

## Ensuring the Central Role of Women in Development

Daasebre Prof. (Emeritus) Oti Boateng<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

---

The paper considers the problem of ensuring the central role of women in development and proposes a practical and creative process of empowering women as key to assuring their full integration in the development process. The strategy utilizes the award-winning root-based sustainable model that places communities at the centre of the development process as dignified agents of their own development. Within the root-based institutional framework (Boateng, 2015), independent Women's Organizations are created to ensure that women are empowered and well-equipped to assume leadership and other strategic roles at the community, national and international levels. The robust root-based networking mechanism ensures that all the women's organizations are interlinked to work together and use the power of shared ideas and information to promote the empowerment of women holistically at all levels. Of central importance is a newly developed and unique four-phased process of empowering women which provides the established women organizations with a solid blueprint to guide their operations. Comprehensive details of this foundational process are provided in the paper. The practical lessons embodied in the paper are expected to contribute not only to ensuring the central role of women in the development process but also in creating a lifelong and transformative society where both genders can flourish in peace.

---

### Introduction

The need to ensure the central role of women in the global economy and the development process has long been recognized. Yet women tend to be poorer than men globally while many women continue to suffer deprivation in terms of health, education, economic participation and basic freedoms. Women have the primary responsibility for child rearing and the resources they can bring to this task would largely determine whether the cycle of transmission of poverty from generation to generation could be broken.

According to Dr James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey (1875 – 1927) of Ghana, 'the surest way to keep a people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a whole nation.' Notwithstanding this great revelation about a century ago, girls in many developing countries still face incredible challenges towards their education. This is exemplified by the statement of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize Award winner, Malala Yousafzai, that 'Extremists have shown what frightens them most: A girl with a book.' The above reflect the contemporary view that, to make the greatest impact on the global economy, peace and development, a society must empower and invest in its women. Without ignoring the importance of education, this paper looks well beyond it and proposes a solution based on the empowerment of women that encapsulates education. It begins with an overview of the current status of women and argues that critical thinking on the way forward is needed to bring change to the undesirable state of affairs that now exist.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chancellor, All Nations University College, UN Commissioner on the International Civil Service Commission and President, New Juaben Traditional Council, Ghana.

It acknowledges that the goal of ensuring the central role of women in development can be achieved where women and men participate in the development process as equal partners to create a lifelong and transformative society in which both genders can flourish. The paper then presents a practical and original solution based on the award-winning root-based sustainable development model which stresses the empowerment of women as essential and critical factor that would ensure the full participation of women in the development process.

### **Current Status of Women**

As the top-down approaches to development failed to alleviate poverty in the 1990's, especially among women, empowerment became a central focus for mainstream women and development programmes. The Beijing Platform in 1995, for example, stated emphatically that women's empowerment is 'fundamental for achievement of equality, development and peace' (United Nation 1995: Para.13). Since then official development agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the UNDP, the World Bank, Oxfam, government agencies and many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have picked up the language of empowerment, gender equality and gender mainstreaming as one of their guiding principles for development policy.

Naila Kabeer (1994), who has played a key role in the operationalization of empowerment as development practice, has emphasized the transformative potential of 'power within', highlighting collective, grassroots participatory action, the power to work together with others 'to control resources, determine agenda and to make decisions' (Kabeer 1994: 229). Parpart *et al* (2002) have warned that critical thinking about power and the empowerment must be incorporated into empowerment projects and policies. The empowerment of women cannot simply be considered as the need to bring women into established power structures. This approach overlooks the deep-rooted and stubborn resistances confronting the marginalized groups worldwide as well as the ingenious attitudinal, cultural and structural obstacles to collective action and generative power to support gender equality. Empowerment in the view of Parpart (2014), requires attention to language and meanings, identities and cultural practices as well as the forces that enhance power to act with others to fight for change; often in hostile and difficult environments. It also requires moving away from the limits of preoccupation with difference, which as Rai (2007) points out, has undermined efforts to support feminist activism across borders and cultures.

An important area of concern is how the processes of globalization impacts on conditions of employment of women from the developing world. Globalization, usually understood as the rapid international mobility of labour, goods, service delivery and capital, facilitated by the liberalization of economies, privatization and 'deregulation' of labour markets, led to the rapid outsourcing of the rich world's consumer goods from cheap labour economies in the global South. In spite of its benefits of promoting economic growth and mass communication and information flows, globalization has also resulted in the exploitation of largely women labour working in inhuman conditions to produce cheap goods. It has led to the creation of Export-oriented Processing Zones (EPZs) in developing countries as well as new export-labour forces who are predominantly women working in these factories.

Notwithstanding the employment opportunities offered to these young women, their plight in the workplace remains significantly exploitative. They continue to endure indecent working conditions including excessive overtime and shift work, non-existent workers' rights and job insecurity. In a study of young female workers in Java, Indonesia, Diana Wolf (1992) described them as 'Factory Daughters' due to the patriarchal gender relations in the factories where they work. The patriarchal conditions in factories were enforced by male managers who dispensed discipline to those who complained. There was a marked neglect of health and safety regulations, and an ease in which women were dismissed if they got married, became pregnant, complained or contracted work-related illnesses. More recent research with female factory workers in EPZ in Sri Lanka has identified social stigma and negative opinions of society towards women who work in factories resulting in experiences of public humiliation and sexual harassment (Hancock 2009). As a consequence of transnational labour flows due to economic globalization, more than 120 million migrants have left their home countries in search of economic opportunities abroad (Piper 2004). The deepening globalization and the digital revolution with billions of mobile phone subscribers and internet users worldwide, have combined to bring rapid and tremendous changes to the world of work.

