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# women<sup>®</sup> top 50



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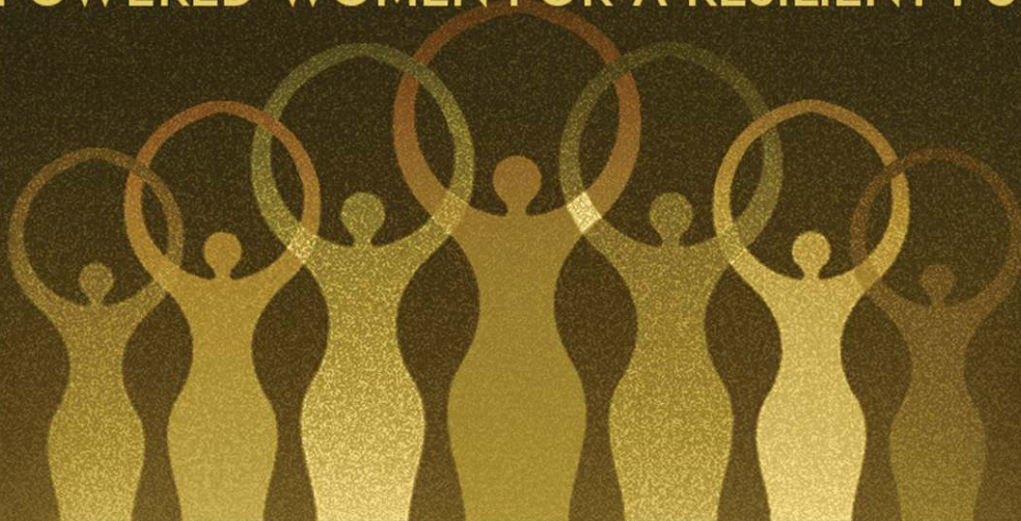
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TAKING SRI LANKAN WOMEN TO THE WORLD



# Celebrating remarkable achievements

## Chief Editor

Dr. Sulochana Segera

## Communication & PR

New Generation Awards  
Committee

## Page Layout & Design

Malinda Ranaweera  
+94 7 199 87 962

## Contributors

Nilam Samsudeen  
Malinda Perera

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As we completed ten years in 2019, Women in Management (WIM) turned the spotlight on a very crucial social group in Sri Lanka by launching the New Generation Awards in 2020. It was a brainchild of mine as I witnessed the need for mentoring and recognising youth leadership for Sri Lanka to progress and develop and become the prosperous nation that our successive leaders have promised to turn it into. The New Generation Awards is a celebration of the achievements of young people all over Sri Lanka. It is a platform that acknowledges the immense ability in youth to achieve and what they have to give to society.

I have worked very closely with state and private university students and I have witnessed their active involvement in social activities and clubs. But when it comes to private sector engagement and leadership beyond their so-called comfort zones, they do not want to take a risk and explore the possibilities due to the stigma of negative social media and fear of failure. Even the private sector complains about the new generation and their lack of loyalty, commitment and attitude as they fail to adopt to our old corporate culture. I would rather call upon the private sector to be welcoming towards the members of the new generation by helping them to take the lead and mentor them to be successful in their country.

This is the second consecutive year WIM is celebrating the New Generation Awards in partnership with the National Youth Services Council. With

a year's experience in dealing with the youth award program and internalising their take on awards, I have realized many things. The youth in the cities and the suburbs assume that they are not ready for an award unless they hold a position or title. On the contrary, youth in rural areas are actively involved in many award programs and look forward to opportunities to nominate themselves. The New Generation Awards was also launched at a decisively challenging time in the local and global landscape and with the plethora of changes that have swept our post COVID world, youth have been able to adjust themselves positively towards the new normal than the older adults. And that is because young people know that this altered reality is their future. They are also cognizant that they will be operating and moving forward in a digitalizing world. As an organisation, we

believe that it is at this point that we, as older adults should help them to move forward with the right values, while being responsible for their actions. As social media has become part of youth networking and careers, we need to mentor them to understand how to balance their personal values with new technology.

I take this opportunity to congratulate all the winners of the New Generation Awards 2021. As you collect your award today, you are demonstrating the human ability to achieve even against the odds. I wish you all the very best.

**Dr. Sulochana Segera**

*R. Segera*

**Founder  
New Generation  
Awards  
Women in  
Management**







# PANEL OF JUDGES 2021



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K.L.K.



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STRATEGIC MARKETING  
COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSIONAL





## The young people of today are the leaders of tomorrow

**Damitha Wickaramasinghe**  
Chairman/Director General  
National Youth Services Council

I feel privileged to write this congratulatory message on the success of New Generation Awards 2021 themed Arise Shine jointly organized by the Women In Management and the National Youth Services Council, for the second consecutive year. As the Chairman/Director General of National Youth Services Council, the apex body for Youth Affairs in Sri Lanka, I am delighted to be a part of this initiative where we could show how effectively public sector and private sector could collaborate on common national goals such as Youth Development.

The youth of Sri Lanka, amounting to 5.09 million, is a population rich in a variety of skills and talents. They

show a great potential that needs to be nurtured and guided in such a way so that the Sri Lankan Youth can actively contribute to the development of the nation. I personally believe recognition rendered at an Awards scheme like New Generation Awards could present them with more opportunities to enhance their skills and motivate them to continue their good work through dedication and commitment.

Being the Head of the Panel of Judges I had the opportunity to witness a plethora of young talent presented in front of us. A significant observation was that the young achievers, despite being highly skilled and successful in their own field, also displayed much enthusiasm and

a positive attitude towards building a prosperous nation. It was interesting to learn their pragmatic perspectives on development as a whole. New Generation Awards is known to create young leaders that will drive the change for the next generation. Hence, I hope to see in near future, the energetic and enthusiastic youth, who are being awarded at the New Generation Awards, actively joining hands with public and private sector organizations to work towards the betterment of the nation.

The young people of today are the leaders of tomorrow.

My heartfelt congratulations to all the awardees for their magnificent achievements!





# NG Press Launch





# *Flying the flag for a holistic approach to health*

**A**dding a new and interesting perspective to Top50, Dr Himalee de Silva, Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Indigenous Medicine, is one of several members of WIM actively

involved in organising its programmes to a successful end. Describing her fellow members as family, and WIM as her second home, Dr Himalee provided fresh insights into the status of Ayurveda in Sri Lanka, its potential as an alternative system of medicine in dealing with escalating health challenges of the present and its strategic value to the economy.

**Can you tell us something about yourself and what inspired you to pursue higher**

**education in the field of indigenous medicine?**

I work as a Senior Lecturer (Grade I) at the Institute of Indigenous Medicine, University of Colombo, Rajagiriya, Sri Lanka and I am a mother of two teen boys living with members of my extended family. As an only child, I had a very close relationship with my parents, we were more like friends. My parents always showed me the importance of education through everyday examples derived from society.

After my GCE Advanced Level exam,

**Dr Himalee de Silva**  
Senior Lecturer,  
Institute of Indigenous  
Medicine,  
University of Colombo





I enrolled for a BSc degree at the Open University of Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, I also got selected to the Institute of Indigenous Medicine. But I refused to quit the Open University to pursue a degree at the Institute of Indigenous Medicine for two reasons – first, I found my soul mate at OUSL, now my husband, and second, the long duration of the Ayurveda degree, which is six years. But my parents showed me the career opportunities available for qualified individuals in the field. Subsequently, I got enrolled for the BAMS programme at the University of Colombo. As the study programme commenced and I began to get high scores, it stirred in me an interest for Ayurveda and for the subjects therein. As a result, I went further to pursue the

Master of Doctoral degree in Ayurveda at Banaras Hindu University, India. Currently, I am reading for a PhD at the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo in Ayurveda. And this is how my journey in the field of indigenous medicine continues overtime.

**As an academic in your field, what is the scope for development of indigenous medicine in Sri Lanka? Is there enough State patronage for R&D in your area of work?**

As an academic involved in indigenous medicine, I can say that there is tremendous scope for development of indigenous medicine in Sri Lanka. Even if there is considerable state patronage for R&D in indigenous medicine in

Sri Lanka, the focus and the direction of the patronage is not properly disseminated. The focus should be directed into policy, law and regulations to strengthen the system and to avoid abusing the privileges of indigenous medicine by some segments of service providers. The practical difficulties in R&D related to indigenous medicine should be overcome with proper State and private sector collaboration. The monopoly in R&D in the field of medicine should be addressed. This in turn will provide ample opportunities for R&D in indigenous medicine to expand and contribute to society, by making scientifically innovative products and services. Indigenous medicine in Sri Lanka can be developed to reach the international demand for primary care in the world. Thus, the scope for development in the field of indigenous medicine is expanding everyday unlike in the other fields.

**With the rise in non-communicable diseases/chronic ailments globally, there has been increased focus on the use of alternative medicine given the limitations and side-effects of western medical interventions. How would you support the potency of indigenous medicine in effectively**

**“The monopoly in R&D in the field of medicine should be addressed. This in turn will provide ample opportunities for R&D in indigenous medicine to expand and contribute to society, by making scientifically innovative products and services. Indigenous medicine in Sri Lanka can be developed to reach the international demand for primary care in the world.”**



**treating non-communicable diseases and why has there been disregard for this alternative treatment process by western medical practitioners and the western medical fraternity at large? Or has there been some support of late?**

The present health burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Sri Lanka is high. According to the WHO, non-communicable diseases cause more than three quarters of all deaths and nearly one in five people die prematurely from NCDs in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, the use of alternative medical systems for NCDs has been recognized by the WHO and other international organizations to improve primary health of populations, not only in Sri Lanka, but also in the other countries as well. The effectiveness of indigenous medicine or Ayurveda, mostly depends on the personalized and holistic approach that is used to modify the diet, medicines and the lifestyle of the individual. In the indigenous medical system, the treatment, diagnosis and preventive measures are decided based on the body constitution of an individual. This theory is based on the concept of 'Tridosha'; Vata, Pitta and Kapha. The concepts and the knowledge used to treat NCDs in Ayurveda medicine concerns the mind, the soul and the body as one unit; so the treatment process is not only for the physical body. These concepts ensure a more effective approach in treating NCDs in Ayurveda and specific threefold treatment methods, that is, Divine Treatment (Daiva Vyapashraya Chikitsa), Rational Treatment (Yukthi Vyapashraya Chikitsa) and Psychological Treatment (Sattvavajaya Chikitsa). Moreover, natural herbal material used in Ayurveda have proven to have less side effects in comparison to other medical systems, because of the polyherbal constitution rather than one single extracted chemical to restore the imbalance of the doshas.

