

Transcription Episode 1: H.E Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

00;00;03;23 - 00;00;45;05

Reeta

I'm Reeta Roy, and this is Transcending Boundaries a Podcast that features deep conversations with exceptional leaders. Each episode dives into the lives of women and men who have changed their communities, their countries, and the world for the better. Join me to discover the relationships, experiences and insights that have shaped their remarkable journeys. On this episode, I have the immense honor of hosting a trailblazer, a beacon of resilience, a global icon of leadership and empowerment.

00;00;45;07 - 00;01;21;27

Reeta

Born in Monrovia, Liberia, she started off as a bookkeeper and rose from humble beginnings to win the presidency of her country and to lead her nation through troubling, challenging times. Throughout her career, she worked for multilateral institutions including the world Bank, Citibank, the United Nations Development Program, and she was educated at some of the world's top institutions, including Harvard University.

00;01;22;00 - 00;02;06;04

Reeta

As president, she steered her country from the aftermath of a brutal civil war to stability and growth. This won her the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her relentless efforts for peace building and for ensuring and propelling women's rights. Dubbed Africa's Iron Lady, her leadership during the Ebola crisis and her unwavering commitment to economic and social reform have left an indelible mark on Liberia and the world.

00;02;06;06 - 00;02;49;26

Reeta

Today beyond her presidency, she continues to inspire, to advocate for democracy, development and gender equality. Her story is one of courage, determination, dedication to justice and equality. She is none other than Her Excellency, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first democratically elected female Head of State in Africa. It's an absolute honor to have you. You've had an extraordinary life. It's, a life of leadership and really transcending all kinds of boundaries.

00;02;49;26 - 00;03;18;16

Reeta

And you are so admired and be loved. The world across the world. I'd love to start, learning more about your story by starting at the very beginning with your family. I know that your father was a lawyer, and he was the first Indigenous Liberian to sit in the national legislature. Your mom came from two communities, is part German, part Creole.

00;03;18;18 - 00;03;34;02

Reeta

And I wondered what kind of boundaries that broke for you growing up in a multicultural household, and how that's influenced your outlook on life and influenced your leadership.

00;03;34;04 - 00;03;36;21

President Ellen

Thank you Reeta. Let me say how honoured I am.

00;03;36;23 - 00;03;38;15

President Ellen

Also for the opportunity.

00;03;38;23 - 00;04;06;12

President Ellen

For this exchange. Let me start this way. I was the third and second girl child of my parents. What that meant is I didn't get the attention of the of the first two. So I had to find my own way to get attention. So I did things that everyone said. Little girl shouldn't do that I climbed trees. I sought where there were open fields in our community.

00;04;06;14 - 00;04;30;29

President Ellen

I went there to play football. I did all those things. Maybe those strengthen, my character to say, you know, I can still get attention from people if I do those things. You know that, may not be the things that they really want to see. But anyway, let's go back to you, to your issue, the research you did about my father.

00;04;30;29 - 00;05;07;11

President Ellen

My mother. So Correct. Indeed. My father was an indigenous from the Gola tribe, and my mother was born in one of the counties, one of the rural counties. To an indigenous mother Creole, with a German father who was a merchant in the country at the time. I'm pleased that my early years, both my mother and father never forgot their roots.

00;05;07;13 - 00;05;40;21

President Ellen

And even though both of my grandmothers were illiterate, had never been to school, did not know how to write. But because the family was together and because my mother and father believed that they could be and give credit to our system at that time, that young children could be adopted by families of the elites. That's where the education of my parents come in, in that they both were taken into the homes of those I will call a miracle.

00;05;40;21 - 00;06;11;29

President Ellen

Liberians. Those who were those are returned on emancipation and founded the country. So they were taken in my family. That's how my father became a lawyer. My mother became a teacher, ultimately a preacher. And so those days we spent with our grandparents, our grandmother from Sinoe, from this rural county came to Monrovia and lived in our home in Sinoe our grandmother from the county.

00;06;12;01 - 00;06;34;01

President Ellen

The other rural county where my father was born. Never did come to the city, but we were compelled every time there were school closing that we had to go back into the rural areas of my father's place, that we had to live there with the grandmother. We had to go to the farms with her young children, following them into the farms.

00;06;34;04 - 00;07;08;04

President Ellen

We had to help with the chores. And so this is why today I still go back to the village where my grandmother lives, where we lived with her. Where today I farm. So it was for me such a wonderful time of life. Young, but with parents that really not only loved you, but because they had spent time to educate themselves, their emphasis was on the education of their children to enable them to be self-sufficient.

