

Africa Beijing +30 parallel report



The African Women's
Development and
Communication Network



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

- ACHPR** – African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights
- AU** – African Union
- AfCFTA** – African Continental Free Trade Area
- BPfA** – Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- CAADP** – Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
- CEDAW** – Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- CRPD** – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- CSOs** – Civil Society Organisations
- EAC** – East African Community
- ECCAS** – Economic Community of Central African States
- ECOWAS** – Economic Community of West African States
- FEMNET** – African Women’s Development and Communication Network
- FGM** – Female Genital Mutilation
- GBV** – Gender-based Violence
- GEWE** – Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment
- GMO** – Gender Monitoring Office
- ICT** – Information and Communications Technology
- ILO** – International Labour Organization
- IPCC** – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- MFIs** – Micro Finance Institutions
- NAP** – National Action Plan
- NCDs** – Non-Communicable Diseases
- NCPWD** – National Council for Persons with Disabilities
- NHRC** – National Human Rights Commission
- PWDs** – Persons with Disabilities
- SADC** – Southern African Development Community
- SDGs** – Sustainable Development Goals
- SDGEA** – Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa
- STEM** – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
- UCDW** – Unpaid Care and Domestic Work
- UN** – United Nations
- UNSCR** – United Nations Security Council Resolution
- WPS** – Women, Peace, and Security
- WROs** – Women’s Rights Organizations

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Rosebell Kagumire, the author of this Parallel report.
We appreciate your efforts in amplifying the perspectives of African women and girls.

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FOREWORD

Thirty years ago, in Beijing, the world pledged to dismantle the structures that keep half of humanity from realising its full potential. African women were at the centre of that historic moment, shaping an agenda that insisted the realities of the Global South could not be an after-thought. Today, as we reflect on three decades of promise and progress, the Africa Beijing +30 Parallel Report tells an unvarnished story: victories worth celebrating, gaps that still yawn wide, and new headwinds that demand sharper, bolder action.

From Addis Ababa to Abidjan, more than 300 feminists rural women, women and girls with disabilities, youth-led collectives, women and girls in who have ben displaced from their countries, activists, market traders, women and girls living with HIV, women and girls in trade unions and academics co-authored the analyses you will read. Their voices, experiences and data challenge the notion that “average progress” is enough when millions of lives are still defined by the margins.

The neoliberal economic model, spiralling debt, the climate emergency and a virulent anti-rights backlash are not footnotes; they are the context in which every policy must now operate. The report shows how these forces intersect to keep African women over-represented in informal, low-paid work, under-represented in decision-making, and first in line for the violence—physical, economic or digital—that accompanies instability. With this report, we offer a road map, not a lament, calling for the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care; for stand-alone femicide legislation; for gender-transformative climate finance; and for the ratification of the African Disability Protocol.

With this report, we wish to remind governments, regional bodies, the private sector, and civil society that the distance between aspiration and achievement is measured in budgets, political will, and timelines, not rhetorical flourishes.

To the governments of Africa: this is your evidence base and your score-card. Let it guide the budgets you table, the trade agreements you sign and the peace negotiations you broker.

To multilateral and bilateral partners: move from pledges to predictable, flexible funding that trusts African women’s organisations to lead.

To the private sector: align profit with purpose by embracing gender-responsive business practices that value care work, close pay gaps and respect environmental limits.

And to the women and girls whose testimonies power these pages: your audacity, expertise and organising have already bent history. May this report amplify your demands and galvanise a continent and a world toward the justice you have so long envisioned.

The Beijing Declaration was a foundation, not a finish line. Our task now is to urgently, collectively, and irreversibly build upon that foundation until every African woman and girl can claim her right to live, lead, and thrive.

Let this foreword be a tribute to the work done and a clarion call for the work ahead.

In Solidarity,

Memory Kachambwa

Executive Director

FEMNET – The African Women’s Development and Communication Network

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a parallel report by African Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) on the progress of gender equality in Africa, 30 years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). Findings were derived from regional review processes, national reports, and consultations with diverse stakeholders, including civil society, governments, international partners, academia, unions, political parties, private sector representatives, youth-led organizations, and disability advocacy groups. National gender institutions collaborated closely with civil society and international bodies, ensuring intersectional and grassroots approaches. Marginalized groups such as rural women, persons with disabilities, and youth were actively engaged.

