

Human Prosperity in a Changing World: Leveraging the Human Potential of Women to Champion our Inclusive Prosperity

Preamble

I have lived all my life in Africa, schooling in Nigeria and running a non-profit there. I have witnessed, in a horrific scale, suffering, violence, hunger, poverty, inequality and the consequences of bad governance in the country. Having being privileged to visit other countries outside Nigeria with the assistance of the UN, I was able to see how common and enormously life threatening these crises are around the world. So, I begin my essay with an acute sense of these prolonged crises that threaten our lives and the price of our inclusive prosperity, filled with difficult questions about the relationship between what constitutes human success and human failure, happiness and sadness, war and peace, satisfaction and discontent, and our determined efforts to replace one with the other. However, in all these puzzle and struggle, it is very important that we should constantly remember that we are not mere prisoners of fate, our actions matter!

Inclusive prosperity is everybody's business; it is not particularly a European, Asian or American pursuit – it is a global matter and needs a globally integrated effort and intervention. This is especially true when one views prosperity holistically as an inclusive thing that encompasses the opportunity for lives – all lives - in dignity, with purpose and roles to contribute to common endeavours in the communities one is part of, and not just material wellbeing. This inclusive prosperity which includes all — the material and economic aspects as well as the social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual side – is the deepest yearning of the human heart and the hope of all the world.

Statement of the Fact

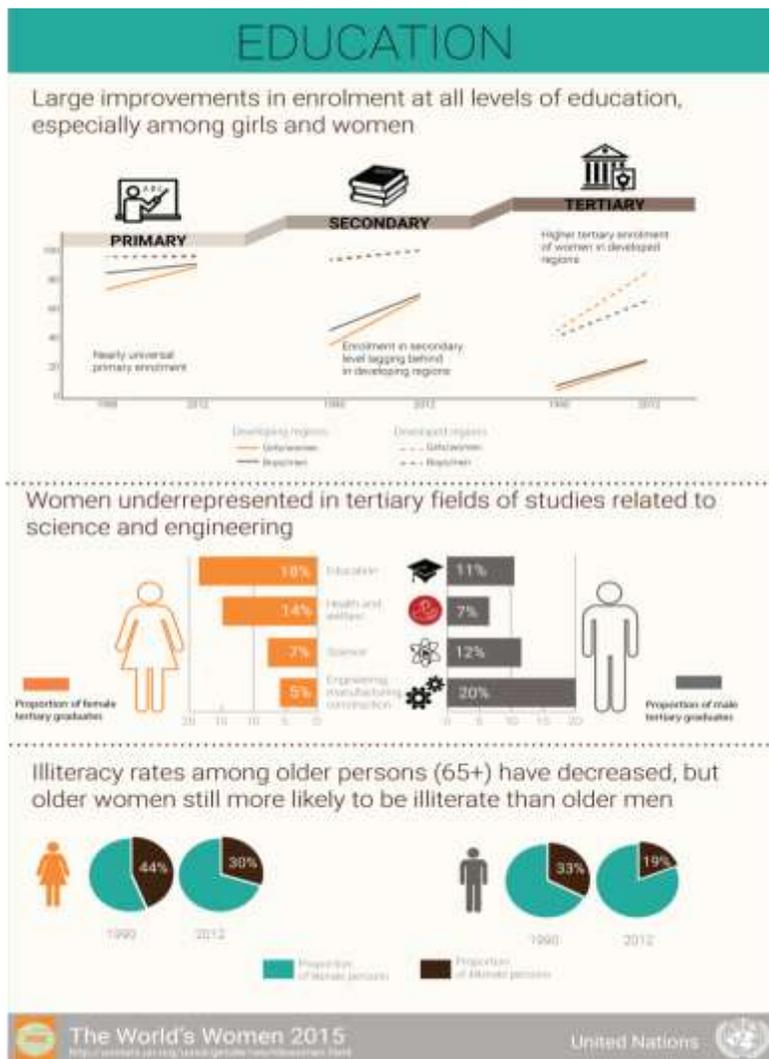
The key factor to realizing inclusive prosperity is 'The Human Potential' which, according to Peter Drucker, is the biggest natural resource on the planet; it comprises human energy, engagement, talent and creativity. Human potential is possessed by everyone; that means every human person, man or woman is a 'resource bank', the mitochondrion of the universe, the engine to drive development. But the unhappy thing is that "only a fraction of this potential is brought to bear today" This warrants me to ask, WHY?

