

Diversity and Inclusion Foster Innovative Development in an Emerging Networked Society

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Abstract - A culture of diversity maximizes different perspectives, ideas, and personalities and takes advantage of inclusion; in order to tap into the prime of talent banks, thereby fostering innovation and attaining transformative value. This is driven by the eco system of the all advancing networked society which enables everyone, everything and everywhere to be connected in real time and impact on the way collaborations are done. It is an environment where different ideas, outlooks, and experiences brought to a sphere of influence are respected, irrespective of who brings it. It is a setting where individuals are able to uniquely fulfill their potentials whilst valuing, supporting and respecting differences. In the gender divide there is a disparity that does not enhance the value of the female gender and their contributions. Through varied efforts by organizations and pro-women societal bodies for gender parity; this has been on a continuous improvement road map amidst varied cultural, unconscious bias, etc challenges. These bodies foster the added value the female gender brings into the specific or related sphere influence and prove that the inclusivity of the female gender builds stronger, smarter, financially robust and productive teams. Inclusive engagement of all workforces especially the female workforce can improve a company's financial base, as diversity is maximized through a shared vision and value system, amidst differences in personalities and perspectives. Inclusion is a corporate responsibility for any trans-generational organization that wants to remain relevant and sustain its essence in a highly competitive environment. The Networked Society enhances the transformational power of ICT to spur socio-economic development, promote responsible career and business practices, as it takes advantage of diverse work place experiences that have an inclusive culture. This results in more connections, added communication, new functions and new behaviors. This would shape the future; create a positive heritage for generations ahead as the fundamentals of diversity and conscious inclusion continually form the building blocks for its sustainability.

Keywords

Diversity, Inclusion, Innovation, Development, Networked Society

I. INTRODUCTION

The current digital revolution is constantly enforcing a change that is gaining a rapid adaptation by all, in the advancing connected village where almost anything is possible. The use of digital tools has become and is still becoming second nature and everyone everywhere is empowered to achieve diverse creative possibilities, engage across unlimited borders, change the way governments and industries function, solve issues that border on development, technology

advancements etc. This has made the entire landscape more inclusive as diversity has also been embraced to accept this all continuous and advancing change.

ICT is now an integral part of our work and living environment, and will continually be a vital resource for business, government and the society at large. It will play a fundamental role in facilitating organizations of all sizes to collaboratively connect and compete more effectively.

Despite these, there are various factors, challenges, experiences and effects this has brought so far and is also anticipated for the future. Hence, it is beneficial to discover what these changes are and their value; how to minimize risks of errors in advancement and the approach for future development ensuring that the outputs are sustainable and trans generational.

In view of these, this paper is aimed not only at highlighting the status, successes, challenges, and issues that adapting diversity and an inclusive culture amidst a rapid advancing networked society entails but will highlight proven practical and sustainable methodological solutions.

This paper would kindle awareness, stir intelligent discussions and attract varied talent to enhance viable development in our continent.

II. DESCRIPTION OF CONCEPTS

A. Diversity

The definition of Diversity is broad, as it transcends beyond gender, nationality, progeny, ethnicity, religion, age and other factors, to also imply diverse personal experiences and proficiencies, family conditions, functional expertise, inherent skills, etc.

Diversity on a face value should be a divisive factor but if taken proper advantage of is actually a unifying one that draws people close together and stimulates the ability to make a significant difference. It maximizes personal strengths which are an integral of a unified strength which is a basis of the building blocks of any organization that desires to thrive sustainably.

Diverse teams have a range of perspectives, ideas and experiences which enhances creativity, as the power of each individual makes up the cohesive whole. It is about getting the

right fusion or mix. When a team is diverse in practice, the experiences, perspectives and ideas would normally make them outshine the homogenous ones. This is because, heterogeneous teams have more innovative business decisions which lead to excellent results and improved performance. Diversity is not a medium for competition within a team but rather an avenue to stimulate creative and excellent results. Diversity is a recipe for global achievements.

B. Inclusion

Inclusion confirms to us that each and every individual in the mix of employees, resources, team members, students, etc is valued, welcomed and is respected for the skills they bring and the contributions and impact they make. It entails valuing, supporting and respecting dissimilarities. It is about a work environment where each person is able to fulfill their potential and where their contribution is maximized. Inclusion also borders on making the most of gender, generational and cultural diversity to ensure respect and professionalism remain the long standing bed rock for sustainable development. Diverse inclusivity makes a team stronger and provides room for untapped ideas and innovative reasoning, to enhance the value of any task or assignment where it could have been naturally ignored due to cultural bias.

