

Gender ROI™ Insight Series



9 Performance evaluation and progression

Africa proving a potential powerhouse of entrepreneurial women leaders and businesses

Despite the deck often being stacked against them, women investors, executives, business owners and employees across Africa continue to demonstrate their skill at transforming potential into different kinds of value. Watch the capital follow.

With its population expected to double to 2.5 billion people by 2050, Africa is a story of significant talent, rich natural resources and vast untapped potential. The continent is home to the world’s youngest population, with the United Nations reporting that 70 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa is under the age of 30.

Paradoxically, productivity and growth in Africa have not only stalled in recent years; they’ve gone backwards, worsened by Covid-19 and geopolitical conflicts. Currently, some 60 per cent of Africa’s population lives in poverty.

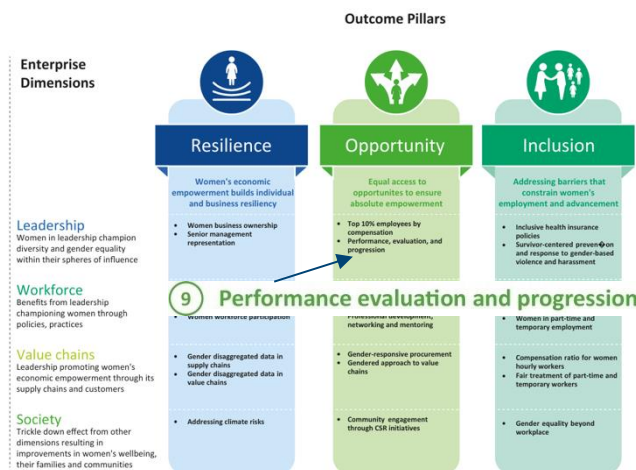
Despite this, The McKinsey Global Institute is upbeat about Africa’s prospects. In a June 2023 report, it urged observers to dig beyond the numbers.

“The continent-wide statistics obscure successes in many of its constituent countries,” the report says. “Over the past decade, certain countries, cities, sectors and companies have been beacons of innovation, productivity and growth – there is no ‘one Africa’.”

“Over the past decade, certain countries, cities, sectors and companies have been beacons of innovation, productivity and growth – there is no ‘one Africa’.”

- McKinsey Global Institute

Co-founder and Partner of ATG Samata, Ms Lelemba Phiri, a leading gender lens investor, couldn’t agree more. African entrepreneurs are mobilising around solutions designed to deliver both commercial and social value, and women are at the front of this wave. “We’ve got a lot of challenges, which means we also have a lot of opportunities,” Ms Phiri says.



“We’ve got opportunities to solve for some very basic things, like sanitation and agriculture, and also for high-tech things, like how might we leverage technologies like artificial intelligence to solve for pressing issues like climate and jobs?”

“Africa already proved its ability to lead when we had the strongest leapfrogs in financial technologies due to our high mobile phone penetration a decade ago. The number of businesses created and the solutions that came out of mobile adoption was ahead of the world.”

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-roitm/>

A former chartered accountant and senior executive, Ms Phiri's eclectic career journey has ranged from leading a fintech business (Zoono) that created over five thousand jobs, to establishing gender-lens funds that included trialling innovative financing vehicles for women entrepreneurs.

Her latest venture is ATG Samata, a blended-venture fund that invests in women-led businesses and gender diverse teams in fast-growing sectors that have a preponderance of women in their value chains (see Spotlight article).

“Processes and programs that reflect stereotypically masculine criteria place women in worse positions and negatively affect their opportunities.”

- Rowena Reyes, Sweef Capital

“Whenever we were invited to speak about Zoono's success, there were always so few women who'd gone through the process of fundraising for, let alone scaling, a business,” she recalls. “At that time, the representation of an African entrepreneur was still a white man. So when I was planning my exit from the business, I decided that I wanted to be part of the solution and help drive more investment toward African women entrepreneurs, and create role models so this is seen as normal, no longer a ‘Wow!’.”

When it comes to women in public leadership, Africa is a global leader. Data from the African Union shows five African countries are in the top

20 nations for women's parliamentary representation, with Rwanda leading the world in terms of numbers of women in parliament. African women hold leadership positions in global agencies and organisations such as the UN and World Trade Organisation.

Yet talented women executives and business owners in Africa face similar challenges to women elsewhere in terms of stereotyping, biases and social expectations that constrain performance, derail progress and prevent access to capital and other resources.

In organisations, such biases affect women's ability to advance into visible and influential leadership roles, according to Sweef Capital Director Rowena Reyes. Better performance evaluation and management is crucial.