The need achieve #Equality and #diversity in the workplace has been on the business agenda for several decades now. Who has not heard about it! The campaign is serious and bigger organisations and larger economies are joining in the quest. Now for the bad news. Almost four in ten businesses in G7 countries have no women in senior management positions. Globally the level of women in senior roles has risen just 3% in the past five years, to stand at 24%. This is bad news for everyone, not only for women, because it translates into lower economic growth.

Lack of quality education for women and girls coupled with poor participation or representation of women in politics and business contributed largely to the poor utilization of the potentials of women. Permit me to quote my last sentence from the essay topic/context lifted from the Peter Drucker Challenge website, “if better leveraged (the human potential of women) this latent potential would be the key driver for economic and human growth”.

Social Change In Favour of Women

Education for Women and Girls: Women did not begin attending college in equal numbers to men until as recently as 1980. Before then, women have largely been excluded from the educational system. Entry of women into the higher professions like law and medicine was delayed in most countries due to women being denied entry to universities and qualification for degrees.

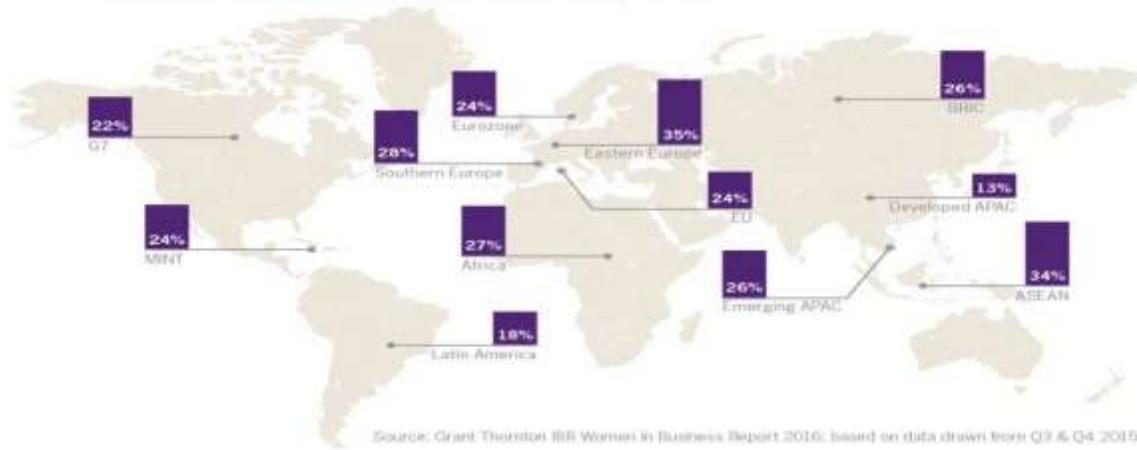


¹Picture: Education report 2015 shows large improvements in enrolment at all levels especially among women

