WHAT IF WE CREATED A SPACE FOR CONVERSATION THAT FOCUSES ONLY ON WOMEN?

During the Leadership Development Dialogue [1], we had received some feedback from community members about how we could best support them to step into leadership opportunities. Much of the feedback highlighted two major goals: (1) Focusing on empowering leaders, by supporting peer exchange, and helping people step into leadership; and (2) offering online opportunities and resources, like in-person social networking.

Connecting with others was at the heart of this request.

With this in mind, we hosted a series of events [2] that focused on the role of women in the Wikimedia movement, that took place during the month of March 2018. Our goal was both to **promote the work women are doing all over the world**, and to better **understand how to best support that work** so that we can foster more diversity across the movement.

The conversations were focused on three areas where women's participation can bring more diversity to Wikimedia projects:
- **Women in Wikimedia Programs**,
- **Women in Wikimedia Leadership**, and
- **Women in Wikimedia technical spaces.**

98 people participated across all 3 events. Participants had a space to reflect on **what keeps them engaged**, and how they found support to get to the place they are in today.

Through questions and personal anecdotes, participants felt a sense of shared experiences, even with other community members that they perhaps had never even spoken to, inspiring a sense of **sorority** and **comradery**.

WHAT ASPECTS OF OUR CULTURE MAKE WIKIMEDIA A MORE WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN?

* L**earning culture**: Everyone is welcome to try, fail, and try again. Comparing to other contexts where women contribute intellectually, Wikimedia seems like a safer environment to make mistakes.

* **Mentorship:** All participants, when asked, were able to point to a person that helped them when they started contributing to Wikimedia, someone they can turn to for help when facing challenges, or when something went wrong.
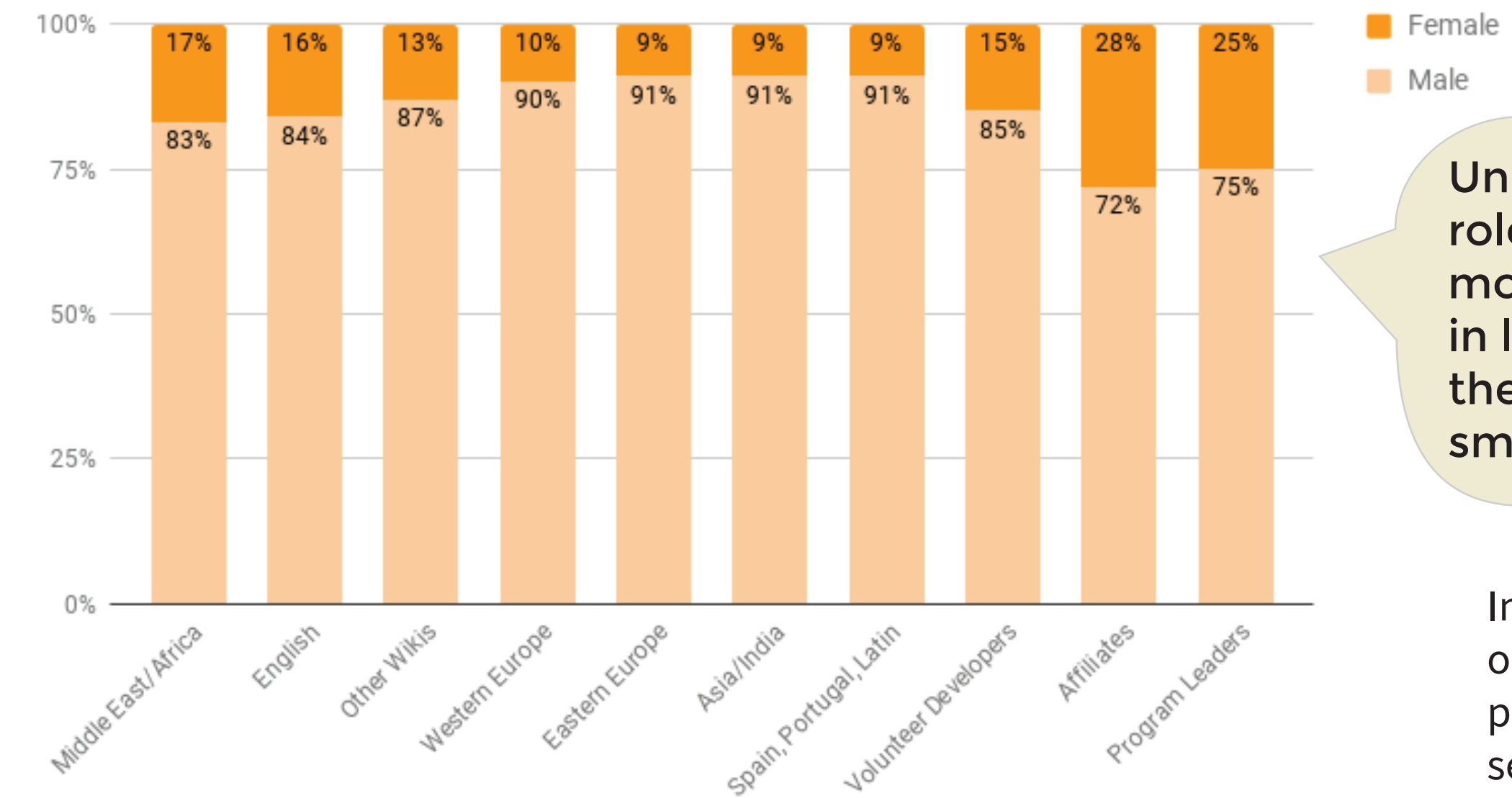
Getting recognition for work well done, and taking small responsibilities one step at a time were key to empowering women to become leaders.

