

Black Leaders Awareness Day: Black women, the concrete ceiling and entrepreneurism

We have all become accustomed to talking about the glass ceiling that women face when trying to get ahead, however, we may not be aware just how this glass ceiling hardens into a concrete one when we factor in the experiences of black women.

Temps de lecture : minute

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This Black Leaders Awareness Day, I am shining an important spotlight on the prevailing concrete ceiling and its impact on black female entrepreneurism.

The concrete ceiling

The concrete ceiling refers to the compounded barriers that black women face at work, such as a significant lack of support and understanding of the unique challenges that they encounter. For example, the effects of colourism (where lighter skin is favoured over darker tones, especially within the same racial group), and stereotypes about black women (eg 'angry black woman'), can affect their treatment in the workplace, hindering career progression and increasing discrimination.

A survey of over 300 BAME women leaders found that over three-quarters felt the leadership style of white women is more positively perceived in the workplace and 80% felt that the communication style of white women is more positively regarded (Different Women, Different Places, The Diversity Practice Ltd, 2007).

Black women can become invisible in efforts to tackle important race and gender issues, because discussions on race often centre black men and conversations on gender centre white women. This might explain why 52% of Black women lose out by as much as £10,000 per year due to wage inequality (*The Impact of The Ethnicity Pay Gap on Black Women in the UK, research report*). A lack of social capital, transparency of promotional opportunities and senior leadership where black women are underrepresented compound this problem.

With this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that recent research from *eBay* discovered that Black British women are the group most likely to start a side hustle - especially in the current climate. According to *JP Morgan*, black women are the fastest growing demographic of entrepreneurs in the U.S., with nearly 2.7 million businesses nationwide.

Black female entrepreneurship

The FSB's report *Unlocking Opportunity: The value of ethnic minority firms to UK economic activity and enterprise*, shows that ethnic minority businesses (EMBs) in the UK contribute £25B of GVA to the national economy. They were almost twice as entrepreneurial as UK-born individuals in the "heartland SME segment of the economy". Based on data covering the four years to 2018, about 17% of all EMBs were led by a woman. This represents about 42,000 EMBs.

The limited visibility of successful black women entrepreneurs can create a lack of role models and mentors who understand their specific challenges and experiences. This lack of representation can affect confidence, access to advice, and guidance that are crucial for entrepreneurial growth.



Read also

[Investing in inspiring Black-run companies, a profile of Black Seed](#)

Racism has led to reduced opportunities and results in ethnic minority-led businesses being denied or taken off contracts, reducing their access to procurement opportunities (Ethnic Diversity in Business Paper by the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry). 53% of black business owners have experienced racism in their entrepreneurial endeavours (Black. British. In Business & Proud Report).

Furthermore, limited access to capital and funding is throttling black businesses starting and growing. Only 13% of black businesses would look for a bank for financial support and just 14% would look to their bank or a relationship manager for business advice and support (Black. British. In Business & Proud Report).

Black women are often penalised by their intersectionality between race

and gender, which has meant that they face difficulty accessing loans, investments, and venture capital. A lack of understanding on the types of business that black women tend to be drawn to (entrepreneurs of necessity) can heighten the threshold for investment.

All businesses require strong networks to survive and black women sometimes find it difficult to access these networks, especially if their industry is dominated by white males. This can reduce access to resources and support such as business training programmes, mentorship opportunities, and access to affordable business services. These resources can contribute to skill development, business acumen, and overall success so improving access is key.

Drilling the concrete ceiling

Black women continue to demonstrate their entrepreneurial spirit and will continue to fuel the growth of black entrepreneurship and the UK economy. Safe places where black women can network and connect with peers, industry experts and potential partners are a must. She should also work to define her proposition and enhance her ability to impact and influence.

FSB National Chairman Mike Cherry remarks

“If we unlock opportunities for ethnic minority entrepreneurs, this will benefit the UK as a whole. We know from this research that EMBs are incredibly innovative, and the Government must harness this by ensuring they are not left out of national strategies and are able to play a vital role as part of a diverse public procurement framework.

“As we look to the immediate economic impact of the pandemic, we know from research by the Enterprise Research Centre that many EMBs have less resilience than the business population as a whole. With a high

proportion of EMBs operating on the 'metaphorical frontline' in their communities, the Government should look to target business support, especially as EMBs traditionally have had lower engagement with mainstream support".

With the right support, black female entrepreneurs can continue to drill into that concrete ceiling and open up real opportunities for growth. Firstly, they must have access to capital. This could be through targeted initiatives such as grants, loans, and venture capital. Breaking stereotypes towards black women and their suitability for investment can make all the difference here.

Training, coaching and mentors can take black female entrepreneurs to the next level of their business if we increase accessibility to these important avenues of education. When black female entrepreneurs have opportunity, it's clear the profound impact they can make.

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