

**DIGITAL TRANSITION AND TRANSFORMATION, AND TRANSMEDIA -
NEW SECTORS FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA BEING A
PAPER PRESENTED BY HIS EXCELLENCY GODWIN GEORGE UMO
OON, NIGERIA'S AMBASSADOR TO THE HOLY SEE AT THE AFRICAN
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INTRODUCTION

1. Advancement in technology, especially, from the last quarter of the 20th century, has greatly altered the human life. This shift cuts across the entire spectrum of human endeavours. Consequently, analogue systems started giving way to digital systems and organizations that had not put some fast-spaced mechanisms in place, to usher in the new technologies, found themselves losing out of the cutting-edge advantages. To keep pace, therefore, with the emerging technological avalanche, companies, governments and individuals started introducing changes into how their affairs were conducted. The analogue systems and modes began to be digitized. Terminologies, in sync with the new phenomenon, also began to emerge. Some of which are Digital Transition, Digital Transformation, Transmedia, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and a host of others.

2. When one had thought that one had heard the last on the evolution of technologies, new ones have emerged and they promise to further alter, not only the human life, the way many things are currently being done. The world has entered the realm of Transformative Digital Technologies, which are defined by Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, Blockchain, Predictive Analytics, Cloud and Augmented Reality, to mention a few. While these may sound complex and even frightening, it must be remarked that these technologies are designed to make the human life easier; though they have their own costs. So, how would these new paradigms empower African women to leadership positions? Before

delving into the answers to this question, some conceptual explanations would be required in order to carry the audience along.

SCOPE

- ◆ Conceptual Clarifications.
- ◆ Catalytic Role of Digital Transition.
- ◆ Digital Transformation and Women Entrepreneurship.
- ◆ Requisite Skills and Expertise in Digital Economy for Leadership.
- ◆ Challenges and Prospects.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

DIGITAL TRANSITION

3. Digital Transition is simply an improvement to existing technologies, tools and processes. This could take:

- a. Automating some manual steps.
- b. Upgrading to a newer technology.
- c. Adding additional integration for improvement in turnaround times, efficiencies in time and revenue, etc.

According to Simon O'Carrol, Digital Transition is simply the digitization of data and therefore should not be confused with Digital Transformation. Consequently, he asserted that many businesses tended to only digitize data when there was so much more to do or realize. He further contended that organizations were employing transformative tools to completely digitally transform their businesses and processes, even though, he observed that the poor business adaptation and understanding of easily-accessible transformative tools were the major drawbacks.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

4. Many scholars see Digital Transformation from different views, however, there seems to be a point of convergence in its implementation. One definition puts Digital Transformation as “*Combination of Transformative Digital Technologies, Tools, Processes and, most importantly, People in order to truly transform the way people do business nowadays*”. In other words, it is the effective building of an entirely new organization from the scratch to drive the project.

5. The emphasis on “People” should be specially noted because that includes leadership, which play an important role in the realization of the project. Any transformation, whether digital or not, requires a shift to a totally different way of thinking and that has to do with the human culture and mindset. So, if the leadership and the team are not in sync with the transformation mantra, there is a great possibility that people will still maintain the status quo, only using the newer technology to do same old things. This would have negated the true aims of the transformation, which is to innovate.

6. Some of the Tools and Processes, besides the technologies to drive Digital Transformation, respectively, would include: Sensors, Wearables, 3D/4D Printing, Robotics and Unmanned Air Vehicles, to mention a few. The Processes would entail Total Quality Management (TQM) and Lean Manufacturing, etc. The digital transition and transformation need a suitable platform to reach target audiences; and this is where the Transmedia becomes indispensable.

TRANSMEDIA

7. Simply put, Transmedia is a merging of media forms, here the digital with the narratives, but with the multiple platform a part of the narrative. Whilst Transmedia promotes interaction, they are not videogames, but new digital narratives offered in a way that has never before. So, video, prose-rich novellas, smart use of specific social media platforms, all collaborating strategically to tell a compelling story while

offering the potential for innovative use of crowdsourcing and audience engagement, are all enmeshed in the concept of Transmedia.

8. Employing its very distinct characteristics, Transmedia has helped, together with Digital Transition and Transformation, a thriving sector that provides women, African women inclusive, opportunities to occupy leadership positions. Going forward, the word leadership has to be properly conceptualised in order to assist in the conversation.

LEADERSHIP

9. Like many concepts, leadership has been defined by many scholars in different ways; but for the purpose of this conversation, three versions would suffice:

a. Leadership is not a person or position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good – JOANNE CIULLA (1998).

b. Leadership is discovering the company's destiny and having the courage to follow it – JOE JAWORSKI.

c. Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality – WARREN G. BENNIS.

Having thus seen 3 of the numerous versions of leadership, a common thread runs through them and that is vision. So how would African women leverage the opportunities provided by the sector to attain leadership positions?

