

Leadership and development: Inclusiveness, education, and sustainability (LADIES)

Since the Consortium for Comparative Research on Regional Integration and Social Cohesion-Social Elevation (RISC-RISE) was founded in 2007 (RISC at the time), it has been characterized by two important traits: (1) a commitment to the principle of leadership within discussions of sustainable development; and (2) the presence of strong women leaders in the consortium's governance structures and scientific initiatives. Neither RISC-RISE nor *Regions & Cohesion* would have thrived without the leadership shown throughout their decade of existence by a cross-regional community of strong women leaders. These women contributed to the success of these initiatives through the promotion of a people-based vision of sustainability (including gendered perspectives), an inclusive academic dialogue (including feminist approaches), and community engagement (including women leaders). Women engaged and directed this dialogue.

Strong women also contributed to *Regions & Cohesion* through articles that made impacts within and beyond academia. Social Activist Evangelina Arce (2014) communicated her courage in her article addressing her fight against the disappearance of women, including her daughter Silvia Arce in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Leymah Gbowee (2016) documented the ability of women's movements to overcome deeply embedded structural sexism in international affairs in her article on the importance of women "from war to peace to development." In her contribution to *Regions & Cohesion's* tenth anniversary issue, Ann-Laure Amilhat Szary (2020) presented an extensive bibliographical review of the region-gender nexus. The article assessed the quasi-inexistence of gender issues in regional journals and the symmetrical absence of regional issues in gender publications. In so doing, it established the specific positioning of *Regions & Cohesion* within that broad panorama.

A new generation has picked up this mantle of leadership. Dr. Sandra Häbel won *Regions & Cohesion's* inaugural best article prize in 2021 for her excellent analysis of the impact of different policy communities' behaviors on the normative coherence for development of the European Union



(Häbel, 2020). The article proposes normative coherence for development as a concept that is committed to transformative sustainability. Similarly, Zenyram Koff Maganda's piece in the Leadership Forum of this journal's tenth anniversary issue (2020) advocates for better recognition of young people as actors in regional development.

The editors of *Regions & Cohesion* are proud to present this special issue on "Leadership and development: Inclusiveness, education, and sustainability (LADIES)," which continues our commitment to recognizing the importance of women leaders in global development discussions. The four main articles presented here derive from RISC-RISE's partnership with the Kapuscinski Development Lecture Series (Kapuscinski Development Lectures, 2022), which is sponsored by the European Commission and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This series promotes important discussions of development issues, such as climate change, economics, energy transition, aid effectiveness, Europe-Africa relations, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These high-level events contribute to the debate and formulation of European development policies. RISC-RISE has partnered with the Kapuscinski Lecture Series as part of its policy-engagement mandate since 2012, having co-hosted seven lectures between the University of Luxembourg, the University of Helsinki (Finland), the University of Johannesburg (South Africa), and the Instituto de Ecologia (INECOL) (Mexico). This innovative initiative, which establishes a public forum for discussion of vital development issues with renowned academics or actors in the field, also permits the consortium to engage stakeholders in sustainable development debates as the consortium has partnered with non-governmental organizations, such as Handicap International, Aide à l'Enfance de l'Inde et du Népal (Luxembourg), Sendas, A.C. (Xalapa, Mexico), and Luxembourg's Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs Directorate (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in the co-promotion of these events. We wish to express our sincerest gratitude to Mr. Jan Szczyciński who coordinates the Kapuscinski Development Lecture Series on behalf of the European Commission and the UNDP. Following this editors' note, Mr. Jan Szczyciński presents the series in an introduction.

This special issue focuses on "Leadership and Development" with a particular focus on women. Not all of the Kapuscinski Development Lectures presented here focused specifically on gender as they addressed a range of discussions on topics related to sustainable development. All of our contributors are women: Wanjira Mathai, Bandana Rana, Toyin Ademire-Ige, and Esther Benjamin, and they have made their mark on the world as leaders in their respective fields. Our focus on women within the framework of sustainable development leadership goes much deeper

than recognition of our individual contributors (remarkable as they may be). All of the leaders contributing to this special issue have noted how the movements that have led the call for change in their fields would not have emerged were it not for the efforts of women leaders. All of the contributions presented in this special issue recognize the importance of women leaders at the forefront of transformative development.

In fact, the subtitle of the special issue highlights the thematic foci of the contributions and the fields of activity in which our contributors are leaders. On its surface, inclusiveness would seem to refer to social integration for traditionally marginalized groups, such as women or people with disabilities. However, while all of Kapuscinski contributions address inclusiveness, the essays by Bandana Rana and Toyin-Aderemi address inclusiveness within the framework of rights (both human and constitutional), equity, and access to resources enriching our understanding of this concept beyond simple inclusion and exclusion.