A major consequence has been in a surge of demand for workers from overseas and the associated migration of vast numbers of women from low income economies, particularly from Asia and Africa, to advanced and emerging economies such as the USA, UK, Canada, Saudi Arabia and Singapore, to work as domestic workers, live-in maids, health professionals, care givers, sex givers and other care services ( Pyle, 2011; Law, 2002 ). These opportunities are also associated with risks as they are predominantly informal, unprotected, low-paid and low skilled positions (Pyle, 2011). For women from poor uneducated backgrounds, migration can often only take place illegally, via a globalized network of human traffickers. In this way, 'women take an extraordinary gamble to bridge the gap between poverty and gaining prosperity' (Beazley, H; Desai V. 2014).

As the economic benefits of remittances from migration are well documented, studies have also emerged on the social costs of migration on migrants themselves, including health concerns, labour conditions and treatment by employers (Piper, 2004; Silvey, 2006). Migrant labourers often face adverse conditions in the overseas employment similar to factory workers. Women seeking low paid jobs abroad encounter a combination of difficulties including racial discrimination, employer abuse, lack of health services, and vulnerable legal status (Piper,2004). Incidence of torture, rape, sexual assault, overwork and non-payment of wages are widespread and extensive (Silvey, 2006). Gender-based discrimination often intersects with discrimination based on other forms of 'otherness' such as race, ethnicity, religion, economic and non-national status placing women in multiple discrimination, marginalization and vulnerability. Increasing sexual harassment cases and human rights violations against female workers, particularly in Singapore, Hong Kong and the Middle East have sparked major protests from labour unions and women organizations globally (Law, 2002) and brought forth the question of the accountability of the state in protecting citizens who work abroad. Many women working overseas or in factories at home endure constant and frustrating experiences of unwanted and unsolicited sexual advances from their supervisors, managers and others in the workplace. Quite often, the offering of the women's initial employment, their promotion within the workforce and their general progression in the organization are all contingent on the granting of sexual favours. In spite of its widespread existence, many women do not report these incidents for fear of losing their jobs, being stigmatized or disrupting their marriage and family lives.

Sexual harassment also prevails in educational institutions from primary to tertiary levels where some young girls are subjected to indecent sexual assaults and, in many instances along the academic ladder, passing or failing an examination will depend on whether or not the girl succumbs to the teacher's sexual demands. The phenomenon of sexual harassment is particularly serious in tertiary institutions as these girls are being trained to hold the mantle of future leadership and development of the country. There is definitely the need to create decency in workplaces and classrooms worldwide devoid of unwanted, unsolicited and disagreeable sexual harassment in all its forms to ensure women's safety and dignity at work and in the classroom. In terms of the new concept of development, these appalling conditions confronting vast numbers of women working in low paid employment at home and overseas cannot be considered as enhancing human development. As the UNDP report published in December 2015 makes it clear, it is not just any work that enhances human development; it must be decent and sustainable work, work that contributes to equality, respects workers' rights and ensures their safety and dignity.

A key finding of the report is on gender imbalances that constrain women's choices, capabilities and opportunities. In the world of paid work, women are disadvantaged in terms of participation, representation and pay. About 72 percent of economically active men as compared to only 47 percent of women are employed. Globally, about 32 percent of businesses do not have any senior female managers and in Latin America even the top female managers earn only 53 percent of what their male counterparts earn. The economic costs of all these are huge. For example, if effective gender gap is eliminated in sub-Saharan Africa alone, the GDP of the region is estimated to go up by \$60 billion a year. In the world of unpaid care work, women bear the major share of work as they undertake three out of every four hours of unpaid care work. In Africa women spend a colossal 200 million hours just to fetch water. With ageing populations, societal changes and epidemics such as the 2014 Ebola outbreak, the care gap will be increasing and women would be expected to bear a major share of that work. The UNDP report argues for societies to urgently adopt new policies, including institutional reforms which would allow more equitable access to care services to address some of these major gender imbalances.

In September 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a sequel to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) based on a set of 17 action-oriented and universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) each with related targets and topics 'to transform our world'. The above observation on increasing care gap is reinforced by the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' and its target 5.4 which stresses the need to 'recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate'.

Although migration presents political challenges to many countries, yet the phenomenon of migrant workers benefits both the source and recipient countries and has the potential to enhance human development if conducted orderly. A modification of existing legal channels and the establishment of innovative ones that consider the welfare of the migrant workers as their cornerstone would, however, be needed. This framework, which should also adhere to international agreements and protocols, would present a win-win situation not only for the source and recipient countries but more importantly for the welfare of migrant workers many of whom are women. It is worth noting that the Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) focuses on 'full and productive employment and decent work for all' with its target 8.8 emphasizing the need to 'protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environment for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment'.

To begin to alleviate the indecencies and move towards fair, humane and descent policies in the workplaces and the classrooms, effective reporting and monitoring mechanisms should be instituted in all countries against sexual harassment. This should include the establishment of national and sub-national centers to oversee the efficient reporting and monitoring of the system. Violence against women constitutes a violation of the fundamental rights of women. In this connection, governments should exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women in accordance with national legislation to help restore the self-esteem, dignity and personal freedoms of women.

