

# HELEN TURVEY

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

women, philanthropy, open, funding, organisation, inequity, administrative justice

## SPEAKERS

Helen Turvey, Betty Kankam-Boadu

### **Helen Turvey** 00:00

When we were really deliberate about open and not just about the license you stick on something but the how of the open, the leaving the breadcrumbs, the ensuring people understand those pieces, things lived on longer. And that's really the gold standard, or should be a gold standard in philanthropy. How can I make my investment actually make a difference beyond the investment?

### **Betty Kankam-Boadu** 00:25

Hello, and welcome to Inspiring Open, candid conversations with influential women who have made an impact in Africa. We're talking about their personal, educational and career journeys, the choices they have made along the way, and what they have gained by setting aside their doubts in a world where women's voices and opinions often go ahead and unacknowledged. Inspiring Open is a space to explore the value of sisterhood and how networks of sharing and openness can create waves of change. I am Betty Kankam-Boadu, a journalist and women's rights advocate. Join me as I explore the fascinating backstories behind Africa's most tenacious female personalities. Inspiring Open is a podcast series from Wiki Loves women, a project of Wiki In Africa. Be inspired, be challenged, be bold.

This week on Inspiring Open I have Helen Turvey as my guest. She is CEO of Shuttleworth Foundation, a small social investor that provides funding to dynamic leaders who are leading social change. Helen vacationed in South Africa and like many others fell in love with the country and its people. This love affair led to her working with Shuttleworth Foundation for over two decades. She has moved the Foundation from traditional funding methods towards the fellowship model of co-investment and collaboration with potential leaders of change. With over 20 years of experience working with international NGOs and agencies, Helen has a deep-rooted understanding of where philanthropy goes wrong and how it needs to change. She is a big advocate of openness and

administrative justice as integral tools to democratise philanthropy and improve education and economies everywhere in the world. Now on Inspiring Open Helen Tuvery.

First of all, in your bio on the internet, you talk about your frustrations with farming. Tell me about that. Your three hens.

**Helen Turvey** 02:33

I love that's where we started. I am, I think I'm a frustrated farmer. I think if I was born into a different life, I would love to do it. And I think my relationship with food and the ground and dirt and things we grow has evolved over time. I grew up in the 80s, things were in plastic containers. That's what we did. It was progress. And, and I'm now in my mid 40s I'm an aspiring vegan. I'm not a very good vegan. I'm a very good vegetarian. I'm not a good vegan. And I just look at the plastic and the huge, bright white lights and supermarkets, and all I see is that's not sustainable. This is not going to work. This doesn't work for everybody. It's not everyone's reality. And all we're doing is taking things from one place in the earth, passing them through a number of hands and sanitising them and then dumping rubbish somewhere else. This is not good. And then the other side of it, it's I love being outside, I love being dirty, I love dirt under the nails. Nothing tastes as good as the raspberry that you pick off your own bush. It's just perfect. So yes, I have various different animals that have come to me. And they come because they're generally reject animals from somewhere else. So we started off with three, we did have 10, we've now got six chickens. Some were from somebody down the road some were from an X battery farm, and they arrive and they're all skinny and they don't look like they've got no feathers and they can't really stand up. But they're so sweet, and they're so loving and they want to cuddle you, and then they give you eggs. It's so beautiful. It's really lovely. And we've got three alpacas that also were rejected because they weren't good enough to have the wonderful fleece that alpacas have because they're boys and so they don't breed with them. Because again reject alpacas. Three dogs, rejected tortoise. We'll take anything, We'll take anything and we'll try and grow anything. Not very good at it, but we try.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 04:56

That's actually lovely, to take these animals and then... particularly the skinny chickens, and then-

**Helen Turvey** 05:02

The skinny chickens. They're very funny.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 05:09

Yeah, and then take care of them. I think it's such a beautiful thing. And obviously, I don't see you as a frustrated farmer, I think you're doing a beautiful thing. And these animals, taking care of them,

and making sure they are safe, I think is such a beautiful thing. I think you are a kind, open-hearted farmer rather than frustrated one.

**Helen Turvey** 05:29

It's very nice to suggest. I couldn't ever kill them, that wouldn't happen. They just come and hang out. And then I grow lots of fruit for them to eat. They basically eat all the berries I grow.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 05:42

That's lovely. That's so lovely. Now, tell me about your background, where you grew up, and the kind of upbringing you had.