00;07;08;04 - 00;07;35;00

President Ellen

And so I found those my happier days of my life, and the days when I just, you know, I just love going back to both the rural areas and just memorialize those early days with me and my siblings, you know, just enjoy being with our grandparents. A changed country today. But those memories are still very strong with us.

00;07;35;02 - 00;08;07;02

Reeta

Not just the memories, but also the actions. And now I can just see your grandparents must still see your grandmothers in your words. And the connection to women in communities. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the stories your grandmothers may have told you as a child growing up, or perhaps some of the principles that you hold on to from a childhood that is, really just rich and its so many different connections.

00;08;07;04 - 00;08;40;04

President Ellen

Well, you know, I always believe that by our situation, by the diversity of our background, we bridged so many barriers. I could easily go into any setting and say, you know, I believe I'm also a native. I believe I'm also indigenous because my father was 100%. My mother was 50%. I could also say that, we bridge also the divide of education because even though they were both indigenous, they had the opportunity to learn.

00;08;40;10 - 00;09;14;28

President Ellen

I know what was really a divided by the elitist system. And so that provided the kind of, determination it probably carved my vision of where I should be. And the fact that our father was the first indigenous set the pace that you can be whatever you want to be, if you're willing to apply your time and to be able to have the vision, the energy and the determination.

00;09;15;00 - 00;09;39;21

President Ellen

There was one part that created another aspect of my life that I think strengthened my character. Our father got ill. He had a stroke. And no, there were no medical facilities that could have helped him. And so he stayed ill for seven years. And our mother then nearly took care of him. We were still there. We were still going to school.

00;09;39;21 - 00;10;07;01

President Ellen

Some of us was still in now into high school, and I always tell people, I said, you know, I know what it is to come from prosperity to poverty because our father got ill. All of the attributes, all of the support, all he did fell away. And so our mother just had to do what other mother's did, make bread to sell, you know, do things that other women did.

00;10;07;01 - 00;10;37;21

President Ellen

But I think, I think her strength in being able to provide that care and at the same time be able to coach her children, that they stayed focus on going to school, getting, education, preparing themselves. I think therein lies my own strength of character and my own ability to be able to forge ahead. If I see that there's something that would improve not only me, but improve, just like in which I live next door.

00;10;37;21 - 00;11;04;25

Reeta

Extraordinary, both your parents are extraordinary. Can we talk about period in your life, a little later in your life when you started to enter politics? Some moment in 1985 when you criticized the military regime at the time and it caused, tumult in life as also a tumultuous time. And, you had to leave the country. Could you talk about that period of time?

00;11;04;25 - 00;11;08;25

President Ellen

You see, if I may, Reeta, let me go a little bit back.

00;11;08;25 - 00;11;10;06

Reeta

Yes.

00;11;10;08 - 00;11;47;01

President Ellen

I was one of the young people in our high school that always took action, always found some reason to challenge the teacher on certain things. And so I started to work very early because I had to. Our family were not rich. And so I. Well, before we get to 1985, I was asked to give a speech at the, at the college that I graduated from the high school, and that's when I started the criticism of government.

00;11;47;03 - 00;12;12;22

President Ellen

That was in the 70s. And that criticism enabled me through a Harvard University advisory group, to go and further my education, to go to school, to build upon the school I had had with my husband, my children's father. But to go back and get further education after that, my life took a different, completely different trend.

00;12;12;25 - 00;12;42;04

President Ellen

By the time we reached 85, I was already known. I had been doing some work at the world Bank at a junior level. But I was called back and I was called back to form a political party, and so I campaign for the selected, candidate of our party, and, yes, criticized quite a bit the policies of government, as I did in my commencement speech way back in 1971.

00;12;42;07 - 00;13;16;04

President Ellen

And ultimately we were now in a military government. And again, I challenged the military government that also led to problems. But what finally moved me was the fact that we were convinced that our candidate won the election, and that, the process of counting the vote was stopped and a new group was formed to be able to read the ballots.

00;13;16;07 - 00;13;43;25

President Ellen

And clearly that group was a pro military government group that we thought that we were shown. I thought we knew that it was fraudulent. And at that point, with my party, the leaders of my party decided we would not. Even though I had won, clearly a senatorial seat, we decided we would not honour a fraudulent elections and we would not serve well.

00;13;43;26 - 00;14;14;29

President Ellen

Obviously, that put me into a lot of trouble. I was haunted by security agents. I am had to go into different places to sleep and hide and all of that. Ultimately, with support from friends outside, was able to leave the country and to return, to work at the bank. What does that say?

