



68TH

Commission on the Status
of Women Sixty-Eight
Session (CSW68)

Position Statement by African Feminists, Women and Girls' Rights and Civil Society Organizations

Priority theme:

Accelerating the Achievement of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of all Women and Girls by Addressing Poverty and Strengthening Institutions and Financing with a Gender Perspective.

Review theme:

Social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

“ *Women in Africa remain the majority of the poor, the dispossessed, the landless, the unemployed, those working in the informal sector and those shouldering the burden of care, yet lacking access to sexual and reproductive care.*”

- African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) 2018-2028

“ *Despite gains, poverty ‘still has a woman’s face. For every 100 men aged between 25 and 34 living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, there are 127 women.’*”

- UN Secretary-General (February 2020)

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Background

The African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET) and NGO CSW Africa, in collaboration with the UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), jointly invited civil society and women's rights organizations to the Africa-wide Virtual Technical Consultation in preparation for the 68th UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) session. These consultations took place from November 3 - 7, 2023, bringing together national, subregional, and regional representatives of women's rights organizations, girls and young women-led organizations, INGOs, UN agencies, and partners working and supporting the work of women and girl's rights organizations in Eastern, Central, Western, Northern and Southern Africa.

This position statement from the consultative meetings provides an overview of the main issues pertaining to this year's theme: “*Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.*” It identifies significant gaps and puts forward recommendations from across African countries.



Preamble

We, African women and girls in our diversities across age, geographical regions, socio-economic status, and disability;

Affirm that this year's CSW68 theme speaks to resounding issues concerning and affecting African women and girls. African countries made major economic gains for 15-20 years since the late 1990s, with average annual growth rates of around 5.5 percent in 2000-2014, and the share of Africans who are poor fell from 56% in 1990 to 43% in 2012.¹ However, the total number of poor began to rise again. While in the 2002-2011 decade, the number of individuals living in poverty decreased from 379 to 365 million, in 2019 it was back up to 389 million.² Poverty is still very much gendered and has devastating gendered consequences for millions of African women and girls. *"Despite gains, poverty 'still has a woman's face. For every 100 men aged between 25 and 34 living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, there are 127 women."* UN Secretary-General (February 2020). If current trends continue, by 2030, more women and girls will live in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa than they do today. The Covid-19 pandemic increased poverty levels globally, especially in Africa. Africa stands out as the most-affected region in the world in terms of loss of income of poor households: the 2021 poverty headcount rate (at \$1.90 purchasing power parity (PPP)/day) is estimated to have increased by 3% because of the pandemic (compared to pre-COVID-19 estimates of poverty levels in 2020.³ The pandemic and its socio-economic fallout have had profound negative impacts on the education, health, employment and well-being of girls and women in Africa, exacerbating existing inequities and hitting women and girls disproportionately harder while presenting emerging challenges. Even before the pandemic, many women in Africa worked in less secure and lower-paying jobs than men, making them more vulnerable to job loss and wage reduction. More women than men reported losing their jobs during COVID-19 in Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Eswatini and South Africa.⁴

Acknowledge that African women's economic inequalities are rooted in the historic exploitation and extraction of Africa's natural resources and labour to fuel an unequal global economy. Inequality between and within countries is both a driver and consequence of crisis. Economic inequality has increased fragility and uncertainty within countries, spurring civil unrest, mistrust and political upheaval. Poverty is a consequence of historic unequal systems of acquiring and hoarding capital, exclusion and discrimination.

Women's and girls' poverty rates shift across the life course. At higher poverty thresholds, adolescent girls often fare worse than adolescent boys. Contributing factors include high fertility rates, single motherhood and early age at marriage.

Women ages 25 to 34 are 1.2 times more likely to live in extreme poverty than men, owing to their predominant role in providing care.⁵ Women are often concentrated in precarious jobs, and they carry

1 <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/is-poverty-growing-again-in-sub-saharan-africa-trends-and-measures-137866>

2 <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/is-poverty-growing-again-in-sub-saharan-africa-trends-and-measures-137866>

3 <https://unctad.org/press-material/facts-and-figures-7#:~:text=Africa%20stands%20out%20as%20the,19%20estimates%20of%20poverty%20levels>

4 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2022/05/25/assessing-the-damage-early-evidence-on-impacts-of-the-covid-19-crisis-on-girls-and-women-in-africa#:~:text=The%20infographic%20shows%20that%20evidence,girls%20disproportionally%20harder%20across%20the>

5 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw68-2024/official-documents>

a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work and are more likely to do unpaid labour in Africa. Women do three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men, with women, on average, doing around 4.1 hours per day compared to men who, on average, do around 1.7 hours.⁶ For women living in rural areas, these figures vary widely, particularly in areas with limited access to basic public services such as energy, water, and sanitation, as women and girls tend to manage these resources and services for daily household consumption.

