

Gender ROI™ Insight Series



3 Women middle management representation

Intentional action needed to progress women into senior leadership roles

Professional women in the Caribbean tick many boxes for individual achievement, yet senior executive and board roles remain elusive for most. A coalition of regional leaders is working to change that.

In large organisations everywhere, middle management is considered the engine room of organisational performance. It's where middle managers implement and execute strategy, provide the bridge between senior management and the workforce, and ensure the smooth running of their enterprise's operations. Middle management is also the pipeline or talent pool for senior and top management.

That's critical to fostering greater diversity and inclusion within senior ranks, producing dividends such as more effective strategic decision making, preservation of institutional knowledge and innovation.

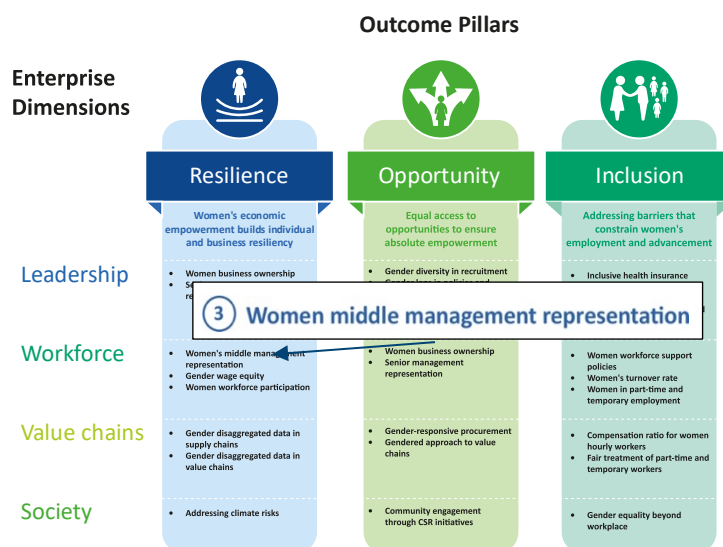
By this measure the Caribbean nation of Jamaica is a global flag-bearer of success. An oft-quoted study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) found Jamaica had the highest proportion of women in middle management in the world, 59.3 per cent, ahead of countries like the US and the UK. While the statistics have retreated from that 2008 peak, Jamaican organisations still boast strong numbers of women in middle management. Statistics also show Caribbean women continue to excel in education, sport and other domains.

Middle managers implement and execute strategy and provide the bridge between senior management and the workforce.

Yet analysis shows the talent pipeline across Caribbean organisations is uneven and full of leaks. While politics, the public sector and community organisations feature more women leaders and directors, women's career progression in the private sector is depressingly familiar.

For a variety of reasons, in countries like Jamaica, somewhere between embracing the expanded responsibilities of middle management and scoring a seat at the boardroom table, the ranks of talented women thin noticeably.

Experienced entrepreneur and director Melanie Subratie describes the Caribbean as one of the world's most 'matriarchal patriarchies'.



Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ indicator matrix



The Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ identifies gender equality and diversity gaps and informs interventions to build resilience, equal opportunity and inclusion. This Insight Series explores how each indicator contributes to delivering social, financial and economic returns: <https://sweefcapital.com/gender-roim/>

“Women do everything, they get stuff done, (yet) a huge amount of respect is given to men,” Ms Subratie said. “That’s not to say that there aren’t men who excel and deserve their positions. But it’s strange that you can have such a high level of women in middle management then they just don’t break into the boardroom.”

Inter-American Development Bank research shows the number of women on Caribbean boards, 12 to 15 per cent, is well below the global average of 20 to 25 per cent. That average masks wide variations in performance, with Trinidad and Tobago at 22 per cent and Jamaica at just seven per cent. Many of the same women serve on multiple boards.

