

Insights from leading women in marketing, NPO and business spaces

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The principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are not mere abstract ideas; rather, they are concrete factors that significantly influence our society. Emerging initially in the mid-1960s, DEI efforts have progressed in tandem with the implementation of laws promoting equal opportunities and affirmative action policies.



Source: unsplash.com

In Africa, a notable shift is observed, with reports indicating that a quarter of all businesses are initiated and led by women. This starkly contrasts the mere 5.7% of female-led entrepreneurial activity seen in European countries. This significant disparity underscores the profound societal context at play.

These emerging statistics serve as more than just numbers; they represent a seismic shift in societal norms and perceptions. Women entrepreneurs are emerging as powerful role models, challenging historical and cultural norms that have often marginalised their voices. Their presence in leadership positions serves as a beacon of empowerment, fostering a culture of positive reinforcement and inspiring future generations.

Undoubtedly, representation holds immense significance. The visibility of all women, with particular emphasis on vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities in leadership positions, acts as a potent driver for societal change. Despite celebrating the notable strides in female representation in corporate leadership, there's been a concerning decline in the presence of women, particularly black women, at the uppermost echelons.



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As we observe International Women's Day this year, under the theme #InspireInclusivity, we pay homage to Ines Kaiser, the first black woman-led PR firm in Kansas City in 1957, and put the spotlight on our clients across various sectors, including social impact, legal, advertising and automotive, to glean insights into the transformative power of inclusive leadership within their workplaces.

Here's what they had to say:

Q: In what ways do you foster a culture of inclusivity in your workplace and within your community?

Teboho Mankga, group brand and marketing manager, Scania Group:

Within the workplace, I actively promote diversity and inclusion through various initiatives. This includes advocating for inclusive hiring practices (especially as a black woman in corporate SA), and driving the conversation around D&I, because working for a global entity, it's often mistaken that diversity and inclusion mean having men and women in the workplace and not necessarily considering their background, race, orientation etc.

Candice Chirwa, minister of menstruation and founder of Qrate SA (NPO):

I strive to exemplify that my team members represent diversity and inclusivity. Our volunteer staff, predominantly women, hail from diverse backgrounds, contributing unique perspectives. I champion inclusivity not only within Qrate but also in my broader advocacy as a menstrual health activist. I actively work to shift the narrative surrounding periods, recognising them not solely as a women's issue but as inclusive for all individuals who menstruate, irrespective of gender identity.

This approach ensures that menstrual health policies and advocacy efforts are intersectional, embracing the diverse experiences of the menstruating community. This is especially true because a lot of what is considered inclusive is often focused on quotas and no real intention to make a difference.

Inclusion has evolved well beyond gender politics and requires consciousness at every level of a business, event or TV advert, to represent the many identities people hold. At a granular level, inclusivity requires restaurants to consider access and mobility for differently abled patrons. In advertisements, how menstruators are portrayed and what knowledge and information has not been considered in its full form to include, again, identities and real-life situations of a diverse and rapidly changing society.



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We also need to underscore the vital role of shared values amongst stakeholders as a strategic imperative. This means that DEI and environmental social and governance (ESG) are inherently intertwined. By prioritising DEI practices, businesses not only create more equitable and inclusive workplace cultures, where mentorship and sponsoring are not only key components of support but also enable a platform to address key social factors within the ESG framework – ultimately contributing to sustainable business practice. Importantly, investors the world over have begun to measure a business's ESG investment as a way to, amongst other reasons, measure long-term value creation and unlock access to capital

Q: What core values drive your leadership approach as a woman in your field

of work?

Natalie Murison, group COO Two Tone Global:

I prioritise empowerment, collaboration and integrity as my core leadership values. I am dedicated to fostering an environment where my team feels empowered to take ownership, collaborate effectively, and uphold the highest standards of integrity in all our endeavours. Leadership, to me, is about uplifting and enabling those I work with, rather than exerting control over them.

Chabo Peo, partner at Peo Legal:

Empathy is very important to me. I recognise that people assume many different roles in their personal lives and it's important to consider each person's unique circumstances when dealing with them. In any environment, you can find that one person in their personal lives is the sole breadwinner, assuming the role of mom, dad, wife and sister. And as a leader, I am aware not to use one paintbrush to colour my expectations and reactions to each person on my team.



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Taking in the nuanced perspectives of the women featured in the article, it only begs the question, how it is that women-owned businesses statistically receive less funding and business opportunities than those owned by male counterparts? When evidently, it is beneficial for both governance and the financial bottom to have women in leadership.

Highlighted in a 2020 McKinsey report, companies boasting gender-diverse boards were found to be 25% more likely to achieve above-average profitability compared to their less-diverse counterparts. This correlation between female board directors and financial success was reaffirmed by the Women Count 2022 study, conducted by diversity consultancy The Pipeline, which analysed FTSE350 companies.

It's important to recognise that diversity, equity, and inclusivity transcend basic strategic imperatives; they are the foundation of a company's culture and intrinsic values that its leadership teams should embody. Beyond just ticking boxes for diversity quotas, organisations must champion these principles as non-negotiable pillars of their identity.

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