In my opinion, disregard for this alternative treatment process by western medical practitioners is a result of several reasons. The abuse of the popularity of indigenous medicine

to treat NCDs by unqualified illegal practitioners providing low quality services is the main reason. The abuse of the system by various groups merely for financial gain is also another reason. There are some technical and theoretical issues as well; like the failure of western medical practitioners to adapt to and understand the philosophical bases, quantitative parameters, quality, safety and efficacy in indigenous medicine in terms of scientific methods. Most of the treatment protocols in indigenous medicine have been time tested through the centuries. Current researchers are trying to prove the validity of some of these with scientific evidence. The complexity of the indigenous system



*These so called 'cures' for COVID touted in the media have been studied by relevant appointed committees. Members of these committees may have decided the validity of such treatments. Nonetheless, the so called 'cures' have not been included in the decisions made by the National Committee of Indigenous Medicine to Combat COVID.*



makes it impossible to prove the efficacy of every protocol which follows strenuous long-term treatments. There are some western medical practitioners who understand and encourage patients to seek Ayurveda treatment as well. But in general, a disregard for alternative treatment processes exists.

**There has been a lot of publicity surrounding the effectiveness of indigenous medicine to fight and cure COVID-19. However, some of these alleged solutions have been dubbed as publicity stunts, while others have been shrouded in controversy. As a researcher, can you explain the truth behind the so called 'cures' for COVID that have been trumpeted so far in Sri Lanka? What is the potency**

**in these solutions against the virus?**

The effectiveness of indigenous medicine to fight and cure COVID-19 has been a most controversial topic recently, with circulation of certain information in the mass media and social media platforms. As a professional in the field, I will explain some of the actions and plans we have taken in this pandemic situation to find treatment options available in indigenous medicine. Before the first outbreak of COVID in Sri Lanka in 2020, the National Committee of Indigenous Medicine to Combat COVID had been appointed, of which I am also a member. The Committee was formed by the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition, Indigenous Medicine and the Department of Ayurveda. Basically we have been focusing on four areas: the preventive protocols, the treatment schedule to treat mild to moderate stage with individual management of patients, combined approach with allopathic medicine and research protocol to find new efficient treatment for COVID, which we have suggested and forwarded to the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition, Indigenous Medicine and other higher authorities. Even though these protocols have not been activated at a national level in the COVID management schedules, the community of Ayurveda medical officers have been following these procedures in a few selected hospitals, such as at the Pallekele Ayurveda Hospital, and at some centres in Rathnapura and at the Walikada Prison.

The so called 'cures' for COVID touted in the media have been studied by relevant appointed committees. Members of these committees may have decided the validity of such treatments. Nonetheless, the so called 'cures' have not been included in the decisions made by the National Committee of Indigenous Medicine to Combat COVID.

When considering the solutions against the virus in Ayurveda medicine, research has shown that a COVID patient who is treated with Ayurveda medicine has less of the associated symptoms and the progression of the disease. The immunity enhancing



properties in Ayurveda medicine and the variety of pertinent medicines present in Ayurveda pharmacopoeia has great potential to be used in this pandemic situation. Other behavioural measures, such as self-isolation and preventive measures are also mentioned in ancient texts under communicable diseases to control the spread of the disease. All those are applicable as remedies for COVID.

**Today, many indigenous medical practitioners are accused of pursuing lucrative practices associated with cosmetology, thereby undermining the reverence associated with indigenous medicine. Don't you think this kind of deviation undermines and prevents the progress of indigenous medicine? What are your thoughts on such practitioners? Do you think it is alright to branch into cosmetic treatment because there is a demand for it? Is it a survival mechanism for indigenous medical practitioners?**

It is true that there is a growing market for cosmetology both locally and internationally. A large number of private sector companies are involved in providing products and services and they use the electronic and the print media to promote their products and services in a competitive manner. Almost all the companies use the name of Ayurveda and indigenous medicine as a business strategy to promote their products and services. But, in my opinion, the trend of deviation among Ayurveda physicians towards such sectors undermines and prevents the progress of indigenous medicine as you mentioned. Ayurveda is the science of life, which involves the treatment of patients and the enhancement of individual wellbeing in all aspects, physical, mental and spiritual. The practitioner who is involved in cosmetology has underestimated his or her knowledge, skills and attitudes with regard to afore mentioned basic concept in Ayurveda. Most of them are not well-qualified physicians and there are no regulations to control such practices.



The involvement of a physician with qualifications as a consultant in cosmetology to treat skin diseases is acceptable, rather than being a marketer. The hierarchical level in cosmetology needs to be appropriate and well-maintained for an Ayurveda physician to serve as a consultant to service providers. Involvement in cosmetology should not be a survival mechanism for indigenous medical practitioners. Well qualified BAMS graduates can establish their own medical treatment facility, rather than be involved in lucrative practices associated with cosmetology. There are many exemplary BAMS graduates who maintain a good name as indigenous medical practitioners.

**What is the potential that Sri Lanka has to market medical/health tourism through indigenous medicine? Could you explain the extent to which Sri Lanka is popular among tourists for indigenous medical treatments? What are the areas that need improvement to attract health conscious tourists to seek treatment from alternative medicine?**

Regarding tourism, including both medical and wellness, Sri Lanka clearly has a competitive advantage in marketing medical and wellness tourism. The industry is already a strong foreign exchange earner; for many developing countries, including as well as for the least developed countries, where tourism is an the most component important services export. Medical and wellness tourism is practiced by many internationally recognized Sri Lankan companies. There may be some travellers who are aware of health tourism available in Sri Lanka. According to my personal experience, by maintaining and managing a home-stay service for Ayurveda devotees, I

have earned a good client base because of the quality of the service I offer and the consumer satisfaction derived as a result. Comparatively, Sri Lanka is not that popular for health tourism, because it is not well established. The State and the private sector should have a collaborative and systematic approach with indigenous medical bodies to introduce wellness tourism and popularize it. Different categories of tourists who visit Sri Lanka should be identified and market specific strategies need to be implemented according to those categories.

In order to attract tourists to Sri Lanka, we have to develop and make additions to the current package; make health tourism a niche product, which comprises of medical tourism (based on western medicine) and wellness tourism, including traditional medicine such as Ayurveda treatments. Here, the indigenous medical treatment systems for kadum bindum (orthopaedic), sarpa wedakam (toxic venom) and umnada wedakama (mental disorders) can also be included. The healthcare cost, infrastructure, human resources, patient perceptions, competencies and the level of government support needs to be improved in Sri Lanka.

**So, do you think going forward, indigenous medicine will be appealing to young people that they would decide to pursue higher education in this area of study?**

**What can the future generation of practitioners contribute to this alternative field of medicine and treatment, and patient care?**



Without any doubt, indigenous medicine remains an appealing field to young people that they can decide to pursue higher education in this area of study. At present, the status of education in indigenous medicine is significant. In Sri Lanka there are two main universities that conduct BAMS (Bachelors in Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery), which consists of five years of academic study and one-year internship in hospitals. All students selected to follow the degree are from

the Bio-Science stream with sufficient Z-score obtained at the GCE Advanced Level examination. The first university in indigenous medicine, the Gampaha Wickramarachchi University of Indigenous Medicine (GWUIM) was inaugurated in March 2021 as the 16th National University of Sri Lanka and as the first university in Sri Lanka dedicated to indigenous medical education. The future education opportunities will widen with the Institute of Indigenous Medicine, University of Colombo and the Gampaha Wickramarachchi University of Indigenous Medicine. Students will have better opportunities to improve training, clinical skills, research capability and confidence. But, as this is a six-year commitment of study, only those with determination should step in to study Ayurveda. There is a Postgraduate Institute of Indigenous Medicine attached to the University of Colombo, which offers MD, MSc and other relevant courses. Significantly, the postgraduate opportunities and basic degree opportunities are available in India for Sri Lankan students as well.

The global Ayurveda market is predicted to grow at a healthy CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) over the forecasted period of 2018-2023, according to the new Market Research Future Report (MRFR) and there will be a scarcity of jobs in many fields due to AI and robotics. Various factors are propelling the growth of the market for Ayurveda. Chronic ailments such as allergy, cardiovascular diseases and rheumatic disorders, minimal side effects, changing lifestyle, growing urbanization, and innovative product launches will open new opportunities for Ayurveda medicine in the global market. Therefore, there are opportunities for entrepreneurs and innovators in the field of medicine and

treatment, and patient care. As the life expectancy of the population increases, so will tight schedules in one's day-to-day life, hence geriatric care would extend its opportunities to Ayurveda as well. Likewise, indigenous medicine can address the needs and value-added services in any field that is related, such as herbal product development.

**How and when did your association with WIM begin and why?**

My interest in WIM was aroused when I came across a post for the WIM 2017 conference. Subsequently I attended the conference, where I met Dr. Sulochana, for the first time. I was inspired by the event and expressed my desire to join WIM. Since 2018, I have been an active member of WIM. In 2019, I was appointed as an ex-member of WIM. Since then, I commit my time and effort to make WIM events a success and help empower other women. The reason for my deep connection with WIM is because of the way in which they approach women's rights while empowering them. Moreover, as a State sector employee, I am keen to work in collaboration with different change makers from various fields. The experience and the self-satisfaction I have gained so far cannot be explained in words. The members of WIM are extremely cooperative and reliable to work with. I feel as if I'm with my family when I am with them. I really enjoy the stress-free environment inside WIM. WIM is my second home.

**As an academic who is a Member of WIM, what do you hope to contribute through your membership to advance the work and interests of WIM?**

I was the first to join WIM as a State sector academic. Therefore, I opened so many opportunities to other academics

and university students as well. In 2019, Professor Chandrika N Wijeyaratne, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo, was a winner at the WIM Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards, which acknowledged her role in education. In 2020, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Kelaniya had been awarded for her contribution to the field of education in Sri Lanka. So I encourage women who have contributed to higher education in Sri Lanka to apply for this award.

In 2020, I was the co-chair of the New Generation Awards, and I guided university students to apply for the award. A student from the University of Colombo had been recognized for her contribution as an entrepreneur. I have been appointed the chair of the New Generation Awards organising committee for 2021 and a Member of the Steering Committee for the New Generation Chapter of WIM recently launched. I hope to work in my maximum capacity to make it a success.

I also launched a project with SLASS' environmental committee and WIM, with the theme 'back to home remedies', an initiative to encourage home gardening of essential medicinal plants. The programme includes to enhance the social, environment and medical benefits of growing such plants, and aims to empower women. We intend to initiate another project to promote sustainable healthy living through traditional medicine in the future, which will comprise of a series of workshops, courses and awareness programmes. My pursuit is to empower women through networking and cooperation by promoting indigenous medicinal knowledge, attitudes and skills.

