

VOLUME 04 | ISSUE 01
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women[®] top 50

ROLE MODELS WHO CAN INSPIRE OTHERS

**Jayanthi
Dharmasena**



RECOGNIZING THE EXEMPLARY ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN

Sarah Twigg

DRIVING THE CHANGE FOR WOMEN

Minha Faiz

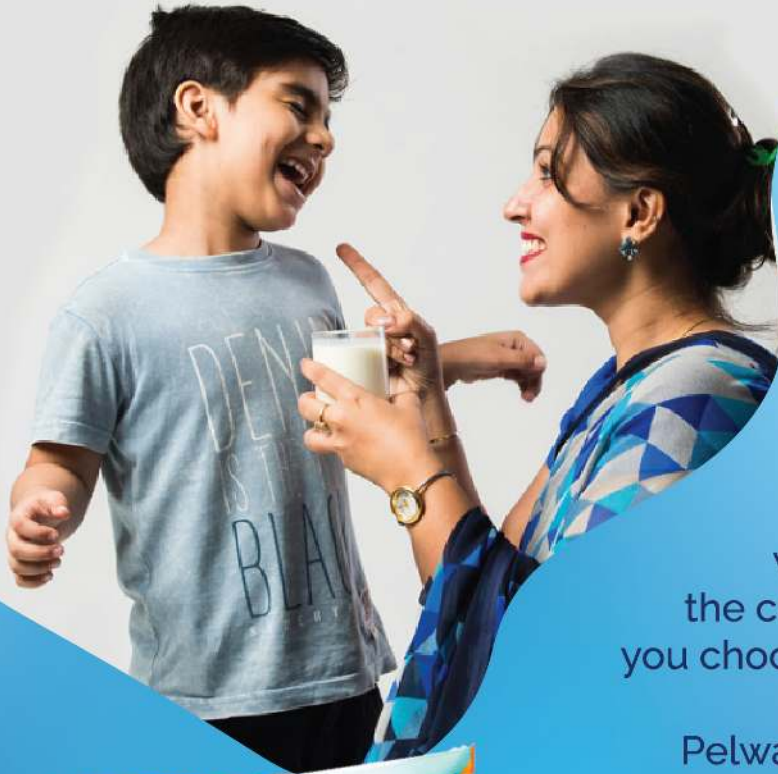


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Changing the game
PAGE 05



Plain T with Sulo
PAGE 20



Ramya Weerakoon
PAGE 34



Persevering through Crisis
PAGE 06



I would encourage
PAGE 23



Aruni Rajakarier
PAGE 35



Top50 Awards Press Launch
PAGE 08



She is (R)Evolutionary
PAGE 26



Deshika Rodrigo
PAGE 36



Girls should be seen and not heard
PAGE 09



Sandra De Zoysa
PAGE 29



Shashi Kandambi Jassim
PAGE 37



Top50 Professional & Career Women Awards Panel of Judges 2020
PAGE 11



Sharmila Ragunathan
PAGE 30



Dilhani Iresha De Silva
PAGE 38



Lessons from an illustrious corporate career
PAGE 12



Tania Polonnowita Wettimuny
PAGE 31



Message from the New Generation Awards Chair
PAGE 40



Message from the WomenTop50 Conference Chair
PAGE 16



Dhashma Karunaratne
PAGE 32



I am passionate about youth empowerment,
PAGE 45



Women Top50 Virtual Conference 2020
PAGE 17



Ranmal Ekanayake
PAGE 33



I never compare myself with others, but, I work really hard.
PAGE 51



womenTM
top50
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AND CAREER **WOMEN**
Awards

SRI LANKA AND MALDIVES 2020
TENTH EDITION

#sheis(R)Evolutionary

In 2020, WIM Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards celebrated 10 years of recognizing women's achievement in Sri Lanka. Looking back, I realize that, it was not about just an event, it was about the brands that I have created by bestowing recognition to over 500 women serving in different fields, accompanied by a desire to be a light in this dark world that has made WIM Top50 Awards a success.

Many people wait for the right time and for a stable environment to initiate something, but that was not the case with me. In fact, I will say that it was the opposite. In my early 30's I left a promising career to play the role of mother and father to my two children with no financial support. With no business background, I went ahead and started my own consulting company, struggled with home, business and children. As a young woman it was one of the most exacting periods of my life. I believe that I have managed to come this far because I never waited for the right time and neither did I have any reservations about my intentions.

When WIM celebrated 10 years in 2019, I launched Plain-T with Sulo, a Talk Show to change and inspire men and women. I am not a TV presenter, neither do I believe that I possess the looks or training to be a TV presenter. Yet, as a believer in the "Power of Intention", I launched the talk show under my name. For the past 2 years I have interviewed 40 personalities, local and international, in Sinhala and in English. My intention was to make a change in the way talk shows generally work, where the focus is quite often someone popular, an actor, a business legend or a politician; I wanted to speak with any woman or man who had the ability to inspire others and show that perfect imperfections are

what people are made of, still everyone has a story to tell. With these interviews I am still on a learning curve. Many of the individuals that I have interviewed had a story, but most importantly for 90% of them, my talk show was their first public interview.

In addition, when Top50 Awards celebrated 10 years in 2020, I introduced the New Generation Awards. I do not believe in being comfortable with where I am today. I continue to look for a purpose in life. The New Generation Awards is aimed at celebrating and recognizing young talent, achievements and contribution to this country. This new awards is different, in that, I made it gender neutral. On 8th December 2020 when 25 young people received recognition for their achievements I realized that there is always a positive outcome when you have the right intention.

The journey of WIM and WIM Top50 Awards was fraught from failures, grew out of an experience that led me sometimes through the deepest and darkest recesses, but through it all its intention was pure; it was a creation that sprang forth from love and passion.

I sign off with gratitude to Nilam Samsudeen, who has been the pillar of WIM's success, to IFC and DFAT for partnering for the past 6 years, to all business partners, friends, WIM members and my family.

Changing the game

Dr. Sulochana Segera
Founder/Chairperson
Women in Management



This year's 'Top 50' Professional and Career Women Awards comes at an unprecedented time. We have all just lived through a year like no other with the ongoing global crisis, triggered by COVID-19, exacting a harsh toll on people and businesses.

It remains a challenging time for many women and men.

So as we honor the work of top women in Sri Lanka through the 'Top 50' Awards by Women in Management (WIM), in partnership with IFC, it's also fitting to acknowledge that in many ways, women have borne the brunt of the impact from both an economic and social perspective, eating away decades of hard-won battles in terms of gender equality.

With plummeting economic activities due to COVID-19

Amena Arif
Country Manager
International Finance Corporation
Sri Lanka & Maldives



Persevering through Crisis

restrictions, women, who typically earn less and hold less secure jobs than men, are at a risk of losing work and livelihoods. In Sri Lanka, some of the industries hit the hardest by the pandemic, such as the garment sector, are primary employers of women.

Women business owners and employees have also often taken on greater household responsibilities, including for child and elder care, in the face of school closures and restrictions on mobility. These factors have combined to result in more women losing their jobs due to the pandemic than men – global estimates suggest women's job loss rates are about 1.8 times higher than men's. There has also been a sharp rise in gender-based violence as a result of the worldwide lockdown and the increased financial pressures faced by individuals and families.

First a health crisis and then an economic crisis, COVID-19 has taken a severe toll on many businesses, with enterprises large and small either cutting jobs or reducing work hours of their employees. Disruptions caused by lockdowns have also impacted the ability of businesses to keep operating.

As we all look forward to a resilient recovery, there is an opportunity for the private sector to rebuild their companies with a focus on gender equality. The women leaders and organizations that are recognized through the 'Top 50' Awards are among those at the forefront of this recovery effort. We should look to these award winners as role models and trailblazers for the way ahead.

In addition to co-hosting the awards for the last six years, IFC and WIM have together created stronger impact in Sri Lanka creating opportunities for women through the mentorship programs, training events and more recently, webinar series aimed at skilled building for stronger careers for women, enabling their progression from senior management to boards. More than 400 women have participated in these programs adding to the sustainability of WIM and broadening its value add.

At IFC, we are helping to address rising inequalities by factoring gender considerations into our COVID-19 relief and recovery efforts and supporting private sector companies and investors to do the same. In Sri Lanka, one of the first countries to draw on support from IFC's US\$8 billion global COVID-19 fast track financing facility, we supported one of our longstanding partners to help small businesses survive and in doing so, helped to preserve jobs. Over one-third of this support went to businesses owned by women.

Globally, during the last fiscal year, over one-third of IFC's advisory portfolio of \$1.5 billion was dedicated towards efforts aimed at closing gender gaps. We work with companies to enhance the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women. We also help companies increase women's access to financial services, technology, information, and markets.

Through the Women in Work partnership with the government of Australia, we are working to close gender gaps in Sri Lanka's private sector while improving business performance. The program is aimed at enhancing the quality of women's employment in the private sector, support increased access to financial and nonfinancial services for women and women-owned businesses, and help strengthen linkages with women in private sector supply chains. And by recognizing the important role women leaders play in the process of closing gender gaps – as role models, trailblazers and ultimately as individuals who can start to turn the levers of power – the WIM Top 50 Awards are an important part of this agenda.

***A message
from the acting
Australian High
Commissioner***

Australia is proud to be supporting the Top 50 Professional and Career Women Awards 2020 through our Women in Work program. The awards have been recognising and celebrating Sri Lankan women leaders for their contributions to sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the country for the past 10 years. Awards such as these, within the country, corporations and communities have led to more inspiring stories of Sri Lankan women entering the workforce and global market. This year it is even more important to encourage women to enter, and continue, in the workforce during COVID-19 as they face additional care responsibilities and safety concerns.

The recognition and the value attached to these awards is important to encourage more women to take up leadership positions. Among the awards “Male Champion of Change” is an important category in recognising men who support and stand by women on the way to the top. Australia’s own Male Champions of Change initiative encourages male leaders to come together to break down social and cultural norms and create momentum towards greater inclusion and diversity.

With only one in three women participating in Sri Lanka’s formal labour force, increasing their participation becomes vital for inclusive economic growth and towards COVID-19 economic recovery. Research shows that increasing women’s participation in the economy boosts sustainable economic growth in the country. In anticipation of achieving this goal, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) collaborate on the Women in Work program, that seeks to increase the number of private sector players who adopt gender-smart business solutions and, as a result, report improvements in their performance. Greater diversity and inclusion in Sri Lanka will, in the long-term, lead to inclusive economic growth in Sri Lanka.

Happy 10th Anniversary Top 50 Professional and Career Women Awards!

***Amanda Jewell
Acting High Commissioner
Australian High
Commission
Colombo, Sri Lanka***



TOP 50 AWARDS PRESS LAUNCH





GIRLS SHOULD BE SEEN AND NOT HEARD

Coming from a school system which espoused that “girls should be seen and not heard”, I am surprised that I am writing as the Chair of the Judges awarding “Top 50 Women in Management”!. Yes, times have changed indeed , and today women are empowered more and more to compete and excel in areas hitherto unheard of for women.

This award program which is a collaboration of WIM, IFC and Australian Aid is very special as it encompasses all areas and social strata of our society. From a firebrand young activist to a silent warrior doing good to a neglected section of our society, to a clever marketing strategist taking a brand to the world, and a savvy corporate CEO, who has reached the pinnacle through sheer hardwork and competence,

The TOP 50 WIM awards recognizes and rewards them all. Yes, it is indeed a very inclusive and diverse list of awardees, all carefully evaluated and awarded, purely on their merit.

On behalf of the rest of the judges I wish to thank the 3 organizations for organizing this program and sustaining it for the past 10 years . We wish all the recipients our heartiest congratulations and sincere best wishes for future success. We enjoyed reading of your achievements so far and look forward to seeing you progress in the years ahead.

