Chapter 4
First African Female to Manage a Global Crisis:
Liberian President Ellen Johnson–Sirleaf Management of 2014 Ebola Epidemic

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many studies have looked at leadership during disasters and emergencies in a number of countries but hardly any has concentrated on developing countries and the implications of these nations' infrastructure, culture, and control systems. This chapter attempts to examine the leadership of Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first female president on the African continent, who led a global medical epidemic response during Liberia's recent Ebola crises. It identifies lessons to be learned by future leaders of developing countries as well as executives of non-governmental organizations frequently working on disaster relief projects around the globe.
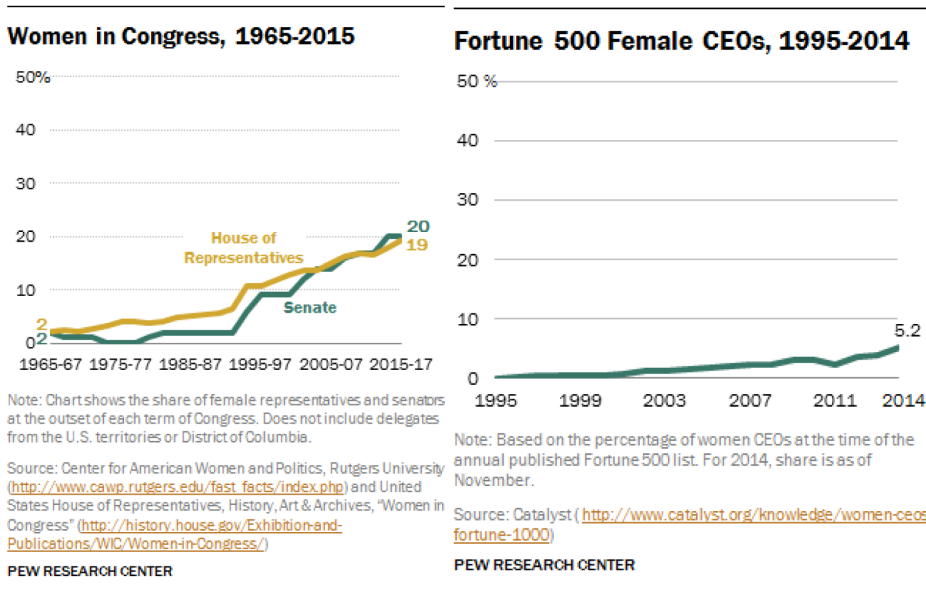
INTRODUCTION

The number of female chief executives—in politics and business—have increased over the past decade but still comparatively in great demand and scares. The election of Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in 2005, and subsequent inauguration in January 2006, as the very first female president of an African country was seen as an enormous progress towards gender equality in Africa. She was strategically placed to lead the world through the deadliest Ebola crisis in 2014. Putting this into prospective,

Australia, France, Canada and USA are still awaiting the inauguration of a female president. The U.S. representatives and senators have had far less than 500 women since 1917, when Jeannette Rankin of Montana was elected as the first woman to serve in Congress (Pew Research Center, 2015). While women have also made inroads into the top leadership positions in corporate America, the progress has also been much slower. Figure 1 shows women making up 5% of CEOs in the nation's Fortune 500 companies and 17% of the corporate board members among Fortune 500 companies (Pew Research Center, 2015). Compared with their representation in the political realm, women have made only modest progress in gaining top leadership positions in the business world.

The corporate world may still be seen mainly as a man's world; women are making inroads in this area slowly over time. One had difficulties naming a single female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies two decades ago. Today, 26 women are serving as CEOs of Fortune 500 companies (5.2%) and those serving as CEOs of Fortune 1000 companies are virtually the same (5.4%) according to Pew Research Center (2015).

This study sheds further light on female leadership in a developing country, contrary to most literature on leadership and policy research on developing country—which has amassed significant evidence in the name of poverty and hunger eradication. While the literature in this area appeals for continuing research amidst the multiplicity of problems in developing countries, previous work tended

Figure 1. Women in chief executive roles in USA since 1965

Women in Congress, 1965-2015

House of Representatives
Senate

20
19

2
2

1965-67 1975-77 1985-87 1995-97 2005-07 2015-17

Note: Chart shows the share of female representatives and senators at the outset of each term of Congress. Does not include delegates from the U.S. territories or District of Columbia.

Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University (http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/index.php) and United States House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives, "Women in Congress" (http://history.house.gov/Exhibition-and-Publications/WIC/Women-in-Congress/)

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Fortune 500 Female CEOs, 1995-2014

5.2

1995 1999 2003 2007 2011 2014

Note: Based on the percentage of women CEOs at the time of the annual published Fortune 500 list. For 2014, share is as of November.

Source: Catalyst (http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-fortune-1000)

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