



## **Where girls go, boys will follow.**

### **Leading economic change through gender diversity.**

*'Men wear the pants but women control the zipper' Unknown*

When I **Vicky Ngari-Wilson** was asked to speak at the Pre- Women Economic Forum (WEF 2016) in association of ALL Ladies League (ALL) - a prelude to the main event where thousands of women across the globe will find their way to Indian this May – Other than social change I was questioning how to bring my subject area to the table, as I never saw the sustainability frontier as gender specific.

However the recent gathering at The World Economic Forum had gender equality and climate change both at the top of the agenda. Naturally it provoked questions to correlate women to social and environmental change. Provoking deeper research for insight, I discovered many inspirational women leading in sustainable change. Howbeit does more women, mean more change?

Studies consistently tell us having diversity on an executive team results in more creative, dynamic approaches. In support of that, even though I was the only one at the forum that focused on Social Change and Sustainability as a topic; my panel on Innovation and start – ups had one other female entrepreneur whose product supply chain was mindful to create jobs at grass root level in Africa. The other two gentlemen when it came to speak on the effects of women in their companies - whether subconsciously or not -brought attention to results in problem solving and making a difference on a wider sphere.

I rarely hear of women in mainstream media leading sustainable change other than occasional celebrity endorsements and in the business sector. This took me back to the uproar 2 years ago when Weinreb Group released a report on 'Sustainability trailblazers' and all six of the pioneers were matured caucasian men. Later it was found that the lower percentage of the voters were women and unfortunately the nominees were even fewer.

Understandably the area of sustainability is still evolving as society try's to define it, let alone being identified as an equal gender industry. Yet it would make sense to determine that this business more than others requires 'soft' tactics and characteristics, those that are typically possessed by women. Possibly women are the ones who could break down the meaning in a language society can recognize.

So what is it going to take to drive more women towards the sustainable and social entrepreneur arena?

As for employment, off course career opportunities and potential salary are key. However taking a brief look at the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) sector as a generic example; I am not shocked to discover not much is different from the countless studies that have proved women's salaries being significantly lower in the boardroom. According to Assets Acre 2014 survey there is an approximate equal split in gender pay at CSR managerial level. Shockingly women make up more off the junior roles, while Directors or Heads have a difference of around 20% in favour of men. To add to that, zero women are earning between £180-220k plus, while there are 1-3% men earning those handsome figures. Lines continue to stay blurred when it comes to women increasing and decreasing in this young industry.

Now for the unapologetic disrupter's, this means great opportunity for entrepreneurs.

Government organisation like DFID, Venture Capitalist and Angel Investors are increasingly looking to invest in innovative social and environmental solutions. The 17 sustainable developments goals adopted by 150 world leaders, alongside the undercurrent mandate of gender diversity in the board room; I would say it is a time to shine, a time for women who have tangible social and sustainable business ideas to drive economies.

Perhaps leaving the boardroom and taking our pencil skirts and suits into rural parts of the globe to upscale local ideas may create revelation as well as opportunity. Perhaps indigenous cultures -where environmental research and solutions are often identified- should be our next board room.

The millennial generation are already on their way, questioning the source of what they consume and what cause their talents can support. So 'millennial women' could be the significant leaders. They could certainly attract generation Z (born after 2000) and more diverse male profiles in this industry into applying their skills to global change.

Based on the age of 'the trend' I would put my money on my female peers to follow eco friendly lifestyles. A perfect example is the gravitation to boycotting palm oil beauty products, who a responsible for huge amounts of deforestation in Africa and Latin America. As for men: the owner of a bar once said to me 'get the girls in and the boys will follow'.

By Vicky Ngari-Wilson

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