Thank you and God Bless you!

SHIROMAL COORAY

Top50 Awards - Chair of Panel of Judges 2020
Chairman & Managing Director - Jetwing Travels (Pvt) Ltd
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Sarah Twig
Program Manager, Women in Work
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2020 Chairman & Managing
Director of Jetwing Travels,



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Jayanthi Dharmasena,
Managing Director of Hayleys
Agriculture Holdings Ltd, Kumara
Samarasinghe, Marketing Consultant,

A portrait of Dilani Alagaratnam, a woman with dark hair, wearing glasses and a dark top, smiling. The background is a mix of black and teal geometric shapes.

Attorney-at-Law Dilani Alagaratnam's final assignment with her long-term employer, John Keells Holdings was as President Group HR, Legal, ERM, CSR and Sustainability. In this interview with Women Top 50, Dilani recounted her corporate journey that began when diversity at Board level was minimum, going on to outline the dynamics of the altered workplace setting of today, the issue of gender pay-gap, skill choices of the emerging workforce, and the influence of the local and global political landscape on business.

Lessons from an illustrious corporate career

This may sound like too familiar a question, but your experience may have been different and hence useful for the readers. What were the challenges, if any, that you had to face in your journey to the top at JKH?

I did not have a challenge as such which was all pervading. I was fortunate to work in an enabling environment where fact of being a woman was not material to any decision, and you were judged by your work and not by your gender.

I joined the organisation in 1992. This was immediately thereafter its first Sri Lankan chairman was appointed and also 3 very young persons, of early 30s, appointed appointed to the Board immediately thereafter, breaking away from corporate traditions that prevailed at that time. away from corporate traditions that prevailed at the time. One of the 3 was a woman and possibly the only woman amongst the top 25 companies at that time. In this backdrop I was fortunate that I joined the company when the tone had already been set from the top.

Like anyone, I had challenges managing my home time and work time. These demands varied depending on needs of my own personal life cycle. However, I never got weighed down by work as I believed in working smart. Further, I had a very supportive home environment where work ethic was paramount.

Having been in HR and given your legal credentials, what mechanism do women use to cope with working in a male-dominated work environment?

The coping mechanisms can vary from not letting it bother them, being realistic that that the composition is not going to change overnight and therefore getting on with their jobs and carve out their own niche; to trying to act like men to seek perceived inclusion.

Do you think societal expectations and beliefs about women's leadership abilities have evolved for the better over time?

Yes, definitely. There are so many role models today we can look up to and learn from. The exposure to how things are done globally with the current unlimited access to information, globalization, increased travel overseas by Sri Lankans for work/vacations have helped in changing the societal

expectations and leadership abilities.

Have you had any mentors, in your career and personal life, women in particular?

I have had mentors. Only woman, who has made a lasting impact is my mother, who bodes no excuses and lives by the mantra that everything is in the realm of possibility.

Researchers have pointed out that one of the main problems that contributes to the gender pay gap is occupational segregation, where men and women remain concentrated in different jobs and fields. Based on your experience, how far is this true for Sri Lanka and what has been done so far to address and minimize this trend?

Job worth, which can be assessed using certain proprietary tools, can and most likely vary from one job to another. Therefore, if we leave gender out of it, every job does not pay the same sum though every job in a particular setting theoretically should pay the same. It is discriminatory practices on the part of an employer that would skew this.

If one looks at the question why certain jobs do not have enough men or women in them, this has its roots in societal beliefs. These beliefs are changing, and barriers are breaking down. Thus, today we have men as pre-school teachers and women have moved into working in space stations to hard core sales, though the numbers, in comparison, are few.

In Sri Lanka, with equality before the law and non-discrimination guaranteed by the Constitution, there is unlikely to be a gender pay gap in the public sector. When it comes to the private sector, the Wages Boards decisions are not discriminatory and private sector is bound by them. However, there could be discriminatory practices adopted at a white-collar level. Such practices, though not regulated, are unsustainable. They lead to employers losing out on the best talent in the medium to long term. This would therefore ultimately impact the business negatively both by way of reputation and profits.

Though there is opportunity to discriminate at these levels, good employers don't. They adhere to a code of conduct or principles that clearly set out non-discrimination as a core principle. The advent of social media, and portals like Glassdoor allows people

In Sri Lanka, with equality before the law and non-discrimination guaranteed by the Constitution, there is unlikely to be a gender pay gap in the public sector.

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to call out miscreants. Further, the proposed changes to the labour laws will make such discrimination difficult as non-discrimination will become a justiciable right.

How do you think this male-female segregation in jobs will change with the millennials and especially Gen Z or the iGeneration being exposed to many choices of independent work and 'passion' driven choices?

These younger generations have a very global outlook, are exposed to social media from virtually their birth and do not see themselves lesser than the next person. Therefore, I believe that they will demand non-discrimination and complete transparency. As the



“

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”

Generation enters the workplace towards attracting them, organisations will be compelled to adopt non-discriminatory practices. It will become the norm and the gap will close with time. I reckon that it will happen faster than it did a decade ago, when one considers the current trends.

Political stability is a necessary condition for an enabling business environment. The focus in this regard is always on an incumbent government. But can the business community here play a role in helping achieve sustained political stability while moving away from cronyism, which the private sector has also been accused of and benefited from?

Business community and the civil society in general can and should pressure governments to agree on and stick to certain fundamental overarching policies which should apply irrespective of which government is in power. This minimizes instability in the private sector as well as the public sector and allows them to function without too many costly upheavals or disruptions.

What businesses have wanted

from successive governments is policy certainty. It would be very difficult for all businesses to speak with one voice, just as much as the civil society cannot. It is an ideal we can pursue but I am unsure whether we will achieve this utopian dream. However, businesses could, through the Chambers they belong to, put forward their collective thinking. There are bound to be black sheep and we should not find fault with the private sector for acts and omissions of a few. We love controversies and sometimes get clouded by them and lose the wood for the trees.

The diverse collection of obstacles and potential dangers occurring globally exposes companies/businesses to risks, threatening their strategic objectives and opportunities and affecting their financial wellbeing. What in your opinion, given your experience will be the risks threatening local companies as a result of local and global trends?

Adage that we live in a global

village, is now being played out very painfully with the global crisis we are facing with COVID-19. It brings home how dependent we are on one another, whether we are from the global north or the south, whether we are in a large metropolis or a remote village tucked away in a far-flung place. All global supply chains are connected, and we are seeing the effects of the “factory of the world” closing as well as the reality of the porousness of our political boundaries.

If we do not assess risks systematically on a continuous basis and mitigate and or identify the mitigatory steps that will come into play on the happening of an event, to the extent of the risk appetite of the business, we will be ill prepared to weather these risks. Every organisation should have a risk grid which they revisit and update periodically, to take the element of surprise out of the equation.



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MESSAGE FROM THE WOMEN TOP50 CONFERENCE CHAIR

It was a great pleasure to take part in TOP 50 Conference as Chairperson specially to demonstrate the resilience and agility of Women In Management during a crisis period through meticulous planning and executing key events in the WIM annual calendar. By nature and nurture, women are determined and courageous so this event itself displayed the strong traits women possess, further through this conference Women In Management “Women in Management had in-depth’ in-depth conversations on stage to discuss challenges encountered by both career and business women/men during a crisis. Over 22 eminent speakers discussed remedies, strategies and success stories through their intensive experience and exposure to shape our thinking and behaviour for the next phase of our journey to create value to our economy and to lead an exemplary manner during a crisis

On this occasion, we are very much delighted

and grateful for all our partners IFC & DFAT and stakeholders for the collaboration especially amidst a crisis that continued with a purposeful cause to contribute to greater success of the TOP 50 Conference presented by Women In Management. We strongly believe rich content and insights definitely inspired many irrespective of gender to be an elite performer in their respective industry at the same time by organizing very first virtual conference members of Women In Management also gained novel set of experience.

Shanika Ranaweera
Women Top50 Conference Chair 2020

WOMEN TOP50 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE 2020

Wrapped Up with Insights on Leading through Crisis

The four day deliberations of the Women Top50 conference 2020 organized by Women in Management (WIM), in partnership with IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, and the Australian Government successfully concluded on a high note. Under the theme ‘Leading Through Crisis,’ this year’s conference, held for the third consecutive year, was hosted as a virtual forum, adapting to the new norm. The conference held during the first week of December focused on sharing knowledge on navigating through the COVID-19 pandemic.

skills needed to navigate through the challenges caused by the pandemic. Sessions ranged from sharing experiences from women leaders who have led organizations through COVID-19 to coping with work from home, balancing work, family, employer and employee expectations.

The conference commenced on 1st December with Hemas Holdings Group CEO, Kasturi Chellaraja Wilson, sharing her extensive knowledge on the theme ‘The paradox of leadership after COVID-19.’ With a touch of personal

there is a transformation happening.”

This was followed by a panel discussion on ‘Lessons from the lockdown: Navigating leadership techniques during COVID-19,’ moderated by Summaiya Macan Markar, Head of Legal and Compliance at Allianz Insurance Lanka Ltd. . The insightful session featured Amena Arif, IFC Country Manager for Sri Lanka and Maldives, Shehara Jayawardena, Joint Managing Director McLaren Group, , Yasas Hewage, Director/Co-founder of Dafedil Academy of Business, , Shermila



The lockdown and social distancing measures in place has had a significant toll on business operations as well as on employees. This year’s conference focused on leadership techniques and

stories and experiences, Kasturi talked about her journey sharing insights on how situational leadership should be adopted. According to her, “you have to slow down and start the race again when



Ragunathan, Director of Haycarb Environmental Engineering, and Nehi Singha, Scientist/Academician. The discussion looked into the different leadership techniques and methods adopted by the panel to navigate their respective organizations and businesses through difficult times, including crisis management techniques. The panelists also spoke on how they needed to embrace change and accept the new way of life, and also on the importance of having the right attitudes to face the very fluid state presently in place. The session also looked into various initiatives taken by the respective organizations in terms of staff well-being, including mental health and other corporate social responsibilities.

The second day of deliberations kicked off with a focus on private sector response to COVID-19. Sarah Twigg, IFC Women in Work Program Manager and Lopa Rahman, IFC Corporate Governance Officer, shared global insights on the importance of building resilient businesses, specifically small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and on how private sector employers can support employees through the COVID-19 crisis. Insights from the IFC tip sheet for company leadership on crisis response were also discussed, including IFC’s experiences with clients that successfully navigated through the crisis.

Day 2 continued with a panel discussion on ‘Occupational Health

and Safety Issues,’ moderated by Lopa Rahman, IFC Corporate Governance Officer, featuring Sanath Palliyaguru, Human Resources Manager, Trelleborg Lanka (Pvt.) Ltd., Chiranthi Cooray, Chief Transformation Officer, Hatton National Bank, Ajith Weerasinghe, CEO, CIC Feeds/Poultry and Bram Woltjer, IFC Specialist on Occupational Health and Safety. The session speakers representing three sectors - manufacturing, banking and agri business - highlighted the importance of ensuring health and safety at work, not just to protect lives, but also for business survival. The panelists shared detailed technical knowledge on preventing and managing health risks at the work place, specially targeting occupational health and safety of human resources, customers and other stakeholders, ensuring business continuity that led to profitability even during this crisis.

The third day of the virtual Top50 conference started with a session on ‘Gender Diversity at the Board: What skills, knowledge and techniques do women bring to the board.’ The panelists of this session included Aroshi Nanayakkara, Aruni Rajakariar, Minette Perera, and Lopa Rahman, moderated by Ranjan De Silva. Deliberations of this session targeted those who are in mid-senior management and members on boards, with insights on how diversity can bring added advantages to the board room, including 20-40 percent higher return on assets and return on equity.