**Helen Turvey** 05:52

Goodness me. All the way back. I possibly feel like I'm a little bit in a therapy session. My parents both grew up in the East End of London. Nobody in their families had been to university. They grew up within the sound of the Bow Bells, which is when you grow up there you can properly call yourself a cockney, a proper London cockney. And through various different events, they had aspirations and dreams that didn't quite work out. But then my father had an opportunity to go to work in Hungary, which at the time was behind the Iron Curtain in Europe. So it was a communist state controlled by Russia. And so, in their early 20s, when no one else in their family had higher education or travelled, that's where they went off to. And they then came back very, very different people. Their tiny world I think had been expanded through travel, and they saw different perspectives, different cultures, different understanding. And I think the most important thing that they... or certainly that I in my upbringing was sure you have a perspective, but other people have different ones for different reasons. And all of them are valid. And so, when myself and my siblings were born, we travelled and went to school in Kuwait, we lived in the Mediterranean for a bit. We travelled a lot as children, we were often going on holiday to places like Kenya and other... experiencing more. that's what they always wanted us to do. They wanted us to see different perspectives and perspectives that weren't... that sometimes didn't quite gel with their own. And that was okay. That was that was good. So when I then became, you know, a fully-fledged adult, hilariously at the age of 18, and went to university, it was right at the start of when Europe started something called an Erasmus Programme. There is still the Erasmus Programme wonderfully in Europe today. And you get on it and do various bits of travel and study in different universities. But at that time, they'd started it and hadn't quite worked out all the kinks. So essentially, for four years, I got to travel around Europe and South America. I was in Argentina, or various other places, with a bunch of people who were also from different cultures and different continents, and experienced the world it was. It was quite phenomenal.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 08:44

Would you say your background has played any role in shaping you towards your career?

**Helen Turvey** 08:50

Oh, definitely. I'm an incredibly confident person, and you get that just by either walking into a bar somewhere or not knowing anyone, and that'd be... but also from being able to understand that there isn't one view and therefore your view is just as valid as anybody else's. And I think that the piece in my career that has been really useful is that I have a fully formed theory of change right now. Obviously, I didn't back then. But I think that within philanthropy and the world that I work in, philanthropy has existed for many, many years. And we continue to do the same thing. What we see is there are these people who are incredibly privileged and have so much money. And so what they do is they try to make the world a little bit better. And that money hasn't solved it. We haven't solved the world's problems. We still have poverty. We still have disease. We still have huge inequities. We still have distrust, and all of the isms If that you want to ... we have all of them. It hasn't solved it. And so the thing that I see is that we need those different perspectives to be able to solve the problems. And when you keep pulling on that thread, you understand that actually, the real problem lies in that money equals power to make a difference. And the problem is, is that's not making a difference. So what we need to do is decentralise that power and decision-making for other perspectives to start making a difference. And sure, it might not work. But what I know right now is that it doesn't work. So maybe trying something different would be beneficial.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 10:39

Did you always know that you are going to be in the philanthropy space? Was that originally your career path?

**Helen Turvey** 10:49

No, it wasn't obvious to me at all. I was very keen to move to ... I wanted to be in London because it was the centre of everything, I wanted to be able to travel, I wanted independence, I wanted all of those things that I think that you probably should want when you're in your 20s. And I worked in, hilariously, in various different media agencies. So for a time I wore all black and thought I was very cool. And I really wasn't. Then it was you the start of the internet. We were doing things like I'm putting annual reports online. And so literally people typing out the annual report and making a web page, which sounds wild today because, obviously it's there first. And so we were experimenting with the internet doing bits and pieces. And then the agency I worked for also did some pro-bono

things. And I worked on a couple of accounts. And one of them was for the [inaudible] and one of them was for the what is now called d

The Dogs Trust. And I just loved it. I remember sitting in the meeting — I mean, I was a kid, I was really early 20s — sitting in a meeting. And instead of people saying oh yes, I want to sell more soap. They were actually talking about differences they were making and things they were doing. That was good and right and just. And I remember, people sitting there talking about actually fundraising to save lives of people who were distressed at sea or animals who were broken. It was mind blowing to me. And I hadn't ever considered it at all before. And so something happened, which was amazing, was my department was made obsolete and was moving to a different agency. So I lost my job. And I remember my mum saying to me she was made redundant once and it was the best thing that ever happened to her. And she absolutely right. Totally made redundant, was a little bit sad. But also, I'd got some cash in my pocket when you made redundant, it's all right.

