

The She Movement; A focus on Potential of African Women in Leadership and Entrepreneurship-ACEYE

Dr. James Emmanuel Kwegyir Aggrey is credited with the pithy saying that “*if you educate a man you educate an individual but if you educate a woman you educate a whole nation*”. This quote might have gained popularity because it was mentioned at a period when women were less regarded in society and education for women was less of societal concern. Having made such a statement challenged the Ghanaian societal norms and shook the foundation of popular beliefs. The gender gap in employment and the upper echelons of leadership is a global problem and it has evolved. Even though it appears that it is improving in the more elite society, the gap still exists in different forms.

Ambitious Women

In the time when women were less regarded in society, some women broke the figurative glass ceiling and did the extraordinary. For instance, Jane Austen authored a great number of the world’s most popular novels and she was not identified as the author for a number of them until she died; Queen Elizabeth I became one of the famous political leaders. She made her way out the rocky society to become one of the famous and greatest monarchs in British history; Catherine the Great made her way out to be the Queen of Russia who modernized Russia, developed an economy, promoted trade and developed arts. Rosa Park led the Civil rights movement in America; Marie Curie also pioneered physics and coined the term radioactivity and discovered two new elements (radium and polonium), and an x-ray machine. She is by far the first person (not just a first woman) who has won two separate Noble Prizes, one for physics and another for chemistry. Ada Lovelace was also the first computer programmer (not just first woman computer programmer); Amelia Earhart also broke out of the gender cage and became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic and the first person to fly from Hawaii to the USA. Some Ghanaian women have also broken the societal boundary and contributed significantly to the Ghanaian community including Yaa Asantewaa, the Queen mother of Ejisu who demonstrated bravery in the fight against the British colony; Ama Ataa Aidoo who has authored several literary works; Alice Annum who has represented Ghana in Several Olympic games and won; Francisca Oteng-Mensah who is the

youngest MP (not just female MP) in Ghana, and some others. There are quite some other women who have also done greater things globally or within Ghana who are not mentioned.

The Women Empowerment Agenda

Women's empowerment and women's autonomy has been a revolution promoted from the twentieth century. The women empowerment agenda seeks to promote the autonomy of women in society and to improve their political, social, economic and health status of women in society. This agenda requires the participation of both men and women such that there will be gender fairness and a bridging of the gender divide. According to the United Nations Population Fund, in all parts of the world, women are facing threats to their lives, health and well-being as a result of them being overburdened with work and yet lacking power and influence. For some years past, Women's contribution to knowledge, abilities, and output is mostly unrecognized. The challenge is that women are not empowered such that the lack of power at various levels in society impedes them from attaining healthy and fulfilling lives. Several programs have been launched by civil rights activists, government agencies, and NGOs to promote the women empowerment agenda. The Affirmative action program has contributed significantly to compensate women and other minorities and to elevate their status in society. Even though the Women Empowerment Agenda has had some significant positive effects in society, there are some issues in the gender divide that have received less attention. To contribute to the economic development of Ghana, The Africa Centre for Entrepreneurship and Youth Empowerment (ACEYE) explains these issues and recommend some solutions to them.

The Role Congruence Concept

Role congruence is a theoretical phenomenon that explains the hidden root of the gender divide and why women are still left at the bottom of the "societal status ladder". The role congruence concept refers to where there is a greater overlap of a person's perceived characteristics and job role. Professor Eagly and Professor Karau in 2002 revealed that role congruence has some prejudice toward female leaders and they proposed the theory of Role Congruity of Prejudice. The theory explains that there is some perceived incongruity (non-alignment) between the female gender role and leadership roles and this perception leads to 2 outcomes: (1) less favorable evaluation of women's (than men's) potential for leadership because leadership ability is more

stereotypical of men than women and (2) less favorable evaluation of the actual leadership behavior of women than men because such behavior is perceived as less desirable in women than men.