The penultimate day of the virtual forum ended with a session on ‘Work from home during COVID-19,’ featuring Roshanie Jayasundera Moraes, Portia Jayamaha, Suresh Shah, and Suzanne Wooster Prematilaka, moderated by Dr. Sulochana Segera. The session gave more of a practical point of view in dealing with work life balance, relationships with spouses and children, with personal experiences from both men and women and stories from the panelists. One insight on ‘work from home’ is the importance of giving each other the space required and on being organized.

The WIM Top 50 virtual conference 2020 successfully concluded on a high note with powerful messages from a distinguished panel of speakers including H.E Trine Jøranli Eskedal, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway to Sri Lanka and Dr Thomas (Tom) Davis, Acting Deputy High Commissioner, Australian High Commission in Sri Lanka. Moderated by Lopa Rahman, IFC Corporate Governance Officer, the speakers shared lessons from gender equality efforts made in their respective countries, and how that has led to impactful transformations. In addition, they shared some of the immediate responses made to address challenges during COVID-19 in Sri Lanka, while their embassies remain committed to the longer term priorities. The discussion is now available on Women in Management facebook page- @SLWIM.



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I would encourage leaders, at every opportunity I get, to focus on getting the house in order.

Introducing diversity, inclusion and wellbeing to all managers and employees at the London Stock Exchange Group in Sri Lanka is the responsibility of Bani Chandrasena as Head of Inclusive Diversity. As a strong proponent of good practices in the work place, she believes in the importance of doing the right thing and being a role model for others to follow. Her passion for gender diversity had enabled her to take a lead role in establishing Diversity Collective Lanka, the women-in-tech association that aspires for greater visibility for women in the IT industry. She spoke with Women Top 50 about her work and the impetus for an inclusive culture at LSEG, which she believes should be the widespread practice that would eventually impact the financial bottom line.

BANI Chandrasena

How can businesses embody diversity and inclusion and why should they?

Employees are any companies' greatest asset. If you can get the best from your employees, this should make business sense and will impact the financial bottom line. Creating inclusive cultures encourages employees to bring their best to work and do their best. Employees bringing their A game to work impacts businesses in more ways than financial; it impacts employee

engagement which will have a positive impact on employee retention. This culture will also encourage more diversity, which is one of the most important business indicators globally today, and research proves diversity does impact top line and bottom-line.

If diversity matters so much to ensure performance and success, then how should organizations identify the strongest candidates?

Businesses should always make selections based on assessments which directly relate to the job. It is good to also, where possible, to review potential for future roles and not just the role at hand. I would not advocate hiring merely for diversity. It is important though, to be aware that at interviews and shortlisting, we all do tend to make biased decisions



unconsciously. My advice would be to minimise this kind of decision making, and to ensure that the assessments for selection are created inclusively.

Diversity also means that it could either work for the best or against. How do you ensure that everyone in such a complex ecosystem transcends beyond the rhetoric to make it successful in practice?

I am a strong advocate for inclusion. I agree that if you focus (too much?) on diversity it can be abused, and the impact can be counterproductive. If inclusion is the way of life (a few behaviours which are clear and held as the standard for everyone) in your company, starting with leadership being held accountable and giving every employee a voice towards holding each other accountable against unconscious bias and discrimination, I think that is a good start towards an authentic inclusive culture.

How about compliance by the leadership - for instance when at a national level we hear rhetoric that somewhat promotes exclusivity and negates the need for diversity and inclusion - do you think such a mindset can permeate company leaders and the working environment?

I don't think we can wait for others to do the right thing. I would encourage

leaders, at every opportunity I get, to focus on getting the house in order. This I mean at an individual level also, i.e. even if my company or my community does not behave as inclusively as I would like it to, it doesn't mean I sit back and watch and wait for others to do right. I have to be ready to behave as inclusively as I can within my remit and continue to do the right thing and be a role model for others to follow. If everyone thought like that we would be living in a very different world. As cliché as it sounds - change has to begin with oneself.

Do you think Sri Lanka has high-performing talent that could be attracted and retained?

Sri Lanka has high performing talent which has even more potential if there is more empowerment. I am seeing more and more young talent that have the right attitude and potential for massive performance and innovation, but we really do need to move away from the micro management culture. This I think is one way to kill great ideas and accountability.

What is your role as Head of Inclusive Diversity in your organization? What have you done differently to be acknowledged at the WIM Top 50 Professional and Career Women's awards?

I don't think we can wait for others to do the right thing. I would encourage leaders, at every opportunity I get, to focus on getting the house in order.



My role has two areas of focus; within the company to introduce diversity, inclusion and wellbeing to all managers and employees and influence our culture. Also to engage with the industry and country where appropriate, to influence these good practices and thinking, so that LSEG is building a future pipeline that is diverse and inclusive in Sri Lanka.

I believe I was recognised for my work in the industry that I have been involved in the last two years. I lead the SLASSCOM Capacity Forum that is building new tools for educating our teachers and youth on better attitudes and relevant IT that will lead to life success impacting high skilled employment in Sri Lanka. Ensuring there is gender balance in these projects is a priority for me.

I have also been part of the pioneering board that created Diversity Collective Lanka; the women-in-tech association that is linked to SLASSCOM, ICTA and the academia with the objective of raising the visibility of women in the IT Industry and driving change starting at school level, while holding a mirror at our own IT corporates in Sri Lanka.

With today's greater visibility into businesses what do you think customers demand from organizations, for instance in terms of the values that an organization espouses/stands for?

The consumer has a lot more power and influence today which means even customers are being held accountable towards more holistic intent unlike before. How company actions impact individuals, such as you and me, the environment, and the planet is a lot stronger and has a voice that cannot be ignored.

What are some of the best practices for diversity and inclusion in your workplace?

We are rolling out a flexible working policy giving all employees an opportunity to work from home, as well as amend working hours when needed, which we believe will improve work-life balance. We have subsidised Crèche options for fathers as well as mothers across all our locations. This includes support for shift working teams. At a Group EXCO level, gender diversity has become a KPI - ensuring that we stay focused to get a better gender



HR requires a lot of patience and multi-tasking, which I think is why many women have been influenced towards this field and become successful. I think HR started more as a caring profession and role in the company, hence why more women chose and were chosen for these roles.

balance at leadership. We are adding other diversity initiatives in this decade, which is a journey LSEG is on as we do need to build the pipeline in order to see real change in the future. We are also making wellbeing a priority which

I think is a great complement to D&I; especially mental wellbeing which is not talked enough about in Sri Lanka.

Why do you think we see more women in HR than in most other fields?

HR requires a lot of patience and multi-tasking, which I think is why many women have been influenced towards this field and become successful. I think HR started more as a caring profession and role in the company, hence why more women chose and were chosen for these roles. Today it has become clear the importance of the strategic focus on people which has evolved towards the C suite roles as companies start realising the importance of the human capital. With automation I think the complexity of how to deal with people, millennials as well as having employees retiring later and later from work, will become even more significant and the people culture and personal development would be critical roles within HR that should be of focus.

A personal question, how would you compare balancing career and childcare as a single parent in Sri Lanka and the West? What are the different dynamics, the support system, etc.?

I think being a single mom was easier for me because I was in Sri Lanka. The support system is much stronger and affordable, I have found, talking with my colleagues across the world. I have my parents that were amazing at helping but not imposing, even my ex-husband and family has been supportive. Friends have been a great support network and there for childcare and of course the ability to have maids to support you for childcare. Looking back, I have used all these options in raising Tevin. I guess it is true that it takes a village to raise a child.

While support is stronger, so is judgment and interference about raising a child, how to behave as a woman, and a mother. What has worked for me is to take the positive and ignore the negative. When it comes to how I act and behave, I decide what is right and wrong which includes how Tevin -my son- is being raised. While I try to listen and get a balanced view, I am known to do my own thing once I make a decision. I think it has worked out well for me both professionally and personally and would not trade any of it.

An initiative by Women in Management, the International Finance Corporation (IFC)—a member of the World Bank Group—and the government of Australia

“When a trailblazer shares the challenges she faced in her life journey, it inspires scores of people to step out of their comfort zones and charter a course that is beyond the stereotype. As a result of this, lives are changed, societies are enlightened and communities are transformed,” said Dhashma Karunaratne, the 2019 winner of ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Award for Supply Chain and Logistics.

She is (R) Evolutionary

‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards Help Change Women’s Status-Quo in Sri Lanka



Karunaratne, the Assistant Vice President for Maritime, Logistics & Freight at Aitken Spence Maritime, is one of the many inspiring women who have been recognized and celebrated by the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards over the years.

The awards were launched by Women in Management (WIM) in 2011, when businesswomen were not formally recognized in Sri Lanka. What started as a conference centered on Colombo, the commercial capital of Sri Lanka with 25 women and five awards, has now evolved into an annual event that recognizes the remarkable achievements of Sri Lankan women in their careers, businesses, and everyday lives.

With over 420 award winners across the economic spectrum and in a wide range of professions — banking and finance, hospitality, media, legal, logistics and supply chains — the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards has been a steppingstone for many women to becoming recognized leaders in their respective fields, organizations, and communities.

Sulochana Segera, Founder/ Chairperson of WIM, notes that over 50 percent of award winners have experienced career advancements, while over 90 percent of micro, small, and medium business owners

recognized by the awards have reported increased brand recognition and market growth.

To further amplify this impact, the International Finance Corporation (IFC)—a member of the World Bank Group—joined hands with WIM for

the 2014 awards. As WIM marks the 10th anniversary of honoring Sri Lankan women, this is IFC’s sixth consecutive year of co-hosting, and the third in collaboration with Women in Work—a partnership between IFC and the government of Australia.

Over the past two decades, women’s participation in the nation’s labor force has stagnated between 30 and 35 percent. This is a significant low considering the continued progress of Sri Lankan women in education and other human development indicators. According to research, a combination of factors—socio-cultural norms, high caregiving responsibilities, restrictive legislature, and misalignment in skills and qualification with the job market—have kept women in Sri Lanka on the sidelines.

In response, while recognizing the value of women’s leadership in Sri Lanka, the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards is a testimony to the progress that can be achieved when women and men are equal participants in the economy.

As Sarah Twigg, IFC’s Program Manager for Women in Work said, “recognizing the exemplary achievements of women who have excelled in their careers or businesses, overcoming stereotypical barriers, also brings to the fore important role models who can inspire others.”

Tanya Wettimuny, the 2016 winner of the Supply Chain Management Award, is a fine example of this. Wettimuny, who went on to start her own freight and logistics company, IAS Holdings, and actively promotes the recruitment and retention of women in a traditionally male-dominated industry. She appointed the first and only female airport cargo village manager at the Bandaranaike International Airport, Sri Lanka’s main international airport. “Being recognized for my contributions in freight and logistics was a deeply fulfilling experience as it reaffirmed the work women have been doing in what is still a male-dominated field,” she said.

Putting the Spotlight on the National Stage

Moving the awards beyond Colombo, allowed more Sri Lankan women to share in the limelight. The

2016 winner of the ‘Upcoming Woman Entrepreneur Award,’ Dilhani Iresha De Silva, proprietor of DHD Handlooms, said the Top50 award was the first recognition she had ever received. “It was like a seal of approval that attracted more international and local buyers. We were able to grow and scale the business because of the award,” said De Silva, who was able to buy two additional machines and hire eight more women from her village to meet the growing demand. Usually, and prior to the impact of COVID-19, DHD Handlooms had a monthly income of Rs 300,000 (\$1,630) during the tourist season, a 650 percent increase from the Rs 40,000 (\$217) De Silva’s company was bringing in before the award.

