

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

INTRODUCTION

Connected Women Leaders overview

Connected Women Leaders (CWL) is a cohort curated across geographies, generations, expertise, and experience to convene forums on some of the world's most urgent threats: climate justice, food security, global health, economic inequities, all with a gender and racial lens, working together to shape just, equitable, and sustainable solutions.

We are but one branch of a larger ecosystem. Working in tandem with other impactful organizations and coalitions, we hope to better inform our collective advocacy with shared content, original research, and the exchange of ideas and strategies.

CWL launched at Bellagio in 2017 with the support of The Rockefeller Foundation. In both 2017 and 2019, Pat Mitchell and Ronda Carnegie, co-founders of TEDWomen, along with partner Hafsat Abiola, president of Women in Africa, brought together at Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center a diverse range of women leaders from around the world for convening with the purposes of developing a women leader's perspective on global priorities, potential solutions, and strategies to confronting global challenges. CWL's goal was to strengthen an understanding of what is needed for a more coordinated approach to system change and create an agenda towards a common vision, better alignment of strategies, and deepen support for one another and other women leaders with a commitment to values-based, solution-focused leadership. The insight from the onset of the pandemic meant that in 2020/2021 Connected Women Leaders quickly pivoted to gather together virtually in a moment when the world was frozen. These virtual educational summits and the creation of the CWL website further delivered on our vision of becoming a warm, trusting, and engaged community of leaders (CWL, 2020).

Report outline

This report presents a comprehensive examination of women's networking within the Connected Women Leaders community. It begins with an exploration of the foundational aspects of women's networks, including their definition, significance, and evolution over time. Drawing upon existing research and literature, the report explores the unique characteristics of effective women's networks, highlighting themes of intersectionality, diversity, and cultural differences that shape networking dynamics.

Following the foundational understanding of women's networks, the report proceeds to discuss the various methodologies employed to collect data for this report. This includes a

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

detailed overview of the Health of Network Survey administered to CWL members, modeled after Rockefeller Foundation's own Health of Network Survey; insights gathered from case study discussions; and the analysis of LinkedIn network mapping data. Each data collection method offers unique perspectives and insights into the experiences and perceptions of women within the CWL community.

The subsequent sections of the report present the findings and analysis found from the data collection methods. Insights from the Network Survey explore the benefits of CWL participation, interaction patterns within the network, and suggestions for improvement. Case studies offer deeper qualitative insights, revealing common themes, anecdotal evidence, and stories that enrich our understanding of women's networking experiences within CWL.

The report also includes an analysis of LinkedIn network mapping data, which provides a visual representation of connections within the CWL community. This analysis identifies network strengths, weaknesses, and potential opportunities for enhancement, informing the recommendations presented in the subsequent section.

In the final sections of the report, key findings and recommendations are synthesized, drawing upon insights from all data collection methods. These recommendations aim to guide future initiatives and actions to strengthen and enhance women's networking within the CWL community and beyond.

UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S NETWORKS

Definitions and significance

In this report, a 'network' is understood to mean a grouping of one or more organizations or individuals, with a degree of formality, united with a mission statement, vision, or issue. In the context of professional spheres, we define a 'women's network' as a modern means for women to come together, within a traditional network format, to exchange ideas and information that enables members to contribute to, and pull from, the network to accomplish more than the sum of the parts would indicate. As a foundation to this report, several important factors are identified and discussed: networks as a method of individual improvement, both for professional success and individual network building, intentional diversity within networks to strengthen results and power, and the importance of gendered networking. These factors serve as guideposts for the findings of this report and

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

are highlighted to create a base level of understanding for all who read and utilize this work.

Networks as a tool for individual professional success

Networking is a crucial catalyst for advancement among women in the workplace. A 2019 study found that women need to network to achieve power – 81% of the 751 women who participated in the study stated that they used their networks to achieve higher positions and pay (Childers, C. et al., 2020). It has also been found that performance strongly increases when women in top positions participate in networks when compared to men, revealing higher returns for women's networks (Manello, A. et al., 2019). CWL can report many instances of network activation to amplify and lift an individual and their work within the community. An example of this network sourcing can be found in the case study of Wanjiru Kamau Rutenberg. A newer member of the network, Rutenberg's first interaction with the community was CWL's 2022 Bellagio convening, which focused on uncommon collaborations and emerging leaders. From this convening, Rutenberg received the support and mentorship needed to set in motion a career shift, which ultimately led to a successful initiative Rutenberg launched – Be Well. From Rutenberg, "Be Well was a baby seed of an idea, and the nurturing I received at Bellagio transformed and strengthened me to build what is now a fully fledged piece of work that has been launched – we are now in the middle of our first cohort (2024a)."

Networks as a tool for individual network strength

Women's networks benefit and improve the individual woman's work more than a similar network would for an individual man (Yang, Y. et al., 2019). In men's networks, network-building success can be found in face-to-face interactions, especially with higher-level leaders. Compared to men, women who had the opportunity to interact face-to-face with senior leaders are 40% less likely to form a tie with that leader (Rua-Gomez, C. et al., 2024). Traits we traditionally associate with masculine behavior creates gendered perceptions of competence in these interactions, which inadvertently creates barriers for women, who may exhibit these traits differently or who may even be penalized for displaying them (Godsil, R. et al., 2016). This is where the network is significantly more important for women. Women are 33% more likely than men to form high-status connections via a third-party tie, i.e. a network. These network introductions are endorsements, character references, and amplifiers of capability. They carry the implicit approval and trust of the mutual contact (Rua-Gomez, C. et al., 2024). In this way

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

and others, a network of trusted and vetted women can be seen as more crucial to the success of the individual woman than that of an individual man.

Intentional diversity within women's networks

Diversity within women's networks elicit higher rates of success than networks without intentional diversification. Women of color report higher rates of networking satisfaction and confidence and are more likely than white respondents to have diverse, powerful networks that extend beyond current and former employer connections (Childers, C. et al., 2020). Findings from another study show that women have a higher risk of career failure than their male colleagues when working within uniform networks, but have better survival chances when embedded in open, diverse networks (Lutter, M., 2015). This is also true for the CWL network, as members gain insight not otherwise available to them from their colleagues of varied geographies and industries, which will be explored further later in this paper.

In addition to the well-documented significance of women's networks in Western contexts, it is essential to acknowledge the equally vital role of women's networks in the Global South. While terminology like 'women of color' may not universally apply in all regions (Zavella, P., 2022), the power of women coming together for collective action and support is not geographically bound. For example, organizations like the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India exemplify how rural women in the global south form networks and collaboratives to address common challenges and advance their civic engagement (Desai, R. et al., 2014). Another example is the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), a coalition of women's organizations and individuals in Uganda working towards gender equality. UWONET facilitates collective action, resource sharing, and community development initiatives among women, positive outcomes that have been investigated and researched (Meier zu Selhausen, F., 2015). These networks not only facilitate knowledge exchange and skill-building but also serve as platforms for advocacy and solidarity. By highlighting the impact of women's networks within diverse cultural contexts, the third crucial layer outlined in this paper is formed in understanding networking dynamics.

Connected Women Leaders' historical significance

Before continuing on to the research conducted within the CWL network, it is important to give the historical context of Connected Women Leaders so that the stage is properly set for data sharing.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

Starting in 2017, Co-Founders Pat Mitchell, Ronda Carnegie, and Hafsat Abiola brought together a diverse range of women leaders from around the world to convene at Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center with the purpose of developing women leaders perspectives on confronting global challenges. CWL reconvened at Bellagio again in 2019 to lead problem solving sessions in their core priority areas. A Declaration on Climate Justice was drafted and presented to the UN Climate summit and signed by 700 world leaders, signifying CWL as an important player in the climate movement.

