

Gender and Leadership for Regional Integration: Leveraging Female Talents to Drive Regional Integration in Africa

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ABSTARCT---- *Shifting market conditions, higher customer expectations, evolving workforce demographics, constant advances in technology and rapid social changes require us to rethink the kind of leadership that is needed to be successful in integrating our societies. Regional integration requires new, unique ideas that connect the regions to the local by including women in leadership positions. Unfortunately women are still stuck on a “sticky floor” and a social revolution is needed to be taped in order to promote regional integration. This paper argues that Africa needs to work up and realise that there are three pillars of sustainable development that must be addressed in regional integration. These are environmental protection, economic wellbeing and social equity. Women are an untapped engine that is sufficiently well placed to promote this since they are less involved in bribery than their male counterparts and corruption functions primarily through all-male networks and in forums from which women are socially excluded. The paper recommends that sustainable regional integration, now and in the future, need to be led by fully engaged, balanced teams of men and women working together synergistically to produce extraordinary results for the prosperity of mankind.*

Keywords--- Regional integration, gender, leadership, female talent and social revolution

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two years, the world has seen the biggest recession in almost a century and now come to accept that regional integration is the way to go to leverage sustainable growth and development. Connecting the global to the local is the way to go in regional integration. After the focus on managing short-term shocks, many business leaders are now preparing their companies to perform well in a medium-term economic landscape. Recovery and innovation will require new, unique ideas that connect the region to the local. For regional integration to be a reality in Africa, we need to create an environment where the best minds, ideas and leadership can thrive. Women who constitute a burgeoning portion of the talent pool available to companies today are better placed to drive regional integration now than ever before. In Africa, over time, the continent’s competitiveness depends significantly on whether and how this developing continent utilises its female talent. World Economic Forum (2010) report states that the most important determinant of a country’s competitiveness is its human talent. These talents consist of the skills, education, attitudes and productivity of its workforce. Africa needs to work up and realise that in many parts of the developed world, women now account for more than half of the college and university graduates and in many emerging economies, gender gaps in higher education are closing dramatically.

Regional integration needs talented executives and profitable organizations that can achieve tremendous success on the backdrop of inclusive policies and programmes. In the 21st century, organisations that seek regional penetration are dealing with new and complex issues, challenges, and opportunities that if not dealt with correctly will have a direct impact on their overall growth, market share, and competitive advantage. While many variables are at play, the primary cause for this shift is that the leaders and organizations continue to rely on the same leadership approach that garnered them success in the past. While current leadership models aren’t necessarily “broken,” the reality is that they won’t drive success in today’s ever changing and always challenging global business environment. Shifting market conditions, higher customer expectations, evolving workforce demographics, constant advances in technology and rapid social changes require us to rethink the kind of leadership that is needed to be successful now and in the future (Shambaugh, 2013). What this means is that for regional integration, the urgency for a new approach to leadership cannot be overemphasised. The truth is that 20th century leadership models won’t work for 21st century organizations and 21st century challenges that affect regional integration. This paper argues that successful organizations, now and in the future, will be led by fully engaged, balanced teams of men *and* women working together synergistically to produce extraordinary results. This is called Integrated Leadership and it is based on the concept of gender intelligence. As 21st century rolls into life, it includes a record number of women leaders who facilitate regional integration and have announced their presence in the

global village by challenging the “old boys’ network” of the 20th century so that it gives way to a gender-balanced leadership model. Politicians and executives who fail to tap into gender intelligence will get left behind. Consider these statistics by Shambaugh (2013):

- Gender-diverse companies are 69% more profitable. (Source: Harvard Business Review cited by (Shambaugh, 2013))
- Companies with the most gender-diverse management had 48% higher earnings. (Source: McKinsey cited by Shambaugh, 2013))
- Companies with significantly more women in the senior ranks had 1.7 times greater stock growth. (Source: McKinsey cited by Shambaugh, 2013).

How can gender diversity make such a distinct difference? When men and women work together as equals, they tap into broader perspectives, access a wider range of skills and think more innovatively. Ironically, the very qualities that have historically kept women out of top leadership roles – emotional and social intelligence, collaboration and inclusiveness – are the very qualities organizations and their leadership teams must have in order to penetrate regional markets and to succeed in today’s challenging and complex global marketplace.