### **An Alternative Solution**

In spite of the efforts made by the international organizations and several national governments over long periods of time, the undesirable problems confronting women still persist. Two important observations are derived from the above: (a) that although the efforts of international organizations and national governments are necessary, they are by no means sufficient to address all the gender problems and (b) that the alleviation of widespread inequalities against women cannot be achieved by relying simply on the orthodox and dominant top-down redistributive mechanism. These call for critical thinking about the way forward to bring a real change to the undesirable state of affairs that continue to confront women. Indeed societies are worse off if women, constituting half of their members cannot participate fully in employment and other socio-economic activities to bring their full complement of skills diversity to strengthen and improve the development process..

An alternative solution that promotes the effective and creative empowerment of women as key to assuring their full integration in the development process will now be presented. It utilizes the cutting-edge root-based sustainable model that places communities at the center of the development process as dignified agents of their own development. Within the root-based institutional framework (Boateng, 2015), independent Women's Organizations are created to ensure that women are empowered and well-equipped to assume leadership and other strategic roles at the community, national and international levels. Community Women Organizations (CWOs) are established in all communities with the critical objective of empowering the female members of their respective communities.

Furthermore, a Council of Community Women Leaders (CCWL) is established from the CWOs leadership to coordinate activities of the CWOs while a League of Women Leaders (LWL) and a Network of International Women Leaders (NIWL) are created to focus on women empowerment and leadership roles at the national and international levels respectively.

The robust root-based networking mechanism ensures that all the women's organizations are interlinked to work together and utilize the power of shared ideas and information to promote the empowerment of women holistically at all levels. Of crucial importance is a newly developed four-phased process of empowering women which provides the established organizations with a solid blueprint to guide their operations. Details of this foundational process, beginning with awareness creation through education, skills development and entrepreneurship to the most important aspect of women in leadership, will now be introduced.

### **Awareness Creation**

The initial phase, consisting of raising self-awareness among the women in the community, should inculcate in the women, a true reflection of the inner-self to contribute to their sense of self-worth and self-confidence. They must be imbued with resilience of character, tenacity of purpose and the drive to succeed. In particular, the CWOs should instill in the community girls a true sense of their 'somebodyness', a natural instinct to act positively at all times and a commitment to a rejection of any stereotypes with a tendency to keep women down.

The hopes and aspirations of these girls should be raised by emphasizing how precious and valuable they are and how, given the requisite skills and hard work, they will be the future change agents of society with leadership, entrepreneurial and other strategic roles. Since contemporary societies are measured by how they treat their women and girls, strenuous efforts should be made to discourage and prevent abuses such as demeaning women, passing humiliating and hurtful comments on them and sexually assaulting them, which are totally against the principles of natural justice and human decency. In collaboration with the community mothers, the CWOs should also organize pre-puberty and puberty counseling for the girls including period management, avoidance of early marriages and premature pregnancies to enable them to overcome these major challenges to their education and empowerment. This phase is critical to assist the women to understand the root causes of their problems, especially, the realization that their deprivation and undesirable state of affairs are not God-given nor the result of innate deficiencies in women as a group.

Women need to be aware that they are much stronger working together and helping one another. Indeed, women need the support of other women, especially dynamic women institutions and role models, to craft better pathways to empowerment. Therefore, being members of the women organizations created under this model and part of its unique networking system is a smart way of using the collective and generative power of women to strengthen and enhance their empowerment. The CWOs should join together to engage the community and national authorities to establish secure websites to encourage further reporting and monitoring of the indecent sexual abuses. The introduction and awareness creation of toll-free short-codes for calls in addition to text messages and tweets directly to a Rapid Response Unit (RRU) organized by the CWOs for tackling sexual harassment cases expeditiously will significantly contribute to effective deterrence against such offences and the preservation of women's self-esteem and dignity. From then on, any notion that women are born to be hurt must be totally dispelled. Likewise, 'womanhood' should under no circumstance be a limiting factor to the aspirations of any woman.

In terms of raising self-awareness among women, the British novelist, playwright and poet William Golding (1911 – 1993), has stated "I think women are foolish to pretend they are equal to men. They are far superior and always have been. Whatever you give a woman she will make greater. If you give her sperm she will give you a baby. If you give her a house, she will give you a home. If you give her groceries, she will give you a meal. If you give her a smile, she will give you her heart. She multiplies and enlarges what is given her. So, if you give her any crap, be ready to receive a ton of shit!" This phase is thus designed to build up determination, hope and dynamism for the women. During this phase, the women must have perpetual awareness that vying for top positions anywhere attracts extreme scrutiny of one's track record. It is therefore important for women aspiring to the top to exercise great caution in all their undertakings so as to prove impeccable during such critical examinations. Once women are treated with dignity and respect and participate as equal partners in the development process, they will contribute enormously to the creation of a buoyant and sustainable environment where both genders can thrive..

## Education

The second phase of women empowerment entails the education of all women in the community which encompasses the acquisition of knowledge and development of the enquiring spirit. The maximizing impact of women's education and associated knowledge acquisition on peace and development of societies have already been alluded to. According to Francis Bacon in his *Meditations Sacrae* 'knowledge itself is power' while in the thoughts of Horace Mann 'knowledge is a mimic creation'. In his speech to Congress on January 8, 1790, the US President George Washington stated that 'knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness.

Since the world of work is changing rapidly, the CWOs should not only ensure that all girls are enrolled in schools but also encourage them to acquire a minimum secondary level education to be able to adapt and fit into the changing employment requirements in the future. Indeed, 'fit of the future learning' would be needed as work of the future cannot be carried out with knowledge of yesterday. Education being a core strategic asset for growth and development, it is essential to invest adequately in it for the requisite skills development to boost growth and competitiveness in the global market. Modern, knowledge-based economies require a workforce with higher and more relevant skills leading to a progressive increase in the proportion of jobs requiring tertiary level qualification relative to the proportion of low-skilled jobs. The CWOs should, therefore, encourage as many of the girls as possible to complete a tertiary level education which is key to gaining entry into several high positions of influence and empowerment.

