

Discussing the importance of investing in women-led agribusinesses

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The sixth annual African Agri Investment Indaba (AAIL), which took place from 20-22 November at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) in Cape Town, saw Susan Payne, COO of Sustainable Planet, and Fuzlin Levy-Hassen, CIO of Glide Capital Partners explore the ways in which women are underrepresented in the workplace, their lack of access to funding and the concept of gender lens investing.



Levy-Hassen and Payne discussed the underrepresentation of women in professional capacities. Payne stated that according to research conducted, having a higher number of female employees in the C-suite leads to a better achievement rate. However, [PwC's Executive Directors Report 2022](#) has reported that of the top 100 JSE-listed companies, only seven of them have female CEOs. As for the rest of the companies on the list, only 8% have female CEOs and 22% have female CFOs, leaving the remaining 85% as male-dominated.

Payne went on to state that women are the powerhouses of the world economy. "Women make 70-80% of consumer decisions," she said, implying that because of this statistic, women should be represented in the companies that produce the products and services that they consume.

Lack of funding for women

Levy-Hassen expressed that despite the proliferation of incubators and similar organisations, women are still having trouble finding funding. It is one of their major stumping blocks when it comes to starting and running a business.

Payne stated that SMEs are not being properly funded, especially when it comes to ones that are owned and run by women. “Without foundations like Mastercard,” she said, “we would be floundering.” The Mastercard Foundation makes it a point to empower women through funding in various ways. She then went on to say that, in order to fix this problem, organisations need to stick their hand up and state that they are willing to fund the women-led businesses that the banks will never be able to reach.

Payne also discussed the lack of funding for women, and entrepreneurs in general, in Africa, saying that business owners are disadvantaged when it comes to access to financial resources. “Funding,” she said, “however it comes, does not come easily on this continent.”

The concept of gender lens investing

Gender lens investing refers to the consideration of gender-based factors when contemplating funding strategies. This means more informed funding and investing in a way that aids gender equality.

Levy-Hassen mentioned that investors aren’t excited when it comes to this concept. This could be due to their lack of understanding.

Payne added that the way to get their attention is by providing evidence of profitable returns. “The return is embedded in the investor mindset, making it important to produce substantial returns.”

Glide Capital Partners

Both Levy-Hassen and Payne are members of the Glide Capital Partners, a venture capital growth fund focused on investing with a gender lens on African entrepreneurs addressing climate change and sustainability. The fund provides finance, mentoring, and networking opportunities to women-owned/led enterprises, with a portion of the fund allocated to disadvantaged/disabled African entrepreneurs.

Levy-Hassen emphasised the importance of this organisation by bringing up the necessity of post-investment, stating that successful businesses will often flounder because they do not possess the critical knowledge needed to sustain a business. For this reason, the fund provides this particular type of assistance.

The two panellists each addressed significant points as they wrapped up; Levy-Hassen highlighted the value of blended funding, while Payne spoke about the misconceptions people hold when it comes to gender equality in professional settings. “Female-focused funding means everyone gets uplifted,” she said “not that men get left behind.”

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