The second theme presented here, education, is also transversal as it is mentioned by all of our contributors. Three of our contributions specifically address the transformative power of education. Bandana Rana documents the progress achieved in Nepal concerning girls' access to education. Toyen-Aderemi's article focuses specifically on the obstacles that people with disabilities face in developing states in order to access education as she analyzes the physical (infrastructure), family/community (stigma), and policy (including resources) barriers that need to be addressed through inclusive education. Esther Benjamin's article links education to preparation for global engagement and global social impact. It provides a vision for sustainability that she recognizes as "Development 2.0." Global engagement, in an interconnected world, focuses on equity, inclusion, and investing in creating opportunities for people and networks of extraordinary people.

Finally, all of these articles address sustainability in terms of transformative development as defined by the SDGs to which all of our authors make reference. Nonetheless, the contribution that most directly addresses sustainability is that provided by Wanjira Mathai. This article focuses on environmental threats and the need to reinforce green belts as an appropriate response. Mathai documents four important actions that need to be taken in order to promote environmental sustainability: support for small-scale food producers (80 percent of whom globally are women, according to FAO), protection of vegetation, reduction of food waste, and restoration of forests.

When each of our contributors gave their Kapuscinski Lectures, they took time to engage with students and civil society stakeholders in interactive discussions. We very much appreciate their openness and willing-

ness to engage in dialogue. By publishing the contributions together in a special issue, we aim to provide another medium through which this dialogue can be furthered. It is with this spirit that we thank these impressive leaders for their contributions.

In keeping with the theme of the special issue (LADIES), the editors are proud to publish scientific articles from emerging women scholars who have engaged each of the aforementioned contributions and highlighted the relevance of their specific foci to broader academic discussions. Inspired by Wanjira Mathai's lecture, Socorro Aguilar, postdoctoral researcher at INECOL, provides an interesting reflection on social dimensions in restoration processes, outlining four possible ways in which local perceptions are linked to ecosystem restoration. Bandana Rana's contribution is commented by Tara Lipovina, PhD candidate in the University of Luxembourg, who introduces the concept of policy coherence for gender equality as a tool for transformative change and discusses this within the contexts of both Nepal and Montenegro. This is followed by a scientific note from Mónica Carrasco and Perla Fragoso, both of whom hold CONACYT chairs in CIESAS (Mexico) on the sensitive issue of indigenous women, development, and the right to a life free of violence, showing data from Mexico and specifically from the State of Chiapas. Toyin Aderemi's article is accompanied by a scientific note written by Patricia Rea, CONACYT chair in the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, which examines inclusive and community education for children with disabilities in two Mexican cases as tools to combat discrimination and social inequality. Finally, Citlalli González, Research Technician in INECOL, addresses Esther Benjamin's contribution through discussion of the need to build capabilities and skills in an interconnected world that allow generating—and multiplying—innovative solutions. This scientific note examines design thinking centered on people (human-centered design, HCD for its acronym in English), which follows the logic presented by Benjamin that holistic approaches based on civic engagement are necessary for policy solutions to complex social issues. For the conclusion of this special issue, we are pleased to present "Women of the wetland" by Socorro Aguilar and Rodrigo Zárate in our World Family Portrait section. This recurring initiative of the RISC-RISE Consortium aims to document human and environmental conditions and promote solidarity by highlighting the common traits of humanity. In this issue, the authors present the story of two female fishing cooperatives in the Ramsar site "Alvarado Lagoon System," a wetland of international importance in Veracruz, Mexico. They specifically portray the daily struggle of these women after implementing sustainable practices for two decades.

This special issue not only recognizes the achievements of individuals but also engages with a very timely discussion for sustainable development. The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women. Economically, women have lost over eight hundred million US dollars in wages since 2019. Moreover, women are three times more likely than men to leave their jobs in order to care for children as schools remain closed in many parts of the world due to the pandemic (Power, 2020). Women have also been affected personally by the pandemic as most countries of the world have reported an increase in domestic violence. UN Women has labeled this the “Shadow Pandemic.” Similarly, reports from Ukraine have documented how many women in that country have borne the brunt of the 2022 Russian invasion and how they have shown exceptional courage and resistance in the face of danger (Wilson Center, 2022). This is not exceptional. In fact, women are presently resisting patriarchal rules established by the Taliban in Afghanistan (France 24, 2022). Not only do we need to pay attention to the well-being of women and address structural discrimination that the pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and Taliban rule (among other examples) have highlighted, but we must also listen to our women leaders. They promote transformative development that is simultaneously committed to inclusiveness, education, and sustainability.

Regions and Cohesion's women leaders:
Carmen Maganda, Edith Kauffer, Julia Ros-Cuellar,
and special issue collaborator, Citlalli A. González H.
Supportive co-editor: Harlan Koff

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