Education and training systems should provide the right skills for the employment market and must work assiduously with employers to bring the learning experience closer to the realities of the working environment. Efforts need to be focused on developing transferable skills, particularly entrepreneurial skills, which make the young girls and boys adaptable to the increasingly inevitable changes in the labour market during their career. The CWOs should coordinate with the educational institutions and employers to foster entrepreneurial skills through new and creative ways of teaching and learning from the primary school onwards. From secondary to higher education level, there must be an additional focus on the opportunity of business creation as a career destination. The CWOs should also encourage the girls to be more interested in the science, technology; engineering and mathematics (STEM) related skills which will continue to be in high demand.

In addition to the formal education, the CWOs should liaise with the traditional community leaders to educate and counsel the women on informal and formal barriers to their aspirations and seek the best ways to tackle these problems. This important assignment, which must be in tune with the community's socio-cultural milieu, would require more subtle and sophisticated approach to achieve the desirable change. In particular, the CWOs being better placed to listen to the girls should make use of this opportunity to facilitate means to invest in their potential and ignite their tremendous capacity to make an impact not only for their future but also on ending poverty for the community and the country. Alongside the pursuit of knowledge, the CWOs should encourage the girls to develop the enquiring spirit with a commitment and curiosity to seek for the hidden meanings behind knowledge. Beyond the secondary level education, the CWOs must ensure that all poor but capable girls are supported in their respective communities to attain the tertiary level education. Such support could be obtained by soliciting the assistance of well-to-do citizens, business enterprises, charitable organizations and others. Business enterprises operating within the community could shoulder a large part of this support as part of their social responsibility contribution.

## Skills Development and Entrepreneurship

The third phase of the root-based empowerment of women covers skills development and entrepreneurship. The efficient management of this crucial phase will provide women the same access to the same opportunities as men within the community and across the country. There is need to advance the careers of women through acquisition of improved new skills. The improved new skills of women are necessary not only to remove the gender disparities and create a more inclusive and cohesive society but also to increase community and national productivity so essential to compete successfully in the global economy.

Skills development will be undertaken at three levels, namely, basic, intermediate and high level skills training programmes with the development of the requisite core skills for training at each level. The basic programme is for women with minimal or no formal education, the intermediate programme for those with secondary education while the high level skills training programme will be open to those with tertiary educational background. The CWOs should dismiss gender stereotypes in skills development and encourage the women to develop new and emerging skills that will meet their aspirations in the employment landscape. The CWOs must ensure that all avenues to the entire spectrum of the job market are open to women with the essential skills. These initiatives are expected to instill in the women that stereotyping should never ever be a limiting factor in their quest for the ultimate skills towards their empowerment.

The CWOs are to partner with businesses and training institutions to identify training needs at each level, influence curricula development and solicit for funding for the cost of training. For women who wish to start their own businesses, the CWOs should institute a mechanism of funding their start-up costs including the provision of appropriate working tools. This process could be facilitated through the networking of the CWOs across the country. For women wishing to enter the jobs market, the CWOs should assist them to prepare for a successful interview by first drawing up a good resume which is well organized, tailored and grammatically correct. They should be able to answer any interview questions emanating from their resume and demonstrate competency in current affairs.

For women wishing to enter various professions such as engineering, medicine and computer science, there is the need to prepare them meticulously for a professional interview. In addition to a good resume and knowledge of current affairs, they should be able to demonstrate a high knowledge about their chosen professions. For example, women wishing to enter Nursing as a profession should know before the interview that nurses are responsible for treating patients, educating patients about medical related topics and performing basic medical tests and procedures. In addition, they should be aware that although requirements for nurses vary by position and duties, yet all nurses must receive post-secondary instructions in the form of certificate or degree and have clinical experience prior to employment. In this respect, the application of the skills of enquiring spirit covered in the second phase becomes very helpful. Markets play an important role in the economy of every country. In developing countries most of the women are concentrated in various marketplaces where they gather regularly for the purchase and sale of food items, provisions, livestock and other goods. Since most of these market women have minimal or no educational background, it is imperative for the CWOs to support them with the requisite training at the appropriate orientation or training centre in order to expand their businesses and enhance their role further in the economy.

The CWOs should also encourage the processing of food not only to avoid waste of farm produce during bumper harvest, but also to add value to the product and ensure its availability during the lean season. For women who wish to undertake careers in food processing, the CWOs should ensure that they are properly equipped to start the business smoothly. Similar support should be given to women wishing to undertake careers in the rearing of chicken, pigs, snails, sheep, cattle as well as fish farming and the cultivation of cash crops. Indeed, with increasing world population and climate change, food and food security becomes a crucial area where power is going to grow in the future opening a career path that can be taken up globally.

**Entrepreneurship**, which together with skills development forms the third phase of empowering women, will now be discussed. Entrepreneurship is a process by which an individual or team identifies a business opportunity and acquires and deploys the necessary resources required for its exploitation. The exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities may include actions such as developing a business plan, hiring human resources, acquiring financial and material resources, providing leadership and being responsible for the venture's success or failure.