00;14;15;02 - 00;14;45;02

President Ellen

It just says that, one finds themselves in those circumstance and it brings you out based upon, you know, your own personal commitment, your own determination, your own self-confidence in what you're doing. My confidence was that I could be what I wanted. I could take a position in accordance with what I felt was the right thing to do, and to be prepared to suffer the consequences of that.

00;14;45;04 - 00;14;47;27

President Ellen

And yet it took enormous courage.

00;14;48;00 - 00;14;59;13

Reeta

Enormous personal courage to be able to do that, whether it was challenging that teacher or challenging the regime. Think more about how you draw upon that courage and that resource.

00;14;59;15 - 00;15;32;15

President Ellen

I think it comes from basically my mother, my mother was a very religious person. And so in the difficulties she faced, with our father's, death and life, life, she became a preacher, Presbyterian, church preacher. And so we, we all grew up with the belief that with God, you can conquer anything. With God, you can be sure you will be safe.

00;15;32;17 - 00;15;53;13

President Ellen

And I think that faith, that, there is this supernatural body, supernatural power. Power! That's the right word. If you're doing the right thing, you will survive. And I think my in my life time, legitimates that view.

00;15;53;15 - 00;16;09;21

Reeta

It also speaks to finding purpose beyond courage, finding purpose and understanding what you're here to do. And it sounds like you had that sense, or you came into that sense of what you were here to do quite early, and it was tested.

00;16;09;23 - 00;16;42;02

President Ellen

Yes Reeta, I, you know, once you start and you very firm in a position, you take and you stay the course of what you believe in, is just one step at a time. And that's something I always like to say to people. There's no catapulting into leadership roles. You sometimes you have to go the full way. You have to learn how to lose and accept losing as a part of character building.

00;16;42;02 - 00;16;44;27

Reeta

Yes.

00;16;44;29 - 00;16;57;19

President Ellen

And I think by my own experience such as that, I did have the experience of being strong in success or maintaining self-confidence in defeat.

00;16;57;21 - 00;17;15;00

Reeta

Speak more about that process of coming to strength, even in a time when you're so challenging, you speak of defeat, and yet it seems like it's also a moment of rebirth and renewal, and self-reflection and learning. And then going forward.

00;17;15;02 - 00;17;47;17

President Ellen

I think that guided me through my long life process. Because I was always looking for what are the lessons to learn? When you reach an obstacle and that obstacle sorts of stops you from your goal, how do you turn failure into success? So I always say to, to some of my friends, you know, failure is just the upside down of success.

00;17;47;17 - 00;18;20;09

President Ellen

All you need to do is to draw from all those experiences, recalibrate, restructure, your own thinking and your own approaches, and then, go again with self-confidence and determination. And I think that has carried me through, through all the points it has not been easy. But then, you know, that's the good part about life, when you have a strong determination, you know, you can face the obstacles very strongly and face to face yourself to it.

00;18;20;12 - 00;18;24;01

President Ellen

Sometimes you, most times you win, but sometimes you lose.

00;18;24;03 - 00;18;28;20

Reeta

That's so true. So true. And how did your family rally around you?

00;18;28;25 - 00;18;57;01

President Ellen

Very much so. I think if there's any strength I have, it came from two sources. First of all, my family, like I said, we have a close knit family and I think we all, because we all had the same character traits, one of independence based upon how we were brought to do so because of what our families went through and because of what we were representing.

00;18;57;03 - 00;19;23;00

President Ellen

The bridge between two worlds, always able to be strong enough, you know, to survive and go on. So I think that family was probably has been the other best of my friend. My of my strength were women. You know, when we talked about, when I was, I had to leave the country. I was in prison before.

00;19;23;05 - 00;20;11;00

President Ellen

And it's women who collected hundreds of thousands of signatures all over the country, you know, to appeal for my release from prison. And so women have always been a part of my life because my mother was a strong woman, and she had many other prominent women in the society, very religious, always having prayer meetings, you know, to help, to pray for the good of the country and pray for the survival in those difficult times when we had, a military government that just became me apart of family, a part of the strength of women, a part of a very determined, resilient society that, against all odds, we're going to keep fighting, keep trying to

00;20;11;00 - 00;20;14;04

President Ellen

move with all the difficulties we faced.

00;20;14;07 - 00;20;47;06

Reeta

You put your finger on the human spirit. That's also propelled by a sense of, what's right, and that we never let the light go out around what's right. And that's something that's coming across really, really clearly. If we move along into your career, when you were elected president, the historic moment, certainly first woman president, not just of Liberia, but for the continent, that moment, that rallying moment.

