On the International Women’s Day of 8 March 2019 Google displayed an inspiring slider with 14 citations. One of them particularly resonated with the author and co-founder of ArbitralWomen and ties in the efforts undertaken by the co-founders. The citation by the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie said: “I matter. I matter equally. Not if only, not as long as. I matter. Full stop!”. Women matter just like men matter, white people and people of colour matter, young and old generations matter, disabled people matter, every human being matters!

In a world where women nearly equal the number of men and where women are active in all business and legal fields, many female practitioners noticed that they were significantly under-represented mainly in key positions in all fields. A few of us in the dispute resolution field were saddened to see that we were doing the same work as our male counterparts, but that we were kept back-stage. A woman acting as lead counsel, arbitrator, mediator or expert was unheard of thirty years ago. Holding a lead position on any board or speaking on a panel was reserved to men.

**Take Action**

Women in dispute resolution were a non-issue thirty years ago. No one in the business and the legal communities was concerned about their absence. As Lucy Greenwood puts it, practitioners had become comfortable with the notion that women are a significant minority (“Getting a better balance on international arbitration tribunals”, Arbitration International, vol.28, n°4, 2012, p.653).

Many women and sometimes also men have invested a lot of efforts in fighting against inequality. Amazing and inspiring women throughout the world undertook admirable initiatives and also strived for the rights of women in all fields, for example Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the second female justice at the U.S. Supreme Court. A few men have also denounced odd situations, such as Geoffrey Beresford Hartwell, a British engineer and arbitrator, who had the courage to ask Louise Barrington at the beginning of the 1990s to report about women participation in the arbitration field. The result was alarming. It was daring to break the silence about the dearth of women in dispute resolution!

Although change was and remains slow, things are better. It required that some people stand up and say ‘this is wrong, it must change’. Those who contributed to change the under-representation of women witnessed an evolution, one of which is the fact that gender equality now matters and can no longer be moot. Discussions about gender parity in the dispute resolution field gained increased popularity around the world. The trend is more successful than anyone could have anticipated, but we now need to see more concrete actions.
Situation leading to Foundation of ArbitralWomen

In 1993 when Louise Barrington attended the International Council of Commercial Arbitration (ICCA) in Bahrain, she was among the five or six women out of 250 participants. She was intrigued and wanted to know if other women in dispute resolution existed. She invited the few women she knew to a dinner and asked them to invite others whom they might know. To her amazement, we ended up being 60 women at a dinner held in Paris on 22 November 1993. That night was the beginning of a story that continues today on every continent of the globe.

A few years passed without many activities until I decided to build on that momentum and to create a Yahoo group enabling female practitioners to connect. Louise and I realised that female practitioners could benefit significantly from the creation of a network to enable them share ideas, celebrate their achievements, and work together to find ways to promote women in the field. As the group continued growing, Louise and I incorporated ArbitralWomen (AW) in 2005, to give it a more formal existence and increase its visibility. Since then, the group has grown to a thousand members from more than 40 countries. Most importantly, AW has created a space for women practicing in this field.

ArbitralWomen Achievements

ArbitralWomen has a pretty impressive record in its brief history. It has initiated a number of exciting, even groundbreaking, activities and is active more than ever to promote female practitioners in dispute resolution.

News, News about Members, Newsletters: After having built its website in 2005 AW started promoting dispute resolution events whenever its members were speakers. Considering that members are spread around the world it realised that it is important to share reports about such events. It thus began publishing a newsletter in 2010. The significant increase of events generated numerous reports and the various dispute resolution news reported were equally increasing. Interviews with Women Leaders in Dispute Resolution and reports about Women’s initiatives in their workplace are published. Around 2014, AW added a new section in its newsletter to feature the promotion of members. The newsletter and the website became the primary communication and promotion tools, and an additional tool was used since 2016, the emailing of periodical alerts on upcoming events and alerts sharing news and promotions.

Events: Events organised around the world remains crucial to spread the word about AW objectives and activities.

The International Women’s Day (IWD) is celebrated each year during events organised by members around the world, and every three years a big celebration is organised, such as in 2013 in Dublin or in 2016 in Paris. Gala dinners after a one-day conference are organised at the occasion of AW’s anniversary celebrations; in November 2018, AW celebrated the Jubilee of its 25th anniversary. AW also co-organises or supports numerous events, including Arbitration weeks organised in several countries. Over the years, breakfast panels at the annual IBA, ICCA, CIArb and ICC conferences have become a tradition.

Part of AW mission also involves encouraging conference organisers to increase equality of representation on speaking panels and recommending women speakers.

One of AW signature events started in 2014 is the ArbitralWomen SpeedNet, an event inspired by speed-dating meant to bring together women practitioners in dispute resolution, of all ages and stages in their career in a comfortable and collegial setting. This format has inspired other organisations and courts to bring together lawyers with in-house counsel, or lawyers with judges. Another signature event is the ArbitralWomen Unconscious Bias seminars intended to help recognising our own prejudices and dealing with them.