Inclusivity in this paper would emphasize on the female gender at all levels and the contributions that they bring to any team, organization or sphere of influence. Disparity in the gender divide is not only parity and social issue, but also a serious challenge to innovative inclusion and economic sustainability. Female gender inclusion on boards has the possibility to lead to improved ethical orientation, sustainability, corporate responsibility and greater corporate transparency. Joint intelligence of a group is strongly associated with the proportion of females in the group, making for smarter and more productive teams. Organizations that are willing to have gender parity with not a few numbers of women at all levels will outperform financially, actualize higher operating margins and market capitalization.

C. Networked Society

The Networked Society is where everyone, everything and everywhere will be connected in real time. It is envisioned by Ericsson (an Information and Communications Technology ICT company), to realize an ecosystem where everything that benefits from a connection will have one as widespread internet connectivity drives change for individuals and communities.

“When one person connects, their world changes; with everything connected, our world changes”[1].

In a world where five billion people are connected; mobility, broadband, and cloud are changing the pattern of society; digital transformation will disrupt business landscapes. This will spur creating new business value in this age of connectivity. It is therefore required to understand the changes

that can help any group create new business value, and learn how to convert pressures and risks to opportunities in the age of connectivity.

As each one, everything and every location will be connected in real time, this will result in sustainable trans generational impact as innovation and collaboration will change.

The impact the connections in the Networked Society would have on the world is of prior importance than even the connections. It is about:

- new approaches to collaborate, share and get cognizant;
- ingenious ways of executing business that are creating productiveness in the public and private sectors;
- shaping the future jointly and acquire resolutions to some of the enormous challenges confronting our continent and the globe.

Taking a cue from the ‘thought and technology leader’ in this emerging networked society - Ericsson, it has been observed that the networked society necessitates taking on innovative new delivery models. Astute networks that are scalable and proffer superior performance are of the utmost importance. Using widespread broadband connectivity, VOIP and media companies are helping end users move above physical media to sociable, synergetic and always accessible networked adventure. The following points are instances:

- Endowed students and teachers are turning conventional pattern of education upside down;
- Entrepreneurs are starting up businesses on the Internet in under 30 minutes;
- About 2.5 billion “unbanked” persons around the globe are progressively gaining access to standard financial services.

Hans Vestberg, Ericsson President and CEO says

“We believe in a Networked Society, where connectivity will only be the starting point for new ways of innovating, collaborating and socializing.”[1]

III. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The ICT industry has been traditionally male dominated and there are relatively low percentages of women with ICT-related degrees. To promote innovative development that is sustainable in Africa, the need for a diverse and inclusive networked society cannot be over emphasized. This would require a strategy that is aimed at education and proficiency so as to ensure the needed skills are developed to succeed within the team or organization’s entire strategy, and develop a talent

acquisition and retention conduit for posterity. It enhances transparent inter communication and engagement to grow the art of inclusion where every person is appreciated; which results in innovation and business excellence. Here are some discussions:

A. *Why Is Fostering Diversity And Inclusion Important To Enhancing Innovative Development In This Networked Society?*

Diversity nurtures new ideas. Our differences make us exceptional, our varied experiences encourages more discovery. Fostering openness in communication would necessitate diversity of thought, welcome new ideas and experiences. This is required because diverse viewpoints show the capability to see things differently – and that is the core of real innovation. Unconscious or implicit bias happens when our brains make automatic judgments about people and situations without us realizing it. These biases are shaped by our backgrounds, cultures and experiences. We all hold these biases – they are a part of human nature – and they can have a profound influence over our decision making.

Diversity acknowledges the differences everyone brings to the workplace. Inclusion confirms that each and every one is valued and welcome. A productive organization strives to be a workplace that respects and appreciates individual differences. When diversity is absent, what obtain are the same thought line, same background and same path in solving problems. Diverse teams are the outstanding ones – with high performance, continuous innovation, with a variety of experiences, perspectives, cultural influences and references. Hence, becoming the most creative and thus the most resourceful and networked society effective.

Applying diversity in technology facilitates a win-win scenario where communities are positively influenced; individuals are helped in their day to day life, which on the holistic view would transform people on a personal and professional level. It is encouraged that teams continue to strive to be productive centers where diversity nurtures new ideas and ways of cooperating, and where groups can elevate their unique potential, strengthened by the teams that surround them.

“To enhance sustainable goals, it is required to ‘reduce inequalities’. In order to reduce inequalities we must work with inclusion in all strands of diversity. We need to learn to embrace our differences and appreciate the equal value of everyone. I am proud to be an ambassador for this Global Sustainable Development Goal”.

Bina Chaurasia – Chief Human Resource Officer, Ericsson.