00;20;47;08 - 00;21;10;05

Reeta

How did you feel just at that moment, at that point when you said you won the election and then the responsibility that settled? I know you've always carried that sense of purpose, that that accountability to serve. But I wondered, how you, how you gathered your strength, knowing what was also ahead, what you were inheriting?

00;21;10;07 - 00;21;29;08

President Ellen

Indeed, when I came into the presidency, I brought into the office a fair amount of experience. Experience from national public service and international public service. So I went in with a vision, but there was no playbook.

00;21;29;10 - 00;21;30;04

Reeta

Mmh

00;21;30;06 - 00;21;57;25

President Ellen

So I didn't have all the steps written our way. I could just do the check mark, And I was taking office after two decades of civil war and destruction of the country, and I was also taking office where many of those who had been warlords or been those who were perpetrators of the war, were part of the new political setting.

00;21;57;28 - 00;22;25;00

President Ellen

And so I had to work with them. I had to be able to be very clear in what I intended to achieve in the country. I had to put together the strongest team possible, and that meant recruiting some of our best minds who were serving abroad, particularly in the United States, encouraging them to come back, to face it.

00;22;25;02 - 00;22;56;29

President Ellen

And I believe also putting women, which was always been my focus in those critical positions that are usually not those held by women, like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce, those critical strategic positions. Because I believe that those who the women who served in those way, we were the ones more committed, more focused, more determined, and certainly with the best integrity as was required in the country.

00;22;57;02 - 00;23;27;07

President Ellen

And so we, our party had this propel us. We, we figured we what we would do was to become, we hoped a middle income country. By a certain period of time, we faced a lot of, difficulties trying to achieve that. Well, what we did was to put in the fundamentals of economic reconstruction, infrastructure, reverberation, institutional independence.

00;23;27;07 - 00;23;44;18

President Ellen

And so I believe that, in my, 12 years of service, we left the country so much better than we found it and left it for, for the takeoff by the next administration.

00;23;44;21 - 00;24;18;04

Reeta

There are many lessons just from everything you said from the beginning to where you left government. I want to go back to a few things because the world's so fractured right now. There are conflicts in many parts of the world which we read about all the time. What does it take to make peace with foes? People who have committed great crimes and yet recognize that they has to be, they have to be part of this process of getting to peace?

00;24;18;06 - 00;24;20;07

Reeta

How does one come to that table?

00;24;20;09 - 00;24;56;05

President Ellen

If I may use my own experience as an example. I knew that there were many persons holding positions, some of it in elective positions. In the country, in our government. I knew I had to be firm in saying that, we respected the rights of people and that the rule of law would always be available to anyone who wanted to take advantage of it and to test it.

00;24;56;07 - 00;25;44;01

President Ellen

But at the same time, to use sufficient influence in forging ahead with the right policies and the right decisions in such a way that you could be able to convert, many of those who perhaps were not committed to the kind of peace that would enable the country to achieve its, development goals. And sometimes that means making compromises, being able to find a way where you can manage the tension, in a country that's post-conflict and a poor country facing huge, a huge debt stock.

00;25;44;04 - 00;26;22;10

President Ellen

How do you get, people like, in, in our legislature, just a parliament, to be able to pass the right laws for the protection of women, promotion of women, but at the same time, to give the assurance to everybody that if you felt that your rights had been compromised, that you had a judicial system that was going to be willing to hear you out in accordance with the rule of law, and I think that enabled me in those 12 years, had we not faced a very difficult season of Ebola.

00;26;22;12 - 00;26;46;04

President Ellen

You know, now that I think is when my resolve was fully tested, fully tested because it was a disease we did not know. We even though, you know, reports say that it was a started something, a disease like that started in Democratic Republic of Congo many years ago. But we had never known a body was far away from our region.

00;26;46;10 - 00;27;20;25

President Ellen

And the effect we're so dynamic, so quickly in spreading across internal borders, people getting sick and falling So, but I again, I believe that the character of taking charge and leading by example is probably where. So I chaired the meetings. I brought, everybody together. We made mistakes. We did we did impose a militancy that led to a lot of people getting hurt.

00;27;20;28 - 00;27;53;02

President Ellen

and even die. But quickly being able to find the measures in a crisis. What we did in this particular case, we just took the entire process of response into the hands of community leaders and made them responsible to detect the symptoms, to make the reports to the to the health authorities, to take charge in leading the responses. And I think that worked very well for us.

00;27;53;02 - 00;28;23;07

President Ellen

So when we, when at the end of the time when Ebola finally ended, I think it was well known that we were those that had really come across by talking about the greatest challenge. We have a large Muslim population in our society, and they have a special way of handling death, a way of being able to, leave the death of the dead, the body, face, the body and all of that.