Diversity Toolkit™: After having learned from experiences built over the years, the testimonies received from many women who suffered or continue suffering discrimination in their workplace, the research undertaken about biases to understand where the problems lie, AW started organising seminars in 2015 to raise aware-
ness about unconscious bias. It has inspired its members from all countries to replicate these discussions locally in private groups and in conferences, including in universities. AW then developed a Diversity Toolkit™ thanks to a generous grant from the AAA-ICDR Foundation and launched it in 2018. The Toolkit offers a training designed to help men and women recognise the role played by prejudices engrained in us and to deal with them.

**Mentorship:** Over a hundred members from nearly 50 countries and all continents benefited from a Mentorship Programme in place since 2006, whereby younger members or experienced members who wish to benefit from the programme, are matched with more experienced members to act as their mentors. The feedback has been positive and is proving helpful.

Likewise, a parenting mentoring programme was launched in 2017 to assist members who could benefit from a mentoring with another woman who has recently gone through the same experience, as there are specific questions and concerns connected with working while pregnant, deciding on the right childcare, and then balancing work and life with a child.

**Moot competitions:** Competitions in dispute resolution became increasingly popular in the last two decades. However, attending these competitions can be expensive, particularly for teams from developing countries with no financial support. The Moot Programme started in 2009 funded over 50 teams. Provided half of the teams comprise women, AW offers financial support by covering their registration fee. In addition, many AW members serve as coaches for teams from schools in their vicinity. The moots are an extremely valuable experience for law students, as they have the opportunity to play a role it would otherwise take decades of practice to achieve.

**Member Directory, Find Practitioners:** Many entries are available to members to help them promote their experience and increase their visibility: first in their profile under Member Directory where they can also upload their publications and make their work available to professionals and researchers; second, members can contribute with articles on Kluwer Arbitration Blog also featured on AW website, news on AW news webpage, and reports in AW newsletters; third, AW website also provides a multi-search tool under Find Practitioners to enable people find female practitioners following specific criteria.

**YAWP:** Young ArbitralWomen Practitioners (YAWP) is the under-40 subgroup of AW. YAWP’s mission is to help young women build their careers and fulfil their professional aspirations in the field of dispute resolution, thereby supporting them during the initial stages of their careers and through their transition to more senior roles. Launched in 2016, it has since then organised a number of events and undertaken a few projects, including the development of the Parenting Mentoring Programme and a series of inspirational interviews called “YAWP Inspire”.

**Pledge:** As change was extremely slow, Sylvia Noury, partner at Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer and AW member, initiated in 2015 the Equal Representation in Arbitration Pledge (Pledge) which has significantly contributed to accelerate nominations of female arbitrators. Over 4,000 people, firms and organisations signed the Pledge. We have seen some change as signatures started proposing women on the list of arbitrators considered for nomination. The Pledge is promoted in most of AW events. Some AW members are also members of the Pledge Steering Committee and a few of them of the Search Committee tasked with assisting professionals in finding female practitioners to be considered for appointments.

**GQUAL:** GQUAL started in 2015 a campaign for gender parity, crafted as a response to the critical under-representation of women within many organisations. GQUAL has become a leading platform advocating gender parity in international justice and discussing human rights. AW supports GQUAL and cooperates on a few occasions.

**GPC:** In 2017 AW partnered with the Global Pound Conference. Given the active role of both AW and the GPC in global dispute resolution initiatives, this partnership has represented a wonderful opportunity for GPC and AW to promote and support one another by running concurrent events in a number of countries.

**UNCITRAL:** AW was granted observer status in 2015 for all sessions of UNCITRAL Working Group II (Arbitration and Conciliation). AW is thus included in the list of non-governmental organisations eligible for invitation to the sessions. Members who attend sessions provide reports published on AW news webpage.
Women Pioneers in Dispute Resolution: AW published the Women Pioneers in Dispute Resolution book, an inspiring bouquet of stories celebrating women pioneers from around the world. Women featured have shared their experience and the challenges they had to overcome. The wide geographical coverage of these success stories demonstrates that irrespective of where in the world the featured women have been working, their challenges have been identical.

Champion for Change: In 2009, AW decided to honour men who were particularly supportive of our activities. AW acknowledges the support of our male colleagues by granting a Champion for Change Award to men who have furthered the goals of AW or have been of real assistance to women in any manner in the field of dispute resolution.

Conclusion

To conclude, any initiative is hard to undertake. If initiators see things others cannot see, if they believe in the project initiated and know that their project is valuable, they should take it forward, while being prepared to be criticised and misunderstood. Walking the talk is what makes the difference; if it was so easy anybody could do it. Perseverance is the key to success. It is essential to continue the efforts.