A successful entrepreneur has an ability to scale an enterprise, delegating to others to make the transition from small to large scale organization while a small business owner never makes this vital transition but remains a self-employed owner, doer and manager. Delegating to others is key to entrepreneurship and portrays a distinguishing characteristic between entrepreneurs and small business owners.

Apart from its liberating influence, delegating also allows the entrepreneur to concentrate on the core issues of the organization. This has positive impact in the business if the right person is matched with the task to be delegated with key performance indicators (KPIs) to be monitored. Entrepreneurship plays a decisive role in fostering a sustainable economy through the creation of wealth, enterprise, innovation, change, employment, value and growth. It therefore has the potential of providing wide-reaching economic benefits far beyond the business owner. Entrepreneurs and their enterprises also affect society in ways other than job creation by stimulating activities such as sports, festivals and entertainment that bring positive change to the community. These activities of entrepreneurs may genuinely improve the very survival of the community within which it flourishes.

The CWOs should encourage all women entrepreneurs to seriously contemplate the prime purpose of doing business in order to guide their actions accordingly. In this context, the prime purpose of being women entrepreneurs should be the pursuit of freedom and empowerment; freedom to be free of working for an employer and to create the financial well-being upon which to pursue the ennobling core values of life-sustenance and self-esteem which are important prerequisites for women empowerment. Selection of women who are most likely to succeed as entrepreneurs should be based on clear and transparent criteria. Potential women entrepreneurs should display initiative and ambition, have business sense and foresight and be decisive. They are to act and serve as the agents of change who accelerate the generation, application and spread of innovative ideas and the empowerment of women. The CWOs should assist promising women entrepreneurs to seek expert advice to start up their businesses and turn their entrepreneurial ideas from concept to the market. They should also arrange for women entrepreneurs to obtain crucial mentoring support that is particularly lacking in most developing countries. Since what is beneficial to women entrepreneurs is beneficial to the global economy, the CWOs should further explore new and innovative ways by which men and women can promote women entrepreneurs globally.

Measures to target women groups rather than individuals can mitigate income inequality and be more effective in empowering women. For example, the formation of voluntary women cooperatives allows groups of prospective women entrepreneurs to help each other. The evaluation of UNIDO/ILO women's entrepreneurship project in Nepal found that "Group formation among women entrepreneurs who live near to one another, for example, in the form of credit and savings group, means that credit facilities which may otherwise not be available can be tapped and, that women can organize relevant social security mechanisms (emergency funds etc), by and for themselves. Other advantages may be economies of scale, for example, by the joint buying of raw material and marketing " (Source: UNDP, CEDAM, NEP/88/050).

To enhance their general management and leadership skills to become effective leaders in a dynamic business world, women entrepreneurs need to attend top-notch entrepreneurial courses designed to help not only to solve problems but also to see opportunities these problems may present, and discover new and innovative sources of revenue generation in those opportunities. In addition to the core competencies including marketing, finance, negotiations and change management business thinking, new management training programmes have emerged to address some of the most immediate issues many organizations and executives may be facing such as Applied Neuroscience which builds on neuroscience concept and techniques to help leaders motivate and inspire their peers and employees in ways that catalyze innovation and increase business success.

Above all, every modern woman entrepreneur should have a multi-media presence by establishing a website with compelling message in words, pictures and video to maximize the attention of the web-browsing readers. Women business owners and entrepreneurs must use the tremendous power of the internet to transform their businesses. This may be accomplished through a relationship building approach with initial offering of something of value upfront such as information and samples followed by converting them to paying customers. Emailing customers about twice a week helps to keep this relationship while the use of auto-responder that captures details of those making enquiries assist in expanding customer base. Women entrepreneurs should also tap into the enormous power of Facebook to connect with other businesses and people by using a range of smart marketing strategies such as targeting and engagement tools to achieve great results. Google pay-per-click advertising, also available on Facebook and Twitter, can further be used to achieve cost-effectiveness in online advertising.



The CWOs should connect the women entrepreneurs into the Knowledge Gateway for Women's Economic Empowerment which is an open global platform established by UN-Women for promoting corroboration, learning and innovation to advance women's economic empowerment. In addition, the CWOs should build a coordinated initiative to facilitate lasting relationships between women entrepreneurs and seasoned business leaders so as to create a collaborative entrepreneurial environment that ensures the prosperity of both genders. Women entrepreneurs should learn to become high impact public speakers. This crucial but often neglected aspect of entrepreneurship provides a vital linkage between women entrepreneurship and empowerment. A motivating, energetic, fact-filled, informational public presentation will engage an audience and leave them feeling inspired. This should be buttressed by developing a precious basic skill of presenting oneself exquisitely with a brisk gait on all occasions and communicating face-to-face with people in a convincing and appealing manner. These will serve as useful and powerful advocacy for the cause of women empowerment in any country and across the globe. Women entrepreneurs must constantly strive for excellence by reflecting a cut above the mainstream, in content and delivery.

### **Women in Leadership**

The fourth-phase of the empowerment process focuses on women in leadership. Numerous studies over the years including the 'Global Gender Gap Report, 2015' by the World Economic Forum and the recently published 'Barriers and Bias - The Status of Women In Leadership' by the Association of American Universities Women (AAUW) affirm that the global gender leadership gap against women is pervasive and extensive. The studies also confirm that the gap is worse for women of colour where opportunities for leadership are particularly elusive making them even more underrepresented in leadership positions compared with women in general. Even though there have been some progress in recent years, the *status quo* is still neither fair nor acceptable. For example, the Global Gender Gap report reveals that while progress has been made on educational attainment and health, large gender gaps still exist on political empowerment and economic participation. Therefore, something needs to be done to respond to this highly skewed gender leadership distribution against women. Women need to be equitably represented at the high table of decision-making to partake, contribute and share in the power of shaping community, national and international destinies. This phase presents a mechanism under the award-winning Root-based Development Model that facilitates the equitable participation and representation of women in leadership and decision-making processes at the community, national, corporate and international levels.