B. *The African Scenario*

1) *The Technology Challenge: Fostering Sustainable Technology Revolution In Africa*

A fundamental shift in technology is spurred by the Networked Society, which is at equivalence with the industrialized transformation and major improvements such as the steam engine, electricity and steel manufacturing. Devices for automated distribution, such as forums, communities and blogs, as well as e-commerce, began to portray a more substantial part. Today, digitization is producing a second economy that is enormous, automated and invisible – carrying with it the largest transformation since the industrialized revolution. Mobility, internet of things and fervent digitization are having a transformational effect on business standards across industries and the society as a whole. Connected individuals and the internet of things will continue to generate massive amounts of data. This imputes enormous pressure on the network system; which needs to be proficient in delivering personalized end-to-end services, relevant applications, and at rather high expectations. It is required to be handled seamlessly irrespective of the number of subscribers or the amount of bandwidth capacity demanded. Ericsson Region Sub Saharan Africa (RSSA) have recently launched the Ericsson ICT Professional Foundation Program which is an online portal that is open to the general public to acquire basic understanding of these concepts. This would be a spring board to the world of opportunities the ICT industry has to offer. It would aid aspiring young professionals and technology enthusiasts across Africa to enhance ICT capabilities. It attracts no cost. The Modules include:

- Ericsson Business and Industry Introduction
- Evolved Packet Core overviews
- Telecoms Operating and Business Support Systems courses (OSS/BSS) overviews
- Network Protocol, IPv6 and IP evolution overviews
- TV & Media overviews

2) *Enhancing Diversity And Inclusivity In Africa Whilst Fostering Innovative And Sustainable Development In The Networked Society.*

In Africa, ICT is facilitating some basic personal needs, for instance communication, finance, security, education, safety and healthiness. Technologies such as mobility and broadband helps to save funds and time, increase earnings, spur entrepreneurship and increased job formation, promote untapped innovative opportunities etc. These include and are not limited to:

- Banking the Unbanked: the mobile money initiative for instance is gaining grounds across Africa; it initially had a very strong imprint in Kenya. Sending, receiving money and general transacting is no longer limited to the banking hall. With this evolution, the mobile phones, tabs, notes, pads are gradually replacing wallets and purses.
- Learning outside the classroom: Learning takes place everywhere as everyone (whether high schooled educated or

less) with a data enabled mobile device at the least, has a very good idea what a search engine such as Google can do in resolving whatever their quest is (can even resolve arguments). The advantage of their search being refined if the spelling is incorrect is also a plus to want to discover more.

- **Business engagements:** innovative models for online business enable entrepreneurs to develop their enterprises to achieve end user needs and expectations in new ways. An example is the use of social media by even the not well learned to achieve small scale business objectives. The use of WhatsApp, BBM, Instagram for instance are avenues for sharing fashion, style, goods and services, hair looks, etc, amongst artisans which boosts their need to get mobile phones that would serve those purposes and lots more.

There are dynamic and challenging expectations which necessitate a flexible portfolio and approach in fostering innovative and sustainable development. Taking ownership of specific task or assignments and accepting responsibility of the inevitable changes that this would demand will be a spring board in the right direction. The momentum of business tasks from commodity development to consumer feedback has accelerated in the continuous dynamic universal market place. Keeping up with the pace would require simultaneous business acumen and predictive analysis, to manage unforeseen market threats and opportunities and for faster decision-making.

In fostering inclusivity, more women recruitment needs to be emphasized. It is essential to create and invest in an environment where women are visibly empowered; recognized for the ideas, knowledge and influence they bring and give opportunities for education and career advancement at any level without any bias. It is vital to constantly strive to ensure equal treatment of all individuals regardless of gender.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Practical application of inclusivity and diversity in fostering technological advancement for trans-generational sustainability is very essential.

It is required to encourage the female gender to take up challenges that seem to be “only men can dos” both educationally and career growth wise.

Here are highlighted examples from Ericsson and LeanIn:

Ericsson has collaborated with other organizations to achieve these developmental and inclusive diverse experiences and also solely achieved same on a cascaded note.

- **Careers International – Top Women Summit:** Ericsson is a sponsor of the Top Women Summit held by Careers International. At the summit participants have the opportunity to meet representatives from leading companies, personally discuss their career with top managers and international recruiters, network with a select group of future female leaders, and learn about the latest industry trends and career opportunities.

