

“Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression.”

Nelson Mandela



In 1956, more than 20 000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest the extension of the inhumane pass laws to women. Their iconic cry,

“When you strike a woman you strike a rock!”

has been embedded into South Africa’s history, yet its sentiment remains as relevant and powerful as when it was first chanted 66 years ago.

At Coca-Cola, we recognise that we owe a great debt of gratitude to the women of our past. Women’s Day (and

Women’s Month) has evolved beyond commemorating our history to also celebrating the important role that women now play in moving our society, culture, local industry, and national identity forward. We believe in championing women in the workplace and in the communities in which we do business.

According to Stats SA, South Africa’s labour market remains more favourable toward men. Women only account for 43% of total employment, and of those in managerial positions, 67% were men compared to 33% of women.

“We must fight harder for economic participation of women. Research shows that when women are economically empowered, they invest a sizeable portion of their income into the health and education of their children, and their local economies,” says Phillipine Mtikitiki, Vice President of Coca-Cola’s South Africa Franchise. “Our society will progress significantly when more women actively participate in government, NGOs, local business and the broader economy.”

It is for this reason that Coca-Cola firmly believes that the journey towards an equitable future requires that we – the corporate sector – need to be a force for progression and good. “The advancement of women is built into The Coca-Cola Company’s overall agenda. Currently, 55% of the senior leaders that comprise our Africa Operating Unit extended leadership team are women. Globally, we aim to have 50% female executives by 2030, and continue to make progress in advancing our female talent,” says Mtikitiki.

“The advancement of women is far more than a tick-the-box exercise. At Coca-Cola, we want to ensure that





our female associates are equipped to succeed when presented with an opportunity,” says Patricia Obozuwa, Vice President of Public Affairs, Communications and Sustainability, Coca-Cola Africa.

“The statistics show that companies that are more gender-balanced outperform companies that are not.”

According to Obozuwa, equality in the corporate world requires three things: First, there should be a representation of women at all levels from junior to executive. Second, women must be given the power, agency and skills development to succeed in their roles and make the most of the opportunities afforded to them. Third, women should be financially compensated fairly and receive the same pay as their male colleagues doing a similar job. “It is only when companies take intentional steps to bring about change that we will see results.”

Encouraging women to break out of preconceived social limitations and aspire toward greater achievements and leadership positions needs to start in their formative childhood years. “When I was growing up, my brother and I would have to share the household and garden chores. Sometimes he would have to cook, while I would prune the trees and tidy the yard” recalls Mtikitiki. “It was only when I started working that I realised there were gender stereotypes about what work men and women



should do. One of my mother’s greatest gifts was helping us ignore these.”

“Every leader needs to be a great leader, whether man or woman,” says Obozuwa. “But there is an added responsibility for women to be excellent role models for the other women who want to rise within the system. People need to see what we are doing in order to aspire to get there themselves.”

The attitude toward female advancement is also reflected in the Company’s sustainability initiatives. In January 2022, Coca-Cola Africa Operating Unit and its bottling partners announced the launch of Jamii, a new Africa-focused sustainability platform that houses the Company’s existing and new initiatives. The new platform will focus on three areas: water stewardship, the economic empowerment of women and youth, and waste management. One of the very first initiatives under the platform, Jamii Femmes, focuses exclusively on advancing female entrepreneurs, and spans 10 African countries and is set to impact over 20 000 women.

Mtikitiki concludes,

“Coca-Cola’s impact on people extends well beyond our own business. We are refreshing the world and making a difference. We are doing it sustainably, and with the intention of creating a better-shared future.”