The pandemic in 2020 pivoted CWL to virtual gatherings. Through partnerships with CARE, the Skoll Foundation, Earth X, the UN Foundation, UN Women, and the NEST coalition of Generation Equity focused organizations, CWL convened forums focusing on the program areas of global health, climate justice, and food security, which are the core pillars of Connected Women Leaders. In the transition back to in-person convenings, 2021 saw CWL's first annual combined conference at Omega: Women and Power. This small gathering was an important moment of in-person reconnection following months of virtual activities.

In 2022, CWL again convened at the Bellagio Center and worked with The Rockefeller Foundation to shape Project Dandelion. Through an UNGA event and a partnership with WRTHY, Project Dandelion began to take root. While the focus of this paper is not on Project Dandelion specifically, it is a flagship project of CWL and can be explored more via the Project Dandelion website (WRTHY, 2022). 2023 was a continuation of this project, a global climate justice campaign ready for activation. The year was spent gathering advocates, seeding collaborations, and pushing for the catalytic funding needed to grow the Project Dandelion campaign. CWL leveraged convenings to create opportunities to focus on the power of women's leadership, educational advocacy on climate, and promoting the networks' lifetime, including Women Deliver, TED Countdown, WOW Festival, UNGA/Climate Week, TED Women, Bellagio Center, Omega, Reykjavik Global Forum, and Africa Climate Summit.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The methodologies used were intentionally chosen to provide a diverse mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

Qualitative Stories of Impact

Three case studies were conducted with key members of the CWL network to understand more intimately the ways in which members utilize and contribute to the community, which will also be referred to as qualitative stories of impact. These stories served as qualitative data and complemented the quantitative data collection. Questions asked in the case studies were adopted from the survey and paired with intentional follow-up questions to elicit further stories and feedback.

Questions included:

1. Can you share a specific instance or story where participation in the CWL Network provided a significant benefit to you, personally or professionally?
 - a. How did this example impact you a year from its origin? 5 years? What long-term impact do you expect to experience as a result of this example?

This question looks deeper into long-term impact of the network for individual success.

2. Are there any ways you would like to engage with the CWL Network that are not currently available?

- a. How would these new avenues of interaction enhance your experience within the community?

This question gathers specific feedback from key members around ways in which CWL and its interactions with the community could be improved.

3. Can you share any instances where you felt there were missed opportunities?

- a. Are there any specific areas where CWL can better meet your individual needs?

This question looks back on past CWL activations to uncover and understand perceived shortcomings in order to strengthen future plans and partnerships.

4. What aspects of CWL's structure do you find most valuable?

- a. How do these aspects compare to other networks you're part of?

This question explores the strengths and identities of other networks these key members may be part of, and looks to see if there are any specific learnings to be adopted from other communities.

Health of Network Survey

Modeled after the Rockefeller Foundation's Health of Network Survey, this adapted version serves as a qualitative/quantitative data hybrid.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

Questions included:

1. What is the biggest benefit of your participation in the CWL Network?
This question, in tandem with the case studies, will highlight the ways in which CWL activates the network uniquely and successfully.
2. In what ways do you interact with the CWL Network?
This question begins to explore individual interactions with the network and if there are differences in interactions based on the individual's geography, industry, etc.
3. What feedback do you have on how the CWL Network could improve, based on your interactions?
This question uncovers individual concerns and ideas, in a confidential manner, around how the network could look to improve.

LinkedIn Mapping

The final method of data collection was a comprehensive LinkedIn mapping of individual members' connections. This included an overview of 23 strategically chosen members, who represent the breadth of the network, through an analysis of their connections on LinkedIn. 1,000 connections were explored for each individual, and of those connections, catalytic women were highlighted and categorized. 'Catalytic women' is defined as those in positions of influence or power. These connections were sorted into three categories – Industry, Geography, and CWL Thematic Pillar. Interconnections were also noted, meaning any given connection also linked with other CWL Members was logged.

This data begins to explore the widespread influence of the CWL Network. By mapping out individual connections within these three categories, the true reach of CWL can be grasped and quantified. This data also produces a service for CWL members.

Understanding individual networks strengths and weaknesses is valuable information, and members will be able to identify other members who may be strong in places they are not, allowing them to network accordingly.

It is understood that LinkedIn is not a complete means of data collection when it comes to individual networks. However, at this time, networking is a major driver of informational benefits from LinkedIn use and is the best means of data collection for this study given outside barriers to other potential varieties of data collection (Uts, S. et al., 2019).

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

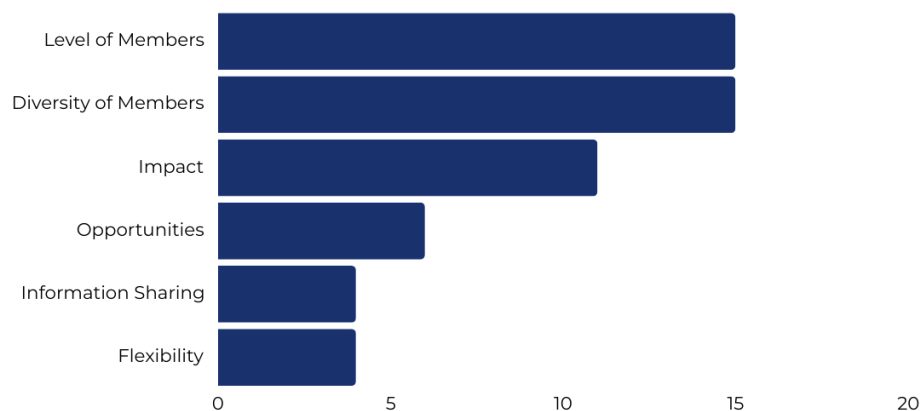
Insights from Connected Women Leaders

INSIGHTS FROM THE NETWORK SURVEY

Of the 84 CWL members, 34% completed the Health of Network Survey. Though the responses are qualitative in nature, full participation is understood, meaning the data gathered is representative of the collective whole. From those who completed the survey, 44% of respondents are in the nonprofit sector, 28% are in the business sector, 19% are in the policy/government sector, and 9% are in the philanthropic sector. The geographic breakdown of those who completed the survey are as follows: 41% are based in North America, 22% are based in Europe, 17% are based in Africa, 13% are based in Asia, and 7% are based in South America and Oceania. Finally, when viewed through the lens of CWL's core pillars, 69% are in feminist activism, 12% are in global health, 9% are in food security, and 9% are in climate justice.

Benefit of CWL Network

It was found that over 50% of CWL Members who completed the survey agreed that the biggest unique benefits of participating in the CWL Network were the level and diversity of members involved. In this case, 'level of participants' refers to the positions the members hold and the rooms to which the collective network can access. 'Diversity of members' references not only the geographical diversity of the cohort, but also the variety of industries, generations, and focus areas represented. As stated by one member, "Working with and learning from a diverse group of women leaders - different industries, career paths, and regions of influence - I think is what makes CWL stand out most...you never get just one kind of voice or perspective here (Survey 12, 2024)." Another member shared, "I'm able to learn how other women in the network are organizing...currently there is not a women's network that I engage with that is like CWL (Survey 31, 2024)."