Women and girls in Africa are vulnerable to extreme poverty because of this greater burden of unpaid care and domestic work, have fewer assets and productive resources than men, earn less than men, and are also likely to be engaged in part-time work. The prevailing conditions where the economic, social, political and cultural value of the care economy – where the provisioning of care goods and services to households and the economy by women – is predominantly invisibilized and without labour protections remains a concern.⁷ For instance, in Ethiopia, Mali, and Mauritius, women spend 22%, 20% and 19% of their day on unpaid domestic and care work, respectively; men spend 8.7%, 2.5%, and 4.8% of their day, respectively, on this work.⁸ The gender pay gap is a glaring symbol of the ongoing struggle for gender equality that persists across industries, borders, and generations. The UN Women (2023) report ‘Why Women Earn Less?’ finds that women earn 21% less than men in the East and Southern Africa region, with substantial variations across countries.⁹

Concerned that Gender-based violence remains pervasive. Femicide is on the rise, with 2023 having recorded the highest yearly number of intentional killings of women and girls in the past two decades. In 2022, around 48,800 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members. This means that, on average, more than 133 women or girls were killed every day by someone in their own family. While women and girls in all regions across the world are affected by this type of gender-based violence, with an estimated 20,000 victims in 2022, Africa has – for the first time since 2013, when UNODC began publishing regional estimates – surpassed Asia as the region with the highest number of victims in absolute terms.¹⁰ Moreover, risks of gender-based violence and femicide are only rising as our world and Africa, in particular, is engulfed in conflict, humanitarian emergencies, environmental and economic crises and displacement.

Domestic violence is a threat to women's safety and contributes to many being stuck in cycles of economic deprivation. Domestic violence is a cost to African economies. In sub-Saharan Africa, more than 30% of women in the region have experienced some form of domestic abuse. Violence against women and girls has a multi-dimensional effect on the overall health of an economy. In the short term, women and girls from abusive homes are likely to work fewer hours and be less productive when they do work. In the long run, high levels of domestic violence can decrease the number of women in the workforce, minimize women's acquisition of skills and education, and result in less public investment overall as more public resources are channelled to health and judicial services. Studies have found domestic violence costs a given economy between 1 and 2% of GDP, further compounding poverty among women and girls.¹¹

6 <https://press.un.org/en/2020/sgsm19962.doc.htm>

7 <https://www.femnet.org/2020/07/african-feminist-post-covid-19-economic-recovery-statement/>

8 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2021.2024675#:~:text=Women%20have%20been%20continuing%20to,spend%208.7%25%2C%202.5%25%2Chttps://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2018/SDG-report-Fact-sheet-Sub-Saharan-Africa-en.pdf>

9 <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/why-women-earn-less-gender-pay-gap-and-labour-market-inequalities-in-east-and-southern-africa>

10 <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/gender-related-killings-of-women-and-girls-femicide-femicide-global-estimates-2022-en.pdf>

11 <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2021/11/24/how-domestic-violence-is-a-threat-to-economic-development>





Child marriage is a major impediment to ending poverty among women and girls. Girls are taken out of school when they marry or enter a union, limiting their opportunity to earn an income and they tend to live in poverty along with their families. Child brides are also more susceptible to domestic violence, health complications, and a lack of decision-making power over their bodies and lives. Child marriage prevalence in Eastern, Western and Southern African regions is projected to grow to 41% by 2030, from 35% currently, highlighting the need to take urgent steps to address child marriage and the grave human rights violations with which it is associated.¹² While the continent has made strides in enacting legal and policy frameworks to protect women and girls from violence, the implementation is too little to make the necessary impact, with governments failing to either enforce or budget for those programs and policies. Importantly, to address cases of violence, a proactive approach is needed, including survivor-centered approaches to restore their dignity, safety and livelihoods, including availing services, programs and products that are grounded in the realities of women and girls in Africa.