The report assesses advancements across the BPfA's 12 critical areas: poverty, education, health, gender-based violence (GBV), armed conflict, economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, environment, and the girl child. While African governments have enacted significant policy and legislative reforms and socio-economic initiatives, systemic barriers and emerging threats persist. The neoliberal imperialist economic framework entrenches inequalities, leaving millions of African women impoverished amid worsening economic and climate crises.

African women urgently demand renewed commitment to intersectional, bold, decolonial gender justice, calling for structural transformations to dismantle deeply entrenched oppression, ensuring economic justice, addressing digital exclusion, and countering the global rollback of women's rights amidst rising anti-rights movements that threaten hard-won gains.

In the economy, women face persistent economic inequality, which in turn affects their progress in other human rights indicators. Women experience occupational segregation, limited access to finance, weak enforcement of gender equity laws, and disproportionate poverty rates. In sub-Saharan Africa, women predominantly occupy informal employment with inadequate social protections. Climate and economic instabilities disproportionately impact women in agriculture and informal trade, exacerbating disparities. Despite adversity, African women continuously strive for economic empowerment.

High debt servicing in African countries negatively impacts public services spending, significantly affecting women's rights advancements. International financial systems and austerity measures further entrench inequalities, undermining women's economic positions, making the struggle to reduce inequality significantly harder. Women in Africa spend substantially more time on unpaid domestic and care work than men. Governments must recognize unpaid domestic and care work as economically vital, integrating it into policies and redistributing responsibilities equitably. While women's participation in entrepreneurship, microfinance, ICT, fintech, and social protection has improved, access to credit, digital skills, and bureaucratic navigation remain significant challenges.

Education and training advancements have increased girls' access, particularly in primary education. However, COVID-19, harmful norms, GBV, poverty, and conflict

have disrupted progress, causing high dropout rates at secondary and tertiary levels. Rural women face compounded illiteracy challenges. Underrepresentation in STEM fields persists, with women accounting for only 20% of STEM graduates. Digital education and AI-driven learning gaps reinforce the digital gender divide.

Gender-based violence remains pervasive. An estimated 36% of African women experience GBV in their lifetime, with legal frameworks often lacking effective enforcement. Africa accounts for over 144 million of the global 230 million women subjected to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Conflict-related sexual violence has intensified, notably in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and the Sahel. Femicide rates in Africa remain among the world's highest.

In women's health, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, cervical cancer, and mental health remain critical issues. Sub-Saharan Africa represents 70% of global maternal deaths. Limited contraception, comprehensive sexuality education, and safe abortion access undermine reproductive rights. Rising anti-rights movements further threaten sexual and reproductive health policies.

On Women in Power and Decision-Making, traditional gender norms and tokenism hinder real decision-making power. Political representation has stagnated at 26% in African parliaments, with only a handful of countries achieving gender parity in governance. Structural and cultural barriers, including political violence against women candidates, hinder meaningful participation in leadership roles. Despite progress in cabinet appointments, women remain significantly underrepresented in high-level decision-making positions. Genuine shifts in political power remain elusive.

Prolonged armed conflicts disproportionately impact African women through displacement, heightened sexual violence, and economic disenfranchisement. Implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and National Action Plans remains inadequate and underfunded. Gender-responsive transitional justice mechanisms fail to address post-conflict gender-based violence adequately.

Media remains a powerful tool for gender equality advocacy, providing platforms for women to challenge stereotypes and participate in public discourse. However, limited female representation in media ownership and decision-making restricts narrative influence, perpetuating gender stereotypes. Online harassment disproportionately targets women, silencing digital participation. Addressing these challenges is essential for the media's transformative potential. Addressing these challenges is crucial for harnessing the transformative power of media to advance gender equality in Africa.