00;28;23;07 - 00;28;35;19

President Ellen

And so I had to make one major decision, and what that was to go against what our society had ever known. And that was cremation.

00;28;35;26 - 00;28;39;05

Reeta

How did you approach and that subject?

00;28;39;07 - 00;29;13;16

President Ellen

One day I had a meeting. I call all the religious leaders and, and the, Muslim leadership and told them that there was a choice. Either we're going to have more thousands of people die, because of this process of handling the bodies. Or we could save ourselves by ensuring that we did something that was unprecedented but most necessary for the sake of the nation.

00;29;13;19 - 00;29;30;18

President Ellen

And I suppose that, they saw my determination to carry out, I was able to say to them in a very reassuring way that this may look bad to you today, but it would be better for you tomorrow. Maybe I was lucky.

00;29;30;24 - 00;30;09;26

Reeta

I think you are also wise and courageous, also wise and courageous and also bringing, bringing them to. And just right then that example, talk about transcending boundaries. It's about bringing science and faith, public health all in one go to save lives. You mentioned something so, astonishing about leadership talked about leading by example, finding people of integrity in that way, to find people from communities to take charge, basically distributing power, devolving decision making, enabling agency at the grassroots.

00;30;09;28 - 00;30;34;08

Reeta

And you also spoke about putting women who had integrity, but who also could take charge into perhaps what would have been seen as unconventional roles in government and in high office. What were the qualities you looked for, even when you were looking to find the best minds and the best people? What did you look for?

00;30;34;10 - 00;30;39;08

President Ellen

Those who demonstrated the ethics of work.

00;30;39;10 - 00;30;42;08

Reeta

The ethics of work? Yeah.

00;30;42;11 - 00;31;25;06

President Ellen

In such a way that they propelled themselves to go forward. You could see it not only in their profile, not only in their remarks, their statements, but in the promotion that they achieved competing with others, but excelling on the basis of effort as a woman. And that to me was very important. I mean, these were women who excelled, were promoted because of performance, because of their dedication and their integrity, integrity to the as to the sense of making those hard decisions that even made them unpopular.

00;31;25;09 - 00;31;26;13

Reeta

And yet they were willing to go

00;31;26;13 - 00;31;52;07

President Ellen

They were willing to go there. And I think that's something I too stood by. That if I have a decision by the probation decision, if it's the right thing, I'll stand by it and I'm prepared to suffer the consequences. I mean, and most times, if you're doing the right thing, you will find that is convincing to others that not only did you do the right thing, but you stood by it.

00;31;52;07 - 00;31;59;17

President Ellen

Against any view, that this will be used against you to make you unpopular.

00;31;59;19 - 00;32;05;00

Reeta

It's a rare quality in politics today. Absolutely.

00;32;05;02 - 00;32;07;25

President Ellen

But it there are so many places.

00;32;07;27 - 00;32;13;29

Reeta

How do we find that and how do we put a light on that type of courage and that type of integrity?

00;32;14;02 - 00;32;52;13

President Ellen

Let me use Africa as an example. Although I have many, you know, women leaders in other countries that I admire so much. And I think some of my strength is drawn from their experience and my learning about what they have done, you know, to make a difference in their societies. But in my societies, I take it back from a native woman, chief who took the decision in those early days of our nation to open up the society to foreign investment.

00;32;52;15 - 00;33;18;04

President Ellen

And this how you hear Liberia was, it's a big rubber country, because of Firestone and the long years of Firestone, you know, having a major rubber plantation, Liberia. But I take it in the fact that, against all the objection to bringing strangers on your land and taking your land, and she stood against it then and she prevailed.

00;33;18;06 - 00;33;52;11

President Ellen

And that was a turning point in the history of our country. And we had many other examples of a woman church who during the days of, our young patriots who were in revolutionary mode, challenging the government there, she walked with the MP in her in her coat, her robes, you know, and stole the keys. So I'm using that, and I look at so many other women in this country, I don't want to call names to clarify one, I would have to name many.

00;33;52;11 - 00;34;30;12

Reeta Roy

Okay. Understood! Understood.

President Ellen

But, I, I take pride in what those women have done in this. This is why, and because I know women's collective action. Determined action got me out of prison. Women's collective action, Determined action for leadership change made me president. So and because I owe all of that to them, my post presidency is also dedicated to ensure it what we can do, you know, to be able to.

00;34;30;15 - 00;34;45;21

President Ellen

To get more women in positions where they can share their vision and they can demonstrate the character that we take, will lead countries and lead us all to a better world.