Acknowledge that women's unemployment remains a challenge in Africa, with rates higher than men's at 7% and 6%, respectively. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 24% of adolescent girls and young women (15-24) in sub-Saharan Africa were not in education, training or employed, compared to 14.6% of young men. African countries currently face the rise of feminization of migrant labour, including problematic forms of migration, such as the commercialized migration of women and girls as domestic workers and caregivers, often resulting in the trafficking of women for labour and sexual exploitation. Impoverishment and increased unemployment of young women is contributing to desperate migration. Women's labour migration is driven by specific factors in countries of origin and destination that are often related to gender inequalities and gender-based discrimination, which may prevent women from accessing the same economic opportunities as men.¹³

In more than 80% of sub-Saharan African countries, women are more exposed to informal employment.¹⁴ On average, approximately two-thirds of women in East and South Africa are employed

¹² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6924035/>

¹³ <https://publications.iom.int/fr/system/files/pdf/the-gender-dimensions-of-the-labour-migration.pdf>

¹⁴ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_792078.pdf

in the informal sector, predominantly in small-scale agriculture and informal cross-border trading. In West Africa, informal employment, including agriculture, accounts for 92% of the economy, with women's participation reaching 89.7%.¹⁵ Working in the informal or grey economy leaves women often without any protection from labour laws and social benefits such as health, pension, paid sick leave, paid maternity leave or insurance. Women in the informal sector work routinely for lower wages and unsafe conditions, including risks of abuse and sexual harassment. Implementing the International Labour Organization Convention on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (No. 190)¹⁶ still has a long way to go for African member states. Women also face a lack of long-term social protection, which has dire consequences, such as fewer women receiving pensions, leaving a considerable number of elderly women living in poverty. There are other layers of intersectional vulnerability within the informal sector that further marginalize and alienate women and girls from formal employment, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, disability, adolescent girls, gender non-conforming persons, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, sex workers, indigenous communities, religious minorities, women and girls living with HIV and women and girls in contexts of armed conflict and occupation. These overlapping layers exacerbate unemployment and under-employment amongst these communities and keep diverse African women in poverty.

Aware that period poverty affects the lives and opportunities of many adolescent girls and young in Africa. Millions don't have access to and cannot afford mainstream menstrual products, and many lack access to the necessary sanitation and hygiene facilities to manage their menstruation. This has dire consequences on education, health and dignity and ultimately worsens gender inequality. UNESCO reports that 1 in 10 girls in Africa miss school due to period poverty, while others will drop out of school altogether.¹⁷ The impact of period poverty further exacerbates gender and socio-economic inequities.

Concerned that women and girls with disabilities in Africa carry a multiple burden of discrimination when their disability intersects with other existing forms of social inequality. Poverty and marginalization are compounded when gender, age and other social markers intersect with disability, contributing to extreme vulnerability. For instance, in Kenya, Mali and Ghana – approximately one in five of the poorest people have a disability.¹⁸ Stigma, invisibilization and marginalization of women and girls with disabilities have an impact on so many lives, such as a higher risk of HIV and violence. Compared with men with disabilities, globally, women with disabilities are three times more likely to have unmet needs for health care, three times more likely to be illiterate, two times less likely to be employed and two times less likely to use the Internet.¹⁹ Even where there are laws that supposedly provide support for women and girls with disabilities, the intensity of stigma and negative attitudes often make them ineffective.

Lament the food insecurity and the inequalities that uphold and sustain it. African women and girls are more likely than men to experience food insecurity, and the gender gap is growing. Moderate or severe food insecurity among adult women rose during the pandemic from 27.5% in 2019 to 31.9% in 2021.²⁰ Women in food-insecure households face a higher risk of anaemia. In 2023, 10 countries out of 12 hardest hit by the global food and nutrition crisis globally were in Africa, aggravated by ongoing

15 https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Background%20Note_SRS_Africa_Final_v5.pdf

16 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/briefingnote/wcms_738114.pdf

17 <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/our-work/womens-rights/period-poverty>

18 <https://gcap.global/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Paper-3-LNWB-Women-with-Disabilities-in-Africa.pdf>

19 https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/01/GenderEquality_Brief_Final_20191203.pdf

20 <https://www.fao.org/gender/background/en>





gender inequality, deepening a nutrition crisis among adolescent girls and women.²¹ Some experts predict that as food becomes more scarce, young girls may be increasingly vulnerable to gender-based violence and forced child early and forced marriage and unions.