To address these persistent challenges to the realisation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), urgent and transformative action is needed:

- **Economic Empowerment:** Strengthen social protection, promote equal financial access, recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, expand women's land rights; increase access to financial services, and ensure gender-responsive budgeting and economic policy reforms.
- **End GBV and Femicide:** Enforce existing laws, introduce explicit femicide legislation, enhance survivor-centered services, leverage technology against violence, and address technology-facilitated GBV.
- **Education Reform:** Expand public education spending, integrate gender-sensitive and decolonize the curricula, and invest in digital literacy programs targeting women and girls. Enhance inclusive and equitable educational policies, improve infrastructure, promote STEM fields, and tackle socio-economic and cultural barriers. Bridge the Digital Gender Divide by increasing women and girls' access to ICTs, digital literacy, and digital skills training.
- **Health Equity:** Increase funding for health services, expand access to sexual reproductive health services including safe abortion, and implement universal health coverage. Prioritize funding for women's health and address healthcare disparities affecting marginalized groups.
- **Women's Political Participation:** Promote gender quotas in government and political parties, criminalize political violence against women, and enhance leadership training for young women. Tackle patriarchal norms that hinder women in leadership.
- **Conflict Prevention and Response:** Integrate gender perspectives in peace processes, ensure accountability for sexual violence in conflict, and allocate resources for the meaningful inclusion of women in peacebuilding and specific budgets for women in conflict settings. Enforce the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.
- **Secure Economic Rights:** Strengthen civic education and legal enforcement of women's land rights, increase access to finance for women-led businesses, introduce subsidized childcare services, conduct gender impact assessments, developing gender-responsive labor policies, and strengthening social protection for women and girls particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups like women with disabilities and the elderly. Create decent employment opportunities, strengthen care systems, challenge restrictive social norms, and expand the fiscal space needed to tackle gender inequalities in the world of work.

- **Human Rights of Women:** Legal advancements have strengthened women's human rights frameworks, but enforcement is inconsistent. Discriminatory laws and lack of access to justice persist. Strengthen judicial systems, enforce gender-responsive legislation, and ensure access to justice, particularly for marginalized women.
- **Gender Equality and Media:** Promote gender-sensitive media policies, increase women's media leadership roles, combat online gendered abuse and disinformation, and support media literacy programs for critical content analysis.
- **Women and Environment:** Integrate gender perspectives in environmental policies, enhance women's land rights, and invest in women-led climate resilience initiatives. Ensure women's representation in climate negotiations.
- **The Girl Child:** Strengthen laws against harmful practices like child marriage, enhance girls' education and health service access, and address socio-economic barriers through targeted interventions.
- **Institutional Mechanisms:** Weak institutional frameworks and inadequate funding hinder gender equality progress. Monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms remain insufficient. Strengthen institutional mechanisms, increase funding for gender-responsive initiatives and women's rights organizations, and ensure robust accountability and monitoring frameworks. Foster political commitment, strengthen governance and funding mechanisms, and increase regional cooperation to implement gender equality commitments effectively, especially at a time of tremendous backlash.
- **Intersectionality:** Implement intersectional policymaking and programs addressing compounded vulnerabilities of women facing intersecting discrimination due to disability, race, sexual orientation, migration and socio-economic status.

Achieving gender justice requires sustained political will, intersectional approaches, and accountability, prioritizing diverse women's rights fundamental to sustainable development. To secure the rights of women and girls in Africa, governments and stakeholders must commit to structural transformations that address deep-seated inequalities and ensure robust implementation through inclusive, intersectional pathways. The Beijing +30 review urgently calls for coordinated, bold actions to fulfill Africa's gender equality commitments by 2030.

1.1 Methodology and Scope

National gender institutions led the Beijing +30 review process in North Africa in collaboration with civil society organizations, government ministries, and international partners. Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, and Sudan adopted participatory approaches involving academia, unions, political parties, and private sector representatives. Public consultations and workshops were conducted to incorporate diverse perspectives, particularly those of marginalized groups such as rural women. However, direct consultation with young people was not always explicitly detailed in national reports, except in Algeria, where the High Council for Youth ensured gender-balanced representation in discussions.

Ten national reports were submitted from West Africa, including those from Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Seven of these countries also completed online questionnaires. The review process engaged various stakeholders, including government ministries, civil society organizations, and international agencies. Notably, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Niger, and Nigeria had not submitted reports at the time of review. The process in this region emphasized grassroots involvement, mainly through national gender institutions and feminist networks, which conducted focus group discussions and national validation workshops to ensure that diverse voices were included in the review process. Governments collaborated with youth-led organizations, national gender sector working groups, and disability advocacy groups to amplify the voices of marginalized communities in Eastern Africa. In Kenya, the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) played a key role in the review process, ensuring the concerns of PWDs were addressed. Rwanda introduced a youth and gender monitoring framework through the Gender Monitoring Office (GMO) to track progress and promote accountability. Additionally, organizations like GROOTS Kenya mobilized grassroots women and community leaders, ensuring rural perspectives were integrated into policy discussions.

