



Building Professional Women Leaders for the Future

A Paper Presentation

by

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Introduction

Building professional women leaders for the future

Over the years, the patriarchal society too often perceives women as being too delicate to lead. This trend, among many other deeply-seated and unconscious gender biases, forces potential women leaders to withdraw into their shells. Yet, women possess inherently strong attributes that can help them lead more effectively.

Multiple studies have shown that strong female leadership improves the status of families and communities, improves employee productivity and increases corporate profitability. According to the Harvard Business Review, companies that increase the number of women in executive and board positions to 30% saw a 15% increase in productivity.

Women comprise about 49.31% of our population. We should have at least 50% of the voice. In terms of numbers, we are a force to be reckoned with. Yet we see that women have little or no voice in places of power, be it as representatives in the legislature, captains of industry, the civil services or even the development sector. Some schools of thought have argued that having quotas to ensure that women are in leadership positions is the way forward to ensure that women take their pride of place in the workforce. Quotas and policies on diversity and inclusion have ensured more women are allowed into top positions in the banking and other such sectors, but also merit-based, which means women who have actually put in the work get the recognition and positions they deserve.

Introduction Contd.

Women being the primary caregivers of children are forced to make difficult choices to choose between the home front and caring for their children or going higher in the career ladder. Women also bear the brunt of the bills of outsourcing childcare in exchange for building their careers. Some issues force some women to move over to other industries when they are of childbearing age to enable them to make time for their children and family in exchange for positions of leadership in more competitive industries. Many women are faced with caring for families, managing households and holding down economic activities.

The quest to drive sustainable growth, enhance social progress and achieve meaningful development goals is a common agenda today. Hence, there is an urgent need for more attention on issues relating to women's participation in leadership positions.

Women leaders are best positioned to carve out a positive future for themselves and their organizations. Women leaders will be better equipped to adapt to the changing socio-economic environment and increase their effectiveness at leading organizations and employees in this new environment.

There is no shortage of qualified women to fill leadership roles: Women make up almost half of the U.S. labour force. They outnumber men in earning bachelor's and master's degrees and are nearly on par in getting medical and legal degrees. Yet from corporate boardrooms to Congress, from health-care companies to the courts, from non-profit organizations to universities, men are far more likely than women to rise to the highest paying and most prestigious leadership roles.

Introduction Contd.

The global gender gap in leadership has been widening despite efforts aimed at bridging it. In 2017, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stated that “equal economic opportunity would boost economic output by 5 per cent”. It also reported that “women receive about half of what men do in the labour market”. A 2021 study from Yale found women are 14% less likely to be promoted at their companies every year and are consistently judged as having “lower leadership potential” than their male counterparts.

This inequality gap has been documented by different studies and reports; including those carried out by the World Economic Forum (WEF). Between 2006 and 2016, WEF reported that the global gender gap remained unchanged at only 58 per cent closed. It maintained that at this rate, it would take another 170 years to close the gender gap in its entirety.

Statistics of Women in Leadership Positions

According to the UN Women, as of 19 September 2022, there are 28 countries where 30 women serve as Heads of State and/or Government, 13 countries have a woman Head of State, and 15 countries have a woman Head of Government; only 21 per cent of government ministers were women, with only 14 countries having achieved 50 per cent or more women in cabinets.

The data also showed that only 26 per cent of all national parliamentarians are women, up from 11 per cent in 1995 with only five countries having 50 per cent or more women in parliament in single or lower houses: these countries are Rwanda (61 per cent), Cuba (53 per cent), Nicaragua (51 per cent), Mexico (50 per cent) and the United Arab Emirates (50 per cent)

The UN Women which is an arm of the United Nations has raised concern that at the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years adding that with an annual increase of just 0.52 percentage points, gender parity in ministerial positions will not be achieved before 2077.

The Role of Women as Stakeholders in the development of the society

Women are the **primary caretakers of children and elders** in every country of the world. International studies demonstrate that when the economy and political organization of a society change, women take the lead in helping the family adjust to new realities and challenges. International studies indicate that women lead in finding solutions to the problems occasioned by a change of political and economic organizations in countries, thereby helping the family adjust to new realities and challenges.