Acknowledge that the climate crisis has had a dire impact on women and girls in Africa, yet the region has contributed negligibly to climate change. The climate crisis impact has hit hardest the region, leading to loss of lives, livelihoods, infrastructure, ecological systems, indigenous knowledge, and ways of being. Gender inequalities, along with other social and economic disparities, intensify vulnerability to climate change impacts, altering the socio-economic outcomes for women, girls and gender-diverse people. Underlying gender inequalities and the failure to take gender issues into account in environmental policymaking put women in Africa in a worse position. As extreme weather events increase in intensity and frequency, women and girls are also exposed to disproportionate hardships, increased work hours, food insecurity and risks of poverty and violence. This plight was highlighted at COP28.

Climate impacts, especially extreme weather events, are affecting the roles of women and men, particularly in rural areas. In some African countries, for example, many men are migrating from rural to urban areas to find employment, leaving women behind in charge of land and the household but not necessarily with the respective legal rights or social authority to do so. An increase in gender-based violence following climate-induced disasters and climate change disproportionately affects women and girls and their ability to perform their everyday tasks as well as escape poverty.²² Yet neither women's unpaid care work nor ecosystem services are taken into account in conventional

21 <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/malnutrition-mothers-soars-25-cent-crisis-hit-countries-putting-women-and-newborn>

22 <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/malnutrition-mothers-soars-25-cent-crisis-hit-countries-putting-women-and-newborn>

economic metrics, both invisibilized in measures of economic progress and prosperity, notably gross domestic product (GDP). More generally, quantitative data on gender and the environment is scarce, hampering evidence-based policymaking. Indeed, women and girls in Africa have been at the forefront of climate activism and can offer unique knowledge and expertise—including indigenous, rural, and young populations—that can support effective climate action. For decades, African women, girls, and feminists have advocated for major emitters to take greater responsibility in climate response actions and financing, as well as for their equal representation in climate negotiations and decision-making spaces.

Recognise the gender gap in access to financial services. Lack of easy access to credit for most women who already form a majority in informal sectors affects their capacity to access markets and new technology and to take advantage of new economic opportunities. There's still low public spending on the agriculture sector, which is dominated by women in Africa, despite an increase in policies towards rural development. Land is a major factor in accessing credit and financial services, yet most women in Africa still do not have land rights.²³

Cultural and economic inequalities leave many African women on the fringes of the financial sector—unable to save, borrow, or build capital. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 37% of women have a bank account, compared with 48% of men, a gap that has only widened over the past several years. The figures are even worse in North Africa, where about two-thirds of the adult population remains unbanked and the gender gap for access to finance is 18%, the largest in the world.²⁴ Feminist economists point out that supply-side constraints such as high interest rates and collateral requirements play a major role in excluding women from the formal credit market. Credit rationing through high interest rates disproportionately discourages women entrepreneurs from applying for loans, while lack of collateral can mean they have less access to loans than their male counterparts. And when they do have access, women typically face more stringent loan arrangements than men. Education is a critical factor for productive female entrepreneurship in Africa. Women with primary education or less are 27 times more likely to have started a business by necessity than those with higher attainment driven by opportunity.²⁵ The number of girls completing secondary school compared to boys remains disproportionately low. At 42 %, less than half of adolescent girls complete secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa, and there has yet to be any progress at all in closing this gap in the past 20 years.²⁶ While Africa leads the world in terms of the number of female entrepreneurs, they largely start a business out of necessity, tend to be smaller and meet more barriers in securing support and investment.

Frustrated that more than \$1.1 trillion in external debt is hanging over African countries. This has implications for the struggle to end gendered inequalities and poverty in Africa. Private Western creditors take a big chunk of this debt repayment and have refused to suspend repayments even after the devastating effects of the pandemic in Africa. If no intervention is done, from 2023 to 2029, 41% of the external debt repayments of lower-income countries – like many in Sub-Saharan Africa will be owed to Western private creditors.²⁷ Implying that much of the savings made by debt-repayment suspension from other creditors would be redirected into repayments to private creditors, severely undermining relief measures. Debt servicing in African countries is almost three times higher than

23 https://www.pep-net.org/sites/pep-net.org/files/typo3doc/pdf/Reports/R3_policy_article_Kagumire.pdf

24 <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2020/03/africa-gender-gap-access-to-finance-morsy>

25 <https://www.uneca.org/stories/new-eca-report-shows-tackling-educational-attainment-gaps-can-uplift-african-women>

26 <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/empowering-adolescent-girls-africa-through-education#:~:text=In%20education%2C%20a%20higher%20proportion,still%20dismally%20low%20at%2042%25>