So I had a bit of time. And I then took any jobs that could come at me that would allow me to sit in front of a computer screen that would give me time. So I became a receptionist in an estate agent, and it was thoroughly enjoyable for about three days, answering the phone and doing .... got a bit bored after that. But then what it enabled me to do was, I sorted out my CV. I decided actually what I wanted to do. I researched what I wanted to do. And I knew I wanted to be in this place of actually making a change. And all of a sudden, the design of the world was different for me. I wasn't optimising for ... I was about to say I wasn't optimising f for me. I was absolutely optimising for me, but optimising for me in a way that I could play a role that would make me feel that I was creating some sort of difference, that I was changing something, that I was doing something. And I've spoken to so many people, they were an activist at university or they did these incredible things. I was not that person. My eyes were only opened in this moment when I heard other people speaking. And yeah, and I felt I could do something. I think that's the other pieces is, you asked earlier about my upbringing, I genuinely felt I could do something, even if I had no idea what it was. I could do something. And I what I knew, and again, it's so interesting that you asked about my life before, because I hadn't really put these things together. But I had this wonderful maths teacher, and he said to me, pay attention to what you enjoy. Because if you enjoy something, you will do it brilliantly. And so, I knew I enjoyed technology because I've been tinkering with the internet in this in this agency. And I knew I want to do something that was different and philanthropic and making a change. And so, I did two things. I was doing some volunteering bits for Book Aid International, which was essentially libraries that drive around in trucks in Africa. And then I got a real job for Guide Dogs for the Blind. And I loved it. I loved everything about it. I sort of learned the ropes of okay, this is what people do. This is how you do everything from write proposals to understand how to write narratives about change-making. And I mean, obviously, it was great that there were cute puppies around. But it wasn't actually... I knew it wasn't the subject that was the thing that got me. I

was in a really established, really well run, really well-known organisation that taught me a whole bunch of stuff. And it enabled me to think about the strategic advantages of how to work in those places.

Then I went to South Africa for a holiday and I just fell in love. I fell in love with the country, fell in love with the continent. Also immediately understood some of the problems with the things that had been happening with Book Aid International and others... which was very much about a Western perspective parachuting in particular ideals and solutions in a place that doesn't belong to you, that isn't ...all of those bits and pieces. It was also at that time that I knew the founder of the Shuttleworth Foundation, and had the opportunity to go to the Foundation. And then question was posed to me, what would you do to make this better? How would this actually compete? How would this make more of a difference than the difference it's making right now? Which kept bringing me back to that Book Aid International. Sure we have this van that's driving around doing this great stuff, but if the money stops, and if the van stops, what is the actual impact that you've made? What is the value you have left? What is the change you were making? And is the change only being made because you're there? And if the answer is yes, that's very nice, but it's not good enough. And that has been the thing that has driven me at the Foundation and driven the work that we do at the Foundation. Yeah, that's the piece that continues to keep me excited.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 17:24

When you had to live and work in South Africa, how was it? It's different from just travelling to go and see the country and going back to yours, but when you have to live and work at a completely different place, completely different continents, it must be different.

**Helen Turvey** 17:40

It's so different. I'm a white European, right. The thing that it constantly hammered home to me was my privilege, and I still can't rightly get past it. I could see it in everything, everywhere, every interaction I had, and the accent doesn't help. I know I sound like a Brit. And I think that is the piece that is something that is that's really personal. I've come to terms with the fact that I walk into a room, I can say something, it's received differently to someone else walking into room in a different way. And that is dreadful. It's also reality. The other piece that living in South Africa and understanding it a little bit more was, I was actually talking to a friend about this the other day, how, in fact, Johannesburg just compared to Cape Town, for example. Joburg makes you quite hard. The design of the city, the interactions you have in the city, the definition of success in that city, the pace of the city, makes you go into everything with a fight. And I think that's different in different places. In, for example, in more rural South Africa, I live for a while in Mpumalanga, and there's a different version of that. You go in with a fight, you're not getting anywhere. You have to go with a, hey,

there's a process. Who do we talk to? How do we make these things happen? And so I think that there's some interesting bits about specifically the design of the cities in South Africa that makes you react and behave in a different way. Which is not just culture. It's a performative piece to the structures and architectures that make up that culture. And that was quite interesting to me. I love the country. I'm married to a South Africa and I think it's a wonderful place.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 19:49

Let's go back to Shuttleworth. How different is it now from when you joined?

**Helen Turvey** 19:54

So when I started, we were a South African specific foundation doing traditional grants. So we had a couple of different programmes. We had one in education, one in open source technology and other bits and pieces. And essentially people would apply to us and say, they want to do this particular programme. And then we would give them grant money. And then they were the programme would roll out over, I don't know, anything from six months to two years. We would do a report, we would all say thank you, it would be super. The thing that we started to notice was, and this is not specific to South Africa, this is grant making around the world. And I come a little bit back to, again, the Book Aid International. Absolutely, it makes a difference. Absolutely, it is good. But it doesn't do anything systemically. It doesn't change anything in a deep sense. It doesn't change the way people behave really. What it does is allow people the opportunity to do that thing whilst you're doing that thing. So that was that was the first problem we found. Or the first challenge we started to think about intellectually.