CATALYTIC ROLE OF DIGITAL TRANSITION

10. Though the initial topic for this conversation was “*Digital Transition and Transmedia: New Sectors That Provide Leadership For Women*”, I altered it to what you now have, fully cognizant of the fact that Digital Transition with Transmedia, solely, would not get the women the desired aspirations to get to the top of Leadership Ladder. Digital Transition, as earlier defined, simply aims at refurbishing

existing system and processes which could result in productivity lift, whilst not realizing the full business potential. In other words, Digital Transition could serve as a catalyst to improving productivity: but, it features short-term happiness. It could be likened to having a 2-phased project, one which aims at providing some soothing relief and the other providing a complete cure to an ailment.

11. If the aim, therefore, is to attain maximum business potential, it would be better to skip Phase 1 and go straight to Phase 2 to cut cost, save time and the inconveniences, and other encumbrances that may crop up after completing Phase 1. In other words, half measures in adopting technology must be frowned at when new innovative technologies are coming up at blitzkrieg speeds. Such technologies as AI and 5G are already taking form, which must be leveraged to innovate. It is the aspect of innovation, which sets a business up for the future, is critical for the survival of the organization; and this is what Digital Transformation is all about – providing new opportunities.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

12 With unparalleled optimism, women entrepreneurs are using mobile devices to process digital financial transactions. This is because a half of SMEs owners foresee complete dependence on digital payments, five years from now. Consequently survey shows that 33% of women entrepreneurs use mobile devices to process digital financial transactions, compared to 26% of men. Women entrepreneurs also lead in other areas of commercial transactions, including:

- a. Accepting mobile payments (71% vs 19% men).
- b. Issuing refunds to customers (29% : 19% W : M).
- c. Paying employees (19% vs 14%).

Besides digital payments, women entrepreneurs are ahead in social media updates and hiring, 44% vs 33%, 12% vs 8%, respectively. Equally, since 2016 there has been an exponential rise in confidence, growth and employee hiring from 21% to 58% in

2018, and the trend continues. This is why the BOA Women Business Owner Spotlight 2018 was encouraged to support and lend to women-owned businesses because their talents, ideas and leadership in the marketplace are essential. Indeed, Sharon Miller, MD and Head of Small Business, BOA, says “*It is exciting how they (women) are innovating and leveraging mobile tools to help their businesses succeed*”, and that raps it up.

13. Despite the cultural diversity across countries, Africa is an incredibly entrepreneurial continent that requires partnership and support to tap into the high levels of innovation there. In Africa, Elizabeth Gore, Dell’s Entrepreneur-in-Residence, asserts that a huge 90% of jobs are generated by entrepreneurs compared to a mere 70% in UK and USA, which makes them vital to economic development in the region. Indeed, it has been observed that it is only in Africa that equal numbers of men and women start up new businesses; and generally in the world, women are the 5th largest contributors, as a group, to global GDP and as such make a real difference to individual country’s economic growth levels. It is therefore thought that if women entrepreneurs could be availed technology and capital, most of the world’s problems would be solved as they will monetize and make profits. Imagine them putting back 90% of the money they earn into their communities and families! It follows therefore that women entrepreneurship has the potential to transform Africa, reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development, despite being denied proper access to capital for start-ups even when they are often able to do more with less.

14. This formidable entrepreneurship spirit has seen the emergence of strong personalities who are essential not only in the media and communications sectors, but in other segments of human endeavours. African women that fall into this category are so many that an attempt to list them, could see us sleeping here. Notwithstanding a few of them would suffice:

- a. Working with Save The Children in Malawi on a project aimed at Improving Economic Opportunities for Women and Children (INEW), Rose Sakala, then

a BSc student in Agribusiness Management at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) helped to train and educate the women in business and finance management, amongst others, which saw the women's tremendous improvement in their living standards. She won the Future African Leaders Awards (FALA) in 2015 and the Women of Distinction Award in 2016, and was invited to participate as a Young Leader to the European Development Days 2016 in Brussels.

b. There is a general saying that majority of innovations comes from places with less resources. A prime example of this is the case of a South African township single mother, Onwaba Mrhwetyana, who developed an application called CRECHE CONNECT, whilst working as an apprentice on Project Codex, intended to tackle early childhood development issues.

c. Another suitable example in this category is Dr Natalia Kanem, Executive Director UNFPA, who has deployed some 30 years of strategic leadership experience in Medicine, public and reproductive health, social justice and philanthropy to better the lot of the African society.

d. Musola Catherine Kaseketi is the first Zambian female Film Director, Human Rights advocate and uses film as a tool for Human Rights advocacy.

e. A Nigerian in the UK, June Eric-Udorie, is a prolific writer, a feminist campaigner, journalist and blogger for the UK Guardian, New Statesman and Cosmopolitan Media outfits. She was given an Award for Leadership in 2015 and in 2016, was among those BBC shortlisted as the 500 influential women.

f. A Transmedia icon and a favourite satirist, Adeola Eunice Fayehun, is a Nigerian journalist who specializes in current geopolitical and socio-economic issues that affect the daily lives of Africans living on the continent, through her programme "Keeping It Real". Adeola is making the most of this to lead a real world change.

g. Finally, Ghanaian Regina Honu, CEO Soronko Solutions, established the first Cooking and Design School for Children and adults called Soronko Academy. For her efforts she was awarded the 2018 AFS Active Global Award for Global Competence Education; and also got the Women in IT Award (UK). Consequently, she was elected as a member of African Leadership Initiative West Africa.