On expanding the awards beyond Colombo, Segera said, “We were able to hold training and awareness sessions at the divisional secretariat level across the island. This was vital as many businesswomen in rural areas did not have the facilities for capacity building. The application process of the awards itself served as a learning ground and a confidence building exercise for many. The widespread recognition brought by the awards help normalize women’s aspirations towards their career goals.”

Selecting 50 remarkable achievers is no easy task. Every year, the best in each category is chosen by a panel of judges who put together a tough, competitive, and meticulous process. Kasturi Chellaraja Wilson, the 2020 Head of Panel of Judges of the awards and Sri Lanka’s first female Group CEO of a public-quoted conglomerate, said, “Prior to being a judge, I had been a recipient of a Top 50 Professional and Career Women Award, and the single thing I recall of that event in 2014 was that there are so many amazing stories of women out there, especially at the grassroots level. This single impact made me want to support this body which was making the effort to connect, impact, and celebrate women from all walks of life. As a judge, while the job was never easy, it was the impact it had on the recipients which made our time judging worthwhile. I saw most recipients going back with confidence and wanting to do more with their lives and communities.”

Shattering the Glass Ceiling

With the resolute aim of promoting women’s leadership in Sri Lanka, the awards have evolved over time. During the first year, under the partnership between IFC, WIM, and DFAT, nominations grew

by almost 400 percent, and three more award categories were added—Best Private Sector Organization for Gender Equality, Male Champion of Change, and Women on Boards.

At IFC’s suggestion, WIM added the Women on Boards Award category. The aim was to recognize the relatively few women who have shattered the glass ceiling. Minette Perera — Board member of Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company and the winner of ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards for Women on Boards in 2019 — was one of the very first to be accoladed under this category. She said, “Most of the companies on which I am a director had a majority workforce of women, but the decision makers were mostly men. In board deliberations, I was able to bring in female pragmatism, thoughtfulness, and diversity to the decision-making process. The recognition through the award highlighted that professionalism could lead to women being appointed to male dominated boards and bring in a female perspective to the deliberations on many subjects.”

The hard work is paying off. The latest research by IFC and Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) points to a rise in the number of women board directors. In 2019, 9.6 percent of board directors of CSE listed companies were women — a significant rise from 8.5 percent in 2018 and 8.14 percent in 2017.

Steady Partnership

In IFC’s 50 years of operations in Sri Lanka, WIM has been a longstanding partner. Beyond the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards, the government of Australia and IFC’s collaboration with WIM has created new opportunities for Sri Lankan women to boost their skills and access new markets locally and globally. David Holly, Australian High Commissioner for Sri Lanka, said that, “In Sri Lanka, we see our Women in Work partnership with the IFC, and the partnership with Women in Management, as key to advancing opportunities for women. It is very important for women to also participate in building a sustainable economic future for their country.”

IFC’s Women on Boards Training of Trainers program is an impactful initiative, which saw the participation of the WIM founder, award winners, and council members. Following this, WIM supported over 500 women entrepreneurs and professionals to participate in similar initiatives. This included a two-day WIM

mentorship program and a three-month mentoring program, where 350 women entrepreneurs from the north and east of Sri Lanka were paired up with mentors. Over 60 ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Award winners shared their expertise and knowledge as speakers, mentors, and panelists in these engagements.

Aruni Rajakarier, the 2019 ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards winner for ‘Inspirational Woman of the Year,’ and the brain behind the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka’s Board Ready Female Member Directory, reflected on the award’s impact on her advocacy work. “Winning a ‘Top 50’ award gave me a greater voice at the table to champion the cause of women at work and women on boards in corporate Sri Lanka. It unlocked more opportunities for me to advance this agenda,” she said.

The WIM network amplifies the recognition of talented high achievers throughout the corporate world, also opening opportunities for women to represent the country internationally. The awards have expanded globally with a presence in Canada and the Maldives, providing scope for cross-border collaboration and networking.

As WIM, IFC, and the government of Australia gear up for the latest edition of the awards, the priority is to set the stage for Sri Lankan women and inspire them to transform the global economy, so contributing to a more inclusive and prosperous world.

About IFC

IFC—a member of the World Bank Group—is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets. We work in more than 100 countries, using our capital, expertise, and influence to create markets and opportunities in developing countries. In fiscal year 2020, we invested \$22 billion in private companies and financial institutions in developing countries, leveraging the power of the private sector to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity. For more information, visit www.ifc.org.

An award that led to a (r)evolutionary pathway: Stories from 10 past ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards winners

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With over 30 years in the mobile/telco industry, Sandra De Zoysa is Sri Lanka's only certified Customer Experience Professional. Having won many accolades for Sri Lanka on the international stage, De Zoysa shares that her 2016 'Top 50' Professional and Career Women Award in Marketing was the first local recognition she received for her contribution to the industry.

"WIM was the first to recognize my work locally. I'm grateful that someone took the time and effort to seek out women who are making strides in their industries. WIM was the catalyst in bringing awareness into my field of customer experience in Sri Lanka, and many others have taken note after this," said De Zoysa the recipient of three international awards, of which, Constellation Research's Ambient Experience 50 (AX50) award in 2020 — an exclusive list recognizing global leaders in customer experience — is the latest.

The Group Chief Customer Officer at Dialog Axiata PLC, one of Sri Lanka's largest telecommunications service providers and the country's largest mobile network operator, De Zoysa manages a team of over 1,000 people and works with multiple stakeholders across the country.

As the Vice President of the Sri Lanka Association for Software and Services Companies (SLASSCOM), the national chamber for the Sri Lankan IT/BPM industry, De Zoysa has been a pioneer in a man's world. SLASSCOM forecasts that the industry will achieve \$5 billion in exports by 2025, creating 200,000 direct jobs and launching 1,000 start-ups. "If you leave 50 percent of the population out of the game, that means you are 50 percent less likely to reach your full potential. Only by getting more women to join the industry and take their seat at the table, would we be able to achieve our target of becoming a five-billion-dollar industry by

2025," said De Zoysa, who is widely believed to be next year's SLASSCOM Chairperson and the first woman chair for the Chamber.

As an executive committee member, De Zoysa has been at the forefront of SLASSCOM's many initiatives aimed at increasing the number of female Information Technology (IT) graduates, fulfilling the criteria of diversity in potential partners, building community-wide awareness of career opportunities for women in IT and Business Process Management (BPM). The Women Technopreneurs initiative is one such enterprise targeted at supporting women tech-entrepreneurs and women-led start-ups, especially in the rural sector.

SANDRA DE ZOYSA

**Group Chief Customer Officer –
Dialog Axiata PLC**

**Award: Marketing –
Gold (2016)**



With over 25 years of engineering and project management experience in energy and environmental engineering, Sharmila Ragunathan was a shoo-in for ‘Career Role Model of the Year’ at the 2019 ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards. An electronics engineer with an MBA from the University of Colombo, Ragunathan has had many firsts in her life. She started her career as a management trainee — one among a small group of women engineers — at Hayleys PLC. Among others, Ragunathan implemented Sri Lanka’s largest township water supply project and secured the nation’s first build-operate-transfer (BOT) project in water/wastewater management. Continuing her tenure with the Hayleys Group, Ragunathan currently sits on the Board of Haycarb PLC and is the Director of Puritas (Pvt) Ltd, Haycarb’s environmental engineering arm.

Recalling her days as a female engineer in Sri Lanka in 1996, Ragunathan said, “During those early years when I turned up at an Engineering Consultant’s office, I would have a visibly irritated gentleman telling me that he thought an “engineer” was coming to see him!” At the time, Ragunathan was one of a handful of women working in a male-dominated field.

Ragunathan also recalls the ‘not-so-laughable challenges’ of navigating high-profile public-private partnerships as a Sri Lankan Tamil woman, amid a war-torn economy. She thanks her employer for providing a discrimination-free environment where she could pursue her passion for sustainable energy and environment.

Speaking about the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards, Ragunathan noted, “It was overwhelming to see how many young women, especially within my organization, connected with the award. I felt that it gave them a space where they could visualize their goals and connect with a career they valued. Some even reached out to me to share how it inspired and boosted their confidence.”

Ragunathan continues her trailblazing work, as she focuses on manufacturing 100 percent locally produced Oxypura facemasks. She aims to take the brand to a global platform while serving communities — affected by chronic kidney disease — through ‘Puritas Sath Diyawara,’ now Hayleys Group’s Corporate Social Responsibility platform.



Sharmila Ragunathan

Executive Director & Director of Environmental Engineering – Haycarb PLC

Award: Career Role Model of the Year (2019)

A trailblazer in a male-dominated industry, Tania Polonnowita Wettimuny has shattered the glass ceiling and is helping other women do the same.

“Being recognized for my contributions in the freight and logistics industry was a deeply fulfilling experience as it reaffirmed the work women have been doing in what is still a male-dominated field,” said Wettimuny, the recipient of the ‘Gold Award in the Supply Chain Management’ category at the 2016 ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards.

At the time of the award, Wettimuny was the Managing Director and local partner of Hellmann Worldwide Logistics (Pvt) Ltd, a German-based logistics company currently ranked 10th in the world in freight forwarding and logistics.

Wettimuny counts over 25 years in the industry. Starting as a management trainee, she worked her way up the ranks. Finally, she started her own business under the name of IAS Holdings (Pvt) Ltd, which comprises two multi-national joint ventures worth US\$ 4.8 billion and US\$ 2 billion, respectively.

In 2015, she was nominated as Chairperson of the Sri Lanka Logistics & Freight Forwarders Association, which is the apex body of the freight and logistics industry in Sri Lanka. She served for two terms and was the first woman to lead an association of such high caliber in the freight industry of the Indian sub-continent.

Tania Polonnowita Wettimuny

Entrepreneur, Group Managing
Director – IAS Holdings

Awards: Supply Chain
Management–Gold (2016)



Dhashma Karunaratne is a trailblazer in the male-dominated field of maritime logistics in Sri Lanka where women make up a mere three percent of employees.

When Karunaratne was awarded the ‘Supply Chain and Logistics Gold Award’ at the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards in 2019, she already had a proven track record. As the Commercial Marketing Manager at South Asia Gateway Terminals (Pvt) Ltd (SAGT), she had contributed to double-digit growth over three consecutive years. By then, she had also convinced the business to introduce targeted internship and mentorship programs to increase recruitment and retention of women.

She continues to leverage the recognition from the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards in her work to create gender parity in workplaces, provide mentorship, and actively develop talent pipelines for women in maritime and logistics in Sri Lanka.



“When I won the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards, it was a significant achievement for me, as it was an endorsement of my years of contribution to the Port of Colombo and my team’s and mentees’ hard work and commitment towards performance excellence. Notable awards like this play an integral role in transforming lives and inspires scores of people who day in day out make tremendous effort to impact a team; a business, an industry; an economy, a community; a nation,” said Karunaratne, who was also Chair of Women in Logistics and Transport (WiLAT), the women’s forum of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. Karunaratne served for two terms, mentoring many women in her capacity as an industry leader.

Since December 2019, Karunaratne has been the Assistant Vice President of Maritime, Logistics & Freight at Aitken Spence Maritime. “Winning the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Award definitely empowered me to position myself as a suitable candidate to this role and expand my experience in the supply chain industry,” said Karunaratne.