It is the contention of World Economic Forum (2013) that capital is no longer the only decisive factor of production in today’s global economy. This assertion appear to corroborate earlier assertions by Shambaugh (2013) that in the 21st century, a business or an economy’s competitive advantage is increasingly determined by innovative ideas or immaterial services, and is less dependent on tangible assets. In this knowledge society, intangible asserts are as important if not more important that the tangible one. According to World Economic Forum (2013), we are rapidly moving from capitalism to “talentism”. This should be the focal point in regional integration. In such a world, gender parity can no longer be treated as superfluous in matters to do with regional integration. It has to be given the respect that it deserves since women make up a half of potential human capital available in any economy. The efficient use of this talent pool is a key driver of competitiveness.

Despite the gains in power, status, and autonomy that workers in various institutions have made most organisations are still organised in a manner that encourages isolation and discourages collaborative work (Schmoker, cited in Slater, 2008). English (cited in Slater, 2008) attributes this state of affairs to the fact that organisations ignore the more humanistic side of leadership. He recommends that future research should consider emerging leadership models that focus on human values and organizational conditions. Sustainable regional integration must be based on human values. It means for regional integration to be a reality in Africa, organisations must be committed to promoting women’s leadership and gender parity across the continent by applying principles that promote sustainable development of the continent. In developed countries which are supposed to be role models, women still aren’t equally represented in leadership. They comprise 51% of the American workforce but as little as 15% of the executive suite and corporate boards. This is one reason why some authorities contend that organizations are using only half of their leadership intelligence. Integrated Leadership offers organizations a way to leverage gender intelligence and create a balanced leadership perspective that yields better business results (Shambaugh, 2013).

Those who value and leverage gender intelligence, realize that there are unique strengths in each gender, just as there are strengths in a diversity of life experiences, age experiences, racial experiences and cultural experiences. Integrated Leadership harnesses this collective human intelligence on gender-balanced leadership teams and it’s actually backed by science! The shift to Integrated Leadership will require the efforts of men and women, as well as their organizations. This paper is trying in a small way to provide the “how to’s” and real examples for men, women, and organizations on how they can not only cultivate a culture that embraces Integrated Leadership but also harnesses the broader spectrum of gender intelligence that fosters a balanced leadership perspective and yields better business results in Africa.

Here are just a few recommendations for women, men, and organizations to consider for being a solution in creating and sustaining Integrated Leadership:

- **Women** must assume responsibility for their own career advancement. Many women are stuck on a “sticky floor” of self-limiting assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours that prevent them from realizing their potential and moving to the next level of leadership. They must look within, acknowledge their leadership attributes, and then confidently take a seat at the table.
- **Men**, who represent over 80 percent of senior and executive leadership, play a crucial role in helping women advance to higher-level leadership positions. These men are in the best position to advocate for women, and we need to tap into their insights, coaching and mentoring, as well as their goodwill (Shambaugh, 2013).

Lessons that can be drawn from the foregoing discussions is that organizations must address the number of women who are dropping out of, or not signing up for, the senior leadership ranks. Many organizations have invested in and developed a robust leadership pipeline of competent women. Now they must take the next step and proactively seek ways to advance more women. However, on the ground, this appears not to be the case. A report by the World Economic Forum (2013) argues that leading companies are failing to capitalize on the talents of women in the workforce. According to the World Economic Forum's Corporate Gender Gap Report 2010 this has significantly affected regional integration. It is the first study to cover the world's largest employers in 20 countries and benchmark them against the gender equality policies that most companies should have in place but are in fact widely missing.

2. WHAT ORGANISATIONS NEED TO DO TO NURTURE FEMALE TALENT THAT WILL SPEARHEAD REGIONAL INTEGRATION

The following talent-development best practices for women from Diversity in Best Practices (2013) are important for regional integration. These are:

1. Provide a peer support system for women to help keep your top performers in the workforce
2. Promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace with respect for local laws
3. Gain cultural competence and understanding for local barriers to gender equality
4. Provide opportunities for global assignments to challenge and engage employees
5. Understand special issues facing women with strong family demands and devise culturally competent solutions
6. Adopt flexible workplace practices and educate managers about the value of flexibility
7. Use alumni/networking connections to encourage loyalty from female talent
8. Get senior-level managers on board with gender-intelligence training
9. Assign diversity champions in select countries to promote diversity-and-inclusion initiatives and help reduce gender bias (Diversity in Best Practices, 2013).