The second piece was, in philanthropy, I think there's a really odd idea about who the customer is. In any business, the customer is the person that you're that you're interacting with the person on the other side of the company. In philanthropy, there is really weird idea that the person that you're giving the money to, should do things for you, and report for you and bend to your will. And actually, that's your job. Your whole role is to give the cash out, to give it to them. And so, so there's an odd power dynamic, which again, happens with money. And the and the customer becomes the board. So looking good to the board and the outside world is the thing that's important in philanthropy. It shouldn't be. But that's how it works. And then the actual customer, the person who you're trying to help, has to jump through a bunch of hoops. And so we've really kept pulling at that power dynamic. And it's not easy, and it's certainly not fixed. But I think awareness is a really good first step. And so, we tried to work out what would happen if we just found these people who were doing amazing things, and trusted them and tried to work out what they needed, not what we needed to prove that we're doing the right thing. Because, again, in philanthropy, absolutely some money will be wasted. It will be. But it's not a government service. Government services can't afford to waste money. They are bureaucracies for a reason and they need to roll out water, education, health, other bits. This is

not. This is an opportunity to do something different. And if we're just doing the same things time and time again, then we're never going to be able to actually fix anything. And so, we've tried really... so yes, that that piece of the power dynamic has been really important.

The third thing we found was when you fund an institution, generally, that money gets sucked up by an institution. And institutions always feed themselves first. Whereas when you fund a person, sure, they might be at an institution, but if a person has a driving need to do something, that person will do it no matter what. And so, we were assessing all of our programmes, and we could see the big difference between that.

And then the last thing we found was that when we did things openly, when we were really deliberate about open and not just about the licence you stick on something, but the how of the open, the leaving the breadcrumbs, the ensuring people understand those pieces, things lived on longer. And that's really the gold standard or should be a gold standard in philanthropy. How can I make my investment actually make a difference beyond the investment. And so, with that, we started to build a different foundation. And we decided we would fund individuals. So we fund fellows. It's not a Genius Award. It's not something for something you've done. It's something that you are hopefully going to do and you're trying to do, when you're trying to work out how to do. So unproven individuals who are who are being very thoughtful about open can really clearly articulate what they want to change and also see their role within it. Because often people think that they can either do all of it or none of it. Change the world, we're not going to fund you. I can change the world, we're not going to fund you. But if you can see the promise statement and see how you can do it and how you can get gather community to do that. That's the sweet spot of us being able to fund and work with you.

**Helen Turvey** 24:46

We try to understand what it is they need. The deal is, is once they've applied and once they're in, they're in. There's not judgement, there's help. There's understanding. There's progress. There's to see what those threads are and those pieces are that aren't working and why? And if they're not experimenting, and if they're not failing sometimes, then this is not a good investment for us we should be because that's the only way we can learn.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 25:14

What do you look out for in these leaders?

**Helen Turvey** 25:19

There are a few things that, you know, that we're quite clear about. So as I said, someone who can articulate the idea. Someone who we believe can do the thing they want to do. Someone who is genuinely committed to open, and not just I've put a licence on it. You know you can hear it. You can hear when people talk about their motivations for how and why they do things. But actually, what we're really looking for is that little bit of pixie dust, the magic that makes people be the people who are going to keep going. We know when we talk to people, and we've got better when we talk to people, about really teasing out, is this something that they're getting a grant for? Or is this something that they are genuinely committed to for life. And that goes back to the people versus projects piece. Projects come and go. And environmental factors make a huge difference as to whether a project is relevant or not anymore. But somebody fighting an inequity or an injustice in a particular field, that doesn't change. It's just the goalposts change constantly. And so if we can set that person up for success, and set that person up to be resilient and set that person up to keep going, that's what we're looking for. Because, to be clear, I don't see in the next 20 years growth capitalism changed for something else. I don't see poverty being wiped out. These people need to stay in the game. We need these people in the game to help preserve our planet, preserve our people, preserve a better vision of how we can live,

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 26:55

You don't put too much limitation on applicants, because you want to be blown away by ideas during the application process. What are some of the ideas that have blown you away?