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When women are living safe, fulfilled and productive lives, they can reach their full potential. contributing their skills to the workforce and can raise happier and healthier children.

Women are **involved in the urban informal sector, largely in retail trade and in small scale enterprises**. In the rural areas, wherever male relocation has been strong, women who remain had to increase their workload and to assume full responsibility of carrying out both agricultural and household duties.

The Role of Women as Stakeholders in the development of the society

With women making up about 50 per cent of the world's population and contributing significantly to global GDP (gross domestic product), their participation in leadership roles is crucial to achieving sustainable development goals.

It is historic that women play significant roles in societal development and ensure the stability, progress, and long-term development of nations. Women also play the role of decision-makers in homes. Globally, women contribute immensely to agricultural development, comprising about 43% of the world's agricultural labour force. In some countries, the number of women involved in the agricultural labour force increases to over 70%. Available records indicate that in Africa alone, 80% of agricultural production comes from small farmers, most of whom are rural women.

Now more than ever, professional women leaders are in high demand. As the business landscape continues to evolve and diversify, organizations need skilled professionals who have a track record of success and can provide creative solutions to difficult challenges. Women have become an integral part of many workplaces around the world and their leadership skills are often invaluable for tackling issues facing the industry.

Barriers to women's participation in leadership

The “qualities” of a leader as well as the path to achieving leadership roles are still largely based on an outdated male model that shuts women out. **The American Association of University Women (AAUW)** lists some barriers to women's participation in leadership.

They include;

1

**Old
Stereotypes**

2

**Fewer
connections**

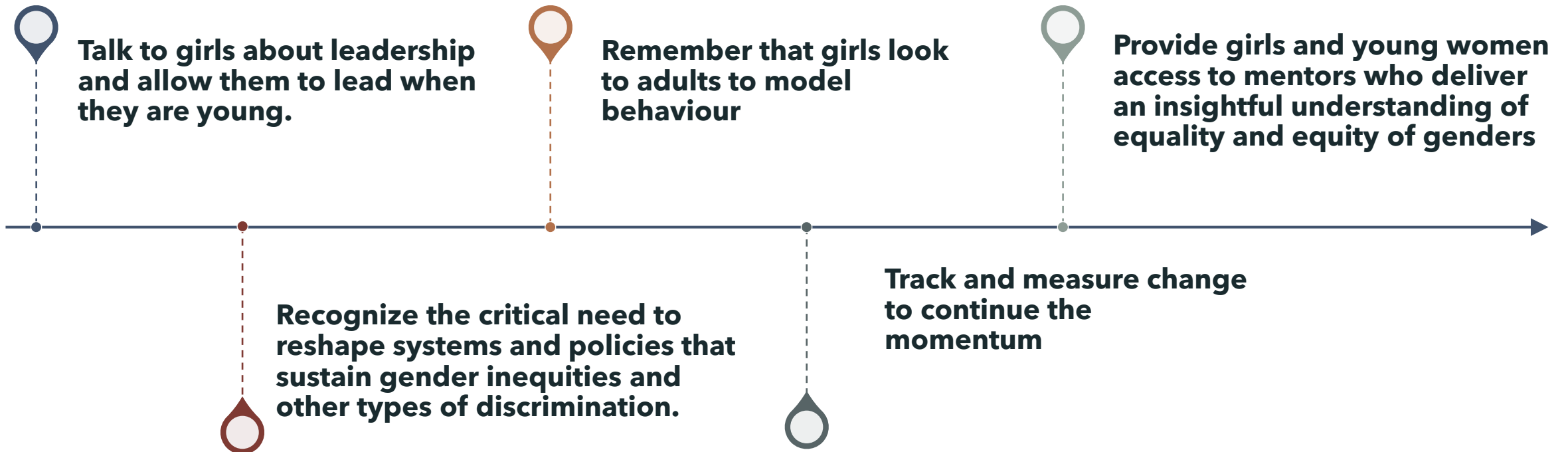
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**Bias and
Discrimination**

4

**Lack of
Flexibility**

Steps that can be taken to build female leaders



Ways of Equipping Professional Women for Leadership Roles

- Develop a culture of promoting women
- Encourage individual leadership
- Embrace mentorship
- Find the right supporters
- Invest in female talent
- Provide leadership opportunities
- Create a workplace women want to join and stay in
- It is imperative the participation of women in key leadership roles is encouraged.
- Empowering women in key leadership roles
- Providing education and the right skills
- Creating a conducive working environment

Ways of Equipping Professional Women for Leadership Roles Contd.

