

Empowering women, unlocking the world's potential

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WOMEN constitute over half of Africa's population yet formally account for only a third of the continent's GDP. There is a saying in Sesotho, "Mosadi o tshwara thipa ka bogaleng," which translates to "a woman holds the knife at the sharp end". The proverb reflects gender disparity and is a reminder of the multifaceted challenges they endure.

Economies that impose restrictions on women's contributions fall short of their potential. Inversely, an economy reaches its peak dynamism when every citizen, regardless of gender, is empowered to contribute equally. Historically, discrimination has dimmed women's prospects and denied them the opportunity to participate fully in the economy. As a result, their talents, ideas, and abilities remain underutilised.

According to the World Bank's Women, Business and Law 2023 report, economies in Sub-Saharan Africa led the way in 2022, enacting more than half of the reforms recorded. Many of these addressed laws affecting women's pay and careers after having children—the areas with the most room to improve.

Governments and organisations must prioritise the development of these competencies to not only achieve gender equality but to harness 100 per cent of the potential of 50 per cent of the world's population.

Yet, this progress barely scratches the surface of what's truly required.

Gender

Only 14 economies in the world are gender equal, according to the WBL, which surveys 190 economies. This means the rest still have room to improve and, at the pace of current reforms, will need some 50 years to catch up. Simply put, a 20-year-old entering the workforce today will retire before she can enjoy gender-equal rights.

Investing in skilling women is not just an act of empowerment; it's a strategic necessity for the continent. Ghanaian James Kwagyir Aggrey demonstrated this foresight over a century ago: "The surest way to keep people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation."

Skills

Skilling women catalyses a multiplier effect that benefits everyone.

Educated and skilled women are more likely to invest in their families and communities, improving health, education, and economic outcomes. They can challenge and change discriminatory practices and policies, paving the way for more inclusion.

According to the International Labour Organisation, the global labour force



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participation rate for women is just under 46 per cent, compared with 72 per cent for men. This gender gap in employment is even starker in project management, where male project managers outnumber female project managers by 3:1, according to recent research from Project Management Institute.

In a sector marked by a talent shortage, the statistics point to underutilisation of skills women bring to the Project Economy and the loss of diversity in a male-dominated environment.

Women's lives in Africa are often complex projects, requiring them to manage and balance multiple responsibilities, roles, and expectations. The essence of project management — planning, executing, monitoring, and closing projects — is remarkably analogous to the daily tasks women perform.

There is merit in formalising these

innate capabilities into project management skills so that they can enhance their efficiency, effectiveness, and resilience. Skills such as risk management, stakeholder communication, and resource allocation are directly translatable to managing finances, negotiating workplace dynamics, and advocating for social change.

Project management skills equip women with a versatile toolkit highly valued across industries. This versatility opens doors to better employment opportunities, fostering economic independence and security.

Moreover, these skills are crucial for entrepreneurship — a path many women pursue in Africa. The World Economic Forum reports that women constitute 58% of self-employment across Africa and contribute approximately 13% of Africa's GDP.

Project management

The journey of mastering project management skills is also one of personal growth. It encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability, qualities that are invaluable in both personal and professional contexts. In the current era, where the call to action could not be more direct, the spotlight turns not just on women's economic and social empowerment but also on how instrumental skills, such as project management, can be in accelerating progress.

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