**I also launched a project with SLASS' environmental committee and WIM, with the theme 'back to home remedies', an initiative to encourage home gardening of essential medicinal plants.**





# CHILDRENS DAY











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# PANEL OF JUDGES

For the second consecutive year, the Women in Management – New Generation Chapter (WIM) and the National Youth Service Council organized the New Generation Awards 2021 under the theme of 'Arise Shine' on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2021

“The NYSC organizes several awards for the youth of the nation but what I believe and appreciate, during the process of judging, is that, where a private, government collaboration occurs, the nominations and the process of selecting winners evolve more on attitudes, soft skills, and deliverables. I am so pleased to sign off the New Generation Winners for 2021 because they are the future of Sri Lanka.”

**Damitha Wickaramasinghe,**  
Chairman, National Youth Service  
Council



“Our country can only transform in keeping with global trends if the new generation of Sri Lankans have the vision, action and passion to prove that Sri Lanka Can. I believe these awards to be a great springboard for such outstanding young local talent. My best wishes go out to this year’s star-studded winners!”

**Varuni Amunugama Fernando**

Jt MD Triad and Director of Derana  
Media Network, Citrus Hotels & George  
Steuart Group.





“I am encouraged to see our younger generation who are absolutely passionate about building a united Sri Lanka. The level of empathy and keenness to understand other cultures and integrate with all as one Sri Lanka gives me hope.”

**Kasturi Chellaraja Wilson,**  
Group CEO, Hemas Holdings Plc



“The old world is being disrupted with a clear invitation to the youth to reimagine and rebuild it . Great to see the bold outlook of our winners in 2021

**Yasas Hewage,**  
Dafedil Academy -  
Marketer, Innovator and  
Entrepreneur



“I am glad to extend my wishes to those who marked the future of this country. You are the icons of the change the nation awaits!!!”

**Prof. (Dr.) Ravi Dissanayake,**  
Senior Lecturer, Department of  
Marketing Management, the Faculty of  
Commerce and Management Studies of  
the University of Kelaniya,



“I am so grateful to the Organizing Committee of New Generation Award for providing me an opportunity to realize the outstanding innovation and mesmerized enterprising skills of our youth generation – the Perpetual Wealth of Our Nation and Game-Changer for sustainable and responsible development with Peaceful Sri Lanka.”

**(Prof) Dr. Suranaga De Silva,**  
Director CERIPA and Act. Director  
CUCEC at University of Colombo



“Looking at the applicants and the eventual winners, I am amazed to see the talents and skills of the youth in Sri Lanka. The winners epitomize the future potential of this nation, the hidden gems who will surely go on to become movers and shakers in their chosen fields. This initiative by WIM is praiseworthy and this year’s winners will surely inspire many more of our youth too!”

**Zahara Ansary,**  
Country Manager, CIMA Sri Lanka





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ONE STOP FOR  
EVERYTHING!

The youth are undoubtedly the future of the world! It's encouraging to note that in Sri Lanka the youth have constantly been in the forefront of change! They are the trailblazers that rise to the occasion time and time again. Not only taking the lead in Sri Lanka but also throughout the world. Our youth have proudly taken our nation to greater heights in the field of sports, art & even technology. Awards such as the New Generation Awards recognize this and give them the much needed encouragement to reach greater heights both locally & internationally! I am glad to endorse this award and I encourage others to join and recognize our youth! I wish this year's winners the very best and hope that you will continue to shine and represent our great nation.

## Hon. Namal Rajapaksa M.P

Minister of Youth & Sports, Minister of Development Co-ordination and Monitoring and State Minister of Digital Technology and Enterprise Development





Best Wishes  
From  
Anoji De Silva



# Bettering Your Best

Anoji  
De  
Silva

**Anoji de Silva is a change manager who loves challenges. As Partner, Ernst & Young, her career has been finely honed through tough experiences that have helped build self-confidence and a can-do attitude. Getting better at something and improving efficiency in the workplace are important work ethics. Anoji spoke with Top50 on a range of topics, including on evolving as a professional and as a corporate in an altered pandemic-present and going forward the new landscape in which professional services firms like EY and companies in general will be compelled to 'look again' at how they do business.**

**Who is Anoji de Silva, the individual, the business strategist and strategic planner, the change manager, accountant and high-flyer - what sets you apart?**

I am a tough 'no-nonsense' Chartered Accountant and/ Audit Partner at work and a 'silly' fun-loving person when not at work. I love spending time with my son Devishke and husband Romesh as we have the same crazy sense of humour and love pranking each other. I also have a small group of female and male friends who I am very fortunate to have in my life.

The untimely loss of three people has impacted me a lot - my beautiful daughter who passed away at birth, my best friend at EY Ronali Goonewardene and the lady who broke the glass ceiling at EY by becoming the first female partner, Lakmali Nanayakkara. These unexpended losses made me realize that life is precious and that we need to complain less, enjoy and appreciate the time we have been given.

As a child, I witnessed how my mother worked to support the family. My father who was a bank manager was posted out of Colombo and , she had to also manage the household affairs and the four of us – me, my two brothers and sister. She was my motivation to be a career woman, as from our small days she used to tell us that we need to be educated and economically independent.

I would also call myself a change manager as I love challenges and thrive in always trying





to figure out how to do things better and more efficiently. In the current context, this is a skill that has become very useful as we need to change strategies and think outside the box constantly to be able to survive and thrive in the COVID-era.

I am also a Philatelist and is looking forward to completing a research I started on "Registered mail of Ceylon" in my retirement. My other passion at present is Scrap Booking and I love to make scrap books for my family and friends to help them celebrate their lives or careers.

My vices are being a 'saree-holic', 'jewellery-holic' and an overall 'shopaholic' - named as my 'essential purchases' by my husband!

**Could you describe your most important leadership experience and how it has impacted you as a leader?**

All the qualities I value as a leader such as integrity and honesty, personal excellence, empowering others and motivating people are what I learnt at Ernst & Young.

We had an EY tagline - "quality in everything we do." As young trainees we were constantly reminded by the partners that whatever you do, how important or mundane, it requires you to ensure that you do your best. This taught me the importance of personal excellence.

As an Audit Partner I am required to give an opinion on the financial statements of my clients. This is a position that requires one to maintain public trust and give an honest and impartial opinion. This taught me the value of honesty and integrity and hard work.

Rosalynn Carter said that "A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go, but ought to be." At EY, we get some of the best young talent in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, our education system does not teach us to reach our full potential. Therefore, I practice "tough love" with them to push them to reach the potential I see in them. One reason why I have been at EY for 34 years is due to the joy I get to see my "EY Children" becoming fully fledged professionals who succeed and thrive in the corporate world. I remember giving one of my lectures to stop being lazy and felt bad at the end of it and said, "please don't misunderstand as I am saying this for your own good".

This young man looked at me and said, "No madam I won't - after all you are like my mother." Happy to report he is now a well-respected professional and still keeps in touch with me.



yield unexpected good results as the team I worked with in San Antonio liked me and offered me an opportunity to move to San Antonio for the balance period of my secondment. They even wanted to explore keeping me back after that - however, I love Sri Lanka and decided to come back.

That too was the right decision as I was able to use all those experiences in a positive manner to build my career at EY. This experience also taught me the importance of accepting opportunities, thanks to my husband and mother who encouraged me. as they come at the right time, but not necessarily at a time that is convenient to us.

**How does your organisation balance high productivity, personalised services and knowledge management?**

The culture at EY is based on our value statement:

"People who demonstrate integrity, respect and teaming;

People with energy, enthusiasm and the courage to lead;

People who build on relationships based on doing the right thing."

These are the values we use to provide high quality services to our clients.

With the advancement of technology, EY Sri Lanka is now able to get current knowledge and training from EY global. EY country practices are grouped under three geographic areas -Americas, EMIA and Asia-Pacific. We belong to the A-Pac region and this also helps us to connect faster with our area colleagues from countries such as Singapore and Australia to obtain insights fast whenever we need assistance or expert advice. This helps us to be very current in our knowledge management.

Being a professional services firm, which also give trainee accountants the opportunity to get on-the job training, we have lots of young talent working with us. The mix of energetic young people and experienced CA's is what helps us to deliver high quality personalised service to our clients.

We also use technology as a key driver in our work. This helps to significantly increase our productivity. Today more than 45,000 people with tech backgrounds work for EY globally making technology and innovation core to EY service delivery.

**As Partner at Ernst & Young, people would see you as having reached the pinnacle of success. But have moments of failure/setbacks ever defined you in such a way as to make you a stronger person/the success that you are today?**

I did an 18 month secondment in USA in 1999. That was an experience full of achievements and setbacks. I suddenly went from being a high achiever to someone from the 3rd world who was not as tech-savvy as my American colleagues. This taught me to have a "can-do" attitude as I had to upskill fast not to fail. Their work ethic was also something I admire and value.

I travelled to the US with my one-year old son and my mother as my husband who had just changed jobs and could not take long leave. Being a short term secondees, when there were long distance assignments we were the first to be picked. I remember being put on a job where I had to travel from Houston to San Antonio. I decided had to take both my mother and son and we lived the week at Marriott Inn and travelled back Friday evening. After trying air travel a few times I decided to drive the 300 km. This was quite an experience, but helped me to build my self-confidence. It also taught me that tough experiences also

**As a professional service provider, your organisation plays very vital business-critical roles that demand physical presence and face-to-face meetings. How do you manage the risk of infection, while ensuring that business would continue? Has working remotely been effective for the type of services you provide? How has your organisation navigated in this challenging space?**

If you asked me in 2018 whether we foresee doing remote audits, I would have said ‘no’. COVID proved the age old saying “necessity is the mother of invention”. The first lockdown happened during our busiest work period – the March year-end where we have some large diversified group audits such as John Keells Holdings Group, Hayleys Group, Softlogic Group and LOLC Group. I don’t think I have even used MS Teams before that. However, we learned fast. We also really valued the EY Technology platforms which are monitored and managed globally. These platforms ensure data security and due to this, clients were comfortable allowing us to access their systems remotely.

EY as a global brand has very stringent rules when it comes to the health and safety of the staff. This compelled us to fill probably the longest health declaration in the country on a daily basis and maintain very strict requirements in compliance with both local and global norms. Even today we have staff who use public transport working from home. With our electronic audit files which we were using pre-pandemic and the secure portals through which we can access client data, we were able to manage the work and issue the opinions without compromising audit quality.

I think the new norm will be a hybrid model where we have auditors doing part of the work virtually with limited physical meetings. All the global firms have been getting ready for digital audits over the last few years. COVID has expedited this process and we will be relying more on digital audit processes which is also expected to make the audit process faster and more reliable. For example, robotic processes will help us to audit a much more extensive samples at a much faster rate. The role of the auditors will change from checking documents to analysing trends and doing focused processes to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the numbers we audit.