27 <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/27-october/news/uk/cancel-debt-burdens-of-low-income-african-countries-government-urged>



education spending, six times health spending, 22 times social spending and 236 times more than climate adaptation spending. Many Africans currently will live in the grip of austerity measures that mainly impose cuts to public spending - education, health and social protection - often alongside increases in tax revenues, specifically via regressive or indirect means rather than progressive taxation such as wealth. In such an unequal global political and economic system, African women's struggle out of poverty will take longer.²⁸

Aware that increasingly fragile and protracted conflicts in Africa have a debilitating impact on women's lives and economic liberation. From the Horn of Africa to the Sahel region, Mozambique to the Great Lakes region, women's economic liberation is thwarted by growing instability and conflicts. Around 30 million internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum-seekers live in Africa, representing almost one-third of the world's refugee population.²⁹ East Africa hosts 10% of global refugees while ranking among the 20 least developed countries.³⁰ Migrant women, women in conflict-affected and recovering countries lack economic opportunities necessary for survival, remain confronted by daily violence in their homes and communities, struggle to cope with heavy burdens of care and dependency and continue to endure the emotional and physical scars of conflict, without support or recognition. Women's rights advocates urge that with fragile and conflict-affected countries becoming home to growing proportions of people living in extreme poverty, the convergence of the security and development agendas should prompt a re-examination of economic support and empowerment for women affected by conflict.³¹ Women are overwhelmingly and disproportionately affected by both conflict and poverty, resulting in lower levels of education than their male counterparts. In turn, this leads to low levels of literacy, numeracy and rights awareness amongst women and can be used to reinforce or justify discriminatory attitudes in both conflict and post-conflict settings.

Limited and disrupted access to markets- both in terms of physical access (e.g. destruction of roads or actual markets) and disruptions to production chains and economic sanctions in conflict areas exacerbated women's income inequalities. Conflicts also heighten women's vulnerability to economic abuse, reflected in increased limitations on women's freedom of movement and vulnerability to exploitation in markets (e.g. unfair rental prices for market stalls).³² Still, women play a significant role in everyday economic survival and, sustenance and recovery in conflict-affected areas. Experience and evidence show that women are more likely to spend their incomes on family needs, including health care and education, thus making a proportionately larger contribution to post-conflict social recovery. Conflict-affected communities that experienced the most rapid economic recovery and poverty reduction had more women reporting higher levels of empowerment.³³

28 https://www.eurodad.org/end_austerity_a_global_report

29 <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/where-we-work/africa>

30 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/east-africa-hosts-10-global-refugees-while-ranking-among-20-least-developed>

31 <https://wps.unwomen.org/building/#:~:text=Women%20in%20conflict%2Daffected%20and,of%20conflict%2C%20without%20support%20or>

32 <https://www.womenforwomen.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/WEEinConflict2021.pdf>

33 <https://wps.unwomen.org/building/#:~:text=Women%20in%20conflict%2Daffected%20and,of%20conflict%2C%20without%20support%20or>

Key Recommendations

To regain economic momentum and accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Maputo protocol, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), African Union Agenda 2063 and other major instruments and conventions, African countries must be more deliberate in unlocking the contribution of all their people – especially women and the youth – who have been largely left behind. This can be tackled through African member states taking measures to address women's poverty as an urgent priority, reforming the financial architecture and financial processes to be gender positive, and creating a conducive environment for and investing in women's rights institutions and organizations. Commitment to the following would begin to undo gendered inequalities that uphold poverty among African women and girls.

Addressing poverty

Strengthen gender equality policies to address poverty with proper accountability. Even though there's been some progress on gender equality in the domestication of landmark international and regional frameworks and agreements, it leaves much to be desired. Gender inequalities remain prevalent and deeply rooted in Africa. Women and girls face ongoing human rights violations and limited access to education, healthcare, employment, decision-making, leadership, and economic resources. Member states must further commit to integrating all these landmark agreements into all development programs and not stand alone.

Member states should implement strategies geared towards reducing gender inequalities by strengthening women's legal and property rights, promoting women's economic empowerment, and enhancing knowledge management and gender quality capacity building. This calls for gender mainstreaming and transformative approaches by improving coordination within and among state institutions to strengthen the implementation of plans, policies and service deliveries to women and girls. In addition, enhance member state responses and ensure accountability, availability and affordability of Internet and digital infrastructure, particularly in rural and informal settlements.

