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Africa's women in business challenge status quo

GENEVA, Switzerland – A Women in Business initiative was launched at this year's Africa CEO Forum, where a high-level panel of female leaders gathered to discuss barriers to women climbing the corporate ladder and solutions to tackling the gender gaps in leadership across the continent.

Madeleine Berre

Even though women make up a little over half of Africa's growing population, they have had little, albeit increasing, involvement in power and strategic decision-making. Gender Diversity was one of the recurring themes during the panel and it was stressed that gender diversity was growing, albeit slowly by 20% each year.

Tonye Cole, CEO of Sahara Group and the only male on the panel, highlighted the differences in male and female leadership styles. He explained that women are more balanced and weigh their different options before making a decision. He added that unlike men, women were not driven by profit or making money.

Women matter

According to the McKinsey & Company, *Women Matter Africa* report, which outlines the continent's progress in terms of women's representation, there is a positive correlation between the proportion of female board members and improved financial corporate performance, whether in the private or public realm.

Rosemary Yeboah, executive director and group corporate banking head at Ecobank therefore challenged companies to "create policies that will help the women to move up in their companies".

The panelists discussed the double burden syndrome - balancing professional and personal life - which is one of the main barriers women still face when it comes to climbing the professional ladder. Madeleine Berre, Gabon's minister of Trade and Industry, traced the problem back to the values instilled in young African women at a tender age, stressing that "what needs to change is how young girls are raised".

Jennifer Blanke of the African Development Bank talked about the responsibility of women leaders to be role models for younger colleagues, saying that "it's not about climbing the ladder to get to the top. It's once you're up there what are you going to do?"

A public-private working group was organised on the second day of the Forum to share policies and get participants to commit to an action plan to promote gender diversity in the workplace. The recommendations and solutions discussed during the meeting will be communicated separately.

Source: African Media Agency

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