00;34;45;23 - 00;35;24;24

Reeta

This is wonderful. I think it brings us very nicely as well to the work of your centre and, the work that you're seeking to achieve by just bringing up women's leadership. Talk about what you see as sort of the strong drivers that will ensure we have women across multiple sectors, not just in high office and politics, but also women who are leading in business, women who are leading in civil society, and how they can ensure not just a strong vision, but really strong contribution to building communities, building countries.

00;35;24;26 - 00;36;23;10

President Ellen

I'm committed to working with those institutions that are working for gender equity. That are working for equality and better position for women at all levels in leadership positions. My center has a strategic, pause. One is to identify those women who have already committed themselves to public service, have already achieved a second level of leadership in their society, but is prevented from going any further simply because they are women, that they have equal education, equal commitment, and equal knowledge.

00;36;23;17 - 00;36;55;12

President Ellen

But this society has not reached a place to recognize them as equals. We intend to be a part of movements not only in Africa, where movements and wrongs that will see us with a wave of women ready through knowledge, through effort and experience and performance, ready

to take any position, leadership position at higher levels. And we do not think that we are asking for any giveaways.

00;36;55;14 - 00;37;20;18

President Ellen

This is women who are prepared to be competitive, win in on a basis of self-effort on the basis of their whole performance on merit. Merit is a tough one. If you listen to the reports and the projections, they say it would take 130 years before you see gender equity in the world. We don't stand by those protections.

00;37;20;20 - 00;37;53;23

Reeta

Which is forging ahead. That's right. We're just forging ahead. This forging ahead. You know, when you won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, that's in so many ways is just a global recognition of your contributions, your contribution of character, contributions of leadership, contributions to the country. How is that recognition? The Nobel Prize, a resource to call on in terms of holding the light up for good leadership, but also for women's leadership?

00;37;53;26 - 00;38;56;16

President Ellen

I think I, I see this as, you know, such an honour and recognition and one that reinforces, my own commitment to work for conditions of peace. That's what the Peace Prize was all about and that means sometimes taking risk to intervene in issues in countries where women's rights, you know, are abused. It also gives responsibility if you a Nobel laureate because you're expected to not only to perform in such a way that that high honour, you know, history is continues to be respected, but also that you did not end your commitment in a promotion of peace.

00;38;56;16 - 00;38;59;13

Reeta

With getting the Order to achieve the peace. Yeah.

00;38;59;15 - 00;39;35;00

President Ellen

That this was something that's a part of you, a part of your very effort. And so I'm, I work in different, the different groups that are promoting peace. Many of our countries, we still have conflict. And there are times when I'm a part of mediating teams, and at times in programs that, that are planned by the Nobel Prize committee of bringing laureate together show up arts and to other statements that are promoting peace and reconciliation.

00;39;35;00 - 00;39;48;16

President Ellen

Through that, I, I stand with all the others and our collective action to continue to find a way to, for interventions that would bring peace.

00;39;48;19 - 00;40;14;12

Reeta

President Ellen when you called on to intervene or to or to come into a room where there has been conflict between parties, leaders, how do you prepare yourself for entering that conversation? What do you look for in those parties to know how to begin even the conversation?

00;40;14;15 - 00;40;50;24

President Ellen

I believe you need to understand a Society and the environment in which you are going to intervene. And that takes time to do as much reading as you can. Any research, all of that helps. But I think it's what you bring to it because of yourself and what you stand for and how you are regarded. Your own life example, so that when you speak on an intervention, you speak with a consciousness of self-effort.

00;40;50;28 - 00;41;30;26

President Ellen

They are times and also one knows when to push and when to stop. Using evidences and examples always help in demonstrating that you could change things by influence and by power and if one uses their own self-example as a means of resolving conflict or trying to manage tensions and expectations in societies, I think, most times people look back at what you've achieved, what you've done, how you have handled it, what do you stand for

00;41;30;29 - 00;41;59;03

President Ellen

And most times I think you're able to find means for compromises. I mean and there were many women. There's another Liberian woman who also shared the Nobel Prize, you know, with me and you. And she had a group of women that did a remarkable job, you know, of trying to, to convince, warlords to be a part of a peace accord.

00;41;59;03 - 00;42;22;01

President Ellen

And so it just being a part of that group, I think you just you just bring to it, Reeta, you bring to it that determination, that example, you know, that influence, even if you you're working into a group of men who, who are the ones that you have to persuade to do things differently or to be more peaceful.

00;42;22;04 - 00;42;52;05

President Ellen

I think you bring in the authority to, in authority to of your own example and authority of your presence, but at the same time not to go bullying things. But using the influence of what's right, what's wrong, how you, the one who's part of the problem can be a part of the solution.