15. With all these inroads into the world of Transmedia and the new networks of influence, African women have assumed leadership role in the continent. This monumental breakthrough notwithstanding, the percentage of women who have attained this status could be improved upon; but some other things are required.

REQUISITE SKILLS AND EXPERTISE IN DIGITAL ECONOMY

FOR LEADERSHIP

16. As a precursor of women empowerment, the EU, in conjunction with the AU, established the EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force. The AU on its own established the Digital Economy Moonshot for Africa. To further emphasize and show commitment to the issue of empowerment, Smart Africa Initiative was born. All these initiatives were designed to bridge the digital divide and promote digital transformation in Africa. This was sequel to the fact that, according to Tierney Remick, digital transformation will open more opportunities for women in those pivotal operational roles, giving them experience and skills.

17. Furthermore, the G20#eskills4Girls Initiative was equally designed to promote digital skills for women and girls and contribute in supporting their participation in the digital economy. It had earlier been stated that women entrepreneurs are leading the digital transformation in Africa; and this is when they are not fully positioned for proper skill acquisition and expertise. Lack of skill, among other drawbacks, has not allowed African women to leverage their full potential in harvesting the dividends of digital economy. Digital Transformation offers new opportunities and allows goals to be set, get a market advantage and be a perceived leader. Failure to leverage the

advantages provided by Digital Transformation would lead to losing customers, market share and value. So training on ERP, CRM and HRs becomes inescapable.

18. It is, therefore, important to acquire the requisite exposure, including leadership training to fully exploit the digital market. It would also be necessary for National Information and Communications Technologies and mobile telecommunication platforms to be in place, alongside new innovative financing and investment channels, in order for the skills and expertise provided by women in a fast-growing market to find expression.

19. Following therefrom, many women would be involved in this new digital sector, which could become a viable platform for South-North collaborations whose network would showcase women's leadership. Perhaps women's performances in the digital space would have been better than the level obtained now, but for some challenges. What are these challenges and how could they be eliminated or mitigated?

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

20. There are barriers, some of them avoidable, that have attempted to roughen the smooth curve to women's leadership in the digital economy. Some of these are:

- a. Prejudice.
- b. Discrimination.
- c. Impact of societal gender norms.
- d. Self-confidence or fear of engaging in competition with men.

Others are access to capital (about 68% of women in a study, claimed to have difficulty in accessing capital and 61% of them complained of having difficulty in start-ups), accessible, secure and reliable Internet service and mentoring support. Notwithstanding these challenges, a good percentage of women are optimistic that the challenges they now face would mitigate in no distant future.

21. Before then, however, certain actions could be taken to ameliorate the situation; and these include:

- a. Development of business initiative by the women entrepreneurs.
- b. Ensure gender-blinding to encourage women participation in the digital economy.
- c. Provide education and training and such training should include the Leader-Follower Cycle (LFC) [Bishop & De-Frank-Cole]. LFC is a model that identifies how women can become exemplary followers. This is also leadership training.
- d. Create government loans which women can access easily.
- e. Enact policies that would aid women's empowerment.

CONCLUSION

22. This short discourse on “*Digital Transition and Transformation, and Transmedia – New Sectors For Women’s Leadership in Africa*” took us through some key concepts of the conversation. The catalytic role of Digital Transition in creating an enabling environment for women exploit their leadership potentials in digital entrepreneurship, was discussed.

23. It was argued that Digital Transition alone was insufficient to bring out the entrepreneurial acumen of women in a digital space; therefore, Digital Transformation, which provides more opportunities, was preferred. The enthusiasm and optimism displayed by women entrepreneurs was evident in their engagement in innovating and leveraging mobile tools that has helped their businesses to succeed. Specifically, in Africa a huge 90% of jobs is generated by entrepreneurs compared to 70% in the UK and USA, and most of them women. This points to the fact that if women entrepreneurs are availed technology and capital, Africa’s poverty level could be drastically reduced and sustainable development enhanced.

24. This formidable entrepreneurship spirit has seen the emergence of strong personalities who cut across the entire spectrum of human endeavour, Media and

Communications, inclusive. Notable amongst them are Musola Kaseketi, June Eric-Udorie and Adeola Fayehun, to mention a few.

25. The AU, EU and some individual countries have come up with several initiatives and policies to bridge the digital divide and promote digital transformation in Africa. This is with a view to opening up more opportunities for women in those pivotal roles, giving them experience and skills. Necessary NICTs, mobile telecommunications platforms and appropriate financing would have to be put in place to enable them realize their full entrepreneurial potentials. It is only when an outstanding performance has been reached by the women would the world extend a hand of partnership for collaborations.

26. Their performances will continue to be impaired until the challenges causing the impairment are eliminated or mitigated. These challenges were identified and possible remedies proffered.