- **Broadband Commission for Digital Development:** Ericsson collaborates with the Broadband Commission for Digital Development. The working group on Gender and Broadband has a three-pronged procedure to raising the number of women in ICT professions: firstly, to create demand among girls and women for careers in ICT; secondly, to ensure a better supply of science, technology, engineering and math education to girls and women; and thirdly, to achieve long-term sustainability by encouraging ICT businesses to attract, recruit, retain and promote women.

- **Employee Resource Groups:** the Staff team has voluntary groups created around a common goal and stirred in that line. They drive, promote and support a diverse and inclusive work culture enhancing unique insights, concepts and perspectives. The employee resource groups are an illustration of the company’s commitment to diversity and inclusion. Groups on a global scale connect and engage in mentoring schemes, career development, networking opportunities, information forums, recruitment programs, and several volunteer events.

- **Girls in ICT:** Ericsson organizes events for this cause, including collaborative workshops, school visits, seminars etc. The objective is to encourage and endow girls and young women to cogitate professions in ICT.

- **Watermark:** Ericsson helps Watermark which is a group of executive women who have risen to the topmost levels of their areas of endeavors. They connect, enhance and press for the progress of women in the work place.

- **TechWomen:** Ericsson supports TechWomen, an initiative that empowers, connects, and supports the next generation of women leaders in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) from Africa and the Middle East by providing them the access and opportunity needed to advance their careers, pursue their dreams, and inspire women and girls in their communities. [3]

LeanIn, a diverse and global organization which stemmed from the volume “Lean In” has also focused on inspiring women to pursue their goals, and changing the discussion from what ‘we can’t do to what we can do’[4]. LeanIn.org became the next phase which included circles. Circles are a voluntary relationship that fosters internal networking, learning and knowledge sharing. It allows individuals to share their business and personal experience, information, values, skills, perspectives, attitudes and behaviors with others; thus boosting personal and professional development. The other expected results are an opportunity for mutual learning, access the knowledge and experiences of experts, initiate a more organized collaboration with individuals that can provide new insights and perspectives.

LeanIn assists women through three vital approaches:

- **Community:** LeanIn wants women to have the confidence and know-how in achieving their goals. This starts with an active and supportive community. Each day LeanIn encourages an open exchange of ideas and information. They

also share LeanIn Stories—short narratives of periods in life when people choose to either “lean in” or “lean back”. It is intended to inspire, teach, correct, encourage and connect.

- Education: LeanIn offers a growing library of free online lectures on topics including leadership and communication. Produced in partnership with the Clayman Institute for Gender Studies at Stanford University and other well-known authorities. The lectures offer women practical capabilities they can apply in their everyday life.
- Circles: Lean In Circles are small groups that meet monthly to encourage and support each other in an atmosphere of confidentiality and trust. LeanIn provides the materials and support to run a successful Circle, including online spaces that make it easy for members to stay up-to-date and connected [5].

Maximizing the LeanIn Circle would require these from team members:

- INTERPERSONAL RESPECT: with diversity as a background, to achieve team excellence, it is paramount to be open, listen carefully and respectfully to other people’s perspectives. Always note that all perspectives are valued, no person is inferior or superior.
- OPENNESS & CURIOSITY: stay open especially if regular thought patterns are challenged
- PARTICIPATION: a real and sustainable change will only occur when there is an open dialog and not to allow your ideas and opinions to go unheard. Reflections could come after discussions and this will spur further discussion and continuity of the dialogue to reach the target result.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Through this conference avenue, it is proposed to have a Diverse and Inclusive Technology Society Factory herein after referred to as DITS Factory would be an avenue to acquire and retain scarce talent whilst creating avenues for discovering hidden and unbelievable talents. It is well known that discovery is recovery; so then it is time to tap into the loads of potentials in individuals that do not even know it is inherent. Diversity and Inclusion is work in progress that should produce sustainable results that are trans-generational. The factory could include these initiatives: workshops and seminars, mentorship program, community service, diversity sponsorships, photo competitions, innovative idea (with results) competitions etc. Whatever the size the initiative is, it should be challenging and sustainable! It would be an avenue to share with the world what makes Africa unique and how we would make the most of Technology to enhance our development rapidly on the bedrock of diverse inclusivity.

DITS factory would consciously manage cultural barriers and challenges, biases, etc that could likely be road blocks for developmental attainments.