Ms Subratie made history in 2018 when she appointed an all-women board following the JA\$4 billion initial public offering of business process outsourcing company Stanley Motta. She said she purposely put together a group of people she admired, proven leaders and performers in their respective fields, and they also happened to be women. It was the first all-woman board of a listed company in Jamaica’s history.

“This is even more remarkable in a country like Jamaica, that has the highest proportion of women managers in the world,” Ms Subratie said at the time. “Yet it still has a shortage of women at the highest levels of corporate decision-making.”

“It’s strange that you can have such a high level of women in middle management then they just don’t break into the boardroom.”

- *Melanie Subratie, entrepreneur*

International research shows a strong link between gender-balanced boards and improved business outcomes. There’s also a symbiotic relationship between enterprises with diverse boards and a healthy balance of women and men in middle management, the traditional launchpad of successful executive and post-executive careers.

Like Ms Subratie, gender and trade expert Nicole Pitter-Patterson is part of regional efforts to identify how to help more talented women move into roles of leadership and influence. A vocal champion of gender parity,

she is Co-lead for a peer action group on Board Diversity and Leadership for 2X Global, a new global industry body for gender lens investing.



Jamaica Chamber of Commerce President
Michael McMorris.

Ms Pitter-Patterson said achieving change was less about who took the lead and more about being clear on desired outcomes and intentional in policies and approaches.

“We have a huge pool of talented women in the Caribbean and extensive evidence about the beneficial impacts of gender-positive interventions,” Ms Pitter-Patterson said. “What we need are conversations to engage and educate more senior

men and women about the barriers women face, about proven solutions to build the boardroom talent pipeline and the benefits of diverse leadership.”

It’s a message that resonates strongly with Jamaica’s 240-year-old Chamber of Commerce, the country’s premier business group. According to Chamber President and businessman, Michael McMorris, local boards have a culture of pulling from the available, mainly male pool within their networks – and that has to change.

“The majority of companies don’t have standardised recruitment and scoring processes for directors,” Mr McMorris said. “The recruitment process usually involves directors from one company calling directors from other companies they know – invariably men – and saying, we need a director for this kind of role, with these particular skills. So despite there being a great many women who are qualified and who’d make very good directors, they are not in the conversation – nor are they known by those having the conversation. It’s a matter of familiarising our companies with that cadre then taking it from there.”

Fellow Chamber Director Joni-Gaye Cawley, an HR specialist and author, said the lack of progress by women from middle management into senior leadership and board roles was due to a combination of factors, such as gender and unconscious biases, stereotyping and care giving and household responsibilities.

“Women take on more (of those responsibilities) so they may not have time to seek upward mobility,” Ms Cawley said. “When there are formal networking opportunities, the women are at home doing other chores, so they don’t get to go out and network as often. There’s also a lack of mentorship and sponsorship.”

Director of Projects for the Caribbean Development Bank, Therese Turner-Jones, is dismayed at the slow pace of change on gender parity in the region. A seasoned transformation executive and director, she said Caribbean women continued to pull their weight at work while shouldering the bulk of family responsibilities.

“The slow pace of change (on gender) is not unusual – just disappointing. What do we do about it? Mobilise.”

*- Therese Turner-Jones,
Caribbean Development Bank*

“Social and cultural change is the hardest thing for we humans to do,” Ms Turner-Jones said. “So it’s not unusual – just disappointing. What do we do about it? We mobilise.”

That’s what Ms Turner-Jones and her peers did in August to thwart the watering-down of gender-based violence measures in The Bahamas, legislation that had taken 14 years to reach the Bahamian parliament.

“There’s a lot of talent that’s unheralded, undiscovered, and that’s just crazy to me.”

*- Michael McMorris, Jamaica
Chamber of Commerce*

After extensive lobbying, advocates won ministerial support to amend the legislation with specific measures to combat gender-based violence. The move was greeted with relief by women across the region.

