

Strengthen support systems to enable women succeed — Women leaders

By Gloria Apprey

TWO women leaders, Josephine Koduah Bediako and Norvisi Sokpe, have urged organisations, policymakers and society to strengthen support systems that enable women to succeed.

They emphasised the need for more structures that aid career growth, personal growth and financial stability and promote flexibility, fair pay and leadership development.

Speaking at an online conversation on Facebook, YouTube and X hosted by *The Mirror* on Wednesday, the two panellists noted that despite strides in gender equality, many women still faced challenges, including discrimination, limited access to funding and difficulties balancing work and personal life.

The conversation was held to mark International Women's Day which falls today, March 8.

Mrs Koduah Bediako, an insurer and Chief Executive Officer of Slim and Fit Company Limited, and Miss Sokpe, the creator of *Vision with V Journal* and Senior Manager of Strategic Insights and Analytics for West Africa at



• The panelists: Mrs Josephine Koduah Bediako, Insurer and Chief Executive Officer of Slim and Fit Company Limited (right) and Miss Norvisi Sokpe, the creator of *Vision with V Journal* and Senior Manager of Strategic Insights and Analytics for West Africa at Danone (Fanmilk) (left)

Danone (Fanmilk), explained ways women could navigate this landscape to success.

Barriers to women in leadership

Discussing the barriers women face in attaining and succeeding in leadership roles, the panellists identified societal expectations and family responsibilities as barriers.

"Insights from Instagram polls revealed that women often stop getting promoted after starting families, despite being hardworking, which is unfortunate. Companies should be intentional about creating

environments where women can thrive professionally without sacrificing their personal well-being," Miss Sokpe emphasised.

She also noted the gender pay gap as a critical issue, advocating fair compensation and equal opportunities for career advancement.

Both speakers called on organisations to implement policies that actively support women in leadership, including flexible work schedules and maternity support programmes.

They also noted the need to call out inappropriate behaviour or sexual harassment in the workplace while preventing biases and discrimination.

Financial literacy as a tool for empowerment

On financial literacy as a tool for empowerment, Mrs Koduah Bediako urged women to adopt strategies such as saving before spending, negotiating salaries, budgeting, investing in insurance and seeking financial education to ensure long-term stability.

She also emphasised the importance of financial planning, including insurance for life cover and suggested that financial literacy should be taught in churches and other community settings.

Additionally, she encouraged women to explore entrepreneurship as a means of financial empowerment, citing stories of female entrepreneurs

who had built businesses through financial planning and perseverance.

The session addressed how financial independence enabled women to make informed career and personal choices and reduce reliance on external support.

Giving tips on salary negotiations, Miss Sokpe advised discussing salary ranges with colleagues in order to incite salary increases and push for better offers.

The speakers also noted saving and investment options like fixed deposits and treasury bills along with personal budgeting strategies for short-term and long-term financial goals.

Health, self-care and career growth

Mrs Koduah Bediako, who is also a health and wellness coach, urged women to prioritise their well-being to sustain both their careers and personal lives.

She stressed the need for regular exercise, proper nutrition,

hydration and stress management while encouraging women to set boundaries, avoid burnout, take time for relaxation, dancing and reflection and seek professional help when needed.

Mentorship and support systems

Addressing the impact of mentorship and support systems on women's growth, Miss Sokpe said "It would be good if young women aligned themselves more with mentors from West African backgrounds as they tend to understand more the challenges the region faces. Mentorship generally requires patience, understanding and a willingness to guide mentees through their mistakes. It's about providing support, helping them see different perspectives and ensuring they have the space to grow and

balance their responsibilities."

Mrs Koduah Bediako recounted her own experience, stating that guidance from experienced women in her field had been invaluable.

She encouraged women to actively seek mentorship opportunities and build

networks that uplift others, just as she does in her field. She also advised them to take on leadership roles and break barriers in male-dominated industries.

"If you are a wife and mother, one way to navigate is to manage household duties through delegation and seeking assistance when necessary. The role of male allies, especially husbands, is also important in establishing strong support systems," she added.

The speakers also appealed to men in leadership positions to mentor and advocate for female employees, fostering a workplace culture that supports growth and development for all.

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