These ways of nurturing female talent appear important for regional development. According to Arnold and Noble (2013), the past several decades have witnessed unprecedented changes and opportunities in the lives of women and girls. It is now a fact that more than ever before, women are working outside the home. They are now moving into domains that were once traditionally men's. This is a social revolution that needs to be taped in order to promote regional integration. The signs of progress are many. In Zimbabwe for instance, women are now making up the majority of undergraduates owing to a government policy on gender empowerment. In government departments, they now earn equal pay with men for the same job or for the same qualification which ever may be the bases of remuneration.

3. SOME REASONS FOR LEVERAGING GENDER TALENTS TO DRIVE REGIONAL INTEGRATION

This paper argues that there are some good attributes of female leaders that are worth consideration if organisations are serious in promoting regional integration. According to Dychtwald and Larson (2010), most poor people in the world are women and children, but enough women across the world are employed and making money that their presence is felt and remarked upon for example in Zimbabwe, despite the fact that there is persistent gender disparities (Chabaya, Rembe and Wadesango 2009), there are others who believe women bring about improved governance outcomes and sustainable development (Sampson 2009). It is contended that sustainable regional development improves with women on board because the quality of politics and governance improves from attributes such as love for peace and concern for welfare; issues that women are presumed to bring to public decision making (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004). To add to this, Hymowitz (2006) lashes out at those who perpetuate gender differences and point out that there is little difference between the leadership styles of successful male and female managers. In this case, integrating regions and continents should not be a gendered issue.

The attributes that are most valuable today – social intelligence, open communication, the ability to sit still and focus – are at a minimum not predominantly male (Rosin quoted in Grogan, 2010). To support this contention, she asserts that women in India are learning English more quickly than men to take advantage of the explosion of call centers, and on the other hand, modern Chinese women own more than 40 percent of private businesses. In the USA, although there is still a wage gap, women now occupy 51.4 percent of managerial and professional jobs in contrast to the 26.1 percent they held in 1980. Regional integration initiatives can ignore these statistics at its own peril.

Studies by Swamy (2001) found out that women are less involved in bribery than their male counterparts. The study concluded that women have higher standards of ethical behaviour and are more concerned with the common good. In that study, it was recommended that increasing women's presence in public life can reduce levels of corruption and this can be useful for regional integration. To Johnsson-Latham (2007), strengthening both the gender equality perspective and the voice of women in decision-making, not least in regional integration initiatives is what appears missing.

Sampson (2009) also brings an interesting dimension to women leaders, pointing out that following deductions made from studies, the World Bank evolved a policy statement that supports absorption of women into public life as an accountability and sustainability measure. This inevitably enhances sustainability and accountability and by ricochet, good governance (ADB in Sampson 2009). Adding to the same issue, Goetz cited in Sampson (2009) point out that corruption functions primarily through all-male networks and in forums from which women are socially excluded.

Studies of women's leadership in many areas have attempted to discover unique feminine leadership styles but ignore other important factors such as cultural, ethnic and religious differences, identity and sustainable development (Shapira, Arar and Azaiza 2010). The complex relationships between these factors shape the being and doing of women leaders' professional lives in different ways (Abu-Rabia-Queder and Oplatka, 2008). Varley, (2005) has shown that gender is an important determinant of leadership and female leaders tend to share power with staff and use a more democratic approach to leadership than male leaders. While we have quite a robust body of knowledge helping us to understand the conditions under which women lead in English speaking countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, we know very little, if anything, about women leaders and regional integration in other parts of the world (Shakeshaft et al. cited in Grogan, 2010). Let alone in Africa. Thus, serious consideration is needed to understand the personal and professional lives and environment in which women leaders work especially in Africa in order to promote inclusive regional integration.