**Given the challenges and limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic,**

**and if this situation continues into the future, do you think clients/companies may try to renegotiate their professional service contracts? And how has client performance in this climate impacted your business?**

Our fees are based on the number of hours spent on the client assignment and the level of experience of the staff. The pandemic has actually increased our work as the risk of fraud and error this year is much higher. With the work from home practices adopted by our clients their internal control environments have also changed. We have had to hold our fees in most instances and even reduce the fees



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the badly affected industries.

Unfortunately, as auditors, we cannot reduce the work we are required to do when fees reduce as our work is specified by the accounting standards. It is also a statutory job and we have to retain the quality of the work which cannot be compromised.

Therefore, this year we have had to do more work for much less fees. The positive side of that is that it has also driven us to look for audit efficiencies and challenge and change the way we work to complete the work more efficiently.

**The strict measures that were imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 resulted in many companies experiencing a decline in revenue, while having to maintain fixed running costs. Amidst restricted cash flow, what are the challenges companies in Sri Lanka are facing in meeting tax reporting obligations? What is the impact of government declared relief measures?**

Cash is king at the moment. Companies with adequate cash reserves or funding are able to ride the challenges of COVID much better. The companies that do not have cash are having a very difficult time and the moratoriums given with the intervention of the government has definitely helped these companies. However, unless your business is able to get sales fast you are going to keep declining in business. This has made evaluation of the going concern of a company critical. Companies have had to also cut the “fat” and relook at their businesses and make it cost effective and efficient, which I think is a positive effect brought about by COVID.

Have restrictions to travel impacted organisations such as yours with a global presence - at a local and global level?

Not really. Everyone is very comfortable using Teams and Zoom and the meetings are focused and effective. This has also cut down the excessive amount of travel we had to engage in earlier. However, for people to make lasting and meaningful connections you do need to meet physically, at least periodically. Therefore, I think going forward we will see a hybrid model.

As a WIM Top50 award winner, does winning awards in recognition of career success add value to a woman’s career and if so how (Here, I make the assumption that men are commonly/frequently recognised for career achievements and rewarded for bagging awards)?

Women go after getting awards and recognition much less than men. The WIM award was the first award I have received in recognition of my career and I consider it the most special award I have received, especially since auditors are generally not considered for awards. This definitely shows Sulochana’s vision as through this award she has helped to bring about a huge personal branding to career women. WIM awards also help women who win it to be more conscious of stepping up to help other women. So thank you Sulochana for being such a visionary. WIM awards definitely add value to a woman’s career.

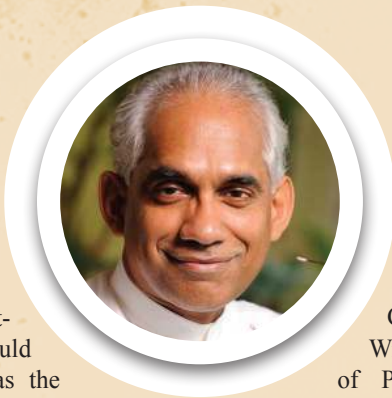


## THE HEART OF RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

# SHARING EXPERIENCES OF LEADERSHIP IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

In ordinary life and in the corporate world these days, the present and future situations are planned around the new normal of the present-pandemic or what could be described further as the ‘ever present pandemic’. While many businesses in the country are still struggling to remain afloat, others have, over a period of one year, honed their skills in navigating operations through the rules and regulations and constantly evolving health guidelines. In this dynamic working environment, the Women in Management (WIM) took the lead in organizing a panel discussion titled “The Heart of Resilient Leadership”, a sharing of experiences from different industry leaders in steering their businesses to ensure continuity through closures and disruptions.

Moderated by Attorney-at-Law and journalist, Medha de Silva, the panellists sharing their experiences were Shehara de Silva,



Managing Director, McLaren Group, Felix Fernando, Group Director, Omega Line, and Sarah Twigg, International Finance Corporation, Eran Wickramaratne, Member of Parliament, and Gany Subramaniam, Chief Executive Officer, Alliance Insurance Lanka.



The uncertainty that businesses and employees were plunged into with the pandemic, was underscored by the panellists, who said that it was this precarious environment that drove them to rise to the occasion to think outside of the box to shine a light of hope for all stakeholders.



Understanding the severity of the situation itself had been challenging, they said, while diversity at the top was an advantage in mounting a range of solutions. Innovation, they said, was an enormous outcome, especially in driving digitization in traditional processes, and thereby allowing continuation. A good case in point is shipping and logistics

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Interestingly, some of the best leadership qualities women exhibiting during the crisis are different to the leadership qualities of men, which are most critical, but are those that are not traditionally thought of as key corporate leadership qualities, pointed out Sarah Twigg, who highlighted that qualities such as empathy, creating personal relationships with team members and staff, putting staff and their wellbeing first because without them there would not be a business have been pivotal in steering businesses in this new environment.

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that play an important part in the country’s import and export goods transportation. Although global supply chains were somewhat disrupted, Sri Lanka’s trade movement continued with the adoption of digital platforms for clearing.

“Uncertainty has been a huge upshot of the pandemic. There was uncertainty in

the staff, the customers and service providers, which creates a lot of anxiety. As a leader, my primary duty was to give confidence to my teams. Confidence that their salaries will not be cut or there will not be a reduction in the head count. As leaders we have to take tough decisions even in times of loss in order to ensure that the staff stay afloat, lest they are demotivated,” said Shehara de Silva, who emphasized the importance of caring and compassion in a time when employees are challenged with the threat of infection, pay cuts and job security and issues with finding transport to get to work, an overall attitude of responsiveness by leaders.

Interestingly, some of the best leadership qualities women exhibiting during the crisis are different to the leadership qualities of men, which are most critical, but are those that are not traditionally thought of as key corporate leadership qualities, pointed out Sarah Twigg, who highlighted that qualities such as empathy, creating personal relationships with team members and staff, putting staff and their wellbeing first because without them there would not be a business have been pivotal in steering businesses in this new environment. She highlighted the findings of a Harvard Business Review study of employee perceptions of 800 different corporate leaders across the world that found the perception of women as leaders increased significantly in the corporate space because of some of these leadership qualities that are not traditionally considered as corporate leadership qualities. “Organizations with diversity at every level have been able to manage the pandemic better, they are able to be more



responsive, pivot better as a diverse group of leaders helps them to brainstorm and come up with a range of solutions.”

Contributing 40 percent to Sri Lanka’s exports, the apparel industry was hugely challenged when the country first went into a total lockdown.

In such circumstances, understanding the severity of the situation was a challenge, said Felix Fernando, who added that some measures were deemed unnecessary and without reason. “Many in the health services were not in favour of allowing our factories to work. We were able to, although very gradually, to make all stakeholders understand the importance of opening factories. We didn’t give up. The industry collective continued its engagement with the authorities to constructively arrive at an acceptable settlement.”

With restrictions to vehicle importation, the insurance industry players soon realized that they had to look elsewhere and apply new strategize to remain in business, hence, as predictions of a drop in general insurance became imminent, they began to leverage on the strengths of a future scenario. “Our opportunity in this circumstances was that we envisaged a tremendous growth in life and health insurance policies. Therefore, we had to be nimble enough to change direction when we lost on general insurance. Our sales are driven by independent contractors and agents, so the challenge was to keep them motivated when their businesses were down in a lockdown environment. We did a lot of online training and development to build relationships. Our staff, regardless of our business objectives and profitability and

## Panel discussion organized by Women in Management (WIM) on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021

growth, were not going to be impacted,” said Gany Subramaniam.

Speaking at the discussion, Eran Wickramaratne, Member of Parliament, said that one of the positives of working in this new normal is the ability to work from home. And, 36 percent of Sri Lanka’s workforce consisting of women is an opportunity for them, as women have kept away from the workforce due to the lack of flexibility. He hoped that this new normal would lead to more women entering the workforce in the future, particularly at the corporate level. Another important point that he brought out was the importance of E-government and its growth. Hitherto the public have had to wait long hours and queue up to attend to many matters of importance, which is somewhat restricted today, which gives every opportunity for the government to consider providing those services digitally. He also underlined the importance of forging partnerships, partnerships led by big businesses that have a future as opposed to the SMEs that are struggling. Government intervention, supported by big companies to save single-owned businesses and SMEs is paramount in piloting the country’s economic trajectory into the future, he said.



# WIM New Generation Award Committee 2021



**Dr. R H S K De Silva**  
**Chairperson of NG Awards 2021**  
(BAMS, BSc, MD(Ay), PG Dip in Env Sc, Dip In Yoga,  
Dip In Psy) Senior Lecturer  
Institute of Indigenous Medicine  
University of Colombo, Rajagiriya



**Ms. Onella Wiranthi Karunanayake**  
**Deputy Chair of NG Awards 2021**  
Executive Directress  
Osm Holdings Pvt Ltd



**Mayanthi Fernando**  
**WIM ExCo Hon. Secretary**  
General Manager  
Worldlink Group.



**Nilam Samsudeen**  
**Director Administration**  
Women in Management

# WIM New Generation Award Committee 2021



**Dr. Thushari Koralage**  
Principal/Managing Directress  
Asian Grammar School and Giggles  
International Montessori



**Zaynab Zafran**  
Certified Education Coach &  
Entrepreneur



**Berne Shanker**  
Independent Consultant



**Dilsha Ruwanpathirana**  
Director – Brands In Style (Pvt) Ltd



# WIM New Generation Award Committee 2021



**Kumari Sinhawansa**  
**Marketing Manager**  
Singer Sri Lanka PLC



**Michelle Gunsekera**  
**Managing Director**  
Chokolaate Magazine  
MG Square Inc.



**Mario Hieler**  
**Business Development Specialist**



**Lihini Weerasinghe**  
**Assistant Director International Youth Relations**  
National Youth Service Council - NYSC



# NEW GENERATION AWARDS 2021 'ARISE SHINE'



*New Generation Awards Ceremony 2021  
On 29th October 2021 at 5.30 pm to 9.30 pm  
at Galadari Hotel, Colombo*

*The Chief Guest*

*Hon. Minister Namal Rajapaksa  
Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports  
State Minister of Digital Technology & Enterprise  
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# A promising future

**Manisha Rodrigo**

Managing Director, Bopitiya Auto Springs, and Chief Executive Officer, Bopitiya Auto Enterprises and Manisha Auto Engineers



**Continuing a family business that has soared through four decades to dominate the local auto-components manufacturing industry, Manisha Rodrigo, Managing Director, Bopitiya Auto Springs and Chief Executive Officer, Bopitiya Auto Enterprises and Manisha Auto Engineers, is a chip of the old block. A positive attitude, enthusiasm, commitment and passion to learn and develop has seen her embracing the multiple roles in the family-owned business with energy and confidence. Today, as Manisha leads the business with members of her family, she stays true to the values and the culture that the founders set forth. While constantly trying to widen prospects, adopt technology, expand and develop new markets and reach new customers, Manisha's greatest asset in her quest is the 'Bopitiya Auto Family' of over one hundred team members.**

**You have been described as one of the youngest CEOs in the country. But someone might point out that this position was handed to you on a platter. Do you think that ownership of your family business is your birth-right or do you think that you have proven yourself to earn the position?**

Because I have immersed myself in the business practically as well as well as theoretically and become successful I think I have proven myself to earn the position of CEO. It's natural for individuals to become accustomed to what they see from an early age. I respectfully recall my repertoire of experiences gained from my father's expertise since childhood. He is the mentor of my entrepreneurial journey. But to succeed, one must have an inherently positive attitude, enthusiasm, and commitment to do so. Then it's not a copy but a condition of building a certain position on your own. It's the result of improving the existing state of

mind and recognizing innovation in various fields on a daily basis, a simple rule that I follow in mentoring in any situation. I have been successful in running a family business because of an inner passion to move forward on my own. Receiving anything on a platter will not ensure sustainability. If I didn't have those skills and qualities, I may not have had the success that I enjoy in my position today. Therefore, I believe that I'm in this position because of my desire, commitment, and passion for learning about the industry.