00;42;52;07 - 00;43;21;23

Reeta

Yes. And one example you've spoken about just not just self-awareness but leading by example, but also that example conveying credibility, trust of wanting to do the right thing and signing the right path. That's a very, very powerful example, you know, and I think about what's happening in the world today, what's happening on our continent of Africa. There's so many lessons that can be drawn by your words.

00;43;21;26 - 00;43;56;11

Reeta

Let's talk about the young people, the young people across this amazing continent who are also seeking their path of leadership, and whether they're working in community projects and in their hometown or village, whether they are innovators and creating interesting businesses to solve problems or whether they're entering a life which will be a life of public service. There are so and there's so much energy and there's so much desire and aspiration to contribute.

00;43;56;18 - 00;44;05;10

Reeta

When you look out and think about all these young people, especially young women, what do you advise them about finding their Path and sticking to it?

00;44;05;10 - 00;45;08;24

President Ellen

All leaders of the world are increasingly recognizing that the future of our world lies with the young people, not only because of their numbers, but because of the abilities that they are getting, being technologically savvy with what they do, getting education and knowledge as they can, and making demands that we cannot have a world that does not recognize this coming generation that is ready for leadership unless we are able to accord them the opportunities that they need to be able to build their own capabilities, to receive as much support for the knowledge that they need and that they demand, so that they have the rightful capacity to be

00;45;08;24 - 00;45;35;06

President Ellen

able to be a full participant, even at a time when they're not fully in leadership positions. But I'm very conscious of the role that they will have to play, and that only we can give them that opportunity to be prepared to fill that role properly in the interests of the country, in the interests of the world. And I think that recognition is coming.

00;45;35;08 - 00;46;12;23

President Ellen

And the more we accept it for what it is, the easier it will be for ensuring that people's participation. And when you say people's participation, you thought you like to talk about the young population, particularly in Africa. I mean, our population is young, increasingly ready to the technical skills they are getting to, to their abilities to have a voice and to speak to their desires and speak to their own abilities to take charge.

00;46;12;23 - 00;46;16;26

President Ellen

And so, it's a new world. It's a young world.

00;46;16;29 - 00;46;37;09

Reeta

It is a new world, a young world. And your word speaks to the heart of the work of the Mastercard Foundation to prepare young people for a life of leadership, a life of service, a life of contributing, and to be able to exercise their voice, their agency, and to make a difference. And you're right. The continent is very young.

00;46;37;09 - 00;47;24;29

Reeta

It's getting younger in some ways. But soon, most of the young people, the world's workforce will come from Africa. You're a leader who participates and at so many forums, and you lead at a global level, elevating, the role the continent and continent's young people can play to solving global problems. And I think right now, you know, we've gone through Ebola, as you spoke about, we've gone through a global pandemic, where young people also exercise and demonstrated leadership in bringing communities together and keeping the community safe and probably right now, the greatest existential threat that we face is climate change.

00;47;25;02 - 00;47;47;11

Reeta

Young people want to be engaged, talk more about how we can sort of lift up not just their voices, but really showcase the solutions that many young people, are going to be bringing forward already are working on across Africa and serve that up, at a global level.

00;47;47;13 - 00;48;28;19

President Ellen

The first thing I know the young people would like to see is Africa takes charge of its own destiny. And by so doing, use our natural resources in the best way for the development of the country. In a world today, as confused as it is perceived to be, unless we can find the way with the our young Africans coming into leadership can, through their collective action, make Africa the continent of the future.

00;48;28;22 - 00;49;30;07

President Ellen

I've been able to find the common voices across countries being able to identify those priorities that are good for Africa but still good for the rest of the world. And being the champion for bringing back the global cooperation that we have seen in the past and that would mean, again, with Africa's strong collective leadership, we can try to break through this major political warfare, and see if we can get back to those days when multilateralism was effective response to global common goods, keen to collective global action, and those who can help Africa to achieve this dominant role of being once mediating among the major powers, is to encourage our

00;49;30;09 - 00;50;03;23

President Ellen

young people to be in those positions that bring their strength and their commitment to that total effort. It's not easy. You, as you said, the existential threat of climate change, artificial intelligence and all of those things are things that we are all cropping to respond to and I think only in Africa that binds itself together because we've got much diversity in Africa.

00;50;03;26 - 00;50;17;28

President Ellen

But if, if in that diversity we can find common strengths and then have common purpose, not only for our development for being able to be part of the championing for a better world. It may sound like a dream.

00;50;18;00 - 00;50;19;29

Reeta

We need dreams.