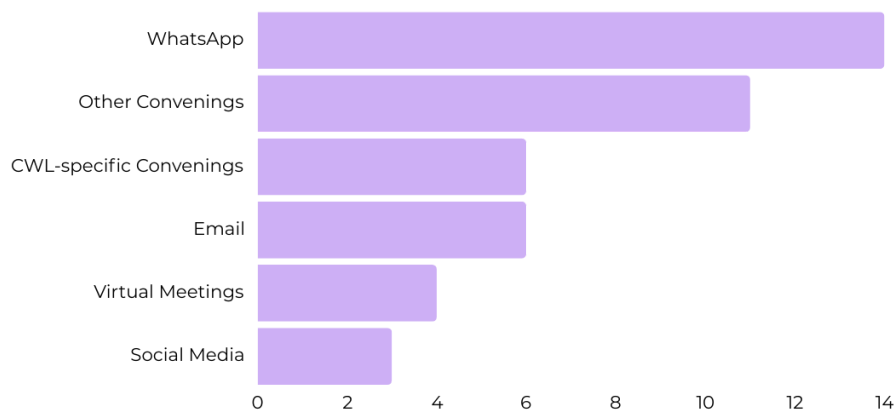
UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

Impact, opportunities, information sharing, and flexibility were also benefits of the CWL Network repeated within the survey. "There's an alchemy, maybe even a magic," one member shared, "in the blend of authenticity, generosity, power, vision, and verve that marks this community (Survey 29, 2024)."

Interactions with CWL Network

Of those who completed the survey, 50% interact with the network through WhatsApp. This informal means of communication points back to the flexibility of the cohort, as the sharing of information and opportunities can be done quickly and in real time on this platform.



A large number of the network also find formal meet-ups at larger convenings to be a useful, convenient way to connect with the cohort. From the survey, "Primarily, I interact through the network via in-person events...I wish more convenings could be resourced and made available – they are invaluable for both immediate, shallow ripples and longer-term, deep ones (Survey 29, 2024)." This sentiment was overwhelmingly shared by those who completed the survey, with over 50% stating some desire for increased in-person opportunities. One member states, "We desperately need more in-person meetings (Survey 7, 2024)." Another shares, "I would like us to convene in person maybe once a year, like Bellagio (Survey 9, 2024)." Yet another answered, "I would welcome annual Bellagio gatherings aimed at helping the members of the network advance work that benefits social aims, particularly gender equality (Survey 15, 2024)."

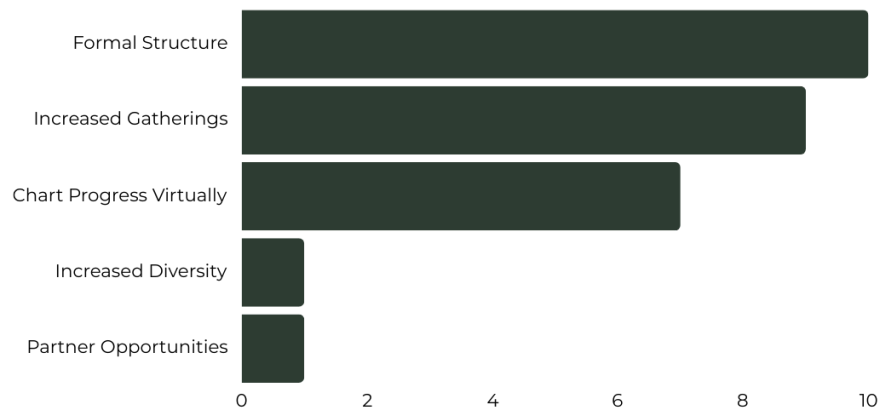
Improving the CWL Network

Interestingly, though flexibility was listed as a common benefit of the CWL Network among those that completed the survey, the desire for a more formal structure was also

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

highlighted. Suggestions included a regular newsletter, a network directory, a LinkedIn page, rules of engagement, and a structured onboarding process. This particular result highlighted a disconnect between CWL members and the CWL core team processes, as many of the suggested improvements have either been prototyped in the past or are indeed already in effect. For example, the cohort released a monthly newsletter for all of 2021, but did not receive high engagement, and the community also has an option to create an account on the CWL website which allows them access to the full list of members and their respective contact information, but this feature has not been utilized. This is an important learning, as these offerings are clearly desired, and this disconnect must be addressed and corrected to move forward with a more formal structure while still maintaining flexibility.



Unsurprisingly, a desire for increased gatherings was also shared. From one member, “There is power in physical presence. Perhaps Rockefeller can help to financially support some of the logistical needs for CWL members to gather around important events (Survey 7, 2024).” Another member shared, “I think we should be more honest about convening for the sake of convening. It’s the way we build community and create the conditions for emergence – the stated outcomes often feel a bit forced. Let’s claim the magic and power of what happens when women get together with intention but not with mechanical, linear expectations (Survey 29, 2024).”

QUALITATIVE STORIES OF IMPACT

The three case studies solidified the findings from the survey with specific stories of connection and feedback.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

Case study one: Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg

As shared previously, Wanjiru's introduction into Connected Women Leaders began with her participation in CWL's 2022 Bellagio Convening, which centered on uncommon collaborations and emerging leaders. Rutenberg felt the power of the network at this convening, sharing that this specific gathering served as a launch point for her new initiative, Be Well Black Women in Executive Leadership.

Rutenberg echoed the desire for structure, as stated in the surveys, calling out monthly newsletters as a potential solution. From Rutenberg, "My main interaction is with the WhatsApp group, which can get loud at times. It's organic, which is the beauty of it, but it also feels like jumping rope when you're trying to decide when to jump in (2024a)." Rutenberg's suggestion to reintroduce newsletters came with added updates, like monthly member highlights, and adding images of members alongside their news to help connect organizations to individuals.

Rutenberg cautioned against losing the flexibility of the network in the effort to create structure, saying, "Don't lose the WhatsApp group to create a formal structure that requires someone to open a laptop. Moderate the conversation, but don't move away from the accessibility." The informality of the network is a value when compared to other networks, Rutenberg shared, so a balance must be made when adding structure to what is otherwise a unique community.

Case study two: Mona Sinha

In contrast to Wanjiru, a relatively new member to the community, Mona Sinha has been a member of Connected Women Leaders since the first convening in 2017. Sinha is a foundational member of the network and expressed the privilege she's had in being part of the community. "Personally it has been a delight to get to know everybody. The time I've spent at Bellagio with CWL has formed a bond. The network is my support system and is there in the background when I need it (2024b)."

Unlike the survey responses, Sinha likes the fluidity of the cohort and simply appreciates that the network is there. She did not share any specific ways that the network could be engaging its members that are not currently available. A philanthropist at heart, Sinha's major feedback centered on fundraising. "You could do better about raising money. We miss opportunities because we're shy to ask for money. The ask is too soft and that's our style, which is fine, but we need to be more confident and know how to ask for it."

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

Case study three: Latanya Mapp

Latanya Mapp joined the cohort the same year as Wanjiru, and attended the 2022 CWL Bellagio Convening around uncommon collaborations and emerging leaders. This is not the only connection to Wanjiru that Mapp shares, however, as that initial introduction in 2022 led to Mapp's former organization, Global Fund for Women, supporting Rutenberg's Be Well initiative – yet another example of the ways in which the CWL community supports members through connection, collaboration, and even funding. Mapp listed many more examples of how CWL has impacted her professional life, stating, "Mona [Sinha] introduced me to the Women Moving Millions network in a more impactful way. When I visited Bellagio [with CWL], I was against a deadline with my book. Mary [Robinson] told me to do a residency at Bellagio and to speak with Kimberle Crenshaw while we were there. It was through that Bellagio residency that I finished my book, right before it was due. That wouldn't have happened without CWL." (2024c)

Like Rutenberg, Mapp shared a desire for structure. "CWL is really good on WhatsApp, but some of the information put in there is important to come back to. How possible is it to create a listserv? Stuff that needs to be done, or put on a calendar, or read, should be collated." This again highlights the need for communicating the services CWL already offers its members, as a listserv and calendar do already exist and are available to the cohort.