**Helen Turvey** 27:08

Oh, goodness. Every single round we do, when we actually look at the applications and talk to the people, they put forward these brilliant ideas that we could never think of, that we don't have an understanding of the problem set. We're so far removed from the problem set. And again, thinking back to that sort of bigger vision of philanthropy, if you sit in a boardroom, and you've got all this money, and you're deciding about what the problem set is, you can't possibly have any realistic understanding of that, and even if you've gone to all of these places, you're not living them, you don't really feel it and see it. You don't understand it in the same way. And therefore your solution set will be different to somebody's lived experience. And so the reason we don't pare it down is we don't want to define it for other people. We also found that when we did, because we did right at the beginning, say here are our themes that we're interested in, we found that we missed a whole bunch of stuff that was interesting that you wasn't already out there. And I think going back to that idea of we're not solving the problems now in philanthropy with the money we have. We're doing some good stuff, but we're not solving it. So we can't possibly anticipate what's coming forward. And again, the flip side of that is that there are some things that I thought we would never fund again. So we funded a lot of work to do with open access within academic and scholarly publishing many,

many years ago. And I thought we wouldn't do that again. We were essentially aiming to sort of open up the scientific literature for everyone on the continent of Africa, or everyone, in places that weren't the white western ivory towers of academe. And we did lots of work in that. I didn't think we would do it again. But then someone came with an idea that changed the frame yet again. And so, it's not just new things that blow us out of the water. It's a different frame on something that we've done in the past. So if we kept to those rigid structures, we wouldn't do that. So, I think, four or five years ago, we started working with someone called Achal Prabhala specifically in access to medicines. And how timely is that given the global pandemic. The vaccine apartheid and the inequities have happened with vaccine distribution and rollout. And so it wasn't something that was on the radar. Today it would be obvious to fund an access to medicines piece, then it wasn't necessarily, but we thought he was brilliant, and we could see the problem set. It's not working in the way it should be working. And then it just so happened that his work became suddenly incredibly relevant today. We've worked in things like debt and debt relief. again, totally changed my frame on what debt is. If you get yourself into debt surely, just like me, you should pay it off. That's an old trope that's quite hard to argue against. But when you start working at it and you see how predatory debt works and how ... I mean, it's just a world of capitalist evil. And how if you can just shine open into it, and I can change that frame as to who owns what, and change, I think, that narrative on who's the good guy, all of those pieces, it starts to make it a little bit different. And I think that today, we have different conversations about debt and predatory debt than we did five or six years ago. Same with access to medicine. And so I think that's the thing that I'm really looking for, those conversations that aren't yet happening, that I hope in five years' time will happen that draw us closer to a more equitable society.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 31:03

I absolutely love this. And when it comes to open, obviously, the work you do is rooted in openness. Personally, at what point did you like experience open in the sense of open movement? And even your work you do and how rooted it is in open?

**Helen Turvey** 31:25

So that is such an interesting question, because it is so multifaceted. I have a very specific memory of experiencing open source software, which is so different to actually open and open movements and open philosophies, and I think that I definitely conflated the two. My hilarious memory about experiencing open source software was just, I ran Ubuntu to on my laptop, it took forever, it wasn't very good in the beginning. And I famously within that software community said, "Oh, my God, not this open source shit again." And I was so cross about it, just because I wanted to be productive. This is many years ago, I might add. But what is interesting for me is how, if I stand back and I look at the world of open source software, and the world of open hardware, and anything that's got open

access, anything that's got like a real label on it happened at a very particular time. And we can really track that back and say, we can see the source documents, this is when this was used, this is when this was defined, this is how this was defined. And it was really defined by a group of, I mean, let's be clear, white, privileged, very intelligent men who were doing something to get something out of it. And, absolutely, it was a push back against systems that were working and proprietary systems. And I'm not saying that there wasn't good in it, there was lots of good in it. But that's where it arose from. And if we actually take a huge step back and think about openness as a philosophy, which is where the foundation comes in, if we take the ... and in fact, we did used to refer to it as, if we take the roots of open source software and apply them to other places. In fact now we think about I, no! If we take the roots of open, which are about sharing, learning communities, if we take those roots, how can we be more deliberate and better about it, and rally against this artificial desire to close control, and productize something for capitalist gain? And then I think back to recipes, and stories and patterns, and seed banks, and all of the things that are actually far more feminist in terms of not necessarily their ownership, but in terms of the cultural process of how those stories and ideas are handed, built upon, and learnt from. And that is the beautiful thing about open, and fashion, those sorts of industries. And I think reclaiming open in a different way than has been defined by those few people at a particular time is really important to me, because I think we were ... and again, we got a lot out of it. But I think we were very blinkered in what that could and should be, and, more importantly, who it was for. And it wasn't for me. It wasn't for you. It wasn't for people who wanted to just play and tinker and get it wrong and say, "We need to stretch that definition and we need to use it ourselves in ways that we care about." Because that's actually what open is, right? It's the is the iteration and build upon and working out how it applies to you as an individual, you in your work and how you want to invite people into that. It's beautiful. It's the most beautiful thing in the world. And yeah, I think there's so much possibility if we can be if we can stretch it. If we can stretch it and do the genuine inviting,

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 35:20

On a personal level, what does open mean to you?