Support and enable sex-disaggregated data collection. Member states need to commit to investing in collecting sex-disaggregated data to inform policy and service delivery to women and girls in all diversities, paying attention to those facing multiple marginalizations. We can only fix what we know, but what we know is often limited by the data we have, what we can access and the level of disaggregation. Data on who occupies or is close to positions of privilege, bearing in mind different intersections and who has access to resources that enable one to manoeuvre or to fail in the capitalist-patriarchal systems we live under, is key. In the commitment to leaving no one behind, member states need evidence-based policy and service delivery around poverty, unpaid labour, violence against women and girls, child early and forced marriage and unions, and gender-responsive budgeting, among others. This is only possible with accurate data.

Strengthen social protection of women and girls: Member states and policymakers should further commit to closing these gaps by extending coverage and strengthening social protection floors, including as part of the 2015 *Addis Ababa Declaration on Transforming Africa through Decent Work for Sustainable Development* and the African Union's *Agenda 2063*. The COVID-19 pandemic has added further momentum to the regional social protection agenda, with many countries rolling out or scaling up social protection mechanisms to protect people against the economic and social fallout of the crisis. It is paramount to take advantage of this momentum. Evidence shows that social protection can narrow gender gaps in poverty rates, enhance women's access to personal income, and provide a lifeline for poor and disadvantaged women like single mothers, the elderly, widowed women, women and girls with disability, adolescent girls and young women. Therefore, member states should implement social protection mechanisms that are gender-responsive, considering how both the current crises and long-standing multiple systems disadvantage or benefit diverse women and girls to cushion them from external shocks while promoting access to quality and affordable social services through gender budgeting and planning. This could include risk reduction policies such as training programs to reduce income loss, childcare policies to enable women to re-enter the labour market, or risk mitigation policies such as enhanced access to financial services to help cope with adverse events. Moreover, evidence-based cash transfer programmes can play a pivotal role in keeping girls in education and reducing child marriage. Relevant government institutions must also mobilize sufficient resources to close the gender financing gap, estimated at US\$ 42 billion for African women across business chains.³⁴

Urgently address food security and climate justice centering women and girls. Member states should build sustainable and inclusive infrastructure and ensure access to food and nutrition, especially in situations of livelihood loss resulting from conflict, climate disasters, and humanitarian crises. The Africa Continent Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) has the potential to be a boon for women's employment in the region should it be implemented in a gender-transformative manner, mainly because most African women migrate within the African continent. Increased intra-African trade can bolster food security and reduce Africa's vulnerability to global shocks, but currently, such trade is hampered by poor infrastructure, among other things. Improvements in roads, transportation, cross-border trade environments, and removing immigration barriers can reduce regional trade costs and improve conditions for women, who make up the majority of informal cross-border traders across Africa. Climate justice interventions must take on the Feminist Climate Justice Framework for Action launched at COP28, which calls for creating a world where women's rights, labour and knowledge are accorded their rightful value (recognition), where economic resources and opportunities are equitably shared (redistribution) and where collective decisions are made with the inclusion of all voices (representation). Tackling climate change in a way that would have a major reduction in poverty rates among African women requires acknowledgement of historical injustices and accountability for past violations and securing future generations. Reparatory justice is central to climate justice, as is gender. Reparatory justice is at the heart of both racial justice for people

³⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/Discussion-paper-Eff-ect-of-cash-based-interventions-on-gender-outcomes-en.pdf>

of African descent and global sustainable development.³⁵ It's urgent that climate solutions center the plight and needs of women and girls and take gender issues into account in environmental policymaking.

Adopting gender-responsive budgeting tools and principles. Member states should increase investment in social infrastructure (health, education, social protection, etc.) to strengthen women and girls' capabilities, to recognize, reduce and redistribute women and girls' unpaid care and domestic work and violence against women, amongst others. This includes taking into account ILO's 5R Framework for Decent Care Work³⁶: Recognize, Reduce, and Redistribute unpaid care work, and Reward and Represent paid care work by promoting decent work for care workers and guaranteeing their representation, social dialogue, and collective bargaining. Indeed, in most African countries, gender budgeting has remained at the conceptual level. Even where there is political will to implement gender budgeting initiatives, the capacity at the technical level to implement gender budgeting is lacking. Regional mechanisms reiterate the call for non-discriminatory practices for women and girls, including budgeting.

Furthermore, Governments need to use gender-budgeting tools and mechanisms for budget accountability and address fiscal biases against girls and women. This can be done by allocating budgets to reduce intersectional socioeconomic inequalities, adopting tax justice measures, and integrating gender and human rights impact assessments into national budgets and economic policies to eliminate poverty and inequality. The national budgets should mainstream gender in all spheres of the budget, especially relating to health, education, violence against women and girls and social protection.