NETWORK MAPPING ANALYSIS

The LinkedIn network mapping was a vital part of this study, as it shared not only individual network strengths and weaknesses within Connected Women Leaders, but also showcased CWL's Network of Networks. The Network of Networks, while typically used to describe the Internet, is defined here as a central node that bridges large networks to one another. (Encyclopedia, 2024) The mapping was done with three categories in mind: Industry, Geography, and Thematic Pillar. Six industries were identified and utilized – Technology, Business/Economy, Policy/Government, Philanthropy, Media, and Nonprofit. Geography was sorted into six main continents – Africa, Europe, Asia, North America, South America, and Oceania. Thematic pillars, perhaps the most subjective of the three lenses, reflected the Connected Women Leaders focus areas – Food Security, Global Health, Climate, and Feminist Activism.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

Individuals, hereafter referred to as 'Connections,' were filtered through twice by the data collector. The first filter utilized the Connection's LinkedIn profile header, or, the space where titles and organizations are typically featured. This first step was primarily to find titles of potential Connections, as catalytic women were the focus of this mapping. Titles like CEO, Executive Director, Chief of xxx, Head of xxx, or Founder/Co-Founder were prioritized, though discretion was used by the data collector to determine catalytic viability.

The second filter was more intensive, and involved a manual scan of each Connection's LinkedIn page to uncover potential focus areas, current and previous positions, and geographic locations. As the Thematic Pillar category is highly subjective, a comprehensive review of each Connection's page was necessary to understand the depth and breadth of their work as it related to each Thematic Pillar. It is also important to note that these pillars are highly intersectional in nature, so while the pillar that was most featured or prevalent on the Connection's page was used to categorize, it is recognized that these categorizations are not indicative of the Connection's work as a whole.

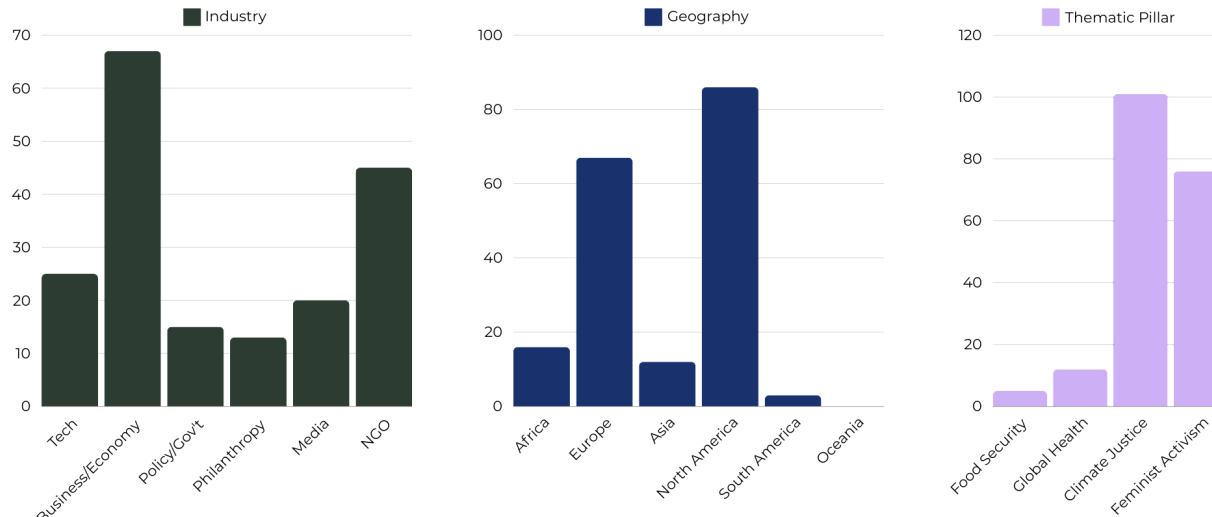
It is also important to highlight that LinkedIn, a worldwide platform, is used in the Global North more than the Global South. For example, over 244M individuals use LinkedIn in North America, while only 65M are active in the Middle East and Africa combined (LinkedIn, 2024). This must be considered when reviewing results of the mapping, as no platform today is truly equal in Global North and South usage.

Individual network results

Three CWL member networks will be showcased in this section to highlight a diverse range of findings. The remaining network results can be found in Appendix C.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

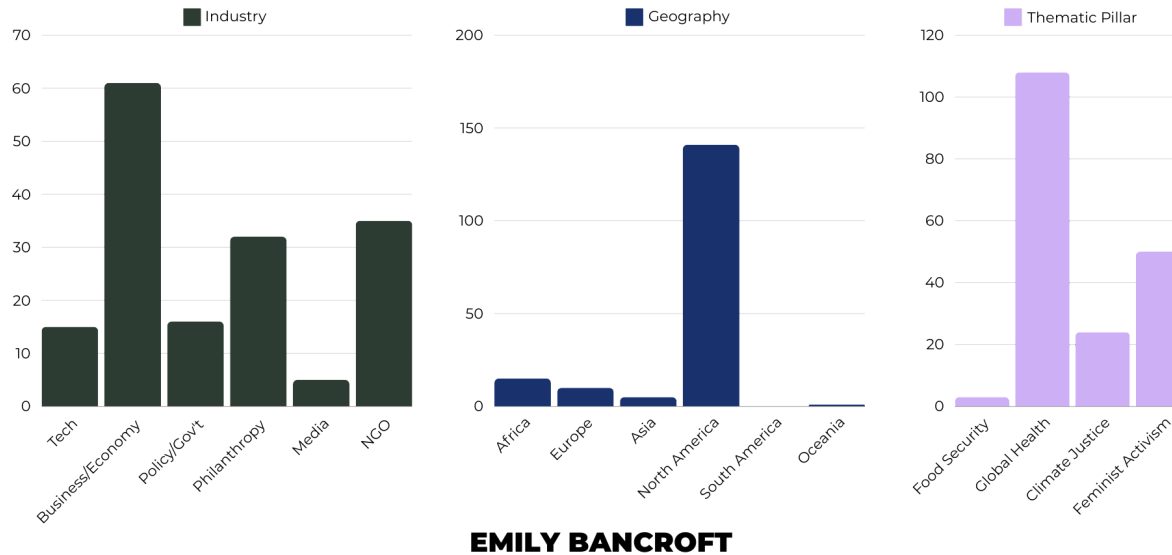


HINDOU OUMAROU IBRAHIM

The first example is that of Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, a member of Connected Women Leaders since 2019. Ibrahim is President of the indigenous women & peoples association of Chad and a strong Indigenous leader for the climate movement. This is reflected in the findings, where Connections in climate-related positions account for 52% of her network. Ibrahim also spends much of the year in France, though Chad is her home, which is highlighted in the mapping, as 36% of her Connections are based in Europe. Though Ibrahim has a variety of industries equally represented in her network, the largest sector among her connections is business and economy, making up 36% of her total connections.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