**The auto-components industry is known to be a male dominated industry. How are you planning on taking this challenge?**

Adapting myself in a challenging industry was difficult to a certain extent. At the same time, it's satisfying when results are achieved through struggle, while one strives to reach excellence in quality and constantly seek new trends and embark on new opportunities. I hope to use my experience to conquer the challenges ahead of me, while staying on course and taking victory and defeat in my stride.

**What are the values and the culture that your entrepreneurial family follows in running the business and how has it contributed to business success?**

We have a family-mentored culture in the three company locations. The companies represent one family although we manufacture different engineering components under different names and different owners. We follow several key values in running our businesses. As a tradition we start the day by hoisting the national flag and the company flag followed by singing the national anthem and reciting the company vision. That is followed by greeting each other "Good Morning". Our doors are open at all times to every employee regardless of the reason. Also, we follow a flat business hierarchy to have a strong communication flow. This family-centred culture has contributed to employees working from multiple capabilities on their own by thinking innovatively, so that ultimately the overall business performance is sustainable as well as innovative in multiple fields.

**Would you give us a description of your company's profile?**

Bopitiya Auto is a prestigious Sri Lankan manufacturer, distributor, and exporter of automotive fastening and suspension components such as bronze bushes, U-bolts, spring pins, shackle brackets, automotive leaf springs, accessories, and light engineering components. Manisha Auto manufactures

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**My style of management and governance is more akin to a familial culture**



rubber and rubber metal bonded suspension components and mounts.

We consistently strive to deliver authentic durable products that are compatible with local road conditions, prioritizing our strategies to increase customer satisfaction. The company constantly explores new methods, expands into international markets, and diversifies its portfolio, to establish it as a prime brand in the auto components market both locally and internationally.

Bopitiya Auto has a workforce of more than 100 dedicated and experienced people along with more than 200 machines for production. The brand has achieved its quality commitment through ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 14001: 2004, and international responsible care certifications. The Asian Productivity Organization in Japan has nominated Bopitiya Auto Enterprises as a “Model Factory” in Sri Lanka.

With the experience of 40 years, and a range of 500 auto component products, we ensure customer satisfaction with dedicated after-sales service. We customize and manufacture light engineering components according to customer specifications. Our products are delivered to any place in Sri Lanka within 24 hours and not late than 48 hours. Given their competitive price ranges, the BAE brand of high-quality products can compete with international brands available in the local market. Our skilled workforce and the sophisticated machine environment, which is one of the best in South Asia, are essential to develop trust with customers.

#### **What is your style of management and governance?**

My style of management and governance is more akin to a familial culture, especially in maintaining relationship between employer and employee. I manage people close to my age, as well

as those older than me. Trust is important in any relationship. Whatever the type of job, I always make sure that employees remain innovative and passionate in their area of work.

Although our business is fundamentally industrial in nature, most people say that I’m a people-oriented leader. And I’m quite happy with that description. The members of the ‘Bopitiya Auto Family’ align themselves with the company culture, which is based on very close relationships that are filial in nature. The family-like relationships help maintain a good workforce to balance and improve productivity. I have an open-door policy which I carry forth from my father to connect with every worker in the organization, thereby helping me to maintain a close relationship with them. It’s a huge advantage to have a two-way communication process, from top to bottom and vice-versa.





**Do you cater to the international market? If yes, what were the challenges in expanding to those countries?**

We are currently exporting to India and the Maldives. Cost is the main challenge in expanding to those countries. It's a challenge to supply a quality product with the competition in the international market. Developed infrastructure facilities, tax benefits, industry support, access to tools, materials and machinery in developed countries are barriers to third world countries like ours to compete in terms of cost. Despite the tremendous opportunities for Sri Lanka in exporting tea, rubber, coconut and apparel, industrial engineering products are beset by quality issues and international price challenges. In order to serve a bigger overseas market, we must add value and other unique features to engineering components.

**What are your goals for the business?**

Since 1981 my family's business has been contributing to the automobile components industry in Sri Lanka. In its early stages, the founders of the company made great sacrifices to become what it is today. Forty years later, not only have we been able to make a technical workforce relevant to this industry, we have also managed to create three model factories in Sri Lanka on par with international standards.

In light of the above, it is only through unwavering commitment will I be able to achieve in the future and continue to contribute to the automotive industry in Sri Lanka. The long-term vision is to explore the potential for expansion into international markets, and consider diversifying the company's portfolio to address the current challenges in the local and international market. I'm empowered with skills and a definite vision to make Bopitiya Auto a prime brand in the auto components market nationally as well as internationally. Also, we are to become an original equipment manufacturer

(OEM) in the future.

**The general notion is that the value of family-owned businesses decline by the second generation. How do you intend to change this notion? How differently do you intend to navigate your family business from the way your father has managed it?**

Yes, it's most likely that the value of family-owned businesses decline by the second generation through restructuring after takeover. But if an entity changes more than 30% from its origins or current state, I think there has to be caution, and hence restructuring should be done very carefully. Every member of the second generation like me have to carry forward the values and the culture that the company has been embracing from its inception. In my case it's a culture of 40 years. Protecting the values and 'the way of doing' things by the business is paramount. Restructuring may force the company's values and the role model to take divergent paths. So, there should be selective decision-making. I believe a business should make sure to move forward without changing its original image.

**Can a family-owned business successfully engage in mentoring and**

**coaching employees?**

Yes definitely. Mentoring and coaching practices are helping businesses grow by supporting the development of their human capital.

Family businesses have a unique culture and distinctive features that make it especially important to discover whether mentoring and coaching affect their performance. I think family businesses flow successfully owing to continuous coaching that happens from generation to generation. Our company culture follows a recruitment process where school leavers are trained within the company and developed through the years, stage by stage while allowing them to rise through the company ladder.

**How can you as a winner at the New Generation Awards inspire your workforce to achieve similar recognition and thereby contribute to the values that WIM promotes?**

Winning the Youth Corporate Leader of the Year Award at the New Generation Awards helped me and my workforce gain trust and recognition, and a sense of empowerment. The award also stirred greater enthusiasm in all of us. My heartfelt gratitude to Woman in Management for the amazing initiative launched for the future generation of Sri Lanka.



# Linda Rose

Chairwoman SUNFO International  
Children's Wing

## Who Am I?

I must admit, when I was very young, I wanted to be a boy. I hated being a girl. Maybe because I only had brothers. I loved to read historical fiction; and it seemed to me that all the heroes of old and the most exciting lives were all led by men. As I grew up, I realised it wasn't being a girl I hated. Rather it was the assumption of what being female meant, such as the lack of opportunities to stride out into the world and make your mark, and needing to be quiet and delicate and feminine – all things



*“Women are constantly pushed to the bottom, not because we are worthless, but because we are willing to sacrifice much to keep harmony and do the necessary jobs others will not do. It's time that those qualities are not seen as weakness but as strength and good, cooperative leadership.”*



I found, and still find, very difficult to do in my zest for life. My passion comes from the example of Jesus; wanting to make a lasting difference in people's lives and leave a legacy which others continue and the ripples of compassion keep moving to others.

## What's a leadership lesson that you've learnt that's unique to being a female leader?

I have always followed heroines who stood out from the crowd, wouldn't accept no as an answer and did what “ladies” weren't supposed to do. I love determined women!

## Does it really matter what others think of you?

As a woman the expectation to be delicate and feminine is very difficult for me to accept. I have a great zest for life, and such expectations may impede one's forward march.

## Do you recall any biases or assumptions made about you?

I always felt judged because I didn't seem to fit into the “expectations”. I was beaten up at school by the girls, and felt more accepted by the less judgemental boys. Hence, it took me a long time as a young woman to come to trust other women.

## My message to women.

Women should support other women with kindness and trust. Respect each other more and judge less.

## Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor or are there specific women who inspired you and why?

My hero from early on was Queen Boudicca from our ancient Iceni tribe in Britain, who reaped revenge on the occupying Romans for raping her daughters and beating her by being the first British leader to galvanise all the surrounding tribes and destroy the Roman garrisons, until the latter sent unbeatable reinforcements.

But at the other end of the spectrum, my lifelong hero is Mother Teresa. Hers was a life of selfless dedication to those in direst need, ignoring the trappings of life she could have had, to focus on those who can never give back.

## You are undoubtedly busy. How do you take care of yourself and maintain a good

## mental health?

It is not easy to keep a balance in life. Having bi-polar II means great energy at certain times and then great depression which can be a battle. My husband is my best friend and companion, and he supports me a lot. My faith is central to my life, and really keeps me focussed and encouraged.

I have learnt to know warning signs when I am overdoing things and to stop and watch a movie or take a trip out. It's very important to know yourself and your body and mind's warnings to rest yourself before you break. I have been at very dark times in my life and this taught me how to rely on God, family and friends.

No one can walk truly alone. We all need strength from each other at times.

## How should women support other women in their organizations?

I don't know why it does seem to be true that women are generally harder on other women than men. Maybe there is something hotwired into our brains about jealousy from the stone ages, but it is not helpful or healthy. Women often judge each other more on surface things than important matters. And yet, we are the ones who want women to break the mould and achieve on behalf of us all. I think we need to be very careful as women to ensure we support our sisters properly and respect and support them equally, or even more than male colleagues.

## What is your biggest indulgence at home?

My indulgence is to curl up on the sofa and watch movies. I love dramatic drama, which shows passion, humanity, love, tears and friendship. One of my favourite films is Lord of the Rings, as the testing of friendship and loyalty between people trying to do good in the face of real evil.