### **Women Leadership at the Community Level**

At the community level, the various Community Women's Organizations established throughout the country provide unique opportunities for women leadership in the communities. These community women leaders across the country are to link together to strengthen and support one another. They are also to provide the grassroots women support-base for all women leaders at all levels in all sectors. The community development governance of the root-based model should be fully utilized by the community women leadership in supporting as many women as possible for elective membership on the independent Community Development Councils.

The Community Development Councils across the country, being grassroots democratic forums, provide excellent training grounds for women members aspiring for political and other leadership positions at the community, national and international levels. The CWOs must play advocacy role by getting qualified women to be appointed to positions of power and ensuring that vital decisions taken reflect the views of women. The combined activities described above create a bigger pool of women leaders at the community level fully prepared and ready for upward mobility at the national and international leadership positions.

### **Women Leadership at the National Level**

It is widely acknowledged that women find it more difficult to move upwards on the leadership scale at the higher levels. One of Africa's most accomplished female leaders who served as the first female Attorney General and Minister of Justice and as Education Minister of the Republic of Ghana, Mrs.

Betty Mould Iddrisu, has stated in her paper titled "Ten Things I Know for Sure About African Women's Leadership" that 'The path to success is littered with obstacles and it takes huge doses of courage and determination to stay the course. I know for sure that, with or without peculiar challenges, hard work remains a non-negotiable imperative for leadership success.'

An innovative mechanism is adopted in this section which responds to the difficulties encountered by women at the higher levels of leadership. Firstly, a League of Women Leaders (LWL), composed of representatives from the Council of Community Women Leaders (CCWL), public and corporate sector leaders and entrepreneurs, is created to deal with women empowerment and leadership issues at the national level. In particular, it will ensure gender equity at various leadership and strategic positions at the national level, engage government on women empowerment and interact with corporate entities on balancing their gender leadership structure. Secondly, the root-based networking system, which uniquely connects the LWL to the CCWL and the CWOs, is utilized to identify women for specific leadership positions at the national level from the pool of qualified women created at the community level across the country. This networking arrangement will ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of a balanced appointments process in government, public and private sectors of a country as it provides a much stronger base to tackle negative issues which impede women from rising to the top. It also provides a broad network of support-base which is extremely important for women leaders who intend to stay and make it at the top thus playing a pivotal role in moving the empowerment process forward in a systematic and lucid manner.

The strategy here is for the LWL to liaise with the CCWL and CWOs to support capable and willing women to contest for seats in the national parliament and then encourage the successful candidates to seek for various leadership positions on the key committees that take critical decisions for parliamentary approval. The LWL should then vigorously lobby for as many women as possible to be appointed to ministerial positions in government. Women with legal background should be supported to join the judiciary to occupy key positions as magistrates and judges of the superior courts to assist in holding the scales of justice in equal poise and balance.

Having dealt with the three arms of government in the above discussion, the next focus of attention is to provide support for the qualified women to be appointed to occupy leadership positions in all areas of the public services of the country. This should include all leadership positions in all institutions and organizations forming part of the public services as well as headships, superintendents and faculty heads of various schools, colleges and universities in the country. This support is to be extended to appointments of women to serve as chairpersons on various boards and councils of the aforementioned bodies. Appointments of women to leadership positions in the armed forces and the police service should also be strenuously pursued to infuse diversity of talent and optimal deployment in the national security system.

A major task of the LWL is to engage government in constant and fruitful dialogue on issues affecting women empowerment with the view to encouraging the initiation or updating of legislation to strengthen gender policies and their implementation. To further assist in removing the gender imbalances in the world of work, the LWL should urge governments to ensure equal pay for work of equal value for both men and women. Furthermore, appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to tackle the harassment and social norms which exclude many women from paid work. The introduction of tougher and effective policies against sexual harassment at the national level, for example, will not only help many girls to overcome a primary challenge to their education but will also add significantly to the crop of emerging women leaders.

Similarly, effective policies on flexible working hours and paid paternity leave for the purpose of accompanying pregnant women to antenatal appointments or when their partners are having a baby or adopting a child will greatly assist working women to move up on the ladder of leadership. There is also the need to extend the paid leave for mothers who give birth to premature babies. The problem of increasing care gap due to global ageing populations and concomitant societal changes could be addressed by the introduction of appropriate reforms that would reduce unpaid care burden carried by women, rebalance the male and female roles and responsibilities in paid and unpaid work and recognize the value of unpaid work.

The LWL should prevail upon government to adopt policies and institutional reforms that would allow more equitable access to care services to narrow the wide gender care gap. Such reforms that eliminate gender imbalances are essential to free women to exercise their full potential in broad choices, capabilities and opportunities. The reporting and monitoring system of national policies that ensure gender balance could be optimized by the use of statistical sampling techniques with yearly reports of all findings which should be made publicly available.