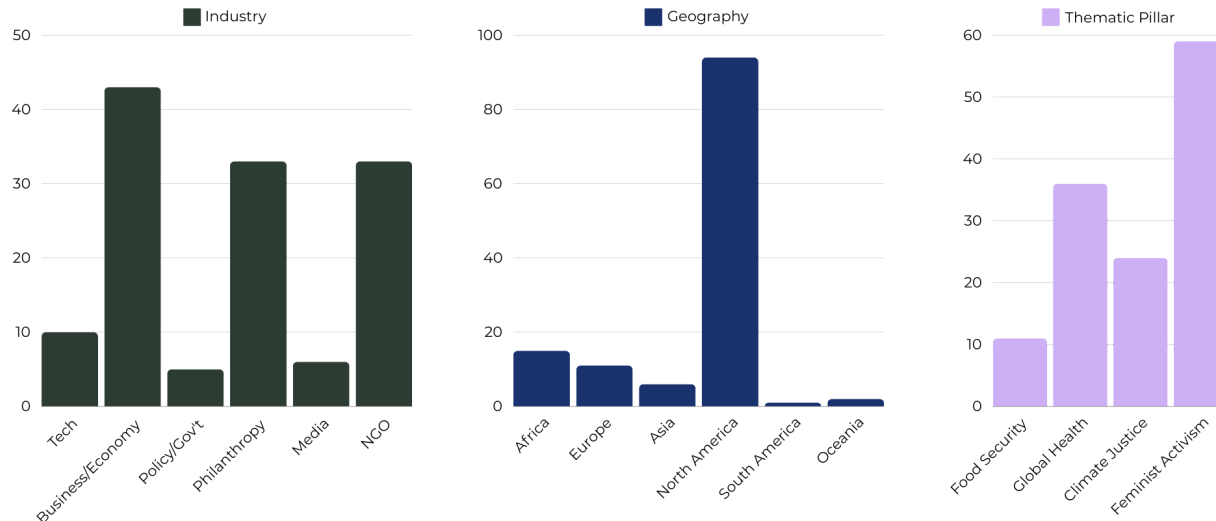
Insights from Connected Women Leaders



The second network mapping showcase is that of Emily Bancroft, a member of the community since 2022. Bancroft is CEO of VillageReach, a non-profit global health innovator that develops, tests, implements and scales new solutions to critical health system challenges in low-resource environments, with an emphasis on strengthening the “last mile” of healthcare delivery (VillageReach, 2024). Bancroft’s focus on global health is reflected in the findings, as global health Connections make up more than 58% of her network. Interestingly, though Bancroft works in the nonprofit sector, which is among the top three sectors in her network, the highest sector among Bancroft’s connections is business and economy, accounting for 37% of her total network. By far the geographical region represented most by Bancroft’s network is North America, with almost 82% of all connections based in this region – though, as previously stated, could be partially attributed to the geographical imbalance of the LinkedIn platform as a whole.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders



ANUSHKA RATNAYAKE

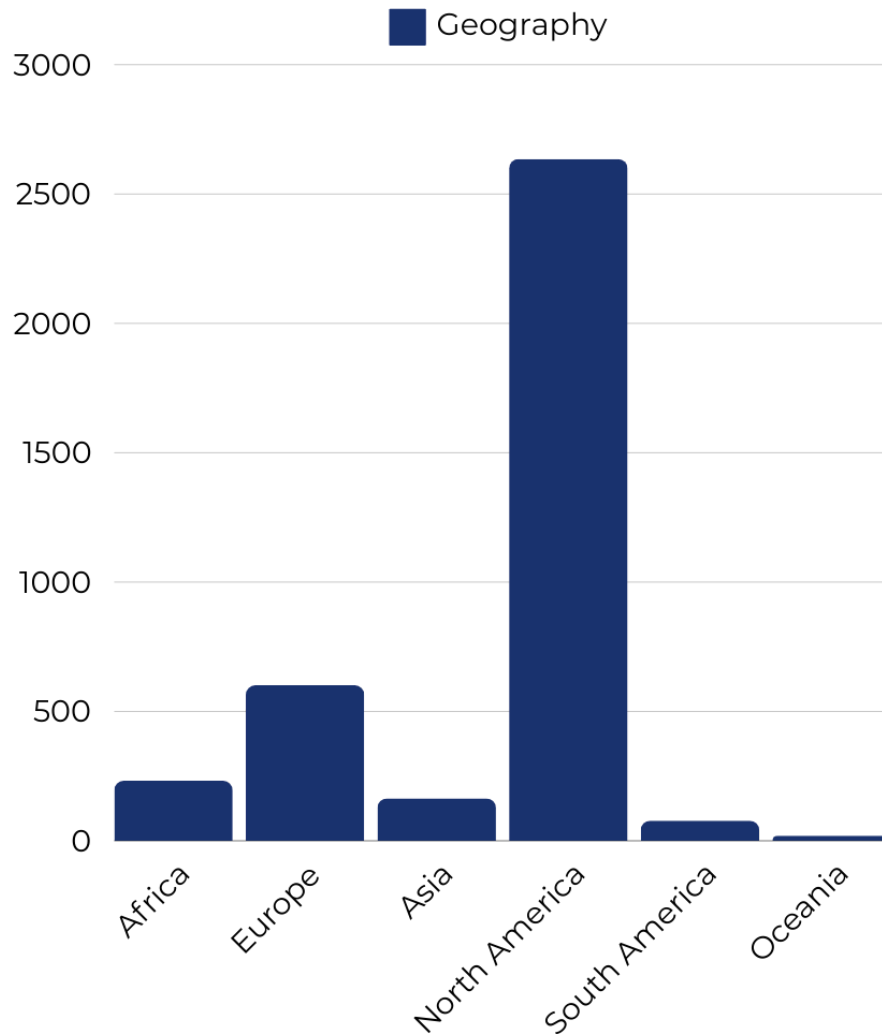
The last individual network map to be reviewed is that of Anushka Ratnayake, a member of Connected Women Leaders since 2022. Ratnayake is the founder of myAgro, a social enterprise committed to empowering small-scale farmers on every level, from self-financing to agricultural training (myAgro, 2024). Though, on the surface, it would appear that Ratnayake's professional world should center on food security, the network map reveals that many of her connections are in the feminist activism pillar, with just over 45% of the network represented in this pillar. Much of Ratnayake's work and life is in Senegal, and while Africa, is the second largest region represented in the mapping, 72% of her network is based in North America. Interestingly, and perhaps relatedly, philanthropy is among the three largest industries within Ratnayake's network, which could potentially account for the scale of her North American connections, as there are more than 1.8 million charitable organizations located in this region (Faulk, L. et al., 2021).

