

# Women Leaders Paving the Way to a Mature Society

by

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Russia is a very big country with deep cultural and intellectual roots that's undergoing rapid changes at present and with enormous potential for the future.

It's very rich in its natural resources like gas and oil. But these resources can, sooner or later, come to depletion. We think that the greatest inexhaustible potential of our country, like in many other countries, lies in its human resources. And the resource which could sufficiently speed up the process of building a mature democratic society is its women. Their leadership capacity is definitely underused in Russia. By strengthening this capacity we could find solution of many burning issues, avoid many conflicts and make our lives much more balanced to be able to meet global challenges.

Let's look at some statistics:

- 53% of the whole population of Russia are women.
- 41% of them are working. Statistics say that working women are more educated than men – 62% of them have university degrees compared to 50% among working men.
- The high educational level of women contributes to their high rate of employment which is among the world's highest. But it has been proved in the latest research that women have “to climb a career ladder 1.8- 2 times faster than men do to reach their finish line simultaneously”.
- Women comprise about 47% of the employed population in Russia. But as we can see most of them are working in education, health or services or, quoting one of the journalists, “trapped in low-wage ghettos”.
- Women make up 71% of the total number of civil employees. But they prevail in positions which do not imply responsible decision making.
- Women's representation declines steadily in the highest legislative and executive bodies. For example, among deputies of the lower chamber of the State Duma of the Russian Federation there are only 10,2% of women, and in the upper Chamber (Council of the Federation) only 2% of our senators are women.
- In Government of Russia —the highest echelon of state power —there are no women at all, and there is only one woman among the heads of 89 RF subjects —governors or heads of national autonomies (in St. Petersburg) (as of June 2007).

The slogan “Governor is a male job”, used by one of the candidates at the recent elections, reflects gender stereotypes in politics.

Political representation is just the tip of the iceberg, which is based on inequalities in the labor market, access to economic resources and property ownership.

Just in short - gender differences in politics and bodies of state power are in many ways not the reason but the result of other gender disparities, primarily economic.

On the one hand –in 2004 Russia was recognized as Number One among the countries having women in the leading positions in private companies –88 % Since then Russia has gone down to the tenth line in this list with 73% of women in the leading positions. But still these figures seem rather impressive. Does it mean that women are ruling in business? Let’s see.

The higher managerial level is, the less women we see among senior managers. They are holding rather expert leading positions than top managerial positions.

Traditionally there are many women among chief accountants - 82% heads of HR departments -62%; marketing and sales departments –42 %.

But on the top managerial level (chiefs)  
CFOs –22 % are women (78% men),  
Directors on Board - 14% are women (86%- men).  
Among CEOs –4% are women (96% -men),

What hinders women from realizing their leadership capacity to its full and to the advantage of the society?

There are many reasons for that, including historical reasons, negative stereotypes regarding public division of gender roles (women’s heavier work load at home) and many other reasons. And all these can’t change overnight. “The mentality of the whole society should change to improve the situation” – thinks the only woman-Governor Valentina Matvienko .

We do understand that changing the mentality is one of the most challenging tasks. But it’s doable. One of the ways of implementing this is to make women who have achieved big success in their lives more visible: let them do, talk and share setting good examples for the future generations of leaders. Going through the period of active change we are suffering from lack of positive information, role-modeling, inspiring facts and creative motivation. People should learn about best practices, learn how to win, how to break through and it’s a lifelong learning.

I’m happy to represent here a unique organization of its kind: The Committee of 20, which brings together the most powerful businesswomen of Russia. All members of our organization are owners and CEOs of the huge companies. By its very existence, our organization counters many of the negative stereotypes, like:

- “Women-leaders can’t stay together for a long time –they start to compete”.

- “Women can succeed only in ‘female’ businesses like beauty saloons, education or services”.
- “Women succeeding in their careers are unhappy in their family lives”.
- “Business-women are thinking only about career and money having no time for the joys of life”.

But all these are not true. I could speak more about how we counter these stereotypes but I’m pressed for time. It’s a very interesting part of my presentation.

One more stereotype is:

- “Having achieved success they rest on their laurels and don’t care about self-improvement”. That’s not true again. Most of our members (14) are PHDs, four are taking their doctorate courses. And they never stop learning. Being CEOs themselves they invite coaches, business consultants, participate in different trainings and inspire other people to learn and to improve.

Their way to today’s prosperity wasn’t easy and required enormous effort, passion and commitment. Having started their companies from scratch they managed within a comparatively short period of time (as the shift to the market economy started only 17 years ago) to grow their companies into recognized industry leaders.

The Irish journalist having interviewed some of our members wrote: “Self-made and hard-working, they have made their fortunes the old-fashioned way - with imagination and commitment - and have banded together to form a powerful new organization, the 20 Committee, to encourage younger women to follow in their footsteps”. And that’s true.

The Committee of 20 is dedicated to helping Russian women entrepreneurs increase their success and be recognized as an influential power in the economic development of the country.

To achieve this we are performing the following programs aimed at strengthening the leadership capacity of women entrepreneurs, growing future leaders and enhancing their skills to participate in decision-making processes at all levels.

- Organization of International Business Summits, conferences, round tables, workshops, networking events etc.

I would like to talk more about some of the programs which are mainly focused on increasing the leadership capacity of women through learning and sharing like:

- Mentoring Program for growing women entrepreneurs from the regions of Russia; and
- Educational programs for high school and MBA students.

Thanks to the Mentoring Program women entrepreneurs from the regions managed to:

- Accelerate business development and achieve its constant growth;
- Improve their management and leadership skills;
- To get easier access to information, financial and administrative resources; and
- Build business networks and relationships.

The Mentoring Program also manifests the importance of cooperation of the international women's organizations and of learning best practices from of each other. To a major extent the Mentoring Program performed by the Committee of 200, which brings together women business leaders of the USA, which is a partner of the Committee of 20, inspired us to undertake a similar program in Russia.

Now we are more focused on working with the future generations. Educational and Youth Programs have been identified by the C20 as the key areas of its activity. These Programs are implemented in close collaboration with the leading Russian Universities and High Schools.

The UN Under Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information said that there is "a two-word mantra that can change the face of the globe: educate girls." While demonstrating that "no action has been proven to do more for humanity..." And we do agree.

Our lectures and masterclasses provide students with the unique opportunity:

1. To obtain first-hand information about business environment in Russia;
2. To meet with the leading entrepreneurs and managers and to have a dialogue with them;
3. To learn from best practices;
4. To become aware of the 'golden rules' necessary to become successful and of the many pitfalls that might be faced on the way to this success ;
5. To discuss real case studies and learn from them; and
6. To get on-site training at the leading companies.

The feedback we get from the students is so inspiring. The questions they ask are so smart and sometimes challenging that it gives sound hope that the future generations will live in a much better country.

Now we are supporting the project called **Russia – 2050** aimed at the University students first of all. At the discussions, seminars, meetings with the political and business leaders and brainstorming sessions the young people will have to answer the main question: "How do I see my country in the year 2050? In what country would I like to live? And, probably the most important, what should I do to improve the situation and to live in the country I would like to live in?" And probably the most important: What is my personal responsibility for its future?"

We do believe that with our support and through life-long learning they'll find the right answer.