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DEAUVILLE JOURNAL

## For Women Who Lead, a Forum of Their Own

By [STEVEN ERLANGER](#)  
Published: October 19, 2008

DEAUVILLE, France — Tory Frame, an Irish-born partner in the London office of the consulting group Bain & Company, used to always try to keep gender out of business. “I always thought I had to act like the male partners to get to be a partner,” she said. “I didn’t have many female role models, and I had a very specific view of leadership.”

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Mychèle Daniau/Agence France-Presse —

But in 2005 she attended the first Women’s Forum for the Economy and Society along with about 500 other women, and it changed her, she said this weekend.

“I came here and I heard loads of women

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Ingrid Betancourt, left, the freed hostage, and Christine Ockrent, of French television, in Deauville, France, on Thursday.



speaking in their own way — clear leaders, but without conforming to that male stereotype, and it encouraged me to be myself, to use empathy and humor,” said Ms. Frame, who has an M.B.A. from Harvard. “It had a very big impact on me. I saw that there are ways to be very powerful, but also warm.”

Barbara Ngouyombo is a young entrepreneur, a systems engineer from Réunion, the French island in the Indian

Ocean. She has started a company in London to provide computerized health information for travelers requiring daily care. “Usually I’m not so comfortable just among women,” she said. “But this is different. There’s so much diversity here. We’re all from different backgrounds and places.”

The annual meeting of the Women’s Forum, which ended here on Saturday and included 1,200 women, is modeled on the [World Economic Forum](#) in Davos, Switzerland, the famous global talkathon. The Women’s Forum ([www.womens-forum.com](http://www.womens-forum.com)) offered three days of lectures, panels, brainstorming sessions and guided conversations on the issues of the moment: the global economic meltdown, the crisis of leadership, the American presidential election, foreign policy, environmental problems, China, Russia, India. Well-known politicians and speakers, both women and men, came from all over the world, with an emphasis on Europe. and included Americans like

[Jeffrey E. Garten](#), a Yale economist, and Clyde V. Prestowitz, president of the Economic Strategy Institute.

There were also workshops on specific challenges faced by women, to discuss how women could be most effective in science, politics, education, corporate life and the media. There were panels on how, as Bettina Götzenberger, the manager of a Spanish legal services company, said, “to think bigger, and how to be less modest in asking for money and investment.”

And there were sessions that featured prominent women. They included [Ingrid Betancourt](#), the former Colombian presidential candidate and freed hostage; the designer [Diane von Furstenberg](#); the sailor Ellen MacArthur; the exiled Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasrin; the venture capitalist Molly F. Ashby; and French cabinet ministers like Fadéla Amara, who is in charge of coordinating plans for the racially mixed and poor Parisian suburbs, and Anne-Marie Idrac, responsible for foreign trade.

As so often is the case in France, earnest talk of global poverty, child abuse and the dangers of the economic crisis for philanthropy was mixed with lavish meals, Champagne and espresso provided by corporate sponsors in the resort setting of Deauville, on the Normandy beaches.

There were the usual mixed messages, with participants given expensive anti-aging cosmetics and offers of makeovers and photographic portraits from corporations seeking to attract

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successful potential customers. There was Cartier, the French jewelry company, which sponsors a global competition for young female entrepreneurs like Ms. Ngouyombo. Five winners receive \$20,000 each and a year of business coaching from Cartier, management consultants McKinsey & Company, and Insead, the business school with campuses in France and Singapore.

The Women's Forum was the brainchild of Aude Zieseniss de Thuin, 58, a French businesswoman who once applied to go to the Davos economic forum, without success. "They didn't even deign to respond," she said.

Angry, she decided that Davos, with many fewer women than men, should have a more female-friendly analogue, and she created this forum three years ago as a private company. The idea, she said in an interview, was not to create a feminist institution, but "to give a voice to women, half of the population," and help provide role models.

"I've had a lot of satisfaction in watching rising talents," she said, adding that her only regret was not having had the idea a decade earlier. The current economic shock "will probably be terrible for many women around the world," especially in poor countries, she said.

"I think it's the beginning of a new world, a worse one, a more difficult one, especially for women. But I'm also optimistic, because it's a time for women to take responsibility."

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