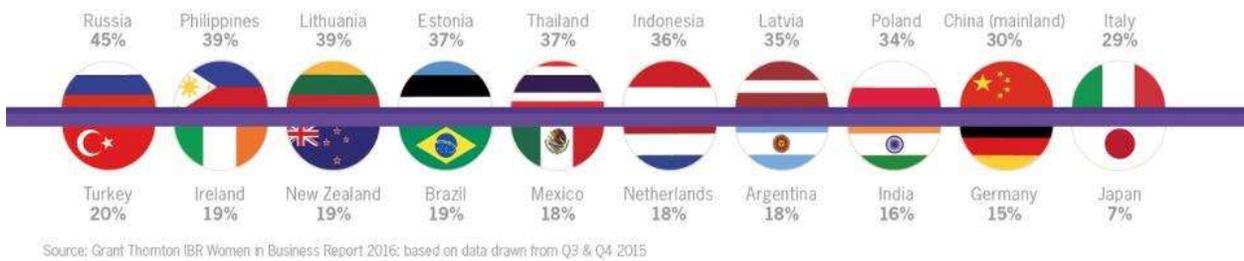
²Image1

¹The United Nations (2015). The World's Women 2015: Education. Retrieved from <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/chapter3/chapter3.html>

Proportion of senior management roles held by women



Senior roles held by women by country (top and bottom ten)



3Image 2

Actual progress in the education of girls began in the nineteenth century with the founding of colleges offering single-sex education to young women.

The need to get more girls and women to school continues to dominate the feminist thought. In Africa, it took long before women were actually allowed to have access to school like their male counterparts who were favoured more in terms of education. Till date the number of out-of-school girls in Africa and Asia is still alarming. Worse still, many girls are still married or rather sold off as baby brides and that completely cancels the chances of ever going to school in their entire life.

² Dina Medland (2016). Today's Gender Reality In Statistics, Or Making Leadership Attractive To Women. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dinamedland/2016/03/07/todays-gender-reality-in-statistics-or-making-leadership-attractive-to-women/#201b92cc6883>

³ Ibid.

So many reasons are responsible for the poor enrolment of women in education in Africa and Asia. Some of the reasons are the "male breadwinner" ideal that prioritizes educating boys over girls and limited funds available to families for education. In addition, in West Africa women are still seen as the primary providers of unpaid care work, as people whose major task or destiny is to cook, care for the older members of the family, clean the house and bear children so education is not important for them. In some parts of Asia and Middle East like Pakistan and Syria, militancy with its direct consequences such as refugee crisis and economic hardship has brutally thwarted the chances of young girls acquiring education.

Despite all these setbacks and debilitating gender disparities, girls' and women's education has significantly improved all over the world unlike what it used to be in the 1980s. Enrolment into secondary school among girls is over 25% and 38% in the tertiary institution in Sub-Saharan Africa. This shows a 'double increase' compared with the data of 1970 to 1990.. Kudos to the feminist movements advocating for girls' education.

Additionally, in other developed countries and continents like Europe and America the education of women is steadily increasing. In some cases, women have surpassed men at many levels of education.

Participation of Women in the Workforce: Women have been greatly challenged by inequality in the workforce. Restrictions on women's access to and participation in the workforce include the yawning wage gap, the glass ceiling, inequalities, legal and cultural restrictions on access to education and professional jobs. This resulted in women being largely limited to low-paid and poor status occupations for most of the 19th and 20th centuries, or earned far less pay than men for doing the same work. Traditionally, women are viewed as the primary caregiver to children and older members of the family to this day, and not money makers. A woman's pay, in some companies, is lowered or she is irrationally fired when she begins having children because businesses do not expect her to stay long after giving birth or to remain in her job carrying babies about in the workplace due to absence of childcare facilities.

Things significantly began to change in the 20th century when women aggressively became involved in organizations dedicated to social reform like The National Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) established in 1903 to advocate for improved wages and working conditions for women; such movements helped to close up the occupational gender gap and opened up a world of chances for women in the business arena. Today women are in better-compensated, longer-term careers rather than lower-skilled, shorter-term jobs and occupying senior roles in some big companies as image 1 and image 2 showed, though

there is plenty of room for improvement if we are to achieve an inclusive prosperity and sustainable development.

Women in Government

Women face numerous obstacles in achieving representation in governance. Their participation has been limited by the assumption that women's proper sphere is the "private" sphere. Whereas the "public" domain is one of political authority and contestation that is exclusively for men; the "private" realm is associated with the family and the home.