* **Strong sense of community:** When you contribute to Wikimedia projects, you are never alone, but rather, you are acting in the context of a community. This makes you feel safe as a woman in the public space. Women support other women on wiki, and because of this Wikimedia has become a great a platform for women to connect on a personal level.

REFERENCES
[1] Leadership Development Dialogue: goo.gl/9HEkQJ
[2] Women in the Wikimedia movement: Conversations with communities goo.gl/n4xASU
[3] Community Engagement Insights, 2016-17 Report: goo.gl/NKjGRU

"It was great getting on this call today and talking to you all about these issues. I feel a big sense of sorority. We should do this every month".

"In this movement, you never act alone."

"An opportunity to make something better."

"There is so much to do, it is easy to observe progress on the work one does, unlike work on other public spaces."

"It is the second time in a row that I see no new women running for Wikimedia elections. I am concerned that we are pretty far away from shaping the conversation, and from believing that this is our movement.

"Wikimedia proves that there is great power in our differences, so we need to invite people from other backgrounds, women included."

This is our place as well, and we are not occupying it."

Women in the Wikimedia movement

WHAT INSPIRES WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN WIKIMEDIA?

	Female	Male
Middle East/Africa	17%	83%
English	16%	84%
Other Wikis	13%	87%
Western Europe	10%	90%
Eastern Europe	9%	91%
Asia/India	9%	91%
Spain, Portugal, Latin	9%	91%
Volunteer Developers	15%	85%
Affiliates	28%	72%
Program Leaders	25%	75%

Unlike other contributor roles, we noticed there is more women participation in leadership roles, making the gender gap slightly smaller.

In the last 5 years we have observed that women participation has increased in several areas.

* **Female representation in affiliate boards and leadership positions** has grown from 20% in 2013, to 28% in 2017, and 4 percentage points of those happened only between December 2016 and December 2017 [3].

* More **affiliates have been** created which focus on gender diversity, whereas before, there weren't any at all.

* More **programs and events** have reducing the gender gap in content as their main goal, whereas before, they focused on other themes.

The mere existence of content and participation gender gaps, like red lists on Wikipedia, is compelling contributors to action. Something must be done about them.

In this sense, women on Wikipedia are no different than women in any other public space: what characterizes a woman in this era is the resolution of changing something that is unfair, out of their own volition.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SUPPORT WOMEN LEADERS IN THE MOVEMENT?

For every woman that feels empowered to contribute to Wikipedia and the Wikimedia projects, there are probably a dozen others from under-represented groups that don't feel like they can participate.

Women's contributions in the Wikimedia movement often focus on underrepresented themes, emphasizing **human-to-human connections**, and **empowering contributors** to be **autonomous**.

These elements are key to creating a **safe environment** for newcomers to feel empowered to participate in the movement.

NEXT STEPS

We want to support community members who want to host similar conversation cycles in their communities. If you are interested, follow this link to read more, sign up for news, and find the toolkit to run the virtual events: https://goo.gl/DM3AoS