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Institute of Political Education “Pedro Arrupe”
Received Sylff fellowship in 2004

My name is Adelasia Divona. I am a sociologist and a gender expert by trade. I received my first Sylff fellowship in 2004 while attending the Institute of Political Education "Pedro Arrupe" in Palermo, Italy, where I attended the International Masters in Public Policies and Local Development.

I spent the last ten years working as an advisor, consultant and researcher in civilian and military contexts. My focus is on topics such as gender equality and women’s empowerment, and women and conflict. I gained military experience serving as Reserve Officer of the Italian Army inside a NATO HQ, working as a functional specialist on social analysis and gender perspective in conflict. After leaving my military assignment last year, I am currently serving at UNDP Namibia as Gender Technical Advisor, working at the Ministry of Gender Equality and supporting the Namibian Government on the implementation of the Country’s gender-responsive budgeting.

Today I am one of the 20 fellows selected for the Sylff Workshop 2018-2019, and being surrounded by such amazing colleagues, with such diverse work experiences and brilliant careers, makes me really realize the privilege, the honour and the pride of being part of the Sylff family. Therefore, first and foremost I’d like to express my utmost gratitude to Mr Sasakawa for making the difference in my education, supporting a lot of international experiences that I could have never envisaged before 2004. Looking backwards to reflect on my path, I still remember the quote that I put at the beginning of my doctoral thesis: “Chance favours only the prepared mind”. I worked hard to be prepared to catch sudden flashes of opportunities that came across my way, and those offered to me by Sylff have contributed to make me the woman and the professional I am today. For this, I will be eternally grateful and always much obliged.



I was 29 when I was officially labelled as “Young leader” by Sylff for the first time, but I learnt about leadership long before, being a team handball player, something that prepared me to face real-life challenges. I learnt something more about leadership when I joined the army, where the mantra is “lead by example”. However, you can really learn something only from those officers who walk the talk. Good leadership is not fixed or absolute, nor stagnant: like any other thing in the military, you need to adapt while you observe and listen to your environment. And this is something I applied as a senior officer in the Knowledge Development Team and in my current position in Namibia, inside the UN family. Leading by example means that you do what you say you are going to do. And you bridge the gap only if your actions are propped up by values. Those that I rate the most are integrity and responsibility. Integrity is the ethical compass that sticks me to my constellation of values and guides my behaviour and my decision-making. It is my vision of the world. Integrity is not an inner talent, but it is an ongoing developing skill that grows with time and new experiences.

I started with self-discipline from my sport background, and I added honesty, fairness, self-awareness and congruence in my actions along the way. Many more are yet to come. Responsibility, on the other side, is about taking ownership of my actions. This means that I have the freedom to choose among many choices and opportunities, but I am not free from the consequences of my choices. This implies also embracing failure, something that I learnt through sport, because failure is a huge resource for improvement and part of an ongoing learning process from experience, which makes me proud of who I am and what I do.

Wrapping up what I just told you about my work experiences, leadership style and values, what

is my anticipation of what 2030 will be? Not an easy one, though. My vision of 2030 is people-centred: whatever the subject at stake, global issues should always put on top of the agenda experiences, knowledge, needs and concerns of women, men, girls and boys to provide equal access to resources. I am talking here about the resources that fulfil basic human needs: food, shelter, health, education, security, stability, peace. In this direction, gender equality is a cross-cutting topic that needs to be implemented at all programmes and interventions levels for the fulfilment of such needs. As for me, I know the worth of my own salt and I will always stick up for what I believe is right: standing up for women rights and the achievement of a fair, just and equal society where nobody is left behind.