In Southern Africa, the review process focused on structured, multi-phase research to analyze gender equality trends, particularly among youth and adolescents. Governments accessed official Beijing +30 national reviews via UN Women and affiliated repositories to compile comprehensive databases of reports. A thematic framework was designed to assess education, health, political participation, gender-based violence, and economic inclusion among young people. Countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, and Mozambique participated in consultations that brought together state institutions, feminist organizations, and youth-led groups to assess gender-responsive policies and investment in social protection.

Pan-African Consultation and Position Statement

The Beijing+30 Africa Regional CSO Consultation, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 30-31 October 2024, convened over 300 African women, girls, and gender-diverse persons from all 54 African member states. Participants, including representatives from women's rights organizations, civil society groups, and feminist networks, gathered to assess the progress of implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). Organized by FEMNET in partnership with the African Union Commission and UN agencies, the consultation prioritized intergenerational dialogue, feminist movement-building, and policy advocacy. The process included voices from Africa's five sub-regions and the diaspora.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action marked a pivotal moment in the global feminist movement. Endorsed by 189 UN Member States, it set an ambitious framework for achieving gender equality in twelve critical areas: poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, environment, and the girl child.

African feminist movements played a key role in shaping the agenda, ensuring that the realities of women in the Global South were not sidelined. However, despite its progressive vision, the declaration lacked binding enforcement mechanisms, leaving much of its implementation dependent on political will rather than legal obligation. Three decades later, the promise of Beijing remains partially fulfilled. The Beijing +30 Africa Regional Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Parallel Report shows that while progress has been made—more women are in leadership, legal protections against gender-based violence have expanded, and girls' education has improved—systemic barriers persist. The neoliberal economic model, which the Beijing framework did not directly challenge, continues to entrench inequalities, leaving many African women in precarious labour conditions.

Additionally, the rise of anti-rights movements and worsening economic and climate crises threaten hard-won gains. Feminist movements across Africa continue to resist these setbacks, demanding accountability from governments and international institutions while amplifying the voices of marginalized women.

As we mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, we call for a renewed commitment to gender justice—one that is bolder, more intersectional, and decolonial in its approach. Beyond policy commitments, structural transformations are necessary to dismantle deeply embedded systems of oppression. This includes ensuring economic justice, addressing digital exclusion, and resisting the rollback of women's rights globally. The Beijing Declaration was a foundation, but the feminist struggle continues, led by movements determined to shape a future where women's liberation is non-negotiable.

2.2 Situational Analysis of Women's Rights in Africa

African governments have made notable strides toward gender equality—enacting policy and legislative reforms, promoting economic empowerment initiatives, supporting women's political participation, investing in reproductive health, and addressing gender-based violence. Countries have built on frameworks such as the AU Agenda 2063, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), and the 2004 AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa to push for the advancement of women's rights in all regions.

Additionally, regional frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development present critical avenues for accelerating gender equality. AfCFTA includes gender as an express priority alongside sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development¹ and can empower women economically by facilitating access to broader

markets, promoting women's participation in cross-border trade, and addressing structural barriers in the trade sector. Meanwhile, the SADC Gender Protocol² provides a legally binding comprehensive framework to promote gender parity across governance, economic empowerment, education, health, and the fight against gender-based violence, aligning with international human rights standards.

The 2023 Africa-wide Gender Index score by the African Development Bank Group and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa³ has improved to 50.3% (where 100% represents gender equality) from 48.6% in 2019. This indicates that, across the continent, African women enjoy barely half the social, economic and representation opportunities available to men. Africa has made significant progress towards gender equality in the social dimension with long-term improvements in girls' access to education and certain health outcomes for women and girls despite some setbacks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The empowerment and representation dimension has slightly improved since 2019 but from a very low base. In the economic and business dimension, the 2023 gender equality figures show a decline over 2019, as rising economic stress across the continent has disproportionately affected women. There are wide variations across countries, with gender index scores ranging from 30.9% in Guinea-Bissau and Libya to 88.3% in Namibia. Lesotho's gender index score also exceeds 80%, while there are 10 countries in the 60-80% range. The social dimension also considers health outcomes. While life expectancy remains higher among women, they continue to face inequality in various areas. Maternal mortality rates are far higher in Africa than in other regions. There is a substantial gender gap in HIV infection rates linked to inadequate awareness of sexually transmitted infections among adolescent girls and limited access to preventative contraception. Teenage pregnancy and early marriage remain pervasive and increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to adverse maternal and child health outcomes. The prevalence of female genital mutilation/ cutting has also increased. Recent rises in food insecurity, conflict and economic stress, all of which are associated with higher rates of gender-based violence, raise fears that this trend may be reversed.