A strong proponent of the business benefits of diverse and inclusive workplaces, Karunaratne is a mainstay in many panels and forums. She has been featured in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Business Leaders’ Conclave, IFC SheWorks Sri Lanka partnership, Asia Women’s Rugby 7s Captains Forum, DP World, and AP Moller Maersk Group. She continues to leverage the recognition from the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards in her work to create gender parity in workplaces, provide mentorship, and actively develop talent pipelines for women in maritime and logistics in Sri Lanka.

Dhashma Karunaratne

Assistant Vice President Maritime, Logistics & Freight – Aitken Spence

Award Supply Chain and Logistics–Gold (2019)



The award for ‘Emerging Leader of the Year’ in 2016 at the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards marked a turning point in Ranmal Ekanayake’s career. As the CEO of Sri Lanka’s leading design school, Academy of Designs (AOD), which is affiliated with Northumbria University UK, Ekanayake was a well-known leader in the education field.

The award inspired Ekanayake to push the envelope further. “After winning the award, I started to think differently and was more confident to venture into a completely new industry. When I got the opportunity to join Sri Lanka’s largest e-commerce network — Kapruka.com — as their Vice President, I was ready for the challenge,” said Ekanayake, reflecting on how the award gave her the confidence to embrace a new challenge in a brand- new industry.

Throughout her career, empowering women has been a passion for Ekanayake. She worked hard to ensure there was a pipeline of talented future leaders among the women on her teams, and proudly recalls the many successful former mentees who are now capable leaders. She also provides guidance to rural women in business development, helping them generate income and support livelihoods and well-being.

“The ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards generated a lot of local media attention and helped me gain recognition for my career in the corporate arena,” said Ekanayake. Today, as the Vice President of Kapruka, she supports small and medium entrepreneurs develop their businesses and thrive in the e-commerce sphere. The program has achieved several goals, including increasing the number of women entrepreneurs in rural areas, assisting them in launching their online businesses, and supporting their household and community.

“

Throughout her career, empowering women has been a passion for Ekanayake. She worked hard to ensure there was a pipeline of talented future leaders among the women on her teams, and proudly recalls the many successful former mentees who are now capable leaders.

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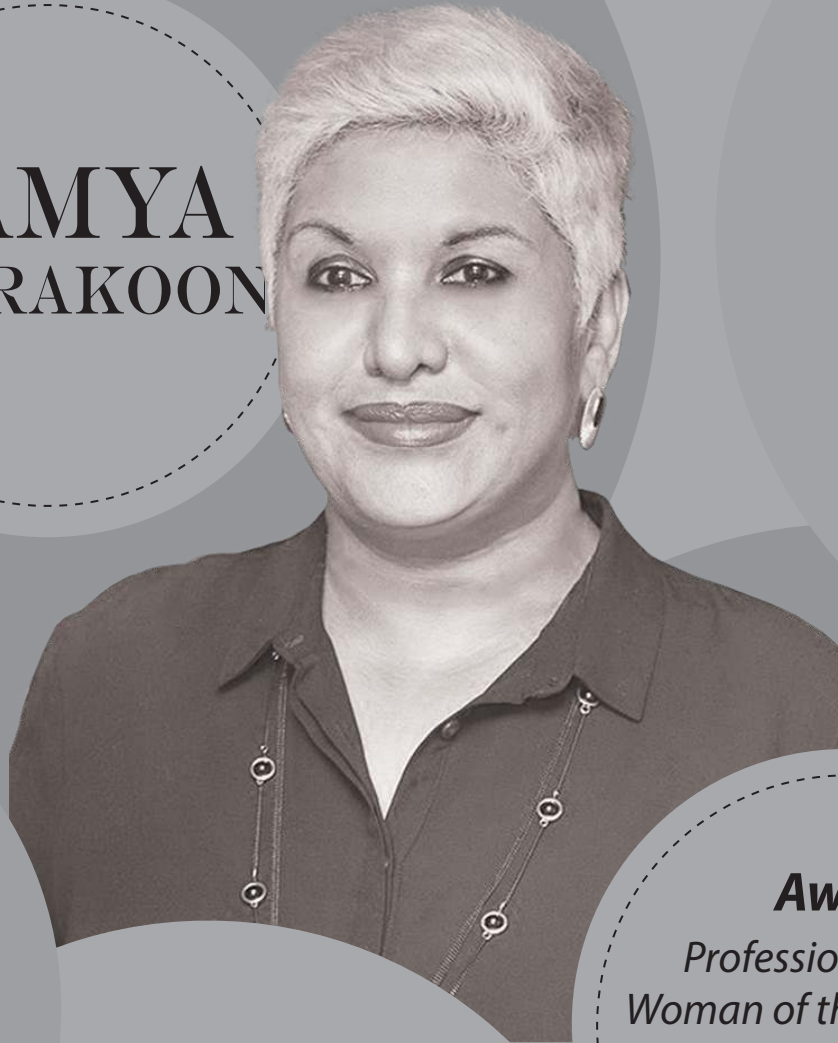
**Ranmal
Ekanayake**

**Vice
President
Grass
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**WIM
Award:
Emerging
Leader of the
Year
(2016)**



RAMYA WEERAKOON



Award
Professional Career Woman of the Year (2012) and Inspirational Woman of the Year (2014)

Independent Consultant Global Business Development

In 2012 — prior to winning the ‘Top 50’ Professional Career Woman of the Year and the Abhimani Award as the first Sri Lankan woman involved in aircraft marketing — Ramya Weerakoon was oblivious to her unique position in the market when WIM approached her.

At that time, Weerakoon was the only woman in South Asia to be engaged in business development, marketing, sales, and coordination of specialized training for flight and engineering crew, for the complete range of fixed and rotary wing aircraft marketed by her company. She was responsible for commercial and military sales and after-market support for Textron Aviation-manufactured Cessna trainer aircraft, the twin Turboprop & the

Citation range of private jets, as well as the complete range of multi-role helicopters manufactured by Bell Helicopter Textron.

“The joy of winning the awards completely changed my perspective of my life and my career. It enhanced my self-esteem and gave me tremendous confidence to pursue greater challenges, which helped me earn a promotion as Vice President – Business Development within a very short time,” said Weerakoon.

Throughout her career in aviation sales, Weerakoon prioritized her role as a mentor to women. She became a vocal champion of safer and more respectful workplaces, spearheading policy and

procedural changes that introduced anti-harassment policies and procedures. Her efforts garnered another win at the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards in 2014 as ‘Inspirational Woman of the Year.’

“I received many opportunities and consultancy offers together with exposure in the media, which created a plethora of additional advantages and recognition in the corporate sector,” recalls Weerakoon. Following a career spanning over 30 years in aerospace, power, and energy with Infotechs (Pvt) Limited, culminating in her taking on the mantle of CEO, Weerakoon retired this year. However, she will continue her advocacy to create parity in the workplace as an independent consultant.

Winning the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Award gave me a greater voice at the table to champion the cause of women at work and women on boards in corporate Sri Lanka. It unlocked more opportunities for me to advance this agenda,” said Aruni Rajakarier, winner of the 2019 ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Award for ‘Inspirational Woman of the Year.’ In addition to being on several boards across Sri Lanka’s largest conglomerates, Rajakarier is the Founder and Director of SheConsults (Pvt) Ltd, an environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) consultancy firm. A chartered accountant by profession, Rajakarier heads a variety of engagements in corporate reporting and strategy, focusing on integrating ESG criteria into formal organization performance review processes.

In 2019, as the chairperson of Women’s Empowerment and Leadership Development Committee — the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka — she launched the ‘Board Ready Female Members Directory.’ The directory promotes more female representation across boards in corporate Sri Lanka, providing a tangible talent pipeline for succession planning.

“There is a severe hemorrhaging of women from the paid workforce. This phenomenon is clear when it comes to succession planning, with very few qualified for senior leadership and board positions. Women tend to drop out mid-career, as societal and cultural power dynamics trip women up on their way up the corporate ladder. Therefore, we wanted to create a list of women who are ready to take on top leadership,” said

Aruni Rajakarier

Founder/Director
– Sheconsults

Award:
Inspirational
Woman of the
Year (2019)

Rajakarier.

“There is so much talent leakage, particularly from the time women have children or have ageing or ailing parents as the unpaid work is largely borne by women. Consequently, women who are being supermoms and superwomen are reluctant to step up to additional positions as they are over stretched. This was evident when only around 10 percent of all the women who were eligible to be in the directory stepped up, and we talked to many women about why they were not stepping up. This unpleasant truth spoke volumes of the reality working women face in our society,” she said. This learning inspired her to introduce the ‘Gender Reporting Framework.’ The framework offers guidelines on collecting and reporting on gender disaggregated data to increase awareness on women’s status in corporate leadership in Sri Lanka.

Rajakarier’s company, SheConsults, offers solutions to professional women who require greater flexibility to balance work and home. It allows them to take on work according to their capacity without taking a total career break. With her own experience as a working parent with four children, Rajakarier is happy to support other women in similar situations and demands quality work delivered on time.

A resolute champion of working women, Rajakarier continues to engage corporate management in the conversation to create a more conducive environment that supports women. She has her sights set on changing society’s perception of women, starting with challenging the portrayal of women in media.



Recipient of the of ‘Gold Award for Human Resources’ at the 2015 ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards, Deshika Rodrigo’s life has seen many changes since the recognition. After an illustrious tenure as the Head of Human Resources at the Standard Chartered Bank Sri Lanka, Rodrigo has leveraged her longstanding career in HR and banking, as well as the accolades she has won along the way, for a dynamic second act. Juggling triple roles as an HR consultant, business coach, and an advocate for women’s empowerment, Rodrigo is using her international and local experience to educate, train, and mentor the next generation of leaders, especially women.

Having the award behind my name, definitely gives me that extra impetus to keep striving forward,” she said.

“Winning the ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Award and having that recognition as someone passionate about addressing gender related issues, has definitely added credence to my present roles. I speak at multiple forums to various corporate audiences on the challenges faced by women in the workplace and how companies can better support their staff. Having the award behind my name, definitely gives me that extra impetus to keep striving forward,” she said.

A contributor to local newspapers, Rodrigo writes on gender parity for working women and is working on a book that chronicles the challenges overcome by working women in Sri Lanka.

“As a single working mother, being able to have an independent income enabled me to give my children the best education and opportunities in life. Economic freedom meant that I could make the choices that were right for me,” said Rodrigo. As an empty nester with two kids in college, Rodrigo started the Tara Women’s Empowerment Network, where working women meet, share



“ **A contributor to local newspapers, Rodrigo writes on gender parity for working women and is working on a book that chronicles the challenges overcome by working women in Sri Lanka.** ”

best practices, and support each other through mentorship and networking opportunities.

“Sri Lanka still has a long way to go when it comes to achieving gender diversity at the workplace. But companies are now realizing that for sustainable, equitable growth, diversity is a must. The corporate consciousness is now awake to the possibility of cross-cutting gender parity and the healthy business results that will inevitably follow,” said Rodrigo optimistically.

Deshika Rodrigo

Executive Coach, Outplacement Specialist, HR Consultant and Motivational Speaker

Award: Human Resources–Gold (2015)



Her contributions to the industry gained wide attention when she won the 'Gold Award for Banking and Finance' in 2017 at the 'Top 50' Professional and Career Women Awards. "The 'Top 50' Professional and Career Women Awards was the first time I was recognized outside the bank, where my services were acknowledged by a third party.



gained wide attention when she won the 'Gold Award for Banking and Finance' in 2017 at the 'Top 50' Professional and Career Women Awards. "The 'Top 50' Professional and Career Women Awards was the first time I was recognized outside the bank, where my services were acknowledged by a third party. It was a huge boost for morale, and I received a lot of appreciation from the industry as well," said Kandambi Jassim.

