

## ABSTRACT

A Social Psychological Study of Leadership in  
Community-based Non-Governmental Organizations in  
Trinidad and Tobago

Stanley Plowden

This research seeks to investigate the under-representation of females in leadership positions in community-based non-governmental organizations. It builds on the foundation research on voluntary leadership in Trinidad and Tobago (Plowden 1989) by giving greater treatment to gender and ethnicity.

A comprehensive history of the local women's movement at the community-based level has been developed. It traces the voluntary efforts of women in humble communities from their adaptation to the socio-economic conditions of the 1940s to their current incorporation in the struggle for empowerment by the wider non-governmental movement.

A multifaceted methodology has been employed, with the major instruments being a sample survey, case studies, unstructured interviews and a factor analysis. This approach facilitated both extensive and intensive observation.

The central outcome of the research is that many women are not willing to become leaders, despite favourable conditions for their emergence in the environment in which they function. A related finding is that proportionately more males than females desired and attempted leadership. At the same time a comparison between a previous survey (Plowden 1989) and the present research shows an increase in the presence of African

females and a decrease among males and East Indians in the village council movement in Trinidad and Tobago.

Within the context of symbolic interactionism and the social learning theoretical framework, explanations for this expressed unwillingness were found in the specificity of cultural orientation and the more general psycho-social processes. The concept of cognitive dissonance was also used to enhance the explanations.

An analysis of gender disaggregated data on females showed that cultural practices which arouse in-group and reference group conflicts accounted for a lack of desire for leadership found among East Indian females.

The research concludes with an outline of community pluralism as a model for greater female inclusion and recommendations for related policy changes.

Key Words: Stanley Plowden; Female Leadership; Community Development; Culture and Ethnicity; Social Psychology.