### **Women Leadership at the Corporate and SME Level**

This section deals with women leadership at the Corporate and the Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SME) level. Nowhere is the drive towards gender leadership equity as elusive as in the Corporate and SME sector. In spite of recent gains, women account for only 4.3 percent of CEO positions at S & P 500 companies according to current data published by Catalyst in July 2016

To change the gender leadership imbalance at this level, the League of Women Leaders (LWL) should engage the Corporate and SME leadership in a constructive and optimal manner emphasizing the under-mentioned compelling reasons for a flexible organizational mindset towards a balanced gender leadership structure in any modern business: Firstly, shockwaves of technology, talent and demographic change continue to shake and shatter many business models and the global economy, breaking the seams of the old economic certainties. To succeed under these conditions, companies must reinvent themselves to evolve into businesses that are flexible and nimble with a workforce of broad skills-set. Secondly, women bring skills diversity of thought and experience that leads to much better balance in decision-making. Therefore, it makes sound economic sense to make women an integral part of the workforce, from top to bottom, to benefit from diversity and equality that improves organizational efficiency and perpetuation of profitability of the company. Thirdly, women excel when it comes to getting the task done through collaboration, teamwork and original thinking. Promoting women as leaders injects new skills that improve the company's ethos and business results.

In a speech on Women and the Corporate World, the first Deputy Director-General of the International Labour Organization, a Consultant to several Governments and International Institutions and former Principal Secretary of the Republic of Ghana, Dr (Mrs.) Mary Chinery Hesse, makes the following statements on women: 'They have a management and leadership style which incorporates assets of intuition and sensitivity which is lacking in traditionally male dominated enterprises. These skills which encourage the building of long term relationships and networks, effective communication skills, sensitivity to cultural diversity are just what would make a difference in the performance of our countries in the global market and should not be ignored'. Once the organizational mindset especially at the top is fine-tuned to gender equity, the next major step is to change the company's board-room dynamics to make it more gender sensitive with balanced membership and decisions that reflect views of women. The internal leadership pipeline should then be filled with the desirable mixture of people with the requisite skills-set. The company finally needs to take action on three key areas of rightful investment, suitable internal education and fitting mentoring to improve and sustain its profitability.

### **Women leadership at the International Level**

A viable strategy to enhance women leadership at the international level is for the League of Women Leaders (LWL) in various countries to form a Network of International Women Leaders (NIWL) to provide a much broader base to engage the international organizations. Areas of engagement should include recruitment, retention and promotion of women into leadership positions within the international organizations while multinationals and other entities could be engaged on issues relating to globalization. On promotion, the NIWL is to liaise with the international organizations to monitor existing vacancies on a regular basis so as to present qualified women from across the world to apply for these positions. Once the existence of the pool of qualified women from across geographical areas of the world is made known to the recruiting international agencies in a transparent manner, there will be no further excuse for ignoring the cardinal principle of gender parity in the recruitment process at this level.

The problem of retention and promotion of women at the international level is reflected by a 2016 report by the International Civil Service Commission of the United Nations (UN-ICSC) on Gender Balance in the United Nations Common System (A.71.30: 2016). The report recognized that 'progress towards gender parity at all levels in organizations of the common system had been slow' with an apparent disconnect between gender sensitive policies, accessed to be sufficient, and their implementation. The report also noted the existence of informal barriers and biases that impede the progress of women at the workplace stressing the need to identify and tackle those stereotypes. It added that even when women reached the top, they often had to conform to and struggle with a culture that reflected "male concerns and ways of working" with some cases of gender stereotypes being quietly permitted to creep into the male dominated domain. The report further noted a significant gender imbalance at the higher levels of leadership positions in the organizations.

The Network of International Women Leaders (NIWL) is to forge close and veritable linkages with the international organizations with the view to enhancing retention and promotion policies for women and devising more effective means of implementing these policies. This approach should lead to the elimination of gender discrimination to pave the way for advancement of women to leadership positions at the workplace. The NIWL should first review the status of women with respect to the existing gender balance policies and their implementation in each organization. It should then interact with and assist the respective organizations to formulate a coordinated and harmonized strategy of updating and implementing the policies. The goal of the review should encompass the achievement of gender parity and better geographical distribution to ensure an organizational climate conducive to equal participation of women and men in the work of the organizations.

To attain this goal, there is also the need to address the systemic informal and implicit gender biases against women in the workplace. This could be done by identifying and scrupulously dealing with the informal gender barriers at the workplace paying attention to the generational and time dimension which impact differently on new and old members of staff. There is likewise the need to tackle the specific problems facing women of colour who suffer from the dual intersection of racial and gender discriminations. In this regard, the NIWL is to encourage organizations to mount special workplace exercises aimed at removing the informal and implicit gender barriers in order to create a more conducive organizational culture that will ensure the advancement of both female and male staff. These special in-house exercises should employ the best available techniques with distinctive targeting of measures and communications to account for the generational and time differentials between the younger and newer staff as opposed to the older ones. These lessons should inculcate the universal principle of equality of the races and imprint indelibly on the minds of the workforce the prophetic words of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. that people are judged "not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character".

To address the significant gender imbalance at the higher levels of leadership positions, the NIWL should encourage the organizations to provide development opportunities for mid-level internal women staff members. This could be done by instituting appropriate career development programmes in order to build a pool of qualified women candidates ready for leadership positions in the organizations. Furthermore, the organizations should be encouraged to develop robust and credible accountability mechanisms to ensure a sustainable implementation of policies and measures dealing with gender balance and promotion of women in those organizations. Enlightenment and a global commitment to specific shared responsibilities for cooperation in eradication of the inequities and workplace indecencies are essential. This calls for a robust legal framework in which to act: that is, labour laws that are enforceable and protect all workers. In this regard, the Network of International Women Leaders (NIWL) should work closely with the United Nations, multinational corporations and other national and international entities to redesign a new type of globalization that is inclusive and works for all – globalization that promotes gender equity, eliminates workplace indecencies and ensures that factory workers all over the globe are fairly compensated, duly appreciated and operate under humane working conditions.