It means that there are some perceived gender personality skills, traits and behaviors and leaders are also seen to possess some particular set of skills, traits, and behaviors. Women are perceived to be comforting, caring, hospitable, emotional, soft, submissive, relationship focus. Male counterparts, on the other hand, are perceived to be firm, confronting, brave, strategic, task-focused, proactive, action-focused, results-oriented, stern, decisive. Society generally perceives the qualities of a leader to be masculine. That is to say that, leaders are perceived to be stern, courageous, decisive, authoritative, task-focused, action-oriented, confronting, etc. Therefore, there is a higher alignment between male personalities and leadership roles. In the selection of a leader, men are favored more than women because of the perception. How does it happen? Yes! That is a legitimate question: In the interviewing process, Men are generally asked promotion-focused questions while women are generally asked preventive-focused questions. This is done sub-consciously because of the perception of gender personalities.

Dana Kanze, Laura Huang, Mark Conley, and Tory Higgins researched in 2017 and discovered that women in entrepreneurship received less funding than men. An investigation revealed that the male entrepreneurs are asked promotion questions while female entrepreneurs are asked preventive questions. All these two types of questions seek to gather the same information, but the nature of questions makes promotion more favorable and preventive less favorable. For instance, while a male entrepreneur is typically asked a promotion question such as “How do you plan to make revenue?” A female entrepreneur is asked a preventive question such as “How long will it take you to break even?” or better still, a male entrepreneur may be asked a promotion question such as Do you think that your target market is a growing one? A female entrepreneur is likely to be asked a preventive question such as “Is the business sustainable in the market where competitors will not come in to take the market share?” At the hearing of the question, there is the psychological tendency of the female to think that she does not have the ability and this influences the soundness of the answer given.

Concerning the second Outcome, women who make their way out to the top and emerge as leaders are discriminately evaluated of their leadership roles. As leaders, females are torn between the elicit of the perceived female characteristics and the elicit of male gender characteristics. While

subordinates expect a strict, monitoring, action-oriented, pro-activeness, confrontation and so on behaviors from the female leader for her role as the leader, the society expects her to be calm, submissive, relationship-oriented, caring, considerate, etc. for the role as a female.

This phenomenon must not be misunderstood as men have such perception against women. Women have such a perception against fellow women as well. Therefore, even women leaders are likely to subconsciously ask preventive questions to females when they sit on a panel just as men are.

Implication

Though the Women empowerment policies are functioning to some degree in the sense that more and more equal opportunities are created for both gender, the ability to exploit those opportunities are walled. Professor Xu explains that there is what is called the glass wall and the glass ceiling. It appears that the way is clear for both men and women, but women are caged by a glass wall and glass ceiling i.e. the societal perceptions of gender roles and leadership roles (held by both men and women themselves). Women are therefore allowed to advance to a certain level and then they are limited. It is certainly the case that potential women who demonstrate ambitious leadership and change in Ghana suffer relationship problems and family issues due to the perceived role conflicts.

Recommendation

Whiles ACEYE cannot discuss the various forms of leadership in this article, the Think Tank introduces that there are various forms of leadership that all work towards the achievement of goals. Female personalities are in line with some form of leadership whiles male personalities are also in line with some form of leadership, not all. It is high time we changed our perception about leadership and our definition of leadership. Women must have a change of perception and must not cage themselves to one role. Overacting masculine roles undermine the female role, whiles overacting the female role hurts the ability to succeed as good leaders. A study by Aparna Joshi, Jooyeon Son and Hyuntak Roh in 2013 showed that female leaders who occupied executive positions performed equally good but performance evaluation is usually biased. Therefore, evaluators are supposed to be fair enough in the performance evaluation to encourage more women into leading roles. Professor Erica (A social psychology professor) stated that women executives in corporations are generally more likely to increase corporate performance by 60% more than

their male counterparts. Based on the research done and a deeper investigation into the gender divide the Africa Centre for Entrepreneurship and Youth Empowerment (ACEYE) suggests that significant female representation in leadership with no glass barrier, no glass ceiling, and fair performance evaluation will move the performance of the economy forward. Only then, can we see the famous quote: “*if you educate a man you educate an individual but if you educate a woman you educate a whole nation*” working.

By ACEYE

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