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

Network of Network results

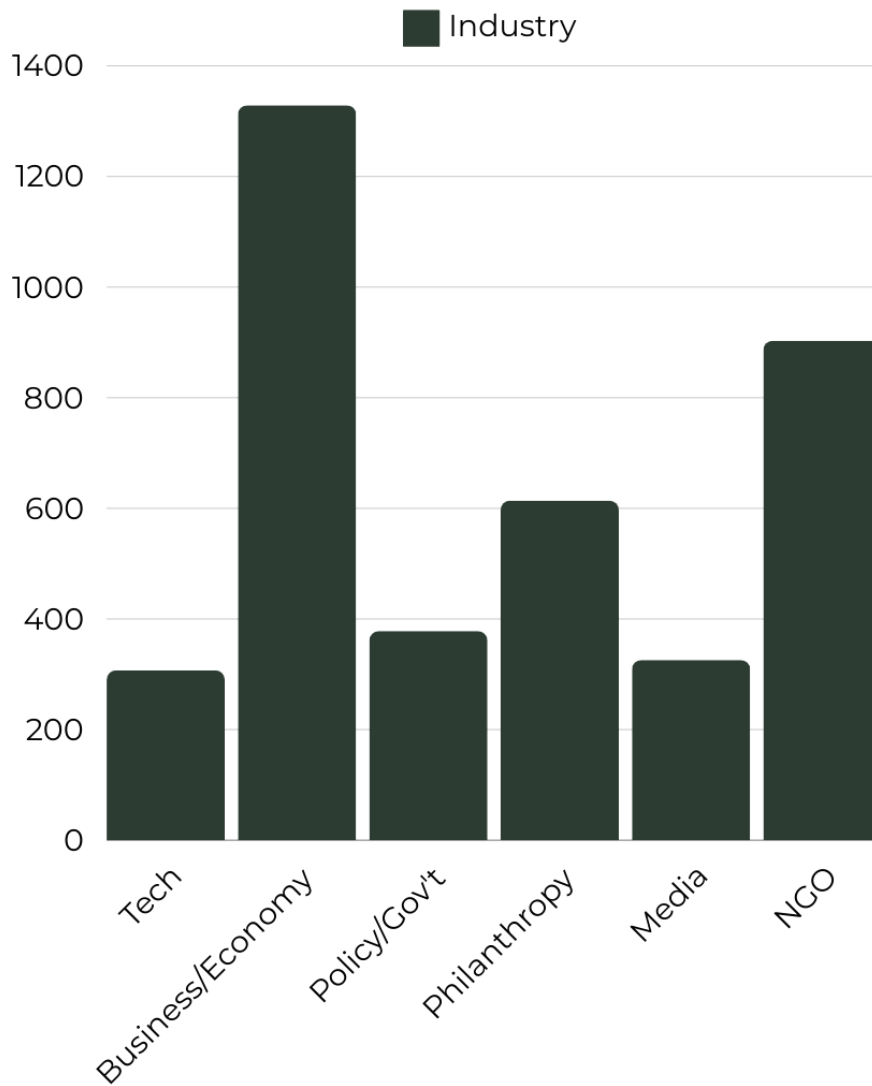
In this section, the total Connected Women Leaders Network of Networks will be reviewed.



It is clear that North America is where the majority of CWL's network resides, totaling 71% of all connections. Europe is the next largest region with 16% of all connections, followed by Africa, representing just over 6% of all connections. This could again be attributed to LinkedIn's imbalance of region representation, though it is worth taking into account when thinking strategically about increasing the global imprint of the Connected Women Leaders network.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

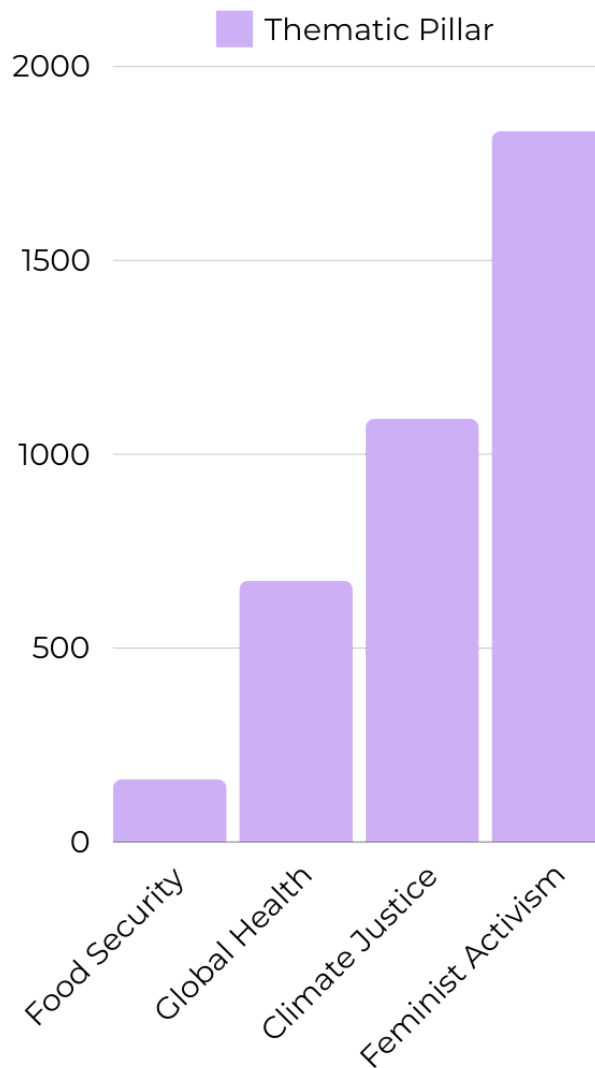
Insights from Connected Women Leaders



While the Connected Women Leaders network is fairly evenly distributed among all industries, the industry represented the highest, at 34%, is business and economy. Nonprofit follows with 23% representation, then philanthropy with just under 16% of all connections. Given this is a professional platform and over 67M companies are listed on LinkedIn, it does stand to reason that business and economy would carry significant weight when compared to other industries represented on the site.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders



Feminist activism, which is a pillar that largely intersects with all other focus areas, is represented the strongest within the CWL Network, with 48% of all connections working within this pillar. Climate is the next most represented focus area, accounting for 29% of the network, followed by global health at 18% of all connections.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

BEYOND THE RESEARCH

While the formal data collection processes have provided valuable insights into the dynamics of women's networks within the Connected Women Leaders community, there are countless stories from within the network that are not quantifiable. These narratives of personal and professional growth, recounted by members of our network, highlight the profound impact of the CWL network. Although not collected through structured surveys or case studies, these anecdotes serve as powerful testaments to the transformative power of women's networks. In this section, these individual stories are recounted, illuminating the ways in which CWL has directly or indirectly influenced the lives and careers of its members, shaping their journeys and fostering connections that extend far beyond the boundaries of traditional research methodologies.

Professional Development

The Connected Women Leaders cohort has played a pivotal role in supporting and uplifting its members professionally. A notable achievement is that 35% of CWL members have had the opportunity to share their insights, expertise, and stories on TED stages since joining the network. While some of these opportunities directly resulted from their involvement with CWL, all were supported, celebrated, and amplified by the collective strength of this community. This demonstrates not only the individual achievements but also the collaborative spirit that drives CWL, fostering a culture of success among its members.

Personal Development

The unique essence of a women's network lies not only in the professional assistance it offers, but also in its personal impact. Lauren Leader's narrative epitomizes this comprehensive support network. In 2022, Connected Women Leaders held its inaugural gathering at the Omega Center in Rhinebeck, New York, coinciding with their annual Women and Power summit. During this event, refugee and activist Chantale Zuzi shared her journey with the CWL cohort, detailing her experiences as a refugee and her advocacy for individuals with albinism. Following her keynote, Leader approached Zuzi to express her admiration for Zuzi's courage and extend her assistance in any way possible. This initial encounter sparked a profound bond between the two women, eventually leading to Leader officially adopting Zuzi. Today, Zuzi resides with Leader, managing her own nonprofit, Refugee Can Be, while pursuing university studies in the United States.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

Another notable personal outcome of CWL involvement is the cultivation of skills within the cohort. In 2022, Connected Women Leaders collaborated with Fresh Speakers Academy, sponsoring 20 members to complete a specialized course tailored for the cohort. Over six months, these 20 members engaged with coaches, participated in group sessions, and attended workshops to enhance their speaking confidence, refine their elevator pitches, and sharpen their communication abilities. As a result of this training, these members have since graced international platforms and secured influential roles, directly attributable to their newfound skills and confidence.

KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's networks, exemplified by Connected Women Leaders, play a crucial role in fostering professional advancement and individual growth. Research, both external and internal, underscores the unique benefits women receive from networking, including enhanced career trajectories and increased access to high-status connections through trusted networks. Diversity within women's networks contributes to greater networking satisfaction and resilience, highlighting the importance of intentional inclusivity.

Insights gained from the data collection process underscore tangible instances of network activation within CWL, showcasing notable outcomes ranging from career advancements to the fruition of impactful initiatives, thereby highlighting the transformative potential of collective support. These findings underscore valuable lessons for our organization. As we move forward in the short-term, it is imperative to strike a balance between maintaining the organic flow of communication on platforms like WhatsApp, which fosters spontaneous interactions, while also introducing structured elements such as regular newsletters to bolster information dissemination and foster sustained engagement among members. Additionally, a key short-term objective entails increasing awareness and utilization of existing CWL resources, including the network directory and LinkedIn page, to facilitate seamless connections and enrich member engagement experiences.

Long-term, CWL's next chapter of work will focus on the role of technology and AI to increase the impact of both individual and collective efforts. This includes partnering with a data capturing company to better understand and extrapolate meaning from the data collected for this paper and beyond. Potential partners include Cymantix and Vibrant Data Labs. The initiative will also involve hosting a series of CWL programs on the subject of

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

strengthening networks, featuring guest speakers. A proposed convening with the Rockefeller Foundation as part of their series for the wider Rockefeller community to explore innovative approaches is recommended. Additionally, responding to members' expressed desire for increased in-person convenings by organizing annual gatherings will be crucial, albeit requiring additional funding to realize this objective. Providing comprehensive training and ongoing support to members to bolster their strategies and individual impact stands out as a pivotal outcome, necessitating further investment within Connected Women Leaders. Moreover, strategic expansion of CWL's geographic reach beyond North America and Europe is imperative to enhance global representation and facilitate cross-cultural collaboration and knowledge exchange. Finally, it is recommended that CWL establish intentional mechanisms for fostering ongoing feedback and dialogue between members and the core team. These mechanisms will serve to identify and address gaps, refine offerings, and ensure alignment with evolving member needs and priorities.

CONCLUSION

The journey of Connected Women Leaders illuminates the profound impact of intentional networking, collective support, and strategic collaboration in fostering professional and personal growth among women leaders worldwide. Through robust data collection and analysis, invaluable insights into the transformative power of CWL's network were revealed, from catalyzing career shifts to amplifying individual and collective impact on a global scale. As CWL looks forward, it is clear that sustaining and enhancing this momentum requires a multifaceted approach. Remaining steadfast in the commitment to fostering diversity and inclusivity within the network is crucial, recognizing and celebrating the unique perspectives and contributions of women leaders from diverse backgrounds and regions. Embracing technology and innovation, including AI and online platforms, offers promising avenues for expanding CWL's reach, magnifying impact, and strengthening the collective work. Moreover, prioritizing ongoing feedback, dialogue, and capacity-building initiatives will be pivotal in ensuring that CWL continues to evolve and adapt to the evolving needs and priorities of its members. By harnessing the power of connection, collaboration, and collective action, CWL stands poised to drive meaningful change and advance gender equity in leadership roles globally.

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Responses

(2024). Survey 1. Unpublished raw data. https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1zbCR1T8sWd5Vrdokcu7I91AdWGHXMCZ2x_LN4IWcOVU/edit?usp=drive_link

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UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

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UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

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Appendix B: Case Studies

UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

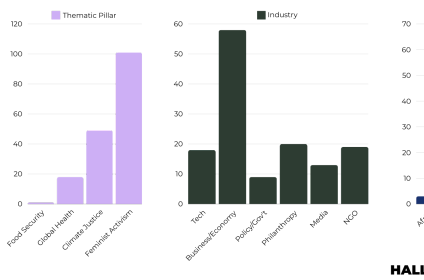
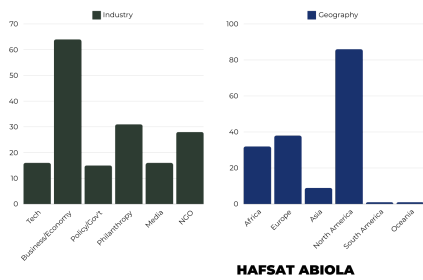
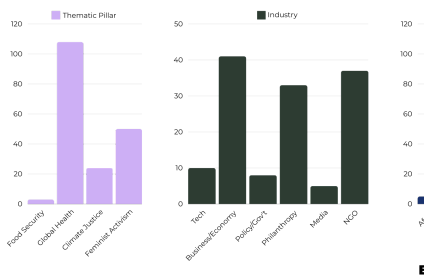
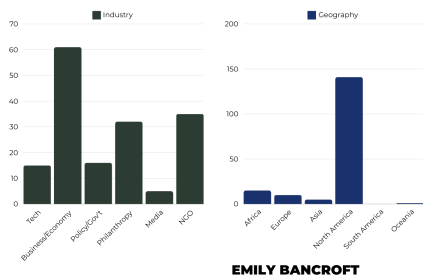
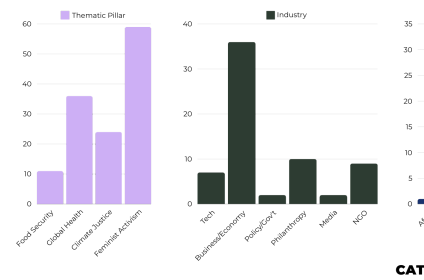
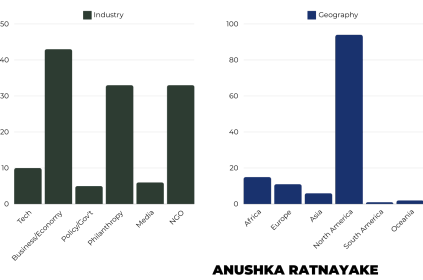
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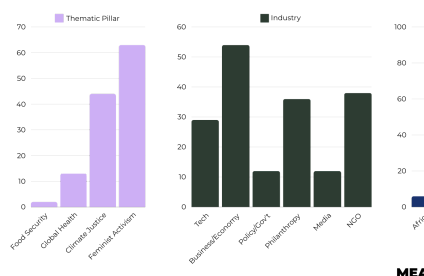
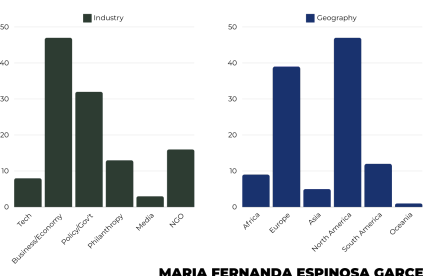
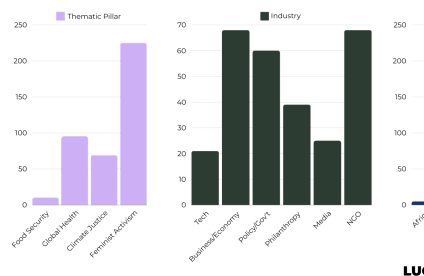
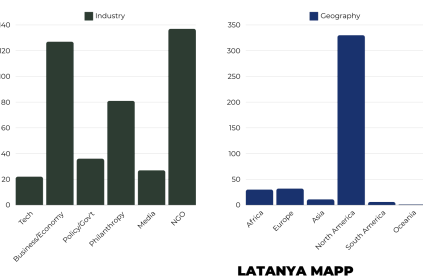
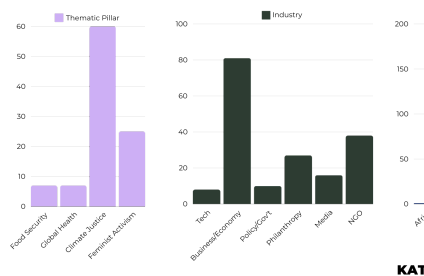
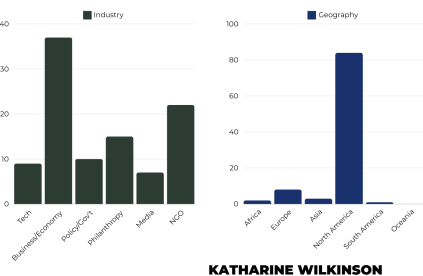
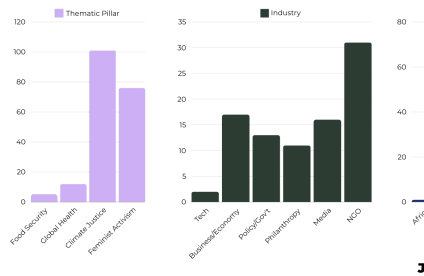
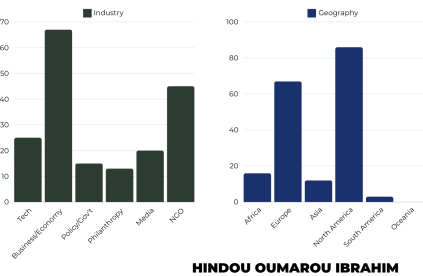
Appendix C: LinkedIn Mapping