**Helen Turvey** 35:23

Goodness me, we're getting a bit emotional here. It's about value creation. It's about understanding that we aren't siloed individuals. That we live within communities and communities impact each other. If we genuinely behaved in open ways, we wouldn't have the climate disaster that we have on our hands, because we would understand your impacts impact other people. We would we would care for each other much more. I think it's an interconnected piece, which is making me making me sort of go back to the ideals of socialism, which are absolutely rooted, for me personally, within openness, and that connected piece. And then my question goes to, how do we actually design to

incentivize care and collaboration versus control and personal gain? And those two pieces, they butt up against each other quite a lot. But I think we can. I think we can design to incentivize for those things. I had a very hilarious moment last week, where my car broke, and I need a car where I live, I had to get a hire car. The hire car was brand new, about performance, and what was so interesting is it incentivized me to drive fast, to consume petrol, and all of the things that it was quite exciting and exhilarating to do it. And then because obviously, I have a dead car, I had to buy a new car. And I bought a second-hand tiny, small Nissan LEAF, that's an electric car. The same person to me, it dropped off this performance car that was quite exciting to drive. Three minutes later, I step into this very small electric second-hand car. The incentives for me to drive differently were overwhelming. I'm now optimising for care of my battery, the harms to the environment. I'm driving like an 87-year-old, and I'm not quite there yet. And I was startled with how when you design incentives differently, people behave differently. The same people behave differently. And I think that's the key that we have not yet cracked with open. And we if we can design incentives for people to think broader than their own game, then they become different beasts, and we can all live in this wonderful, harmonious utopia.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 37:57

I love this perspective. I've never actually thought about it in this way. So, Helen, you've been at Shuttleworth for maybe over 10 years,

**Helen Turvey** 38:07

15, 16 years now.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 38:08

Woo!

**Helen Turvey** 38:09

I know.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 38:12

For somebody to work in the same organisation for over 15 years, I think two things happen. Either that passion you started work there with is still burning, and the work environment you are in supports this passion and drive that you still have, or you are probably stuck and just don't-

**Helen Turvey** 38:38

Which is it? Tell me!

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 38:39**

... Just can't see yourself doing anything else, or discovering something new. And which of these two is happening for you?

**Helen Turvey 38:49**

I discover something new every day. I mean, I'm probably very irritating to work for because I'm excited about pretty much everything. Whether it's thinking about the Australian Open and the visa issues in Australia, all the way through to... everything is interesting. Because everything is interesting, and everything makes up how we behave in this world, and why we do what we do. I have the privilege of working with people who think they can make a difference. And that's wild because people are making a difference. And these people continue to be excited, continue to be driven, continue to shape my perspective on the world. I'm definitely not the same person I was when I started. If anything, I think I'm more excited about the potential that we have as humans to impact the planet properly. And I think that the other piece is, is that the work hasn't in any way stayed the same. We have, myself and another director, we're on a bunch of boards from fellows' organisations that have left the programme, so there's more work still to be done. This work doesn't end. And I think that's the piece that's interesting. Again when you focus on the people, not the projects, interestingly, the projects keep going because the people keep going. They may look wildly different. But the things that fuel them are still there. And we thoroughly enjoy everything, we enjoy the people, I enjoy the people I talk to you. And so I think that's it, I'm constantly challenged, constantly seeing possibility, constantly invited in to do something positive. And that's huge. That's such a privilege. Please come and help, and you have a piece of a puzzle that is going to impact something in a positive manner. That's addictive.

I think one of the other pieces going ... I keep reflecting on the questions you asked at the beginning about upbringing and shaping and thinking, I love making decisions. And what I think a lot of the time is that when we're in organisations, and places that know what they're doing, decision-making becomes pretty hard, because it's all obvious, because we've done it a million times. So when something comes up that's different, it becomes quite difficult. Every day we have different and so we have to make decisions on things. And sometimes they're wrong. And that's okay. Because then we can learn and we can make the different decision next time. And so I think the ability to make decisions and learn from them, and not let those cripple you even if you might need to take five minutes, and then carry on going is really important. And that's the environment that I have that I can work in, which is amazing.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 41:38**

What does it mean to be a CEO? I know, obviously, decision-making is part of it. But what does it mean as a woman? And I ask because we don't have a lot of women CEOs in the world. We don't. And I feel that when men fail they don't get the backlash compared to when a woman fails. I guess, I would say that I think we're so used to men failing, and then we want a woman. And then we put all this responsibility on a woman. And sometimes we forget that a woman can also... a woman is like a man, a woman can also fail. Of course, we don't hope for her to fail but it can happen. And she should not be judged differently because that happened. And I feel that probably adds some layer of pressure on a woman CEO. This pressure to excel. This pressure to kind of do well, so you pave the way for other women to follow. This pressure that you carry generations of women at your back. So you have this huge pressure to do well. Do you have that pressure as a CEO?