00;50;20;01 - 00;50;48;29

President Ellen

There's always dreams that can be made. Realities. I think Africa needs to, to do that. After this. Vision 2063 lays the groundwork, but it's, you know, again, there's no play back through there. But I see a commitment on the part of young people in a changing leadership that's recognizing the important part that the young people play.

00;50;49;01 - 00;51;11;06

Reeta

Yes, they speak about vision that while they may not be a playbook, we've got to make up the playbook as we go along, create that playbook. But also created on the basis of trust, integrity, collective action, right action, and also some imagination. So much of what you've spoken about is also that human connection.

00;51;11;10 - 00;51;11;29

President Ellen

Absolutely.

00;51;11;29 - 00;51;14;07

Reeta

and seeing each other as human beings.

00;51;14;10 - 00;51;58;17

President Ellen

Again, by reaching out to people, at levels in the society, people who been largely marginalized before that giving them a voice, giving them a reason, giving them, I think that that true build. What do you want to see in the societies of, of collective action toward common causes I believe that the effort of massacre, not only in the countries of preferences, but also finding programs of intervention that cuts across, that enable all the countries in Africa to build in their own societies.

00;51;58;17 - 00;52;07;12

President Ellen

The responses to the existential threat, like climate change and other things. I begin to see that happening.

00;52;07;15 - 00;52;29;17

Reeta

Well, first of all, President, we are so proud and so grateful that you serve on the board of the Mastercard Foundation. Your leadership, your voice at that critical time, when the world faced this incredible threat, which we didn't even understand. Today, we understand the coronavirus much more. We understand what it took to fight Covid.

00;52;29;19 - 00;53;02;06

Reeta

But at that moment, your voice mattered so much, that helped propel us to take the right action and to partner with the Africa CDC. So many lessons, so many lessons. But more importantly, when I think about the work going forward, there's so much more that we have to do to build the workforce, to build leadership. Yeah, to enable entrepreneurs to access opportunities, not just financing, but markets and networks so that the continent can flourish.

00;53;02;06 - 00;53;05;06

Reeta

Because if the continent flourishes, the world flourishes.

00;53;05;08 - 00;53;10;14

President Ellen

And I applaud the work on the promotion of women. I'll come back. I'll Come back to that.

00;53;10;14 - 00;53;11;16

Reeta

Yes, absolutely.

00;53;11;16 - 00;53;51;12

President Ellen

It was I think that that is clearly what is now required, to be able to move at a faster pace, the contribution of women to economic development, contribution to peace and security, to a better world, less wars, less conflict, more compromising. I think that's what women bring to leadership in the continent and beyond. And until we can get enough of those women in those places, we cannot achieve.

00;53;51;15 - 00;54;14;01

President Ellen

Statistics also show what this will do to the GDP of all the countries by the contribution of women going beyond. But just think of what it will bring in societies like our own, which, predominantly depend upon the work of women, women on the farms, women in the markets. But going beyond that, women leadership.

00;54;14;03 - 00;54;22;14

Reeta

Women's leadership, which brings peace, prosperity and dignity to all of us.

00;54;22;17 - 00;54;56;21

President Ellen

And I and I'm quite sure we always face that question when people say, well, what about the men? Are we going to leave the men behind? And the answer to that is no, it's just a matter of catching up. So Women were behind, in catching up. And with that catch up, we have more collective, more unified action and a better world for boys and girls who now see that they can be just what they want to be with their own effort, and their energy, you know, and their strategies, they can be what they want to be.

00;54;56;24 - 00;55;33;27

President Ellen

They can see each other as equal is no longer a, you know, a younger me. This is a person of character, an African person forging ahead, taking charge, speaking up, taking positions, winning, competing. That's what we want to see where young people and they grew up, girls and boys with all the same rights, same advantages, same opportunities, all left to the individual to make it happen on the basis of their own effort.

00;55;33;29 - 00;56;04;24

Reeta

That's powerful. Thank you so much, President Ellen. Thank you. Thank you very, very much for contributing, for sharing and for leading, leading all of us. You are an absolute inspiration. Thank you. Thank you so much. From homemaker to Nobel laureate, from leading the nation to impacting the world and generations, even from an early age, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was a change agent.

00;56;04;26 - 00;56;36;17

Reeta

She was already breaking barriers. She's a phenomenal example of transcending boundaries. Thank you for joining us on Transcending Boundaries. I hope this conversation sparked a new idea or inspired you to reflect on your own leadership journey and the values that guide you. If you enjoyed today's episode, please subscribe! Leave us a review and share our show with others.

00;56;36;20 - 00;56;40;26

Reeta

Until next time, keep leading with purpose and with courage.