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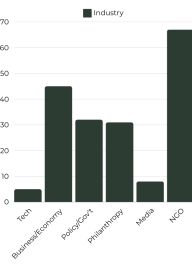
UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

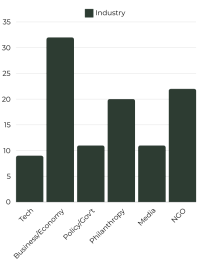
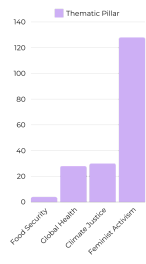
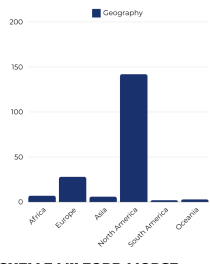


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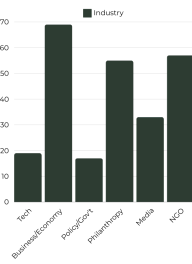
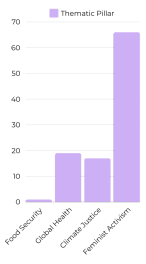
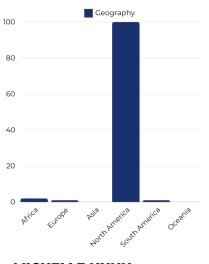
Insights from Connected Women Leaders



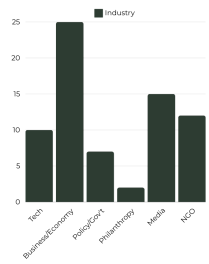
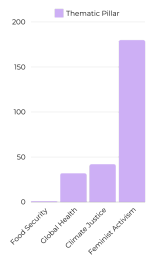
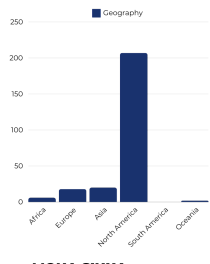
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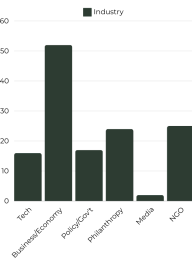
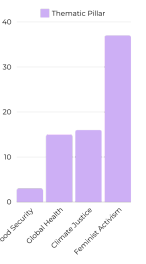
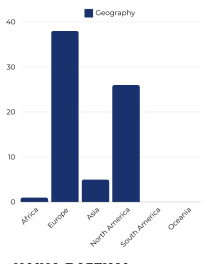
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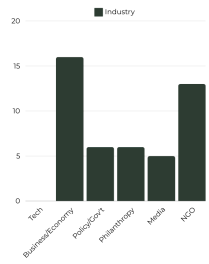
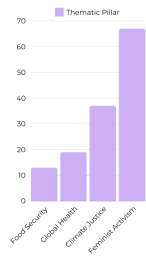
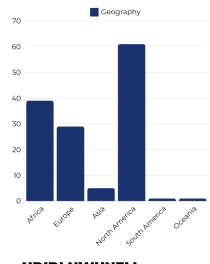
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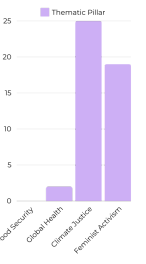
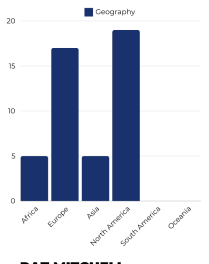
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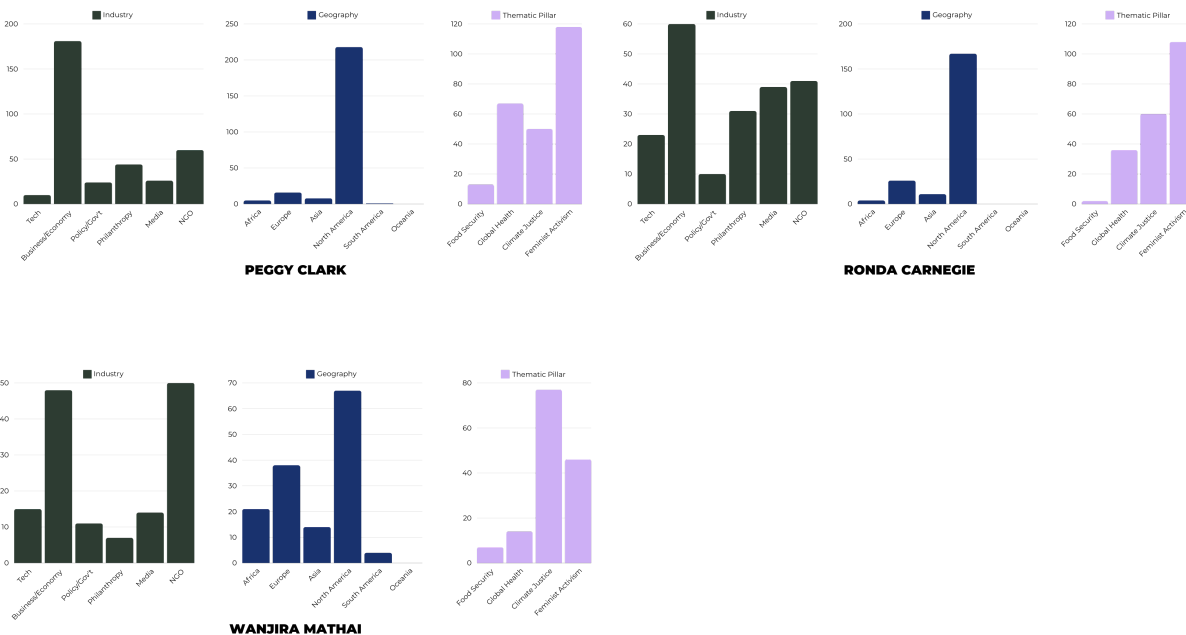


PAT MITCHELL



UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders



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UNVEILING THE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN'S NETWORKING

Insights from Connected Women Leaders

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