**Helen Turvey** 42:45

I think on the one hand, as a CEO, it's just the title. And you're just working with your team. And if your team is brilliant, then you can be brilliant, because you can all support each other and you can all work ... So that is the one side of it. However, being really realistic, I think there's a massive difference today than there was even five years ago, definitely 10 years ago. I remember once I was in a meeting with various people in the broader group, and, halfway through it, I just stood up and walked out. I'm done, done, done. In this moment. I'm absolutely done. And it's because, you'll have experienced this, I said something that was ignored it was repeated by a man five minutes later. Oh, that's a great idea. You know, just please! All of the pieces. And then the other thing I saw, and I still see today, is there's not enough colour in the room. I think five years ago, there weren't enough women in the room. I think today, there's not enough colour in the room. And I genuinely believe that, again, this broader philosophy of we haven't fixed it with just money and the ideas we have. So if we need different perspectives, we need to have that diversity in the room. And we need to decentralise this power. And so, I think that I'm in a really fortunate time where the door has been opened for women to do things. It hasn't been great. And again, yeah, most of the time. 10 years ago, I was the only woman in the room. Now I'm not, and that's brilliant. My kids are definitely not going to be the only person in the room and it's definitely not going to be all white, which is brilliant. So I think I'm at a fortunate time when you when we can see those sides, we remember what that passes, but it also gives us fever and fight to change it for the future. Not necessarily as a female CEO, but as a female leader. I think that there have been times, especially when I was younger, when I was so frustrated. I didn't understand how to let out some of the things and so I would behave as potentially the males in the room. I don't know. None of it was particularly deliberate. However, what I feel a greater confidence around now is, as a woman, absolutely it is easier physiologically for me to cry. And if I want to, I will. And that doesn't mean that I'm not right. And it doesn't mean that I don't have power. It means that I'm a whole human. And I'm very comfortable with that. And again, going back to privilege, that's something that comes with age, it's something

that comes with my extensive CV. I've been in enough rooms now, I've made enough impact for it to be okay. However, I do have a personal thing that I do, which is whenever I'm sitting in a room, and there are women in the room, if you notice how many times in mixed gender groups, women will say, oh, sorry, I'm prattling on, or, oh you probably know more about this, or there's that techy bit that I'm not quite clear on. And we'll take them aside, say you paid to be here, you add value, you know what you're talking about. Just remove those sentences, those qualifiers, from the beginning of your sentences, because I used to do it all the time. And it's not true. We are brilliant. People want you in the room, you're invited into the room. So take up the space. And I think that idea of taking up space is really important, because no one knows what they're talking about. Everyone's finding their own way. Everyone's trying to learn and understand if you're doing anything interesting. Nobody knows what they're doing. It's very easy to say have the confidence to be that. Pretend, just pretend you have the confidence, remove those qualifiers from your language and own that space. Because I guarantee the only thing people will remember is you prattled on about technology, as opposed to that really valuable important thing you said in the second half of the sentence. So just say that second half of the sentence. It's very hard to still see it today.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 47:18

I think we mentioned know that when you are in there, you've earned it and forget about whatever it is, and then do the work. At the end of the day, the work will count.

**Helen Turvey** 47:27

Do the work.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 47:28

Do the work.

**Helen Turvey** 47:29

It's so simple, literally one foot in front of the other. Do the work.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 47:34

Yeah. So have you found support from other women and how much value do you place on that?

**Helen Turvey** 47:40

I love being around women, I think they are absolutely the lifeblood of community. I have some incredible support from lots of different women in the space when they've worked specifically in technology, or they've worked in philanthropy or they've been some of the fellows. And I think that is

the piece that I am very conscious of and try not to... I try really hard to make sure it isn't the defining piece of the relationship is I am sitting on one side that hands out money, and with that comes a lot of rank. And actually, if you can redefine relationships based on value and learning, then I'm learning and gaining at least as much if not more than the other person is from just having cash. So that is the piece that I really tried to define our relationships on.