Kandambi Jassim continues to be at the top of her game. Promoted to Senior Deputy General Manager Corporate Banking at Sampath Bank, she shares her experiences and knowledge with young aspiring bankers, speaking at various industry and national panels. "I have been approached by many young women who are looking to overcome challenges and reach leadership

positions in banking. When I was younger, I used to look up to my seniors and aspire to be like them. Today's young women have more and more women role models to look up to as they navigate their careers," she said.

Going forward, Kandambi Jassim plans to use her knowledge to help women entrepreneurs start and scale-up micro, small, and medium businesses. "With my years of banking experience, I understand the issues in finance, management, and HR that confront an entrepreneur. I'm also keenly aware of the barriers for women entrepreneurs in gaining access to capital markets and my goal is to form an organization that will help skilled women entrepreneurs bridge these gaps."

In 1989, when Shashi Kandambi Jassim graduated from high school, Sri Lanka was in a state of civil unrest. Universities were shut down, depriving Kandambi Jassim the opportunity to pursue higher education. Determined, she decided to join Sampath Bank to gain professional qualifications and industry experience.

With a career of over 30 years with the Bank, Kandambi Jassim has served across departments and contributed her time to serving the larger industry as an active member of the Association of Professional Bankers — Sri Lanka (APBSL), which has the broadest representation of banking professionals

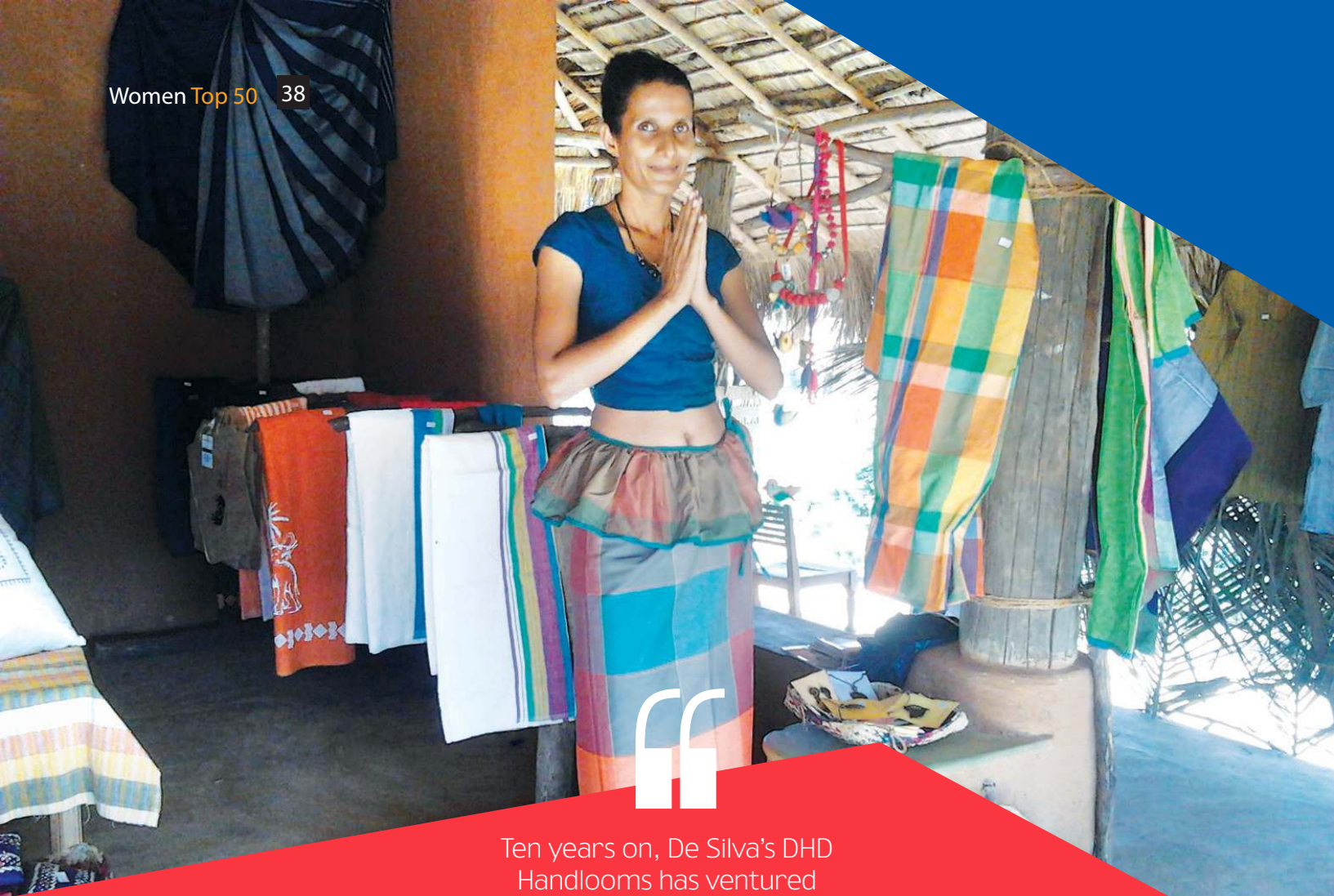
in the country. She went on to serve on the Board of APBSL as the President and spearheaded many training programs and conventions aimed at capacity building and skill development for young bankers.

Her contributions to the industry

**Shashi
Kandambi Jassim**

*Senior Deputy
General Manager
Sampath Bank*

*Award: Banking and Finance
Gold (2017)*



A mother of two, Dilhani Iresha De Silva transformed her one-woman sewing business into a thriving enterprise, selling handloom products to tourists. When she won the ‘Upcoming Woman Entrepreneur Award’ in 2016, De Silva’s DHD Handlooms employed four women, who worked on four machines out of her living room, bringing in a monthly profit of approximately Rs 40,000 (\$217).

The awards catapulted her to the spotlight, garnering much media attention both nationally and globally. This enabled De Silva to secure a greater number of international buyers. Today, she runs a 12-woman operation, with six machines, and is putting the final touches to a factory space. Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, during the tourist season in her hometown of Galle, DHD Handlooms brings in a monthly profit of approximately Rs 300,000 (\$1,630), a 650 percent increase from her previous monthly earnings.

“The ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards was the first recognition I received for my business. It was like a seal of approval

Ten years on, De Silva’s DHD Handlooms has ventured into the export market, boasting a loyal national and international customer base. Through diversification and innovation, DHD Handlooms has stayed ahead of the curve — introducing new and exciting color palettes and producing everything from clothes to soft toys.



that attracted more international and local buyers. We were able to grow and scale the business because of this. I received many other regional and national level awards after the recognition from WIM.”

When De Silva made the difficult choice to pass on a teaching transfer in favor of being a stay-at-home mom to her two young sons, she did not expect to become a successful entrepreneur. Ten years on, De Silva’s DHD Handlooms has ventured into the export market, boasting a loyal national and international customer base. Through diversification and innovation, DHD Handlooms

has stayed ahead of the curve — introducing new and exciting color palettes and producing everything from clothes to soft toys.

“The ‘Top 50’ Professional and Career Women Awards gave me the exposure to grow bigger and expand my export share. I was able to earn more and hire more women from my village. My ultimate goal is to make DHD Handlooms a household name and become a female entrepreneur of global recognition,” De Silva added.

Dilhani Iresha De Silva

Founder – DHD Handloom

**Award:
Upcoming Woman Entrepreneur Award (2016)**



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MESSAGE FROM THE NEW GENERATION AWARDS CHAIR

I am truly privileged and honoured to have been chosen as the Award Chair of the New Generation Awards 2020 – the inaugural edition of an exclusive celebration of Sri Lankan youth.

As a successful global brand, “Women Top50”, which represents Sri Lankan women in the global stage, has identified and recognized more than 500 women leaders in the past 10 years through the “Top50 WIM Awards”. WIM is a brand to reckon with as a trendsetter and its many admirable initiatives, especially in recognising talent and bringing it to the spotlight, while also making a positive impact to the nation and the economy, and the initiative to recognise youth is an extension of WIM’s ingenuity. It is indeed significant that the National Youth Services Council stepped forward to join hands with WIM for a synergetic private-public partnership to recognise young talent.

The New Generation Awards 2020 was held on 08th December 2020 at Regent Country Club – Malabe with the objective of casting the spotlight on extraordinary young leadership by recognising contribution to their communities, to the nation and to the world at large in a range of sectors. Following an extensive process of screening, our panel of judges found 24 young achievers, representing both genders and ethnicities from all the provinces.

The journey that has begun with the New Generation Awards will not end here. WIM has already mapped out a strategy to launch a new chapter for youth leaders and to direct them towards continuous development.

As a member who joined Women in Management at its inception, being recognized as the “Member of the Year” for the first time at the Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards - 2016, being an Executive Committee Member for 04 years and

servng as the Honorary Secretary of WIM for the last 03 years, I am extremely proud to witness the success and the qualitative improvement that WIM has achieved over a period of time. I vouch for the fact that WIM membership has given me priceless experiences, precious opportunities and unlimited exposure throughout my career and personal life, which I am sincerely thankful for.

Chairing an award ceremony of this magnitude was a massive undertaking, especially during the most challenging period of recent human history. Yet, I considered it as a great opportunity to have been part of recognising young personalities aspiring to be future leaders, while associating with industry experts, not forgetting the support I received from my fellow organizing committee members - which was truly amazing - in order to reach our common vision.

The invisible pillar of strength behind all this was Dr. Sulochana Seger, an individual always passionate about providing equal opportunities to all, someone who is able to recognise underlying talents and sets the platform to showcase those to the world. With her guidance and the team effort of the WIM team, I believe that the WIM Global Brand will achieve success in all future endeavours and I invite everybody to collaborate with us for a successful journey.

Kushlani Perera
Awards Chair - Inaugural Edition
New Generation Awards 2020

Leaders of Tomorrow

New Generation Awards 2020





Women in Management, National Youth Services Council Launch Inaugural and Inimitable Opportunity for the Sri Lankan Youth. – ‘New Generation Award 2020’ under the theme of “Leaders of Tomorrow”

Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 25, 2020

In the journey of finding hidden talents of Sri Lankan youth and their unsung contribution to the nation, Women in Management (WIM) who are known as experts in setting new trends, came up with a concept for youth recognition initiative and Sri Lanka National Youth Services Council stepped forward to join hands with WIM on this felicitous cause.

The New Generational Awards 2020 aims to shine a spotlight on extra ordinary young leadership within the age group of 16 to 30 years, to support and recognize positive contribution to their communities, nation and the world at large considering sectors such as careers, entrepreneurship, sports, social service, innovation, talents, arts, creative science, social media, etc.,

Nomination Opens from 1st August to 5th September 2020 and can be made by visiting www.womeninmanagementawards.org The gala award ceremony will be held on the 24th of November 2020 at Shangri-La Colombo.

This year’s panel of judges, chaired by Mr. Theshara Jayasinghe - Chairman National Youth Service Council together with a diversified team including Ms. Varuni Amunugama Fernando - Managing Director Triad Advertising Limited and the national TV channel Derana, Ms. Gowri Rajan - Director Sun Match Group, Mr. Dinesh Weerakkody - Chairman ICC, Ms. Indira Samarasinghe PC - Principal Law College, Ms. Lopa Rahman – Corporate Governance Officer, International Finance Corporation, a member of

World Bank Group and Ms. Shehara De Silva – Non Executive Director Keells Food Private Limited.

Head table of the press conference will be attended by

Theshara Jayasinghe - Chairman National Youth Service Council

Lopa Rahaman - Corporate Governance Officer - Women in Work International Finance Corporation (member of World Bank)

Shehara De Silva - Non Executive Director Keells Food Private Limited

Dr. Sulochana Seger - Founder and Chairperson of Women in Management

Kushlani Perera – Award Chairperson and Hony. ExCo Secretary of Women in Management.