## Conclusion

The paper considers the problem of ensuring the central role of women in development and proposes an effective and creative empowerment of women as key to its solution. The strategy utilizes the innovative root-based sustainable model which places communities at the center of the development process as dignified agents of their own development. Within the institutional framework of the model, independent Women's Organizations are created to ensure that women are empowered and well equipped for leadership and other strategic positions at the community, national and international levels using a newly developed four-phased process of empowerment. The robust root-based networking mechanism ensures that all the women's organizations work together in a synergy to meet regularly and exchange ideas, experiences and views towards a holistic and effective women's empowerment.

The U.K. Brexit vote in June 2016 which exhibits a large backlash against the results of globalization so far has brought to the fore the urgent need to re-engineer a new type of globalization that will work for all, especially for the empowerment of women. The proposed solution for women's empowerment portrays the universal and useful principle that when people join together for a mutually beneficial purpose, they are far stronger and better enabled to achieve the desired results in a sustainable manner. As a last general recommendation for the implementation of the empowerment proposals, women should not be content with the Appetizer and forget the Banquet. It is hoped that the practical lessons embodied in this paper on gender equity and women empowerment will contribute not only to ensuring the central role of women in the development process but also in creating a lifelong and much ideal environment where both genders can flourish.

## References

- AAUW (2016) *Barriers and Bias – The Status of Women in Leadership*, Washington DC.
- Beazley, H. and Desai V. (2014) 'Gender and globalization' in *The Companion to Development Studies* (Desai, V. Potter, R.B.) (eds.) Oxon: Routledge
- Beazley, H. (2007) 'The Malaysian Orphans of Lombok: Children's Livelihood Responses to Out-Migration in Eastern Indonesia', in R. Panelli, R. Punch and E. Robson (eds), *Young Rural Lives: Global Perspectives on Rural Childhood and Youth*, Routledge, London, pp107-120
- Boateng, D.O. (2015) 'A root-based Model for Sustainable Community Development' in *Development in Unity Volume Two, Compendium of Works of Daasebre Prof. (Emeritus) Oti Boateng*, pages 29-51 [www.partridgepublishing.com/africa](http://www.partridgepublishing.com/africa).
- Catalyst (2016) accessed at [www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500](http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500)
- CIDA (2010) *Gender Equality*, Ottawa; CIDA Chakraborty, K. (2009) 'The Good Moslem Girl', *Conducting Qualitative Participatory Research to Understand the Lives of Young Moslem Women in the Bustees of Kolkata*
- Cornwall, A., Edstrom J. and Greig A., (eds ) (2011) *Men and Development; Politicising Masculinities* London: Zed books.
- Derne, S. (2002) 'Globalisation and Re3constitution of Local Gender Arrangements', *Men and Masculinities*, 5(2): 144-164
- Desai, V. 2005 'NGOs, Gender Main Streaming and Urban Poor Communities in Mumbai', *Gender and Development*, 13(2): 90-98
- Desai, V. (2006) *Women Social Transformation, 'NGOs and Globalisation in Urban India'* in Saraswati Raju, Satish Kumar and Stuart Corbridge, *Colonial and Post Colonial Geographies of India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London; pp 120-140.
- Elson, D. (1995) 'Male Bias in Macro Economics: The case of structural adjustment', in D. Elson (ed), *Male Bias in the Development Process* second edition, Manchester University press, Manchester.
- Hancock, P. (2009) 'Violence, Women, Work and Empowerment: Narratives from factory women in Sri Lanka's export processing zones', *Journal of Development Societies*, 25: 393-420.

- Kabeer, N. (1994) *Reversed realities: Gender hierarchies in development thought*, London: Verso
- Kabeer, N. (1999) "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment: *Development and change* 30(3): 435-64.
- Law, L. (2002) 'Sites of Transnational Activism: Filipino Non-Government Organisations in Hong Kong', in Brenda, S. A. Yeoh, Peggy Teo and Shirlena Huang (eds), *Gender Politics in the Asia Pacific Region*, London: Routledge
- Moser, C. (1993) *Gender Planning and Development*
- Parpart, J. (2013) 'Exploring the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming', *Journal of International Development* (8)
- Parpart, J. Rai, S. and Staudt, K. (eds)(2002) *Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and Development in a Global-local World*, London: Routledge.
- Piper, N. (2004) 'Rights of Foreign Workers and the Politics of Migration in South East and East Asia', in *International Migration* 42(5): 71-97
- Pyle J. (2011) 'Globalization and the Increase in Transnational Care Work: The Flip Side", *Globalizations*, 3(3): 297-315.
- Rai, S. (2007) *The Gender Politics of Development*, London: Zed
- Silvi, R. (2006) 'Consuming the Transnational Family: Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers to- Saudi Arabia', *Global Networks* 6(1): 23-40
- Wolf, D.L. (1992) *Factory Daughters: Gender Household Dynamics and Rural Industrialization in Java*: in The University of California Press, Berkeley
- World Economic Forum (2015) *The Global Gender Gap Report 2015; 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, Geneva, Switzerland.
- UNDP (2015a) *Human Development Report, 2015*.  
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2015-work-human-development>.
- UNDP (2015b) *Sustainable Development Goals 2015 – 2030*,  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>.