Highlighted are suggested initiatives that can be adapt as a follow through to this Presentation, via the DITS Factory:

- › Promote LeanIn as an external tool for enabling constructive dialogue among people (students, staff, members of the public, etc) around topics relating to diversity and inclusion (or any other topic within any specific team that would address inclusivity, diversity, sustainable innovative development, maximizing the riches of the network society) and social feed that allows for conversations with circle members and sharing of articles, photos, and videos. Lean in circles has locally sponsored programs, mentoring forum, etc.
- › Partner with technology companies like Ericsson to support the provision of cloud-based solution to enable live lectures online, listen and interact with tutors through data enable mobile devices. Covenant university can partner with other top universities, technology based industries (intra and inter Africa) to develop joint educational ecosystems, providing free online programs that are accessible to anyone.
- › Partner with technology companies like Ericsson and relevant identified technology companies to have an R&D site as highlighted earlier that will concentrate on intelligent transport systems (ITS); smart grid technologies for the utility sector; cloud applications; TV and multimedia; broadband communication; and machine-to-machine (M2M) technologies. Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) will be evidently reduced by more intelligent electricity grids and connected transportation systems. This will in turn open the way for a low-carbon economy and redefine urban landscapes.
- › Attracting women to ICT by promoting practical applications of ICT initiatives with respect to how technology is changing the industry and society, as well as the community in general. Doing things in technology, positively influences the community, helps individuals in their everyday life; to transform people on a personal and professional level. Taking a cue from Ericsson, like Girls in ICT days / TechnoGirls, etc.
- › Strive to create an environment where people can work more effectively across cultures by providing the resources and training necessary to build and manage high performing teams across the continent. Managing Unconscious Bias training would also be required.
- › Inspire inclusivity in all endeavors to promote the feminine line of involvement. It will be required to support awareness and appreciation of cultural differences in the unique sphere of influence and to focus on the strength that cultural diversity brings. Recruitments could be through referral program or female target hiring. Appreciation of diversity by the male gender as a competitive advantage to any

productive team rather than a threat will foster team spirit and excellent results.

› Managing the diversity challenge: the fact that the ICT industry has been traditionally male dominated and relatively low percentage of women with ICT-related degrees, it is required to encourage the female gender to take up challenges that seem to be “only men can do” both educationally and career growth wise.

› Enhancing services and tasks for improved energy efficiency, opportunities are created for transformative solutions that essentially modify the way we live and work. Promote building a climate positive city, applying a climate smart and proficient infrastructure, connecting persons, homes and workspaces.

In addition to these initiatives and others that will spring up, it is expedient to put in a conscious, deliberate and consistent commitment to ensure a balanced gender representation for inclusive growth to occur. This is vital to Africa’s developmental rise. These initiatives need to be actively encouraged across all levels of endeavors.

“To see a desired change in any task or assignment, it requires a conscious, deliberate and consistent effort to realize its actualization”

Faith Oyedepo Vice President Education, Living Faith Church World Wide.

VI. CONCLUSION

Today, technology gives the liberty to challenge conventional standards and find solutions to the issues our society faces; as it has demonstrated to be an essential enabler of an enhanced quality of life and economic advancement. The main players in the Networked Society are those who fathom its necessities and have the capability to rethink, innovate and reinvent so as to grab the opportunity of this value-building ecosystem.

In a complex, diverse and ever changing world, leaders and aspiring leaders need to be agile, flexible and demonstrate willingness and initiative to learn and grow. Thoughtful and inclusive leaders mobilize a diverse, dynamic and pro-feminine team. Diversity and inclusivity promoting leaders energize, engage, develop and retain talent through the conduit of an advancing networked society that promotes the value that the feminine gender bring to the team’s productivity. Since diversity and inclusion enables organizations to appreciate diverse personalities, talents and promote gender parity, this will in turn spur motivation for delivery even when very high expected monetary motivation is not immediately present.

To remain diversely inclusive in approach at attaining any innovative feat whilst maximizing the benefits the networked

society has to offer our community where intelligent females are, it is required to involve everyone, evaluate progress regularly and be focused in approach – have specific targets. Creativity, consistency and continuity are the rules of engagement for trans-generational sustainability.

As enabled people and societies are the pilots of essential change, this will lead to business opportunities and solutions that would handle global issues such as paucity, urbanization, access to education and health care, climate variations and the productive utilization of natural resources with the back bone of feminine inclusivity. Evolving ICT is the essential facilitator of the progressive transformation, as real time connections will demand new requirements whilst opening opportunities beyond the imagination.

Connectivity is aptly the start point for fresh approaches to collaborating, innovating and transacting business, which will promote problem solving initiatives rather than problem amplification concerns. It will launch new entries to lifelong learning, improved quality of life and economic boom. The joint forces of mobility, broadband and the cloud will revolutionize every part of our world especially in cities which will always cascade to villages as their residents will prospectively accept the innovation and transformation technology brings rather than shun it.

“Connectivity in the future will change behaviors of people, business and society.”

Hans Vestberg, Ericsson President and CEO

Stay Productively Engaging!

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