By relegating women to the private sphere, their ability to enter the political arena is appallingly curtailed.

Gender inequality within families, inequitable division of labor within households, and cultural attitudes about gender roles further subjugate women and serve to limit their representation in public life. Societies that are highly patriarchal, most Africans societies, yes like my country Nigeria, often have local power structures that make it difficult for women to show their face in public spheres. Thus, their interests are often not represented at all or under-represented.

The poor representation of women in government played a significant role in the establishment of Women's suffrage, the right of women to vote in elections. Most countries enacted women's suffrage in the first half of the 20th century. This opened up a whole new opportunity for women and as the world advances over the years, involvement of women in public offices grew tremendously. As of January 2017, the global participation rate of women in national-level parliaments is 23.3%⁴

Benefits of these Social Changes

Improving girls' educational levels has been demonstrated to have clear impacts on the health, wellbeing and economic future of young women, which in turn improves the prospects and growth of their entire community. The infant mortality rate of babies whose mothers are educated is substantively lower than that of children whose mothers are illiterate. According to UNFPA survey, every extra year of school for girls increases their lifetime income by 15% and reduces early marriage. Therefore, improving female education, and thus the earning potential of women, improves the standard of living for the community, as women invest more of their income in their families than men do.

Higher attendance rates of high schools and university education among women, particularly in developing countries, have helped them make inroads to professional careers with better-paying salaries and wages. Education has been shown, in addition, to increase communication between spouses, women and their employers; it improves the rates of civic participation such as voting or the holding of public office among women. Education for women and girls is vital, in fact, it is high time we hit hard with truth, it is indispensable for human development.

⁴ Women in Parliamentary (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

I cannot say enough the immense benefits of having women fully active in business. But I find someone's words more eloquent and convincing. Let me quote these brilliant lines from Sacha Romanovitch, the first woman to head a major city accountancy firm and the CEO of Grant Thornton which has published a report⁵ based on its annual survey of 5,520 businesses in 36 economies "We know that businesses with diverse work-forces can outperform their more homogeneous peers and are better positioned to adapt to a rapidly changing global business environment," says Sacha. "Within the context of increased uncertainty and complexity, firms must resist group-think and welcome a range of perspectives in order to grow and meet the challenges of today" she concluded in the research. Our contributions alone in business cannot, can ever bring about inclusive prosperity to humanity, women will have to be fully involved as much as we are. Sorry guys, but it is true!

Increasing women's representation in the government empowers women and advances gender equality. Women, as the direct primary caretakers of children and have the welfare of the family at heart, often have a more prominent role than men in advocating for children. In national legislatures, there is a remarkable trend of women advancing gender and family-friendly legislation.

Peter Drucker and his Perception of Women's Potential: An Idea for our Contemporary Society

I have been fascinated with Peter Drucker since I came to know about him right from my adolescent age. He saw little or no distinction in capabilities between men and women in today's knowledge work. This he has eloquently demonstrated through his writings, leadership and verbal conversations in interviews. He proclaimed Frances Hesselbein, a woman, "the best CEO in America." That was in 1990, exactly the year I was born. Frances, then CEO of the Girl Scouts of the USA, was nearly unknown to anyone outside a small cliché of people involved in some nonprofits.

Peter Drucker understood the situation of things in the society far better than any thinker or scholar that lived in his time. He understood the complexities of human problems and proffered solutions, not (merely) alternatives. **Solution and alternative are like human potential and robots. For instance, developing human potential (man and women) for effective contribution is a solution to shortage of labour, while robotics is an alternative. We should concentrate more on solution for the sake of our inclusive prosperity, not alternatives.** Empowering women is smart business. Peter Drucker understood the need to empower women and give them an equal space for participation. He was a 'smart guy' and had his eye on smart business; he saw what others could not see!