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# Dato Lai Lin Hooi

*CEO and Director of  
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Malaysia*



## Who am I?

I am a simple ordinary woman who started her career from zero. I lost my parents at the age of 10. My life mantra is gratitude. I appreciate everything that is given to me. I look forward to new learning opportunities every day. Determination and perseverance are my strengths. The positive thinking that I always try to inculcate into myself makes a difference in my life.

## What's a leadership lesson that you've learnt that's unique to being a female leader?

I have a passion for driving excellence. Driving excellence is important so that even when you fall it wouldn't be too deep down. I believe the results are different when you strive for excellence.

## Does it really matter what others think of you?

Every individual has his or her prerogative in forming their own thoughts. We can't expect people to think everything good about us. While I may ignore what others have to say about me, I also would take a step back to contemplate about my own code of conduct. I would examine to determine whether there's room for improvement. Moreover, if it's factual I would have to take a look. But certain factors like passing comments about your dressing doesn't upset me.

## Do you recall any biases or assumptions made about you?

Not being an individual of tall stature, I have had female friends bug me about my height. When I was young, people have said that I'll be only good at acting the role of one of the dwarfs in Snow White. But I didn't take those comments seriously because God has given me a pair of legs, which is a reason to be thankful. It's a waste of time to feel sorry over such petty comments.

## My message to women.

Sometimes as women we become too emotional by listening to sob stories and end

up putting our business at risk. I would advise women to use more of their head than their heart.

The lessons that I have learned at my age is that there are a few things that you cannot escape if you want to change your life. One is perseverance. Determination is equally important. You must believe that you can actually change and not give up. In simple terms be fearless. I often think of Susan Boyle who became a sensation through Britain's Got Talent. Had she not taken the first step to go on stage at the age of 47, she wouldn't be where she is, from her first stage appearance to today. Most importantly she wasn't afraid to go on stage at her age. So have no fear. Believe in yourself and have confidence. Don't put your dreams to sleep. If you talk about dreams, but don't do anything about them, they will always remain dreams.

## Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor or are there specific women who inspired you and why?

Mother Teresa. I have always been inspired by her universal love and compassion to mankind. We can never be Mother Teresa, but we can try to instil some of her values into our daily life. The legacy she has left behind makes me think on how to make life more meaningful.

## You are undoubtedly busy. How do you take care of yourself and maintain a good mental health?

I meditate and listen to music. As I always work late, I can only resort to an indoor workout. I go on a dancing cum stretching exercise program for about 40 minutes at least five times a week, which I can do even late at night.

## How should women support other women in their organizations?

Share our experiences with our peers and subordinates. Rejoice at another woman's

“

*have no fear.  
Believe in yourself and  
have confidence. Don't  
put your dreams to sleep.  
If you talk about dreams,  
but don't do anything  
about them, they will  
always remain  
dreams.*

”

success. Lend a helping hand to those who need help. Be a mentor.

## What is your biggest indulgence at home?

My biggest indulgence is music. Music is my food of life; it calms and de-stresses me.

## Why do you think companies would benefit from having more women at the top?

Contrary to the “archaic” beliefs that women are less capable than men, women have proven to have increased productivity and enhancing collaboration, to inspiring organisational dedication. Due to their traits of being more sensitive and approachable when dealing with human behaviour, they make great mentors.







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TV USANA



**RASIKA JAYAKODY**  
AUTHOR / MEDIA PERSONALITY



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ADDITIONAL DIRECTOR GENERAL  
DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT  
INFORMATION, DIRECTOR -  
MEDIA CENTRE FOR  
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HEAD OF SOCIAL MEDIA/EDITOR,  
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**DADALLAGE SRIYANI**  
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### Who Am I?

I am a mother of three girls. I am an accountant by profession. Given my passion to do many things, I am an entrepreneur working in media and journalism, event management, business training, and real estate investment. As a philanthropist, it's my desire to bring change to people's lives and communities and for Africa as a whole. I manage four businesses – an event management company, a business innovation academy, and a real estate business, while founding and publishing the Ladies in Business Magazine Global. As a Nigerian based in the UAE right now, I have launched the Africa Change Movement to initiate activities involving Africans living in the UAE in order to generate positive perceptions of Africans living in the UAE and around the world.

### What's a leadership lesson that you've learnt that's unique to being a female leader?

Being a leader is not easy. Leadership is actually servanthip. Leadership is more than leading people from the forefront, directing, organising, coordinating and controlling them. A good leader leads by example. At the end of the day, a leader serves the people by delivering benefits to them. A leader's actions convey a powerful message. Leadership is about having humanity, empathy and sympathy for people. I consider the greatest strength of a leader is the skill of listening. Because when you are able to listen to people you sense the perspective from which they speak and understand them and give them the appropriate solution.

### Does it really matter what others think of you?

Although it doesn't matter what other think of me, sometimes, perception is real. The way people perceive you can be real at times because you're displaying it in some form even unknowingly. But others' perception is not the perfect measurement of who you are. I wouldn't say that I don't care about what people have to say about me. At the same time, I would look at the people who are

talking about me, because some may speak from a negative or positive point. You've got to listen to what others are saying. If what others are saying is not you, then just move on. Otherwise, you need to stop and listen, and take a look. It's easy to accept the good that's spoken about you. But some truths about you can be bitter. Nevertheless, if it's true you've got to accept it, work on it and find a way to change. While perception may be real in some instances, it cannot be used wholly to convey who you really are.



### Do you recall any biases or assumptions made about you?

### My message to women.

Be passionate about whatever you want to do in life as a business person or as a leader. If you are not passionate about what you are doing there's bound to be trouble. Passion is key to enthusiasm, courage, energy and consistency to continue. Be original. Don't fake it. Don't deceive yourself by faking it. We can't be someone else. I am

who I am. My personality is taken already. It's unique. People can see when you fake it. Social media is driving a frenzy among young people to look good. I wouldn't say all that is bad. But is that the real you? Will I see the same you in real? You have to quit putting on a façade. Achieve a balance in everything. When you remain authentic and true to yourself what is meant for you will be yours. People will find it easier to work with you once they know the real you.

### Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor or are there specific women who inspired you and why?

Oprah Winfrey and Mo Abudu are two

md/ceo sholskoncept event management.  
founder of business innovation academy.  
vice-president luxuryflats apartment  
founder/publisher ladies in business magazine global.  
founder africa change movement uae

women leaders that inspire me to overcome the hardships of life, reach my full potential and someday surpass their achievements.

Oprah Winfrey, an American talk show host, television producer, actress, author, and philanthropist is dubbed the "Queen of All Media". She was the richest African American of the 20th century. She was also once the world's only Black billionaire, and the greatest Black philanthropist in US history. By 2007, she was ranked as the most influential woman in the world.

As CEO of EbonyLife Media, Mo Abudu has made her mark through various endeavours in the corporate world. She has the nickname "Africa's Oprah Winfrey" and Forbes described her as "Africa's Most Successful Woman", while CNN said she was "Africa's Queen of Media who conquered the continent." Abudu was rated as one of the "25 Most Powerful Women in Global Television" by The Hollywood Reporter.

### You are undoubtedly busy. How do you take care of yourself and maintain a good mental health?

I always make a conscious effort to take care of my mental health after completing every project, to rejuvenate and psyche up for the next hustle. I am intentional about treating myself with kindness and respect, and avoiding self-criticism. My support network is my family, so I usually take them on staycations, to relax, have fun and try new things together. These routines make me more efficient and enhance my productivity, and gives me a sense of security and safety.

### How should women support other women in their organizations?

Personally, the best way for women to support other women is to have a clear distinction between collaboration and support. I operate with the tag line "Competition is dead, collaboration is key", which incorporates efforts, resources and power. We should not be afraid in face of competition, but be willing to go into partnerships with women from like industries to create bigger things. Mind you, always collaborate with businesses on par with your level and brand or higher! Negate any risky collaborations by only supporting the organizations that are below your ranking.





# PlainT with Sulo

Plain-T with Sulo was started by Dr. Sulochana Segera in February 2019 as a Youtube Talk Show to bring positivity to social media. Dr. Segera's honest and engaging personality quickly turned the program in to success and in 2020 it was hosted on two of Sri Lanka's major media platforms which are Daily Mirror and Lankadeepa



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SANDYA SALGADO



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APPAREL SECTOR IS  
THE NATION SAVIOUR  
FELIX FERNANDO



BEING A 'NOBODY'  
MAKES ME A JOYFUL PERSON  
RASIKA JAYAKODY



DIVERSITY BEYOND HR  
BANI CHANDRASENA

“I believe in  
working smart”

## Thamari Senanayake

Director Corporate, Regulatory Affairs, Consumer Care  
and Health and Safety and Legal



**As a professional with a dynamic work history, in the public and private sector, Thamari Senanayake, Director Corporate, Regulatory Affairs, Consumer Care and Health and Safety and Legal, at Fonterra Brands Lanka is motivated by new challenges, learning opportunities, knowledge and experiences afforded to her at work. Remaining true to her values in whatever sector that she serves in, Thamari takes pride in her organisation's relationship with small holder dairy farmer families and their rural communities to create a thriving local dairy industry.**



**What has been your career journey? What have been the values and strategies that you advocated in your journey to the top? Share your insights into what women should embrace to succeed at work and the mistakes they should avoid in the process.**

I started my legal career as an executive at the Securities and Exchange Commission of Sri Lanka, the regulator of the capital market, then moved to Ceylon Tobacco Company as Manager Regulatory Affairs, where I had total exposure to regulatory, risk management and governance protocols. I moved back to the public sector as Director Investigations at the Insurance Board of Sri Lanka, which was the regulator for the insurance industry. I'm currently working as the Director Corporate, Regulatory Affairs, Consumer Care and Health and Safety and Legal at Fonterra Brands Lanka. So, all in all, it's a mixture of private and public sector experiences.

I always advocate the tenet that women can take on any role as they are the best at multitasking. I do believe that you should never forego an opportunity, but take on the risk and do your best. Once you own your space you can thrive.

Also as a career woman you should be authentic and be yourself. I have never changed my principles or values whether in public service or private sector. This is your solid ground that makes success sustainable.

**How would you describe your area of work, that is, corporate and regulatory affairs in relation to your company and its line of business?**

Well, in a few words, my role is that of "guardian of the business". As a food manufacturing company we make sure that what we make is 100% compliant not only with regulations and standards here in Sri Lanka, but are benchmarked to international standards, which are the primary tasks entrusted to me and my teams. It also involves working with industry partners and authorities to develop rules, regulations and policies to suite both government guidelines and business growth.

**What is your style of management?**

Working together as a team; simply managing by building relationships. I truly believe in earning the respect of the people that I work with rather than demanding it.

I believe in being myself no matter where I am and what I do. I believe in honesty and transparency, two rules I live by, and I believe these are the principles that earn people's trust. I have tremendous respect to those who live by their values.