“Processes and programs that reflect stereotypically masculine criteria place women in worse positions and negatively affect their opportunities,” Ms Reyes says. “Talent management documents may have pro-male definitions of leadership, and some talent management criteria and competencies may have a masculine bias. Feedback is often delivered differently to women, and women may struggle to access career-enhancing development opportunities or projects.”

Performance conversations can prove a de-motivating experience for women and the tone and focus of questions, Ms Phiri says, reflect similar biases to those identified in the entrepreneurship process.

“When women entrepreneurs are trying to raise money, they're asked more risk-related questions while men are asked more opportunity-related questions.”

- Lelemba Phiri, ATG Samata

“When women entrepreneurs are trying to raise money, they're asked more risk-related questions while men are asked more opportunity-related questions,” Ms Phiri says. “That's a global story. It's vital to review these processes to try to make everything as uniform as possible to reduce these biases.”

Ms Phiri says effective performance evaluation is a critical part of becoming more gender-equitable for organisations, but it must be intentional and holistic.



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-roitm/>

“We look at the whole process of recruitment and talent development, not just performance management,” she says. “Right from the beginning: how are you communicating these jobs in the market? How are you screening? How are you interviewing? How are you onboarding? How are you training and promoting? What does your brand look like? Because at any of these points, there’s so much unconscious bias that results in women being disadvantaged.”

On top of managing a broad investment portfolio, Ms Phiri is completing doctoral research on the intersection of gender, race and entrepreneurial finance. What she’s learning is inspiring.

“I’ve been focusing particularly on the resourcing practices of black female entrepreneurs because their intersectionality (being both black and female) results in them having a harder time resourcing for their businesses. This then often results in them having smaller and less profitable ventures,” she says. “In spite of the odds being stacked against them, however, what they’re doing to resource for their businesses is phenomenal! Even as an investor, I often say to myself, ‘Hey, I could do that too!’” #

About the contributors



Lelemba C. Phiri is Co-Founder of ATG Samata, based in Cape Town
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/lelemba/>



Rowena Reyes is Investment Director at Sweef Capital, based in Singapore.
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/rowena-reyes-82578850/>

Sign up [here](#) for the Insight Series and for updates on Sweef Capital news and events, including Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ forums and activities. We’re keen to hear your feedback about the series and the Gender ROI™. Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) to keep in touch.

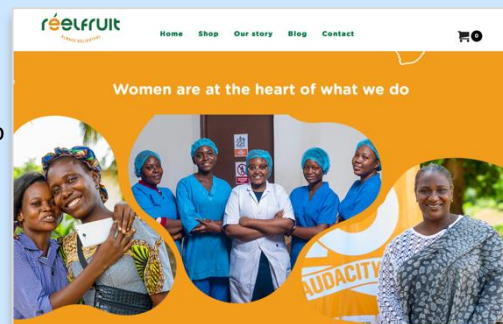


ATG Samata – identifying Africa’s business ‘gems’

It was back in her fintech days when ATG Samata Co-Founder Ms Lelemba Phiri noticed a pattern in the company data: women were managing their businesses better than men. Ms Phiri and her colleagues revamped their strategy to focus more on developing women entrepreneurs in their communities, a pivot that delivered “fantastic” results for the impact-focused financial services platform, Zoono.

“Our revenues grew, we had less volatility in agents leaving – there was a lot more stability in our network,” Ms Phiri recalls. “Additionally, when there were shocks in the economy, the women’s businesses just seemed to be more resilient.”

Fast forward to 2023 and the launch of ATG Samata, a \$50 million blended venture fund set up to accelerate equal access to capital and opportunity for talented women entrepreneurs. ATG Samata’s target markets include the large, fast-growing economies of Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia and high-growth markets such as Ghana, Rwanda and South Africa.



The fund uses a proprietary diversity, equity and inclusion screening and due diligence tool as part of its investment processes. Recent investments include SolarTaxi, a green public transport, fleet management and courier platform in Ghana, and Nigerian food manufacturer and distributor, ReelFruit.

“Our research shows that 50 per cent of high-growth ventures in Sub-Saharan Africa have at least one female co-founder, but they raise disproportionately less capital,” Ms Phiri says. “Women-led startups return twice the revenue for every dollar invested, compared with male-led businesses. And by creating more inclusive cultures, these companies are also more innovative and productive, with higher levels of talent retention and employee satisfaction. This is a massive growth opportunity that other investors tend to ignore.”#

For more about ATG Samata, visit: <https://atgsamata.com/>