

Panel Discussion

High Level Meeting on the Margins of the 74th UNGA: “Renewing Commitment Towards Enhancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Africa”

Question 6: What do you think must be prioritized to ensure equal participation of African women and girls in all leadership and decision-making positions?

Tuesday, 24th September 2019

New York, USA

TALKING POINTS

There is no one prescription for all women and girls participation in leadership, given that they are not a homogenous group to start with, and the reality they live is not always the same.

It is dependent upon a number of factors, including their levels of education, financial capability, and whether they are urban or rural-based.

The variables are many and so are the approaches for different categories.

To begin, let us first acknowledge the following two realities:

1) Structural, social and cultural barriers and stereotypes, lack of resources and sometimes skills constrain them from actively participating in leadership;

2) There is a cost to development, associated with women's absence in leadership and decision-making positions. In fact, a 2015 report by McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) shows that every year, we lose US\$12 trillion to global growth, by not including or fully utilizing women's full potential, especially in decision-making!

We must therefore ask ourselves, what can be done to fast-track women and girls' participation in leadership and decision-making?

- We must break the cycle of the vicious poverty trap.

- We must promote the self esteem of women, while continuously engaging the men, who lack the sensitivity to respect the fundamental rights of women, to participate in the leadership and decision making, at all levels.
- We need to engage the men. We cannot keep asking the oppressed to be the ones to come up with the revolution. The oppressor needs to be talked to.

To achieve all this, there are pre-requisites:

a) Strong leadership at the highest level – without political will to create the requisite conditions for women and girls’ entry into politics and leadership at all levels, it is very difficult to make significant progress in this respect. Political will must never be taken for granted.

In instances where this will does not exist, one strategy is to sensitize the leadership (mainly men) with scientific evidence of the high cost of inequality to long-term sustainable development and peace.

b) Strong institutions and legal frameworks – the revision of national constitutions provides an excellent opportunity to remove all discriminatory dispositions against women and girls, and to replace them with progressive provisions for women and girls’ rights and equal participation in leadership and development, including quotas; age of marriage; citizenship etc.

Allow me to share a few examples from Rwanda, of support for women and girls leadership in politics, business and local administration and what impact it has had

In Rwanda, the unequivocal commitment of the President of the Republic to gender equality and the empowerment of women is evident in the number of women in Parliament (61.3%), the conducive policy and legal environment for their full participation and the institutional frameworks to enforce gender-responsive policy.

In addition to this, the law strongly condemns any form of gender-based violence, which has a negative impact on women and girls' physical and mental health, self-esteem and productivity.

Indeed, according to the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion of Rwanda, since the enactment of the land law, the number of women who own land has kept rising and women's financial inclusion moved from 36% to 63% in only four years (2012 – 2016).

And last, but not least:

- c) Strong human resource capacity – once the fundamentals are in place: good leadership, good policies, and good institutions, it is important to have the right people, well trained and equipped to translate the laws into practice for the benefit of all, and the full participation of women and girls.

In conclusion, let us all further dismantle the barriers to true gender equality, holding men accountable for their essential role in preserving gender empowerment, while envisioning the immense possibilities, that will be realised, when women in our communities,

are part of a developed value chain - to quote Dr Akinwumi Adesina of AfDB, women will be able to achieve self-actualisation.'

Thank you!