**Given that any field is dynamic, what do you do to ensure personal/professional development?**

As a professional you need to keep abreast with the developments that take place around you. Continuous engagement with local and international experts of your area of work is a must.

I have always tried to broaden my area of work and take on new challenges. I'm a lawyer by profession with a regulatory background, yet I have taken on roles to head dairy development projects at Fonterra, which has given me a diverse set of knowledge and experience. I'm also currently involved in managing Health and Safety at Fonterra, definitely another exciting task for me and a golden opportunity at enhancing my knowledge.

**As a leading manufacturer of dairy products can you describe the role that Fonterra plays in uplifting the rural economy and the lives of dairy farmers and the rural farming communities in general?**

As a dairy co-operative from New Zealand, Fonterra continues to work



**I always advocate the tenet that women can take on any role as they are the best at multitasking. I do believe that you should never forego an opportunity, but take on the risk and do your best. Once you own your space you can thrive.**



hand-in-hand with small holder dairy farmer families and their rural communities to create a thriving local dairy industry. We are committed to making a tangible difference by sharing expertise and best practices. We have invested in focused training and development initiatives with our farmers centred on the right herd, right feed and right business model to increase milk yield and quality. Our pioneering Training and Demonstration Farm in Pannala was opened in 2016 to help us amplify the impact of these initiatives.

Since 1997, we have been collecting milk from Sri Lankan dairy farmers for our local dairy portfolio of set and stirred yoghurt, drinking yoghurt and fresh and flavoured milk. To preserve the quality of this milk, we invested in milk chilling, collecting, and processing infrastructure with pioneering technology. Therefore, it's a holistic approach that we take in order to help grow and develop the local industry.

We also began to accelerate our export efforts of value added dairy to countries in supporting the national priorities set out by the Presidential Task Force on Economic Revival and Poverty Eradication.

**Is there any focus on uplifting the lives of women dairy farmers and making them economically independent? What is their level of participation and contribution?**

Local women in dairy are vital in running their families' farming businesses. Women often play substantial roles in the dairy farm, while also balancing multiple commitments such as managing the household, children and sometimes even other businesses. Every day we work with dairy farming women through our training programmes, discussion groups and farm meetings. We encourage these women to find their voice in this environment and when they do, they bring unique perspectives that we can use to grow as an industry.

**The present- pandemic situation has altered lives, especially the work life of people. What have been the challenges of operating in such an environment? What have been the business-critical roles that have been affected? How has your company steered the demand to limit person-to-person interaction and**



**in your experience how have people adapted to working remotely? What are its strengths and weaknesses in relation to your company's business?**

Like for any other company it has been a tough time for Fonterra as well. With lockdowns and people finding it difficult to find their daily means it did affect our distribution network to a certain extent. However, we were quick to analyse these risks and find alternative methods and means to make sure our supply is intact. Being a dairy company that supplies one of the essential food items to consumers, our prime objective was to work with all parties to ensure we have uninterrupted supply of dairy nutrition to our consumers, whilst ensuring the safety of our people. Being a global company we were lucky to share and learn from each other.

We Asians have very intimate and close-knit cultures, hence, it's difficult to work remotely while not seeing each other. But I would say at Fonterra we did a lot to bring people together even virtually, celebrating Christmas, birthdays, fun days and even sessions on knowledge

sharing.

**Given your experience, do you believe that men feel challenged and dislike focused and determined career women? Have you had any experience of being stymied by male colleagues/bosses? If yes, how did you navigate your career through such challenges and your advice to any woman faced with such challenges?**

I was lucky to have worked in an environment where being a woman was not an issue for growth at all. I was always judged by what I brought to the table – the knowledge and the expertise.

However, as a mother and a wife, I too had my share of challenges battling commitments in the home and at work due to time pressure. But what matters is how you make it at the end of the day. I believe in working smart, by which you choose what to prioritise and thereby minimise the impact.

I have worked in male dominant environments. I believe it's the respect that you gain through your knowledge and experience and how you conduct yourself that makes what you are in such circumstances.

**As a member of the Panel of Judges of the Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards what were the challenges you faced in selecting the 'best of the best'? Has that experience given you any fresh insights into women in Sri Lanka's work force? Are women more confident of their ability and contribution to their organisation that they see themselves worthy of recognition?**

Women are incredible; they are multitaskers. Choosing only some from many inspiring stories was the biggest challenge.

I'm inspired by what women can do. Reading their inspiring stories made me feel proud of being a woman more than ever. Through this award, WIM has created a new brand identity among all the winners. It's not only the corporate leaders, but also women entrepreneurs and social workers that are rightfully recognised by WIM. Such recognition throws the spotlight on these individuals and the work they do, thereby giving them the opportunity to do more for society and the work place.





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Abhigheta  
Dharmawardena

# HE Dr. Edna Joyce Santos,

*Ambassador Extraordinaire and plenipotentiary for the Antiquities Imperial Kingdom of the Nation of YHWH Tribe of YHDHYCQN*

## Who Am I?

I would describe myself as a “maverick of optimism”. It is in my nature to bring a positive outlook to every situation. I have been a medical doctor for 39 years, a practicing ophthalmologist for 33 years, and a psychologist for the past 43 years. It was not always smooth sailing as I had faced a lot of challenges, too, in my journey. It is my strong belief in Allah that

I was able to bring myself out of the quagmire I had plunged into. Through my enthusiasm and zeal, I lifted myself and refused to be held back. I was willing to take bigger risks than most people would ever dream of because I trust Allah to protect and guide me every step of the way. My experiences have given me sufficient knowledge for people to trust

my perspective and for me to venture out of the box, for which I am presently consultant and Board member of several corporations. Hence, I found out that I am also an entrepreneur at heart. I have found my passion in writing at this late stage and had written two books which were published by Amazon. And now I am Ambassador Extraordinaire and Plenipotentiary for the Antiquities Imperial Kingdom of the Nation of YHWH Tribe of YHDHYCQN. I am also the Chairperson of Sirach Health and Wellness Ministry.

I am an explorer and highly inquisitive by nature, and willing to be an inspiration to others. My optimism is overflowing. Some people would describe me as one of the most enlightened, easy going, and fearless individuals they have ever met. I am drawn to self-reliant people, driven by new experiences, and my zest for life never ends. Yes, I aim high and work hard to be able to achieve my goals of not only helping the destitute and downtrodden but be able to provide food and shelter for the homeless, Insha Allah, in collaboration

with the A.H.R.O.M. (Ancient Holy Royal of MLKTZDK) of the Antiquities Imperial Kingdom of the Nation of YHWH Tribe of YHDHYCQN. By advocating Perfect Love and Perfect Justice, we will be able to achieve perfect peace, harmony, and unity throughout the world.

## What’s a leadership lesson that you’ve learnt that’s unique to being a female leader?

You have to learn to listen and be empathetic towards your employees and followers as a whole. You have to lead with your heart but at the same time impose discipline and ethical values in all your dealings with everyone. Always be fair and just in everything you do, and share motherly love and care to everyone as much as possible.

## Does it really matter what others think of you?

As long as you know deep in your heart that you treat each and every one like your own sister or brother, and that you do everything for Allah’s sake, you don’t have to worry about what others may think of you.

## Do you recall any biases or assumptions made about you?

“Do not put a ceiling on your dreams. Maintain high ethical and moral standards in your journey. Do not compromise your values. Strive for righteousness, and you will find doors of opportunities opening for you.”

When you are living in this world, it cannot be helped that people tend to make assumptions about you, and be jealous of what you have accomplished, even before they have even met you. When people meet me and get to know me better, immediate rapport is established, and they respect who I am and what I believe in, and their previous assumptions about me will simply go flying out of the window.

## My message to women.

First of all, I would like women to have a strong spiritual belief above anything else. Let everything you do be done for the sake of Allah. Then have a strong belief in yourself that you can manifest whatever you want or desire. Do not put a ceiling on your dreams. Maintain high ethical and moral standards in your journey. Do not compromise your values. Let us strive for righteousness, and you will find doors of opportunities opening for you. Happiness and success will follow you eventually wherever you go. Always be grateful for the favours Allah has bestowed on you, and praise Him always in order to gain salvation for our souls.

## Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor or are there specific women who inspired you and why?

My mother had always been an inspiration to me. She was not only a brilliant doctor but also a great humanitarian at heart. I literally had big shoes to fill when I followed in her footsteps. She and my father had inspired me to be the best that I can be without losing perspective of who I am, where I came from, and to be humble and meek at the same time. You should remember that there will always be someone far greater than you are.

## You are undoubtedly busy. How do you take care of yourself and maintain a good mental health?

Despite our busy schedule, we should see to it that we have enough sleep, eat nutritious and organic foods to maintain good mental and physical wellbeing. I also find the time to walk and exercise. Most importantly, to be still, and pray to the Almighty, for without Him all our sacrifices and diligence will come to naught.





# New Generation Award Winners 2021



**Dinara Chenuka  
Punchihewa**

Arts, Music Dancing &  
Theater (Female)



**Dr. Kudapana Don  
Buddhima Hansinie**

Youth Inspirator Award



**Gehan Cooray**

Trailblazing Youth of  
the Future



**Madhusa Sandeepani**

Best School Prefect  
Female



**Christina Sugirthan**

Best Startup  
of the year



**Yohani De Silva**

Global Local (Outstanding  
Personality who is Sri Lankan  
and has achieved unparalleled  
international recognition)



**Gilany Indakumar**

Arts, Music, Dancing &  
Theater (female)



**Bernadine  
Jayasinghe**

Entrepreneurship  
Service



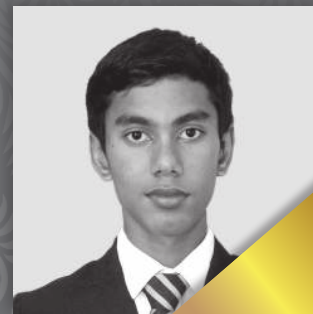
**Chamalki Madhusa**

Young Pioneer Award



**Shiran Fernando**

Young Professional  
of the year



**Ilham Asmone**

Young Sportsman  
of the year



**Tharindu Lakmal**

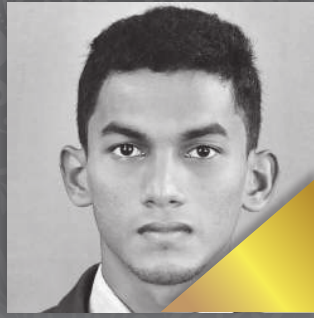
Entrepreneurship  
Manufacturing





**Anna-Marie Ondaatje**

Heritage Award (Outstanding non resident personality with Sri Lankan roots)



**Ajnulabdeen Mohammed Azeem**

Humanitarian Award - Individual



**Hirushi Jayasena**

Positive Social Media Influencer of the year



**Zeron Anas Noorul Jinnah**

Responsible University Graduates Award



**Janith Perera**

SDG Action Award



**Mohamed Fawaz**

Technopreneur



**Nathalie Weerawardena**

TV/Radio/Youtube Presenter of the Year



**Ninuri Asalya**

Young Activist of the year



**Nimesha Perera**

Young Agro Processor of the year



**Sachitha Kalingamudali**

Young Corporate Career Man



**Sajindu Perera**

Young Corporate Career Woman



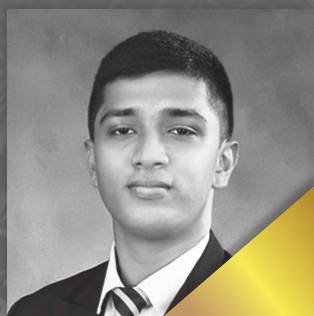
**Razak Mohamed Jafran**

Young Farmer of the Year



**Sachintha Kodikara**

Young Sportswoman of the year



**Darshana Giragama**

Best School Prefect - Male



**Zara Esufally & Humaira Azeem**

Blogger of the Year



**Wijeya Newspapers Limited**

Youth Focus Corporate of the Award



**NG Youth on the Move** is an online talk show done under the **WIM New Generation Chapter** in partnership with **Daily Mirror** and **Lankadeepa Online** to create positivity and encourage youth productivity.



