of women is a global phenomenon where patriarchal systems are the norm and women, just by their very nature, are treated as inferior to men." It takes a courageous person to set out to battle this phenomenon, a person who recognizes that macro problems must be solved by micro solutions.

First, for India's macro problem: As a result of femicide, there are only 930 females for every 1000 males in India; the number of girl deaths annually exceeds boy deaths by over 300,000; and every sixth infant death is due to gender discrimination. As Sandhya observes, "At birth girls are mourned, as children they are unwanted, and as adults they are victimized."

Sandhya's first career was as a teacher. She became enraged that girls' education had low value to many families who would say that "educating a girl is like watering the neighbor's garden." In 1992, she founded the Vijay Foundation Trust (VFT, see [www.vftrust.org](http://www.vftrust.org)) to establish a children's home for orphaned or unwanted children. The Aarti Home she founded recently expanded to include Aarti School, which is taught on Montessori principles and has become a magnet in the community as well as teaching children in the home.

Sandhya's ambitious goals are to triple the number of children in the Home from 100 to 300; to expand the number of women who study in the Foundation's skill development courses from 2000 to 5000; to offer forums for children, youth and women to change attitudes toward women and girls; and to increase her funding in the next year to \$5 million.

Sandhya's accomplishments have been supported and worked on by all the members of her family--her ophthalmologist husband, her two daughters and their husbands, and her parents and siblings. She notes that VFT volunteers are also part of her family or, as she says, "Every single woman who shares my vision is my family."

She notes that her three-year-old grandson takes up all her spare time and asks, "Can I say he is my hobby?"

For this woman who already had a broad vision, WLW (Women Leaders for the World) led her this summer to "explore opportunities and possibilities I wouldn't have focused on before." Here's her own description of how WLW changed her:

*Before WLW, I knew I had the courage to stand up against several breakdowns, but what WLW taught me was that "success in any field depends not only on discipline, hard value and luck but also, more than anything, on our perseverance and intelligently looking into the possibilities and opportunities and taking full advantage of them." To make such change happen is not easy, and I can't do it alone. It requires a lot of support from people. But support doesn't come easy either. If I need support, I have to stand up and ask for it too.*

*A few years ago, the government granted two acres of land to Vijay Foundation Trust, but the actual sanction of this land was in litigation for a long time. When I returned from WLW, I took a new direction to solving this problem. I thought of who is that one person who can resolve this problem in minutes. The Chief Minister! That seemed a little lofty initially, but then the words "If you ask you might gain everything, but if you don't, you lose a precious opportunity" rang in my head. I decided to go ahead with it, happen what may. I made an appointment with the chief minister and just waited for days to see the result. On the day of the actual appointment, I went to his office a half-hour early. The chief minister called me promptly on time. He heard me explain my situation, and within minutes the land problem was resolved. And even after that, he*

*wanted to hear all about VFT and my current undertakings.*

*After WLW I feel that I am not alone. I feel that all women, wherever they are and in whichever part of the world they live, share the same feelings. With this newly found enthusiasm, I am more certain that I can influence women and communities in our state to keep their girl babies and not abort and abandon them. I hope and anticipate that I can help 1,000,000 mothers bring back their girl babies to their homes happily with pride and dignity.*

Sandhya's highs come from seeing girls in Aarti Home growing up with pride and women in her courses becoming independent. Her lows come from seeing the number of girls and women she cannot reach. This woman of extraordinary energy bears in mind that the problems of the world can only be solved in the way as she is doing--girl by girl and woman by woman.