

WOMEN ON CORPORATE BOARDS: Navigating gender hurdles to access corporate boards in Kenya - Millicent Omukaga

This study investigates the struggles around women representation on corporate boards in Kenyan companies listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange. The study views board representation in the light of gender equality in decision-making, using an institutional lens. Formal and informal institutions and practices that sustain female subordination and male dominance tend to privilege men in the gender order and leadership. Hence globally, women tend to be excluded from decision making, particularly on corporate boards. Lack of diverse voices that look at issues critically is a global concern and may imply that most critical issues are not raised nor discussed.

The study utilizes multiple methods, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches for a deep and broad investigation, considering the complex nature of women representation on corporate boards.

The study finds prevalence of existent social norms regarding women's trajectories to corporate board level, and brings out the interaction between formal and informal institutions in the professional development of women to the board level. This notwithstanding that Kenya is progressive in laws addressing gender equality. The study concludes that the institutional interaction that occurs from earlier stages of life and through all stages determine women board representation.

The study recommends negotiation with informal institutions in a manner that promotes gender inclusion and harmonious coexistence so as to increase WoB to critical mass. This is the first extensive study to examine the life trajectory of women joining corporate boards in Kenya. In addition, the findings advance the debate on gender equality and women representation on corporate boards in the region.

Key words: institutions, corporate governance, gender diversity, women on corporate boards