

# WORLD: A leap forward for gender equality in global health

By Nicole Schiegg

Huff Post – <http://bit.ly/2km4Jj0> – Women have been making sizable contributions to global health for decades. We have influenced advocacy, policy, technical and programmatic issues. However, as a global health community, we still battle conundrums like “all male panels” and not seeing enough women in the top leadership positions. In that respect, today was a game changer. Dr Tedros announced his senior leadership team at the World Health Organization (WHO). Not only do leaders represent 14 countries, including all WHO regions, **60% of the appointments are women**. This is monumental moment for gender equality in global health leadership.

WHO serves as the guardian of health for all people. However, if we are being honest, the organization has lagged behind when it comes to achieving gender equity and indoctrinating this issue into its leadership, governance, and programs. In announcing his team, Dr Tedros said he was “reflecting my deep-held belief that we need top talent, gender equity and a geographically diverse set of perspectives to fulfill our mission to keep the world safe.”

It should be no surprise that Dr Tedros kept his promise on gender parity. Throughout his campaign, Dr Tedros reaffirmed his belief that “gender equality brings sustainable development – that investments in girls’ and women’s health and rights are investments in a healthy and more prosperous future.” He consistently pledged that as Director-General (DG), he would “encourage bolder and more sustainable investments and partnerships to advance girls’ and women’s

health and rights.”

Dr Tedros has also said that women, children and adolescents are “the center of gravity of universal health coverage.” In that spirit, I am proud that women were the center of gravity during his campaign for DG. Led by the incomparable Dr Senait Fisseha, campaign chair and now transition chair who spearheaded WHO’s senior leadership recruitment, there was a dedicated and hard-working team of women pushing the campaign across the finish line. This is a moment to take stock and reflect on the determination and drive that contributed to today’s advancement. There are so many women to thank. I would like to give a shout out to the following amazing team: Joy DiBenedetto, Elizabeth Bird, Claire DeLancey, Christy Feig, Meron Feleke, Jessica Freifeld, Anjali Nayyar, Kathleen Omollo, Jill Sheffield and Zain Verjee.

Today we must also credit the Women in Global Health movement. Women in Global Health is a multi-stakeholder, inter-generational dialogue that brings together leaders at all career-levels in conversations about furthering gender equality in global health leadership across the globe. They stayed vigilant during the campaign – asking the important questions on equity and staying visible throughout the process. In fact, to make the case, Women in Global Health conducted an online survey at the end of 2016. Regardless of which DG candidate one preferred, universal health coverage along with the gender equality and empowerment of women were the top ranked priorities by respondents. I am optimistic about the future of this movement and encourage everyone to support their agenda – our common agenda.

So, what’s next? I am excited to see how these new WHO leaders will shape the organization. As I have said before, a strong WHO benefits us all. And we all have a role to play in WHO’s success. The same is true on advancing gender equality in global health – men and women alike. Follow and engage with #WomenInGH to help keep these issues at the forefront and to

encourage more leaps forward in equality.

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