A report By Diversity Management (2013) provides evidence that U.S. businesses need to make talent development for women a top business priority to retain global competitive advantage. This will be necessary to attract, retain and develop the best female talent, a group that is increasing in economic influence, according to its findings. They argue that the biggest implications for developing female talent are global demographic and economic shifts. "Executives are 70 to 75 percent white men but, if you look forward, demographic shifts in gender and ethnicity show that employees and customers will not be," explained Turley cited in Diversity Management (2013). "Boards need to be more actively engaged with who they represent." An interesting aspect of the report is the assertion that women can be quantified as an emerging market. They are the No. 3 economic power in the world today, behind only India and China added Brooke (cited in Diversity Management, 2013). To this end, this study appears to support the argument in this paper that women are an untapped engine for regional integration because they promote and reinforce regional competitiveness. Other interesting findings in the study are that:

- **Women are highly talented:** 36.8 percent of master's degrees now are earned by women. In 2010, more women earned bachelor's degrees than men (20.1 million compared with 18.7 million, respectively), according to census data.
- **Businesses with more women directors perform better:** A Catalyst study of 2004–2008 data shows that companies with the highest average of women directors (top quartile) outperformed companies lacking representation at senior levels (bottom quartile) by 26 percent in return on invested capital.
- **America is falling behind:** Currently, 15.6 percent of U.K. board members are women. The percentage of U.S. women on corporate boards ranges 12.1 to 12.3 percent, with Fortune 100 companies averaging about 11 percent women and Fortune 500 companies averaging 15 to 16 percent.
- **European countries will continue to promote women:** The United Kingdom announced in March a strict diversity goal to obtain a minimum of 25 percent women board members for FTSE companies by 2015; the European Union's justice commissioner has noted that legislation on the issue could be passed since self-regulation has not brought enough progress. Quotas of 40 percent are being considered in Norway, Spain, France, Italy, Iceland and Belgium cites the report(cited in Diversity Management, 2013).

4. REMOVING GAPS IN GENDER CORPORATE LEADERSHIP SOME USEFUL HINTS

As for the solution to removing gaps in gender among corporate leadership, the Diversity Management (2013) panel says there are a few factors that need to come together. Some of those cited include:

- **Accountable leadership with CEO commitment.** The pipeline of female talent is there "but it really comes down to leadership. Everyone has to be on the same page and communicate that focus on diversity down through the recruiting process."

- **Champions for change.** “We need a series of CEOs to come forward and say they’ll become U.S. companies of change,”
- **Changing representation at the top.** “Until you get more women onto boards and on management teams, the discussion doesn’t change enough,” added Turley. “Corporate culture needs to change so that merit is not about face time but what executives produce.” This will allow a more inclusive environment and give women the ability to take advantage of flexible work schedules, work-from-home options and other work/life benefits.
- **Improve sponsorship initiatives:** “Women traditionally are not as good at sponsorship. It’s something we need to make a cognizant effort of,” said Becker, noting that women tend to share credit with their team, which makes it more difficult to identify top performers. Companies should look to assign women sponsors as well as mentors.
- **Women helping women:** All the panelists agreed that women also need to take more actionable roles in promoting their own careers and raising their sights. “About 36 percent of men said in a [McKinsey & Company] survey that they aspire to get to the top, compared with only 18 percent of women,” said Barsch. Women executives need to share their stories and how they manage work and life responsibilities to prove to others that it can be done, added Becker. This is in addition to continuous networking and publicizing to managers how high up the ladder you’re aspiring to go (Diversity Management, 2013).

5. CONCLUSION

This discussion paper showed that in promoting regional integration, what appeared missing is linking women leadership and regional integration. It is a known fact that regional integration must be for all, men and women alike. BUT: women and men do not experience today's challenges in the same way. How can they when women own less than 1% of the world's land property, are often responsible for the majority of agricultural production, producing the bulk of domestically consumed food and sustaining the livelihood of their families (Arthus-Bertrand, 2002). Women are underrepresented in institutional administration (Hudson and Rea 2010). For regional integration to become a reality, organisations must allow women to reassert their authority by removing the wedge and re-defining the territory so that things can be different for the young women who will lead regional integration sooner or later.

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