In another article on Forbes⁶, Peter Drucker was reported to have said that "women are better corporate leaders". That is true, though I agree that I have not devoted a great deal of

⁵ Grant Thornton(2016). Women in Business: Turning promise into Practice. Retrieved from https://www.granthornton.global/globalassets/wib_turning_promise_into_practice.pdf

⁶ Rick Wartzman (2013). Do Women Make Better Corporate Leaders Than Men?. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/drucker/2013/04/02/women-better-corporate-leaders/#50be313723de>

time to evaluating that proclamation, but I have examined the leadership attributes said to be especially common among women which are traits greatly valued by Peter Drucker and they prove highly effective in driving corporate growth. Such traits are: inquisitiveness—of asking questions—when it comes to working effectively with others, ability to consider competing interests and take a cooperative approach to making decisions and communication.

Recommendations

Human prosperity is an inclusive thing and requires inclusive approach that would bring to bear the two fractions of the human potential. It has a unique price tag and everybody has got to dole out a coin.

Focusing on the themes of my essay in line with the theme of this year's Peter Drucker Challenge, I hereby make these recommendations:

The government and organisations should ensure a well-researched, effectively implemented and monitored affirmative action programmes to boost education for the vast majority of women and girls at all levels including education on family planning, safe sex, and birth control in population control programs. I say this bearing in mind that the majority of African women living in the rural areas are poor and are largely illiterate. The bulk of women that would champion or contribute to inclusive prosperity are obviously not from this class.

Recognizing the invisible nature of power structures that marginalize women at the workplace, the government, management and the family should partner to create a conducive working environment for women by promoting gender equality in the workplace, eliminating all social standards or norms that relegate women to the background like 'think-management-think-man' norm, the 'ideal-worker' phenomenon and the 'glass ceiling'. Improving work and family balance as well as maternity and social protection will improve working conditions for women. Companies and organisations must do more to transform their leadership cultures or structure in order to attract women aspiring to senior roles. This is what is substantially lacking in businesses in G7 countries like Japan and Germany despite widespread public commitments to equal opportunity and an abundance of research illustrating the commercial benefits of diverse leadership. This will enable us to build inclusive organisations and expand opportunities for underrepresented populations in the labour market.

There should be transformation of the political system, a transformation that will bring a change in structure which will empower women to emerge from the base instead of being appointed. This change in structure is so important because there would be no impact if

women are appointed or emerge as leaders surrounded by men in a system that is constructed to serve only men. The positive result comes from the change in structure.

With women now representing 40 percent - or a little above that - of the global labour force and more than half of the world's university students, it seems the world will depend more on the female population in future to drive growth in this knowledge-based economy. Their overall productivity will increase if their human potentials are developed and used more fully.

We spend billions of naira on agriculture in Nigeria yearly, yet we cannot feed ourselves. Only men get these aids and grants because they have access than women, and that is where our problem lies. If women farmers have the same access as men to productive resources such as land, capital and fertilizers, agricultural output in Nigeria could increase by as much as 2.5 to 4 percent and that would have saved us from entering recession. The elimination of barriers against women working in certain sectors or occupations like agriculture could increase output by raising women's participation and labour productivity.

Conclusion

Having tried to (re)connect this 'disconnect' that seems to exist in our perception of women workforce and human development, I therefore end my essay with these thoughts.

First, as an African, I have come to understand that our failures and misfortunes as a continent have some gender undertone. I sincerely hope my essay will bring Africa's gender gap on the international desk again for discussion; and I hope it will challenge the younger generation of Africans to begin to demand for and be the change that is fundamental to our inclusive prosperity and democracy, like gender equality.

Empowering women to participate fully in all aspects of social endeavour is essential to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities.

The private sector is a key partner in efforts to advance gender equality and empower women. Ensuring the inclusion of women's talents, skills and energies—from executive offices to the factory floor and the supply chain—requires intentional actions and deliberate policies.

Nevertheless, I believe that in future, women not only will represent one of the largest economic and social opportunities in our lifetimes but also will be an important force in spurring a recovery and generating new and inclusive prosperity.