- Women should unite to collectively push for their rights and demand recognition for their contribution towards nation-building.
- Leadership development programs should focus on honing women's skillsets in critical areas
- Communities and individuals can make a difference by actively promoting and celebrating women leaders. **like we have in APWEN**
- We can all do our part to promote gender equality, especially in the workplace
- Personal development and empowerment programmes aimed at women should be developed, delivered and embedded
- Effective leadership training will prepare women for future challenges and enhance their performance as leaders in organizations.
- Leadership training will develop women leaders' capacity to integrate leadership skills

What More Needs to be done

- We must engage young women to realize that they have all it takes to solve problems and lead locally, nationally and intentionally in whatever sphere of influence they find themselves.
- Women should learn to trust their abilities and intuitions through observing, listening and learning, empathizing with others and persevering when doing what bring systematic change.
- Most importantly, we should encourage women and young girls not to be afraid to dream big or not be afraid to start small, because seeking solutions to day-to-day problems facing us and our communities can lead to much bigger changes in our world.
- In order to bridge this gender gap in leadership positions, governments must create enabling environments that promote women's empowerment.
- Corporate organizations must play a leadership role in the promotion of gender equality both in the workplace and in society at large.
- Governments should put in place policies or programs that promote women's participation and leadership roles in politics, governance and business.

What More Needs to be done Contd.

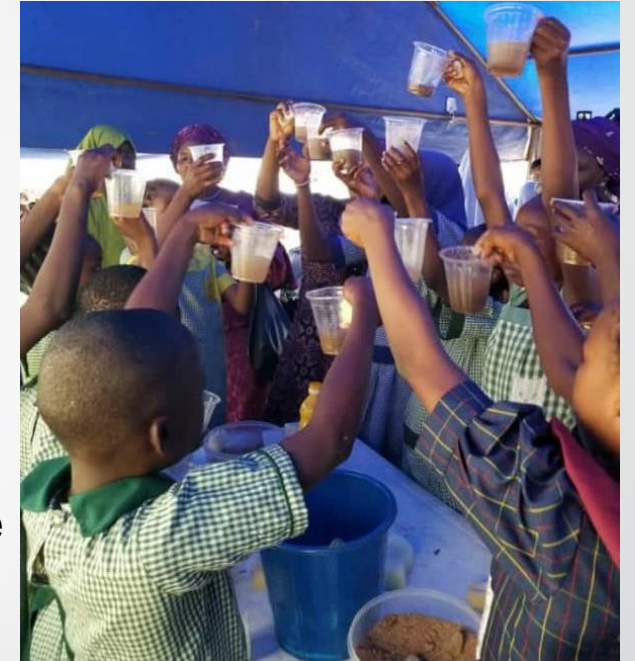
- There are a lot of organizations in industry and academia that encourage girls involved in STEM programs and foster women's participation in technology at all levels. An example is the Association of Professional Women Engineering of Nigeria (APWEN), which help to reframe the narrative and stereotypes at all levels. It is important that women looking to develop their leadership skills seek such organizations and learn from many inspiring women leaders.
- it is critical to establish a framework for the next generation of women. Doing this will involve providing women with access to STEM/STEAM education and ensuring they understand the positive impact on the world
- Recognising the accomplishments of women is critical to empowerment but constantly calling them out as women in leadership only highlights that the gap still exists.
- It is imperative for leadership to treat women's skills as equal/to men and consider them capable of leadership positions.
- Much-needed reforms to sustain African women to continued toward greater solidarity and integration.
- Providing women with key **insights**, to better understand key business metrics and including women in tough conversations about staff reductions, budgeting, and operational principles of business from entry-level positions is critical for grooming them for leadership positions.