Reforming financial architecture

Assessing financing gaps to implement anti-poverty policies and programmes. Extending social protection coverage is a matter of urgency for member states in order to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, facilitate access to health care and education, promote gender equality and achieve decent work for all. That is why closing the social protection gap lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, target 1.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) urges countries to "implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors ..." Globally, before the COVID-19 crisis, social security contributions represented 5.1 percent of the GDP of developing countries. If all countries that are currently below the expected average coverage/contribution trends were to raise their contributions to the expected level, it could reach 6.3 per cent of GDP. The expected net increment in fiscal space creation through this channel would be a gain of 1.2 per cent of GDP, which appears to be an achievable goal over the next ten years.³⁶

Promoting women's access to credit. Member states should ensure greater investments in access to finance working capital for many African women entrepreneurs so their

35 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/forums/forum-african-descent/sessions/session1/state-ments/2023-01-23/Michael-McEachrane-Reparatory-Justice.pdf>

36 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---soc_sec/documents/publication/wcms_758705.pdf

businesses can blossom, paving the way toward a better future for everyone. Africa's gender gap in access to finance has had an impact on the continent's social and economic progress. Today, African women dominate the agriculture sector, yet women farmers lack access to financial services, which limits their ability to invest and expand and access to modern technologies to raise their productivity. With current levels of access to finance, women cannot diversify their farms, grow high-value crops, or invest in assets such as livestock. Rising sectors like the fashion industry, dominated by women whose small businesses connect a vibrant cotton-textile-garment industry, produce \$31 billion annually.³⁷ Without access to financing, women-owned enterprises and entrepreneurs struggle to tap into higher-value areas of the fashion industry. Promoting women's access to credit will address the gender gap and poverty.

Reform international financial institutions to address gender inequality. Global economic governance has not kept pace with changes in the global economy, the rise of the global south and other geopolitical changes (including the end of colonialism and the recognition of the human right to self-determination). Despite repeated commitments to meaningfully reform and adapt the system towards the representation of developing countries in international financial institutions, regional development banks and standard-setting bodies have remained largely the same. African women's economic position is directly impacted by inequalities between countries and hegemonic power upheld by international financial and trade systems. Change is long overdue, and African women cannot wait any longer. To eliminate poverty, we must transform the governance of global financial institutions, and member states should call for:

- An updated IMF quota formula to reflect the changing global landscape.
- Reform voting rights and decision-making rules to make them more democratic, for example, through a double majority rule. This voting process necessitates a majority of votes based on two distinct criteria. The technique is commonly employed to necessitate robust endorsement for any initiative deemed to be of significant relevance.
- Delink access to resources from quotas. Instead, access should be determined by both country income and vulnerabilities (through a multi-vulnerability index or “beyond gross domestic product (GDP)” indicators).
- Support the implementation of the UN-led Tax Convention to close tax loopholes to address the estimated \$480 billion lost by countries globally annually in potential tax revenue, largely owing to aggressive tax avoidance by the wealthiest companies and individuals, which could otherwise be redirected into key public services, such as education and health services—especially sexual and reproductive health services.³⁸ The tax resolution passed at the UN General Assembly on 22 November 2023 marks a significant milestone in breaking down a global economy that was primarily established by imperialism and continues to exploit resources from resource-rich countries in the continent.

³⁷ <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/022/0057/001/article-A015-en.xml>

³⁸ https://www.taxjustice.net/cms/upload/pdf/Africa_Tax_Spotlight_5th_edition.pdf

The convention is crucial to dismantling an international financial architecture. It has the potential to address outflows and recover the billions of dollars in lost tax income needed to build societies and economies that care for both people and the planet. It also means all governments have a voice in decision-making about global tax issues.³⁹

- Boost developing countries' voices and representation on international financial institution boards and improve institutional transparency with specific attention to illicit financial flows.
- Strive for gender-balanced representation in all the governance structures of these institutions, particularly at the leadership level, as well as considering the financial needs of women and girls living in poverty in the African continent.
- Enhancing international and regional cooperation to create fiscal space for social development for women and girls, including through the fulfilment of official development assistance (ODA) commitments to developing countries.