**Give us a description of your designation and the portfolio of duties therein?**

As the Senior Vice President Consumer Banking at DFCC Bank PLC I am responsible and accountable for formulating and facilitating the implementation of strategies that would contribute to the market share, profitability and related objectives pertaining to all areas of the retail business.

**Would you describe your career journey as one of 'rising through the ranks'?**

Give us a brief narration of that journey, including its ups and downs and significant milestones. My commercial banking career spans over 34 years, which commenced with a short stint at Duestche Bank AG, as a clerk, before moving to Seylan

**Leading by example is her mantra. Gillian Edwards, Senior Vice President Consumer Banking at DFCC Bank PLC has a career spanning over three decades, in which, gender was never an issue, as she tells Top 50 that it was her performance and the ability to deliver that enabled her to make her way up the corporate ladder. In her conversation with us, Gillian also explains the dynamic environment of the new normal that has led the banking industry to manoeuvre operations through a fresh lens.**

Bank. I was a pioneer member at Seylan Bank and was privileged to be part of the team that set up the bank. My career at Seylan spanned 23 years, covering all areas of retail and branch banking. On my promotion to Assistant General Manager, I was appointed Head of Personal Banking, responsible for driving and growing the personal banking business. I chose the field of Personal Banking as the subject was close to my heart. In 2011, I joined DFCC Vardhana Bank as the Head of Personal Financial Services. In 2017, I was appointed Senior Vice President Consumer Banking at DFCC Bank PLC.

On relinquishing my services at Seylan Bank in 2011, I was the only staff member who rose to the position of Assistant General Manager after joining the bank as a clerk. I just completed my term as the President of the Leasing Council of Bankers of Sri Lanka

and was privileged to be the first woman to hold the position. Being a woman has never been an obstacle in my journey. Having set my heart on banking as a career at an early age, I was focused and determined to achieve my goals. Yes, I was the first as a woman in many a job role and was given the responsibility based on my ability to deliver and my performance recognized. Regardless of one's gender, on accepting responsibilities you should deliver with no excuses. As a woman you cannot expect preferential treatment in a level playing field. I always believed that I carried out my duties better than any of my male colleagues, and have held strong to my beliefs which has got me to where I am today.

I am a firm believer in gender equality and if one qualifies for the job, he or she should be given the opportunity regardless of gender.

**You have described yourself as being result-oriented and goal-driven. How would you transfer this to your current position and how do you lead your team/s to do that?**

Lead by example. Every leader has his or her own natural leadership style. Whatever



**Deliver**  
with  
**no** excuses



style one chooses honesty is paramount. As much as we focus on results we have to manage relationships, which could be challenging. Leadership is not only about generating numbers that impact the bottom line. One has to strike the right balance which makes the wheel turn. I believe in being decisive, clear and following through. To be a good leader one has to be an even better team player. A leader should be able to step into any role in his or her team. I would not ask of my team any task that I am not willing to carry out, walk the talk as we call it. Respect and trust is earned and actions speak a thousand words. I lead with confidence in myself, which, in turn, inspires trust in others. I am the rock they lean on, the foundation of the structure. We are a team and I believe that the very essence of leadership is accomplishments of goals through combined efforts.

**How do you organize, plan and prioritize your work in relation to your personal life/commitments?**

It's a matter of organizing yourself and it's a trait I have practiced throughout my life. I would plan well in advance not leaving things for the last minute. Women are very good at multitasking. However, there are times when work comes first. As a leader you cannot abandon the ship, hence, the captain has to make certain sacrifices. Success comes at a price and all leaders have faced this challenge. On the other hand, creating the right work life balance is very important. Make time for yourself to recharge your batteries. Eat healthy and get plenty of exercise. Everyone needs that time out, therefore, make time for yourself. You have to live life to the fullest and it's not all about work. Do not neglect those who matter in your life and live to regret. Having a partner who supports your career and shares domestic responsibility would be ideal, but unfortunately all are not that fortunate. We also have so many women who have balanced parenting and careers by themselves, and I applaud their courage and determination.

**So do you think there's a level playing field in corporate Sri Lanka, as mentioned by you in an interview? Don't you think that women in reality face more obstacles to upward mobility in organizations and in society at large? Or in your experience have you seen positive changes to what women have endured for years?**

I cannot state that there are equal opportunities for women across the board. However, there has been tremendous progress made over the years. We have the best examples when it comes to leadership in our country. Let's not forget that Sri Lanka produced the first female

Prime Minister. And we also had a mother and a daughter together lead our country. In my opinion it works both ways.

First and foremost, women need to acquire the necessary qualifications for the job. Next, they should be willing to take on responsibilities. Hard work is a must and one should prove that she is capable of meeting expectations. A woman should not expect preferential treatment.

In a nutshell, it's up to the women to penetrate the so called glass ceiling.

However, on the other hand, there is always the question of the woman's level of commitment to the job. Will she be as committed as a man because of her responsibility towards her family? And yes, some women are compelled to sacrifice their career for family. Some give up working all together, while others settle for low profile jobs due to family pressure.

It's unfortunate that we do not have adequate childcare facilities in the country, which would support a woman in pursuing her career. In Sri Lanka, women have to rely on domestic aides or family to take care of children. But in the west women pursue their careers with no support from extended family and domestic aides. They do rely on a government regulated day care service which gives them peace of mind to carry out their responsibilities. There are so many successful single mothers out there.

Further, a woman can also pursue self-employment. There are so many opportunities for a woman to work from home where she can strike a balance between work and family, which has resulted in many successful women entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka.

As I mentioned, there has been tremendous progress over the years and the number of women in leadership roles have increased. For instance, let's take a closer look at the banking industry which was a male dominated line of work not so long ago. However, with many women entering the industry we also witnessed women taking up key leadership positions. Today, banks are led by women, and going forward we are confident of seeing more women in key positions.

**Banks operate in a challenging environment; more so in the present-pandemic driven situation. How has the banking industry responded and adapted to this changed and challenging environment?**

COVID 19 has changed our world with untold impact on public health and the economies.

In such a scenario, banks played a vital role in the country's economic revival.

As I mentioned, there has been tremendous progress over the years and the number of women in leadership roles have increased. For instance, let's take a closer look at the banking industry which was a male dominated line of work not so long ago. However, with many women entering the industry we also witnessed women taking up key leadership positions. Today, banks are led by women, and going forward we are confident of seeing more women in key positions.

Working in the new normal, banks focused on connecting with their customers, working in partnership with more social responsibility. Banks had to embrace continued reinvention, improving technology and productivity and manage risks.

Under the guidance of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka we witnessed the banking sector leading many initiatives in response to the demands of the economy. Debt moratoriums and various relief measures were rolled out to individuals and businesses that were impacted by COVID 19. Apart from the CBSL directives, banks also extended moratoriums and numerous relief packages to their customers. Special loan schemes at very low interest rates were extended to get the SMEs and MSMEs back on their feet.

Continuous reinvention of business models had to take place to accommodate consumer behaviour. The banking industry turned to technology to facilitate business in the challenging new normal. We witnessed a move from branch banking to digital with minimal branch expansion. COVID 19 has been an eye opener as we need to be prepared for the unexpected. Who would have ever thought that our lives would be impacted to this level? A smart organisation would view this experience as an opportunity to be maximised. Going forward, banks have to be agile, geared for change and able to deliver on customer expectations, whilst never taking tomorrow for granted.

**How would you describe customer behaviour in the current pandemic-driven environment?**

The pandemic has been a huge learning curve for all of us. At the end of the day we deal with human

beings who have gone through tremendous upheavals in their lives such as business failure, loss of employment, salary cuts and loss of loved ones. The need for empathy is paramount as you support your customers through ups and downs. Under the directive of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka moratoriums were extended. Apart from the CBSL, the banks have extended numerous moratoriums and relief packages to both fixed income and business sectors.

The pandemic resulted in customers resorting to technology to handle their banking as physical interaction has been limited. Banking at one's convenience was a key requirement and we witnessed an uptake on digital offerings. As customers searched for cost effective solutions, banks were compelled to improve their processes and efficiencies to manage transaction costs.

**What is your opinion of the regulatory environment and general market conditions today? Do you see an improvement or a greater impact of government policies on banks?**

We have witnessed a reduction in policy rates which have resulted in interest rates plummeting to an all-time low. Monetary authorities are focused on keeping the policy rates static. The low interest rates and market liquidity is aimed at boosting the much needed credit growth to high inflow generating sectors as well as those with potential but are underfunded. Interest rates are expected to hold and we do

predict a further decline in interest rates at this juncture. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka has also hinted at lending targets to banks as a further measure of accelerating lending to the MSME sector.

As we are aware, the CBSL has extended moratoriums and we may see a further extension a third time around to the sectors that are still to recover from the impact of COVID 19. This could be challenging to banks that have already accommodated numerous relief measures to SMEs and MSMEs. Banks are also being challenged in maintaining asset quality with the rising Non Performing Loans which will impact the bottom line.

We do expect that regulatory measures and market forces could lead to consolidation within the banking sector, resulting in more efficient banking operators and economies of scale. Smaller banks will remain vulnerable given the pressure on their capital buffers and profitability.

**As a WIM award winner, what has that recognition meant to you personally and professionally?**

The award has given me a tremendous sense of self accomplishment and one of the proudest moments in my life.

Professionally it has given me recognition in the banking industry. I will remain grateful to WIM for giving me this platform to further my career and achieve my goals.





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(two pages)			
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