STEM Initiatives *A. Invent It, Build It Competition for Primary School Girls*



Activity-based competition

- A platform where students do projects related to solving their community or the nation's problem
- Creating a revolution of girls that will take up engineering as a career
- Scholarships secured from Primary to University
- Ultramodern Science & Technology Laboratory, motorized borehole

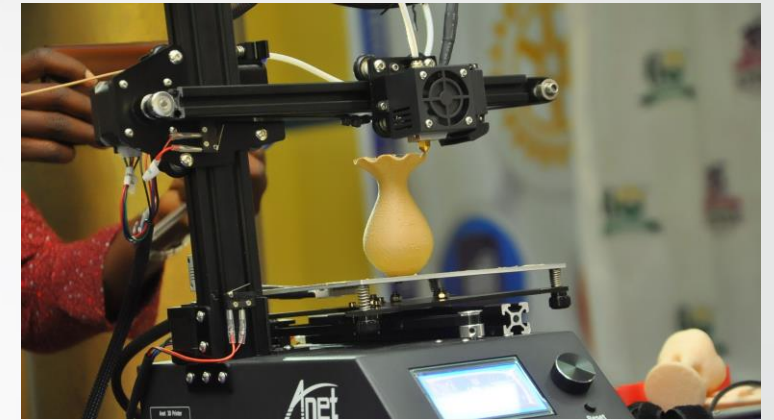


B. Technical Boot Camp for Girls – Junior Secondary School



3-day holiday event

- Inspiring girls through hands-on, engineering-related activities
- Visit to engineering facility
- Artificial intelligence (AI)



E. Who wants to be an Engineer (WWTBAE)



Objective:

Increase public acceptance that engineering is a career for girls too.

Inspire 100 more girls to study engineering

Mobilize others to “recruit engineers

- North-Central Zone
- In-person participants.
- A year scholarship each



- North-West Zone.

- Virtual participants in Kaduna

What More Needs to be done Contd.

- As professional women in leadership positions, it is imperative that we should and can operate under the existing patriarchal system by sharing our accomplishments and ambitions, so as to change and shape our communities' perceptions about women's ability to lead, and create a source of inspiration for women to rise above the gender bias and fear.
- Governments should provide equal access to education, health care and economic opportunities, eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and enhance their involvement in decision-making processes, especially in areas such as infrastructure development.
- It is encouraging to see that some African governments have publicly committed themselves to gender equality on various international platforms, most recently at Beijing 25+ which was held in New York.
- By creating opportunities and developing programs specifically tailored to help female employees grow professionally, organizations can benefit from their knowledge and expertise.
- Investing in resources such as mentor networks, special training sessions, and networking events provides key tools that give female professionals the opportunity to excel. This type of program fosters collaboration and engagement amongst female colleagues who may not otherwise have been given access to similar growth opportunities.

What More Needs to be done Contd.

- By cultivating a supportive environment, women are encouraged to use their full range of talents and skills in pursuit of successful outcomes.
- Female professionals who feel supported often make innovative contributions that bring long-term success both at work and beyond. Building strong relationships with peers creates opportunities for leadership roles, while self-confidence provides the courage and determination necessary to take on difficult tasks.
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- In conclusion, there is still a long way to go when it comes to building professional women leaders for the future. But if businesses embrace the idea of providing equitable access to resources, mentorship and training opportunities from a young age then there is potential for a lasting impact that could see real growth within these communities going forward.
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- Overall, it's essential for companies to actively promote an inclusive culture where all members are valued equally if they hope to successfully build strong professional women leaders for the future.
- Recognizing each individual's potential can create lasting change through increased morale, higher productivity levels, more meaningful interactions, diverse viewpoints and better performance outcomes – all qualities of effective teams.



The Association of Professional Women Engineers of Nigeria

A DIVISION OF THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY OF ENGINEERS

ENCOURAGE ENHANCE EXCEL



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