“It’s high time Sri Lanka recognizes youth leadership and also it’s time for the youth to take responsibility of their own future. As a nation we have built a dependency mindset in youth and it has resulted with them by depending on elders and the government for their future. This is the main reason as to why WIM initiated NG Awards to build their own role models for their future,” says Dr. Sulochana Seger Founder/ Chairperson of WIM as her introduction to the New Generation Awards.

In the process of this tremendous journey, the role of National Youth Services Council explained by Mr. Theshara Jayasinghe - Chairman National Youth Service Council saying “The National Youth Services Council, as the apex body in Youth Development in Sri Lanka, deeply appreciates the interest and commitment displayed by Women In Management in organizing New Generation Awards for the youth of Sri Lanka. The NYSC has partnered with WIM, enthusiastically extending





support to initiatives of this nature, founded by non-governmental actors in recognizing youth talent and contributing towards Youth Empowerment with the goal of harnessing the potential of future leaders.”

Ms. Shehara De Silva - Non Executive Director Keells Food Private Limited enlightens the fact on judge’s measures saying “The future belongs to our youth. As judges we will strive to look for exceptionalism and to ensure that the winners will have the potentiality to leverage this recognition as a springboard to build a better, brighter future for our country and perhaps the region or the planet..”

Ms. Lopa Rahman - Corporate Governance Officer, South Asia, IFC, said “The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow, by making effective use of their talents in innovative and enterprising ideas, they can create employment opportunities and enhance Sri Lanka’s job market, which fits well with IFC’s development agenda. This award will help to inspire, motivate and recognize such individuals. We hope to celebrate their efforts at the ceremony to be held later this year.”

About Women in Management –

Since 2010 Women in Management (WIM) works to empower Sri Lankan Career women and women entrepreneurs by connecting and bonding them by providing leadership and guidance in nurturing their knowledge and skills and inspiring them to achieve their goals and to act as conduits to the transformation of the role of women in career and business into a dynamic force.

www.womeninmanagement.org

www.womeninmanagementawards.org

About National Youth Council - Existence of a multi-talented, discipline and dynamic youth population in a country is always considered a treasure which helps development of the particular country. As such every country gives a special recognition for the country’s youth. Sri Lanka too places utmost importance on the country’s youth to achieve her ambitious development targets in social and economic spheres. Hence, Youth of Sri Lanka are also having an undertaking for economic and social upliftment of the country. It is important to inculcate self-reliance in youths and directing them towards winning over those goals. The National Youth Services Council in Sri Lanka has been established with the aim of guiding the Sri Lankan youth in the proper direction to enable them to empower themselves to the fullest potential while contributing to nation’s prosperity. The Youth Services Council was established under the Volunteer National Youth Services Act No. 11 of the year 1967 and was revised by the Act No. 52 of 1968. Over the years, activities of the Youth Council were expanded beyond volunteerism and subsequently the scope was revised again under the Youth Services Council Act No.69 of 1979 giving the status of a fully pledged youth development organization.



Empowering the New Generation Professional - WIM Youth Team



H.G.S.V. Jayasuriya
Medical Student (final year)
Institute of Indigenous
Medicine
University of Colombo



**Umesh Mandakini
Suraweera.**
Ayurveda medical student,
Institute of Indigenous Medicine,
University of Colombo.



K. H. Srimal Dilmika
Medical Student (final year)
Institute of Indigenous
Medicine
University of Colombo



Harshana Piumal Niriella
Owner & Founder of Health Tech
Solutions and DocLanka.com
Medical Student
Institute of Indigenous Medicine
University of Colombo



Devindi Sandareka
Intern Medical Officer
(BAMS)
University of Colombo



Promodha William
Intern Medical Officer
Lunawa District Ayurveda
Hospital



Dilisha Wijesinghe
Intern Medical Officer
Aniyakanda Ayurveda Weda
Medura



K Iresha Udayangani Silva
Ayurvedic Medical Officer
Proprietor
Seth Ulpatha Ayurveda Weda
Medura

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I am
passionate
about youth
empowerment,

Dhashma
Karunaratne



Impressive in every sense of the word, Dhashma Karunarathne, Assistant Vice President - Maritime, Logistics and Freight at Aitken Spence is what many would describe as the embodiment of the modern gung-ho female professional who has weathered the clichéd glass ceiling to reach the 'top'. Reflecting on her journey of many accomplishments that include awards in recognition of her work, Dhashma said her success is a result of team effort, which together with a demeanour to say yes to challenges and a drive to learn more at every opportunity has been rewarding, together with a team of solid mentors who give her perspective whenever she needs it.

As the immediate Chairperson of WiLAT Sri Lanka what has been your role in its thrust on mentorship - at an organizational level and industry level?

Since its inception WiLAT has crafted an impactful mentoring program named IGNITE. It is our flagship program for the year and our vibrant Ex-Co works tirelessly to bring this to fruition. The IGNITE mentoring program has enabled many young graduates to charter exciting career journeys. The success of IGNITE has transcended borders and today has been adopted worldwide in numerous country chapters of WiLAT global. WiLAT Sri Lanka is very proud of this accomplishment, as we are impacting lives and altering careers, at a global level; contributing towards United Nations' Sustainability Goal #5 on Gender.

What was the type of mentoring that you received in your career journey?

When I entered the corporate world in 1999 I didn't have the privilege of a formal mentor-ship. However, I always gravitated towards job roles, under good leaders and great teams that stretched me and developed me. In the last decade or so I have surrounded myself with solid mentors such as Gayani De Alwis, Deshika Rodrigo, Dishan Wickramaratne, Ted Muttiah and Ronnie Pieris, who continue to reveal my blind spots and also help me to augment my strengths.

Do you really believe that in an



When I entered the corporate world in 1999 I didn't have the privilege of a formal mentor-ship. However, I always gravitated towards job roles, under good leaders and great teams that stretched me and developed me.

organizational environment such as ours that there is a genuine effort at mentoring or is it just lip service?

Many companies and associations are genuinely committed towards mentoring, an employee when mentored will unleash one's potential, and will result in tremendous value to an organization/ institute. Yes there's a genuine effort, and I have been a witness to organizations investing in formal and informal mentorships.

What has the impact been of IGNITE spearheaded by CILT and the BacktoWork initiative by WiLAT on women, especially on empowering women in the industry?

The impact has been significant, we

have just launched our 6th mentoring program. The success stories of these individuals continue to propel the program further, and each consecutive year we have many graduates applying for jobs. An individual who invests time and makes effort to get good advice and execute them, reaps a good harvest, just as the Proverbs teach us.

What role have you played as a mentor for emerging women leaders in the industry? And what have you found as the most discouraging or critical factor/s that impact women's participation negatively/positively in the industry?

I am passionate about youth empowerment, as they are tomorrow's leaders. It's the societies biasness that

discourages an individual. Very often young female talent gets discouraged by “concerned” members of job interview panels, who unconsciously put them off track. However, I have been able to coach a few ladies to overcome barriers to entry into highly male dominated industries and functions such as commercial, shipping, health and safety in ports and terminals. Just like kites, they learn to fly higher by embracing the wind that blows against them!

As a Management Accountant you have held diverse roles, such as in corporate finance, business strategy, management accounting, compliance and business development. How did you transition into logistics and transport? Is it an area totally external to the field of accounting and how has your previous experience helped in the transition and your subsequent performance?

Differentiation strategy gives you a sustainable competitive advantage; even as an individual. Diverse qualifications and continuous professional development give you the edge. I am holding three charters in very different professions; namely Management Accounting, Human Resources and Logistics and Transportation. I find my strong fundamentals in finance to be my greatest strength. When one sees a

jumble of numbers, I see patterns, correlations and trends. Finance plays an integral role, for timely decisions and this transcends to any role or function, and enables me to contribute towards value creation.

Do you think Sri Lankan companies in the logistics space have increased their technology spending targeting the adoption of new technologies, given the challenges that drive the shipping industry?

Yes, here at Aitken Spence we invest much on warehouse management, robotics, block chain and internet of things. As a pioneer and industry leader, we have the innate responsibility of being the trendsetter for the industry, by embracing technology. In a VUCA environment, trends can be forecasted and opportunities exploited, if a company leverages on technology. Still there’s much for the local industry to achieve. I have had the opportunity of seeing the best of Logistics and Supply Chain Management in many places, for example the vehicle booking system of Hamburg Port ensures minimum waiting time for truckers at the terminals. Sadly here in Sri Lanka we are too comfortable with queues and waiting times. All these result in cost inefficiencies and negative impact to the environment.

How would you describe the fillip

to your career as a direct result of winning the Gold award for Supply Chain and Logistics at the WIM Top 50 Professional and Career Women Awards? Describe your new career journey since winning the award.

Going up the steps to accept my award, with my family and team applauding me was indeed a goose bump moment. I had flashbacks of my high and low moments as I have had my share of cuts and bruises. This award made me realise that my greatest struggle was within myself. I knew it was time for me to make a change and charter a different path. Today I am responsible for Business Development for the Aitken Spence Maritime, Logistics and Freight cluster, a role that inspires me to go beyond my comfort zones.

You have been described as a strong proponent for gender empowerment and family-work-life balance. You have so much on your plate, which also includes community work, while you say that you play the perfect role of wife, mother and daughter-in-law. How do you strike a balance? Is it really possible? Haven’t you experienced moments when you fell short of the perfect situation?

To strike a balance is a tall order. Many priorities compete with each other. However, I am blessed with fantastic teams, at home, at work, at church and even in the industry. Success is a result of a team effort, a cohesive team’s commitment to performance excellence can make something good, great. There are no heroes and sheroes, there are great teams that make individuals/families/companies/industries look good. A culmination of this results in a progressive country! We are individually strong, but together unbeatable!



Abhishek
Dharmawardena



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Top50 Professional & Career Women Committee 2020



Waruni Algama

Top50 Awards Chair 2021 - General Manager.
Digital user experience design and channel adoption - Dialog Axiata PLC.



Aparna Tilakaratne

Top50 Awards Deputy Chair 2021 - Chief Law officer - Sri Lanka ports Authority



Vijitha Samarakkody

Top50 Awards Committee Member - Senior Cluster Manager -Allianz Insurance Lanka Ltd.



Mayanthi Fernando

Top50 Awards Committee Member - General Manager -Worldlink Travels (Pvt) Ltd.



Pushpa Samarakkody

Top50 Awards Committee Member - Chief Executive Officer -Bacopa Worldwide (Pvt) Ltd



Darshanie Samanthilaka

Top50 Awards Committee Member - Visiting Lecturer and freelance Diving supervisor.



Swarnamoyee Chatterjee

Top50 Awards Committee Member - Project Manager MSc. (Information Security) PMP Azure Cloud

I never compare myself with others,
but, I work really hard.

“

As the General Manager – Digital User Experience Design & Channel Adoption at Dialog Axiata, Waruni Algama has had a long and exemplary tenure of more than two decades under a single employer, to whom contentment, loyalty and integrity and service had been the drivers that modelled her to the top. Waruni spoke extensively about the creativity and ingenuity required by an effective digital knowledge manager to create a unique user experience. Communication and collaboration are critical skills of leadership in a good designer of user experience said Waruni who spoke on the importance of change in telecom to be up on with the changes therein to intensify the best user experience in the digital sphere.

”



What does digital user experience design mean? Can you elaborate your role in this regard?