Also to just think about women in this space. When I took over the foundation, when we first did it, only men applied. Only men applied to be fellows. And they were doing brilliant things, absolutely brilliant things. But in our first retreat, as we looked around the room, and it was little awkward, I'm a woman. My other directors are women, how is it that we've only appealed to this demographic. We genuinely couldn't work it out. So again, these things aren't obvious. They take time to unpick, they take time to understand. We're a very different shape of the organisation now in terms of who applies and how people ... we have people of colour, we have trans people, we have all sorts of different jurisdictions around the world. And we've been really deliberate about shaping that. And so, it's things like that and the incredible women who have applied to the programme and been on it that have helped shape us so we can be a better place for more people in this programme.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 49:38**

You've said so many things about your work that excites you. So I'm just going to turn this question around because I was going to ask, which part of your work do you find most rewarding? The whole conversation sounds like you find your work so rewarding. But what part do you find most complicated about what you do?

**Helen Turvey 50:02**

So the part that I find most complicated is, we're essentially trying to fight inequity wherever it stands. And yet the structures and the systems that we use to do that make it impossible to actually do the business of the business, which is move money around. If I want to fund someone in India, forget it. The way the Indian government is set up, and the way the structures are set up in Europe and Africa, it's not going to happen. We just cannot get money to the place. I think the structures that we use today are Victorian, antiquated structures that you know, sort of companies or trusts or any of that, and what they do is they have a philosophy that says that due diligence and protocol, and essentially, incredibly wealthy people at the top of the pile, are best placed to A make decisions and B control wealth. And I don't think that's true. And it's also very difficult to do something different. In fact, it's pretty impossible to do something different. And what ends up happening actually, if you take it all the way to the other end is, we've all seen the Panama Papers, and you, essentially, Amazon who doesn't pay tax, so people right at the top of the pile, get away with it, the masses in the middle, try really hard to comply, because they're doing the good stuff anyway. But

they're just jumping through hoops for jumping through hoops sakes, because it's not actually creating any value. And people at the bottom are left out entirely from these structures. So that's not working. That's not working. I don't know what success metric you could make that look good under. And so that I find incredibly frustrating.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 52:01

Helen, and I'm sure at some point in your life, obviously, you found love. You have a husband, you have kids, and I always bring the love question up because sometimes we feel it's not part of humans. It is and, and I think it's such a big part of us as a people.

**Helen Turvey** 52:25

It's kind of a hilarious story. I'd been working in South Africa for a while. I loved the place. And so I brought my family, my parents, my brother to South Africa just to experience this wild place that I was living, to share the culture, to share just the beauty of the country. And so we went on a safari and he was the game ranger. And it's slightly embarrassing, but I did sort of fancy him a little. We stayed in touch, but quite difficult, you know, I was back and forth, other side of the country. I say we stayed in touch. I met him on his 30th birthday, didn't know it was his 30th birthday. And we were married in the year, which was awfully fast for lots of people. And the reason why we got married so quickly was just because it was just for all the practical reasons it was not. It was definitely living in different countries visas, all of the stuff, terribly impractical. But we just both knew, and it sounds terribly trite to say it. But it wasn't about wings, and it wasn't about hell, it was just solid. And it was just about the same values and about the same ideals and what we wanted. And we had so many questions about the adventures that we would go on. But actually, we knew we wanted to do it together. And the great thing about, we both knew we wanted kids. I worked again pretty quickly after kids. And in fact, after my third I sort of worked throughout, but at the same time there's it's shared. It's not it's not one or the other. I sometimes work in the evenings, we work internationally, it's all over the place. But we also have quite an important time where, between five and seven, we're with our kids we all have supper together. We do all of the things that we care about together. So it's not about the wings and the hell. It's more about the companionship and the learning.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 54:36

Thank you so much, Helen.

**Helen Turvey** 54:38

Thank you. This was actually way more fun than I thought it would be. I was really intimidated by the questions. It's all about me.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 54:44**

Oh, I'm glad. We actually had fun. Helen Turvey, CEO of Shuttleworth Foundation, and she and her team are making it possible for young people to change the world with their ideas. Thank you for listening to Inspiring Open, a podcast series from Wiki Loves Women. This first series of Inspiring Open was funded through the International Relief Fund for organisations in culture and education 2021, an initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office, the Goethe Institute and other partners; and an annual grant from the Wikimedia Foundation. If you enjoyed today's show, subscribe on Spotify, Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to your podcasts so you never miss an episode. Feel free to share, rate and review us. We appreciate the support. You can also tag us in your posts. We are @WikiLovesWomen on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. I'll leave you with the words of Ntozake Shange. "Sisterhood is important because we are all we have to stand on. We have to stand near and by each other, pray for one another and share the joys and the difficulties that women face in the world today. If we don't talk about it amongst ourselves, then we are made silent by the patriarchy. And that serves us no purpose. Until next time, look after yourselves and your sisters. And remember, be inspired, be challenged, be bold. I am Betty Kankam-Boadu and you've been listening to Wiki Loves Women, Inspiring Open.