Analyzing fiscal policies and advocating for a reform of the tax system. Member states should make more progressive and gender-responsive tax policies and systems. Studies have shown that tax systems are not gender-neutral because they have differential impacts on men and women. Underlying socio-cultural beliefs about gender roles and responsibilities influence fiscal policies. As such, tax systems can be tools to ameliorate, exacerbate, or reproduce existing gender inequalities. Studies reveal that understanding the household as a unit headed by a male breadwinner has created explicit tax biases in the personal income systems of some countries.⁴⁰ With the renewed interest and commitment to increasing domestic revenue in most African countries, policymakers need to be cautious not to overburden poor women and marginalized communities through taxation. Recent studies emphasize that the reliance on indirect taxes as the major tool for domestic revenue mobilization (ibid), in particular VAT, is regressive and tends to burden women from lower economic status, further exacerbating poverty.

Addressing sovereign debt through debt cancellation and the introduction of sovereign debt resolution. Heavy debt build-ups and the risk of sovereign debt distress among developing countries pose a severe challenge to economic growth, poverty alleviation and sustainable development. For debt restructuring processes to be fairer and more efficient, member states should call for greater inter-creditor equity and fair burden sharing, especially between official and private creditors. In addition, increase the transparency of debt data and debt contracts to facilitate more expedient creditor-debtor negotiations and allow both parties to identify which bonds are at risk of holdout or litigation tactics; and prepare realistic economic forecasts that incorporate downside risks to facilitate earlier gendered identification of cases in which large write-downs should be necessary.

Promote and invest in digital literacy, access, and use of technology initiatives. Especially as it relates to trade facilitation, market access, information and knowledge management,

39 <https://actionaid.org/news/2023/historic-un-tax-vote-convention-major-win-public-services#:~:text=A%20historic%20tax%20resolution%20tabled,Convention%20on%20International%20Tax%20Cooperation.>

40 Source: (ibid).

accountability, early warning, and justice systems and ensuring the availability and affordability of Internet and digital infrastructure in rural and informal settlements. Sub-Saharan Africa has among the widest gender gaps in mobile internet use in the world, with over 190 million women not using mobile internet services (a 37% gender gap)⁴¹. Today, digital skills and tools are increasingly essential to access services such as health, education, social protection, and financial services. Moreover, digital technologies are a gateway to create much-needed jobs on a continent with a growing workforce: in sub-Saharan Africa, an estimated 230 million jobs will require digital skills by 2030. To compete in the digital economy, countries will need to prioritize education and build the digital skills of their workforce or risk being left behind. This holds especially true for women, whose employment is critical to spur economic growth, increase personal agency and improve health and education outcomes for themselves and their families.⁴²

With a digital public infrastructure approach, member states can advance a range of development objectives and respond better during crises. Although each piece of digital public infrastructure can have an impact on its own, the interaction of this infrastructure can unlock the most significant impacts in countries and across the SDGs. Digital public infrastructure can accelerate global economic growth, support the transition to sustainable and green economies, and grow accessibility and public trust in institutions- all key to women's economic justice.

Investing in women's rights institutions. Member states should commit to a conducive environment to enable women's organizing and holding states and non-governmental institutions accountable through established channels and platforms. Noting the increase in attacks and the shrinking of civil spaces in many countries that disrupt the work of women's human rights defenders and empowerment programmes that are key to citizens knowing their rights and demanding better, member states should commit to building a safe and protected space for women's organizations from the grassroots to the national levels acknowledging their contributions of civil society to both economies and human freedom.

Member states should ensure that women participate at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. This will require deliberate efforts to revise electoral laws and increase women's representation in the political sphere, as well as mandatory provisions to ensure gender equality in private sector structures. Integrating gender into workplace policies will require incorporating parental leave to ensure that both men and women exercise family responsibilities while effectively engaging in work life. Deliberate efforts are needed to address barriers to women's integration and career progression through talent outreach, job search, grievance and complaints mechanisms and childcare benefits policies.

Consultation with women and girls/young women's led organizations. Member states should ensure this takes place at local, national and regional levels in discussions and

41 <https://blogs.worldbank.org/africacan/accelerating-gender-equality-lets-make-digital-technology-work-all#:~:text=Sub%2DSaharan%20Africa%20has%20among,a%2037%25%20gender%20gap>.

42 Source: (ibid)

decision-making on policy, processes, and financing for gender equality. Aspiration 6 for the African Union's Agenda 2063 calls for an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children. Member states should adhere to the Agenda 2063 call for all citizens of Africa to be actively involved in decision-making in all aspects.

With member states being committed and adhering to the above, we can begin to imagine an Africa where women and girls are free from poverty.





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