



TARGET  
GENDER  
EQUALITY



## Target Gender Equality – When She Leads

"The activist is not the man who says the river is dirty. The activist is the man who cleans up the river." – Ross Perot



**Quick facts:** Jane Waiyaki-Maina – Head, Sustainability & Responsible Business Partnerships - Absa Bank Kenya PLC - Kenya

**We have 10 years to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. What are you doing to champion the Global Goals in your business?**

Absa Bank Kenya is part of Absa Group limited, an African Financial services group that aims to be the pride of the continent. We are committed to finding solutions for local challenges and everything we do is focused on adding value. It is for this reason that Absa Kenya has committed to driving the sustainable development goals through everything that we do. We actively support 10 SDGs out of the 17 and currently prioritizing 4 in the short run and the remainder in the medium to long term. Quality Education (SDG 4) is one of our priority SDGs. As the lead of the sustainability agenda, I have come to appreciate the power of education and awareness, as it is the very thing that made me 'stumble' on the sustainability

agenda. I attended a one-week session that was trying to demystify SDGs and other frameworks. That day was one that changed my life forever.

In the true spirit of the SDGs and leaving no one behind we at Absa have committed to bring everyone along on this journey through training and capacity building. We have committed to train all our colleagues and our supply chain on various principles and frameworks to help them drive the sustainable development agenda. Our focus has been on unpacking the SDGs, the Ten UNGC principles in the areas of human rights, labor rights environment and anti-corruption, the shared value principles among others and how they intersect with business both for colleagues and business owners. We have since trained over 800 colleagues within the bank where 76 of those colleagues are subject matter experts (sustainability champions) and also kicked off a supplier training where the first cohort of 45 suppliers have completed the training. We target to train over 2000 colleagues and over 400 suppliers by year end. Change doesn't happen overnight and it's not an isolated action for a few people.

Transformational change must bring everyone together so each one can play their part. 10 years is a very short time, so if we help people understand the impact of their actions and inaction, I believe we will win the climate change crisis together. But more importantly it's my hope that we are equipping to add more value and what we teach will be put in action either at a personal level or a business level because knowledge that has not been actioned hasn't been gained. Success in the fight for the planet is a series of many steps not one giant leap.

At Absa Bank Kenya we strive to be a force for good by making a difference in the communities which benefits people and the planet. We're part of a truly African brand, inspired by the people we serve and determine to always be brave, passionate and ready so we can make our continent proud.

**What motivates you to keep fighting for the issues you care about?**

The future generation. As a mother, every day I wake up, I want the best for my son. To be a great mum and be able to provide him with all his needs and wants. So fighting for a better future is one of the most important gifts



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we can give to all future generations because without a great planet to live, all other things may be irrelevant. So I fight through driving awareness and equipping people because we cannot compound the impact if we do not equip others. Additionally, I have to keep fighting because we may be the only hope for the future generations.

### **Can you share one obstacle that you had to overcome to achieve a successful career in business?**

Self-doubt. I believe women experience imposter syndrome much more, I don't know why, but I know I have, severally and still do. And it can be crippling if you let it get the better of you. With time, I have mastered the art of identifying that feeling when it's a mile away and stopping it in its track. I have learnt to stop spending so much time focusing on what I could be when I can start from where I am. I have also come to accept that I don't have to know it all from the onset but I need to learn to trust myself with the experience already gained. Finally, it's ok to make mistakes, learn to forgive yourself and move on.

### **Can you share one barrier to women's economic empowerment that you think is overlooked or not adequately prioritized? In your opinion, what needs to happen to accelerate the pace of change?**

I believe one of the major challenges to women empowerment is the cultural aspects especially given the patriarchal society combined with the low levels of education in most communities. With this knowledge more should be done to be able to support these differences may it be employment policies, lending policies, wage policies etc. with the full knowledge of the impact it has on equality, equity, dignity among other things. I believe as individuals we should create awareness at community levels with more focus on communities that are needier, as private sector our ways of doing things should reflect that support in our policies and mentoring initiatives and lastly and more importantly for more impact governments should drive this at a national agenda to implement regulations that should be adopted across all to accelerate change and reduce stigma.

### **What is one piece of advice you would like to share with fellow women that are aiming to shatter the glass ceiling in the business world?**

You are enough. Leadership is a journey where you will keep learning every day. You don't have to have your act together but purpose to get better every day. It's not about perfection, but finding your voice and always being ready to say yes to that opportunity.

### **What is one piece of advice that you would like to share with male leaders?**

I believe women are generally held to a higher standard than men in the same circumstances, both by themselves and by others. So to all the men out there, strive to be the He for She when you have the seat at the table.