Atlantic LNG Vice President and director, Caroline Toni Sirju-Ramnarine, takes a long view on gender advancement, pointing to the time lag between instituting new policies and seeing the outcomes reflected across management and leadership ranks (see Spotlight article).

“I believe in addressing the root causes of not having this pipeline of talent coming through,” Ms Sirju-Ramnarine said. “Companies need to examine their policies for things preventing women from progressing, and these may not be deliberate. Policies may have been produced long ago, maybe by men, when we weren’t as sensitive to the unconscious biases written into policies and procedures.”

For Mr McMorris, the continuing failure of business decisionmakers to tap the Caribbean’s rich pool of talented women makes no sense.



“There’s a lot of talent that’s unheralded, undiscovered, and that’s just crazy to me,” Mr McMorris said. “When do you ever get those kinds of opportunities where you don’t have to actively start from scratch and build resources? The resources are right there. I reject the notion that we have to ‘train’ women before they can become board members – male directors never had that hurdle. Director training is an asset for both sexes either before or after they become a director, but the lack of formal training should not be a disqualifier. We just have to look harder and closer.”#

About the contributors



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Sign up [here](#) to Sweef Capital’s GenderROI™ Insight Series. An online forum on September 28 will provide more information about the Sweef Capital GenderROI™ Practitioner’s Manual and how to apply it in your organisation. Register [here](#) – places are limited.



Taking a targeted gender approach in the Caribbean

Caroline Toni Sirju-Ramnarine may have left her engineering days behind, but she still takes a systemic view to complex challenges like workplace diversity.

Currently Vice President, Corporate Operations and Transformation at energy company Atlantic LNG in Trinidad and Tobago, Ms Sirju-Ramnarine is also a highly regarded director, serving on the boards of a microfinance enterprise, Republic Bank Limited and the local chapter of the American Chamber of Commerce.

Ms Sirju-Ramnarine said there was a time lag between the point when larger numbers of women started moving into middle management and now, with statistics demonstrating the success of those initial measures. And from that middle management talent pool, she predicted, more women would begin to move into senior ranks – it would just take time, and good role models.

“Not having women in some of those senior roles doesn’t make it seem possible for both men and women to picture women holding senior positions,” she said. “The glass ceiling still exists. I think the more you start to see women getting into those roles, the more you’ll start to see more women becoming that way. The value they bring will be evident, hopefully. I do think it’s a time lag and we’ve reached this tier and now we have to reach the next tier.”

Ms Sirju-Ramnarine’s broad executive portfolio, ranging from IT, digital and cybersecurity to corporate communications, sustainability and transformation, is atypical in a corporate world where women still tend to follow functional pathways such as HR, sales and PR. These pathways are often less valued than operational and technical experience in terms of promotion, and can preclude women from board opportunities later on.

“They’re not valued in the same way, and that’s a pity,” Ms Sirju-Ramnarine said. “The more we get women in middle managerial positions that are in more diverse roles, the greater the pool you’ll have to select from.”

To support women’s career progression, Atlantic LNG has introduced a suite of measures around family care including day care with lactation rooms and flexible work, and recruitment to remove biases and expand the candidate pool. Ms Sirju-Ramnarine said many measures taken benefited both women and men.

She encouraged women to be intentional about networking opportunities, upskilling, and to seek mentoring and sponsorship from senior men and women. As a young engineer, she hadn’t had a female mentor, “but there were many men who, without being named as such, were my mentors”.

“I want to stress that this is not a women problem,” Ms Sirju-Ramnarine said. “This is everyone’s problem, and all of us play a part in the solution. It’s about building awareness – I really do advocate seeing men as allies. Where you have opportunities to educate and change (systemic) barriers, that’s where we need to be placing the emphasis.”



Atlantic LNG Vice President, Corporate Operations and Transformation, Caroline Toni Sirju-Ramnarine, centre, at Amcham T&T’s 9th Women’s Leadership Conference.

For more about Atlantic LNG, visit <https://atlanticlng.com/>



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