Today we see how various functions that were once performed by humans are being performed by digital tools. With the company's digital transformation strategy, my responsibility is to understand the users, their mental model and specific tasks that they are trying to accomplish and then design the end to end customer journey when they interact with various digital channels such as App, Web, Chat bot, etc. It is a very challenging role as we have to ensure that the digital channel is designed in such a way that it is friendly and convenient to the user and capable of providing similar or a better user experience than a human interaction. Successful adoption is purely based on a perfect design.

What are the skills that are required by a good Digital Knowledge Manager and why?

Creativity, ability to generate, develop and implement ideas are main skills that one should possess when it comes to designing a product or a service. However, it is also important for someone to have skills in good communication, empathy and collaboration when leading cross functional teams and agile projects. Collaboration is a critical skill that a leader should possess when handling diversified teams. How well you collaborate with others will have a great impact on the project's outcome. Being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes and finding the best solution is a must for a good user experience designer. I say this because if you're detached from your end users, you fail to design for their needs and feelings which can create a bad user experience.

Your career profile is impressive. But what is most striking is your service record at Dialog, from 1996 to present and your phenomenal rise to the top. When many HR managers complain of a trend where millennials are in a hurry to rise up the ladder and are quick to give up, tell us your mantra and your experience that has brought

you so far in your career and your advice to those who are frustrated at being stagnant?

I see myself as a unique individual compared to others, and I say so based on several reasons. One is, I am content with what I get, but have lots of dreams in life. I never compare myself with others, but, I work really hard. I never live in the past, but always remember my beginning which helped me to rise. Loyalty and integrity are the two main values that I uphold and I don't play just a role in my work place, but always try to "be myself". I always let my superiors and subordinates, including customers whom I serve know my human side, so that I am genuine in all my dealings with them. I am passionate about serving people and I grew with the company whilst accomplishing my dreams. I'm truly humbled and content about where I am today and want to give back to the organization which has helped shape my career. So my advice to youth is "be yourself" than being a follower and do what is right for you to be successful in career and in life. I must admit that this is the first time that I am sharing my mantra for success. All my dealings with human beings are always wrapped with love, an acronym defined by me to mean loyalty, ownership, value other individuals and empathy. I am sure if anyone follows my definition of love, he or she could be a unique individual.

Research has shown that women lag behind men in the sphere of technology and technological skills, thereby creating technological inequalities. Is this true of Sri Lanka and what trends have you observed in this regard and in your opinion what could be the intervention to change this trend?

The numbers from the ICT workforce survey shows that female participation in the ICT industry is at 20% to 30%. This means Sri Lanka has not reached its full potential. Unlike those days, today we can see a considerable amount of female graduates passing out from universities and have also shown interest in developing ICT skills. The issue

arises when women choose to work in the ICT sector continuously, moving up to senior levels or being entrepreneurs. The subsequent reduction in women's participation is due to marriage, family commitments and certain policy and infrastructure issues faced by women at work. In order to encourage more women to participate in this industry, organizations, society and governments should render their support in certain ways. We could begin with schools by providing skills for kids (coding), by including ICT into the school curriculum and providing tech devices, while organizations should adopt best practices like agile frameworks, adjustable policies of working hours, introduce work from home arrangements, and maternity and paternity leave. Society too should play a big role in encouraging and creating awareness among communities in order to attract more women to join the industry.

Customer needs and sentiments change rapidly. With the explosion of competition what must operators do to keep pace, while being able to retain and maintain a customer?

I have become in the service industry for more than 25 years and witnessed most of the technological changes such as analogue to GSM, 2G to 5G, basic device to smart phone, and physical and traditional transactions to digital transformation. I believe that consumer needs remain unchanged, but due to the complexity that has become part of human lives, consumer behaviour too has become more complex than before. Today, convenience, simplicity and speed wrapped in human touch have become the most demanded features by the users. These technological changes have been mostly adopted by the younger generation, especially by the millennials and the challenge is to keep both the aging population and the youth happy with the service provided by the operators. Price, product and technology can always be matched, the only differentiator being the service. Operators should focus on differentiated service offerings to various customer segments to make them loyal to the brands and promoting the same with others.

At the same time, telecom companies themselves are diversifying their service portfolios and coming up with new offerings. Are telecom companies adequately customer-

General Manager Digital User Experience Design & Channel Adoption at Dialog Axiata
Waruni Algama

centric and quality-driven to provide the required customer support?

In response to declining ARPU from legacy, telecom companies are diversifying their service portfolios to generate new revenue streams. However, most companies have identified that the service differentiation is the core strategy which could keep them to stay ahead of competition and struggling to embed customer-centric and quality-driven strategies and execution model into their organizations. Operators are trying to compete with each other by trying to provide unmatched service offerings to consumers. This has led to an increase in customer expectations, which has a huge cost implication to organizations. Therefore, most companies are following a segmentation-based approach to service which helps to deliver on both customers' and management's expectations by providing the right level of service for each customer or customer group based on their value and needs, whilst maintaining quality at a reasonable cost.

Are there any practices/activities in the industry in Sri Lanka that do not add value, undermines quality and requires improvement?

The telecom sector in Sri Lanka is one of the country's most dynamic sectors, contributing significantly both directly and indirectly to investment, employment, productivity, innovation, and overall economic growth. Sri Lanka is in the lead in terms of technology introduction in the South East Asian Region. With rapid digital transformation taking place, I feel some of the policies and practices are outdated and need refinement. Further, it is also important to revisit the Consumer Data Privacy Law, or else these can be roadblocks to providing a good customer experience to consumers during their service journey.

What are the emerging/likely industry trends in the near future and is Sri Lanka ready to embrace them?

The 4th Industrial Revolution comprises technologies such as AI, Blockchain, Bigdata, Drones, IOT and Robotics. Technologies are emerging and therefore it is possible for companies and startups in Sri Lanka to have equal success as those in the US and Silicon Valley.

Digitization has brought many advantages to human civilization. It has

contributed towards the development, value addition and enhancement of people's lives. For example, the arrival of the smart phone made the world a smaller place to an average customer in terms of accessibility and reach.

A country like Sri Lanka requires to embrace and start with educating, creating awareness and placing priority to these technologies and so far the business models in Sri Lanka has been adaptive to digital transformation driven by global technologies, however, we are yet to achieve the full potential.

As a professional who professes to have excellent communication and organizational skills, how do you use them in navigating your work on a day to day basis?

Communication plays a key role in any business or relationship. I always communicate with my team and management and customers when it comes to goal setting, achievements and interactions. I am a practitioner and a follower of many tools and frameworks available in the market place such as TTD list, (Things to do) Kanban chart, Scrum meetings and daily stand ups.

These best practices help me to organize myself, prioritize my work and improve my team's productivity.

What has winning the Gold award at WIM Professional and Career Women's Awards done in terms of your career? Has your victory been an inspiration to other women working with you and under you? What have you done to encourage your female colleagues to strive for the same recognition?

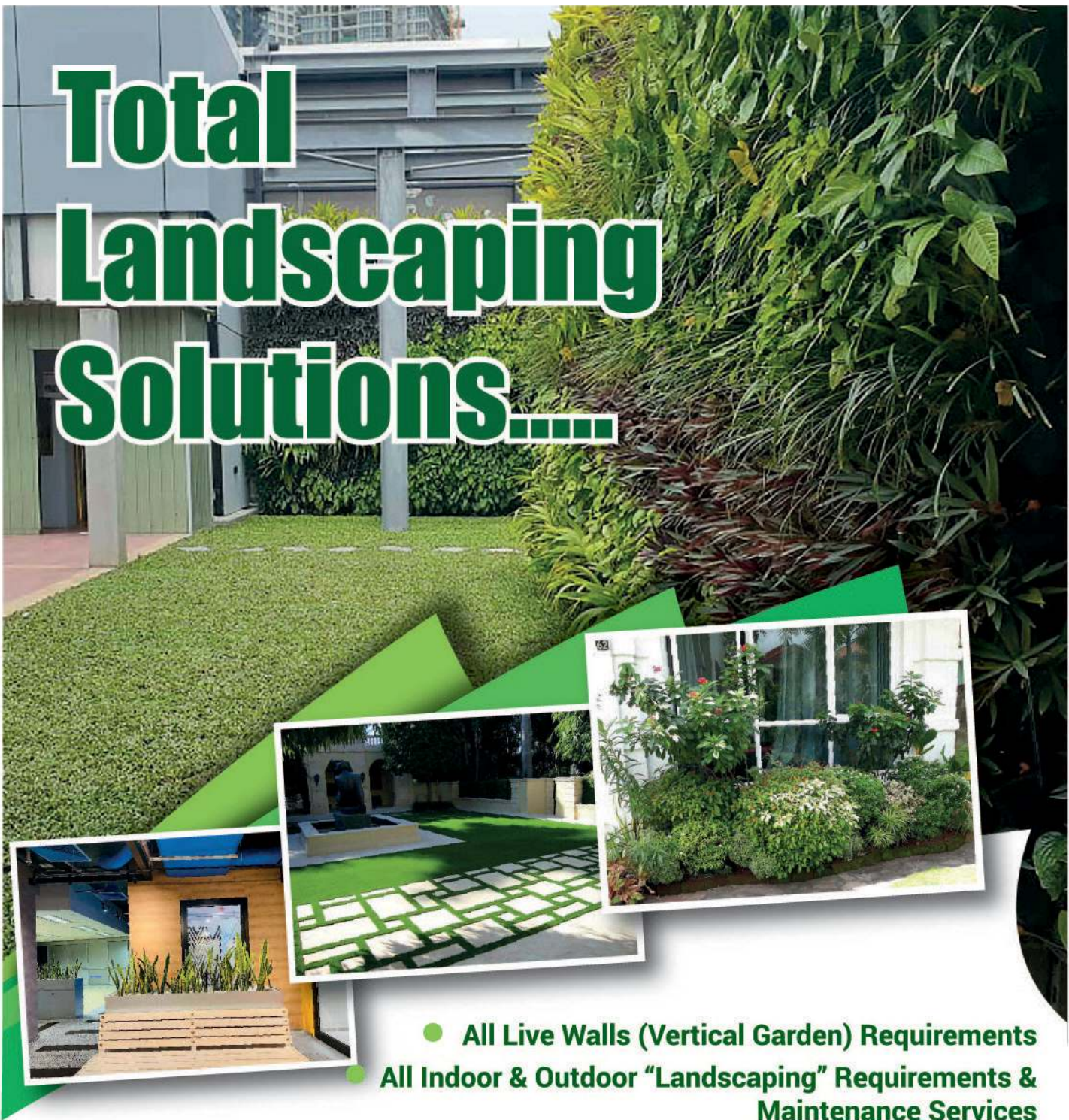
I was humbled and honoured to receive this award last year and it made me realize my full potential. The amount of feedback and the recognition I got from my organization, colleagues and subordinates, and family, relatives and friends was amazing. The WIM award is something which I dreamt of and when I was privileged enough to receive it I felt that it is also my duty to encourage other women around me to participate. More than winning an award, participation is also a challenge as we know most women do not want to brand themselves even though they are capable. I have always been an inspiration to them where I am a game changer and the first to take up any challenge and then tag along my female friends and subordinates with me.

Now that you are a member of WIM and involved in its activities what is your take on its role in general for women and for women in careers and professions? Given your experience and wealth of knowledge what would you bring to the table to make a difference?

In my opinion, I see WIM as a very strong brand established not only in Sri Lanka but also in some other part of the world. WIM always recognizes individual efforts and contributions, and sets the stage to showcase women leaders to the world. This is indeed a worthy cause that Dr Sulochana Segera has initiated for women from all walks of life and I am happy to be a member of WIM where I can also contribute. Further, as a WIM member I too am given many opportunities to brand myself. I have always wanted to help people and make them happy by sharing my knowledge and experience if it makes a difference in their lives.



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