Emerging challenges, such as rising regression and gaps in implementation, funding, and accountability, threaten progress in the advancement of key rights like reproductive rights, freedom from violence, education and worker's rights. Intersectional, inclusive approaches and stronger cooperation are needed to address emerging challenges such as climate change, technological disparities, and the gendered impacts of crises. Furthermore, the slow progress has been attributed to persistent and new internal factors such as weak institutional arrangements, limited financial resources, negative stereotypes and social norms, illicit financial flows and persistent challenges relating to the availability of gender statistics.⁴ Persistent violence in many parts of the continent makes it extremely difficult to reach the promises of the Beijing Declaration.

In Central Africa, many countries continue to grapple with deeply rooted gender inequalities. High rates of child marriage, gender-based violence, and economic marginalization remain significant barriers for women and girls. Limited access to education and healthcare further exacerbates these challenges, preventing women from fully participating in economic and social development. While some countries have introduced legal protections and policy reforms, enforcement remains weak, and cultural norms continue to hinder progress. For example, in the Central African Republic, 61% of women aged 20-24 were married or in a union before age 18. As of February 2024, only 11.4% of seats in parliament were held by women.

North Africa has made substantial advancements in women's rights. Tunisia has a high female enrollment in education, significant improvements in maternal health, and increased political representation under a 50% gender parity law. Morocco has strengthened gender equality through strategic frameworks and institutional reforms, ensuring gender-responsive national development programs. Egypt has prioritized women's economic empowerment, expanding access to microfinance, improving labour force participation, and increasing women's representation in business and government, though cultural norms and rural-urban disparities persist. Algeria has seen growth in women's employment, particularly in civil service and key sectors, with strong placements in temporary employment programs. In South Sudan, conflict has eroded a lot of earlier gains; there's a need to support efforts to end conflicts and incorporate gender perspectives into national security and peace efforts, implementation of the Anti-GBV Bill (2023), Family Law Bill (2023)⁵, and the implementation of targeted programs to enhance girl child participation in education.

While North African countries have made significant progress, with many translating international commitments to gender equality into constitutional, legislative, and political reforms, socio-economic and political indicators reflect limited progress in achieving women's rights. For example, women's political participation in the Maghreb is mainly below the 30% threshold recommended by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and only a few of the elected women in the region have access to decision-making processes and bodies⁶.

In many countries, family laws restrict women's rights; their movement and access to land rights remain a challenge to economic empowerment. Women's political participation is low, and few elected women have access to decision-making. Conflict, extremist groups, and political turmoil in some countries have taken thousands of lives, displaced millions and pushed many women and girls into poverty. Young women and girls are vital to sustaining gender equality efforts, yet their voices remain underrepresented.

The West Africa region faces persistent structural barriers to women's rights, including discriminatory customary and religious laws that limit land ownership, inheritance, and decision-making power. While countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal have implemented policies to promote gender equality, enforcement remains inconsistent. Burkina Faso has the fifth highest child marriage rate in the world, with 1 out of 2 girls marrying before the age of 18 and 1 in 10 before the age of 15. Studies show that marriage is the second reason for girls dropping out of school after financial constraints.

Economic inequalities, high unemployment rates for women—especially in the informal sector—and the burden of unpaid care work continue to hinder progress. Political participation remains low despite legislative reforms to encourage women's leadership. Additionally, violent extremism and conflicts in parts of the region have exacerbated the vulnerability of women and girls, increasing the risks of displacement, exploitation, and gender-based violence.

The East African region has made commendable progress in gender parity, with countries like Rwanda and Ethiopia implementing strong policies that have increased female political representation. Rwanda, in particular, has one of the highest percentages of women in parliament globally. Kenya and Uganda have improved women's access to education and economic opportunities. Still, barriers such as gender-based violence, restricted land rights, and limited control over natural resources persist. Across the region, women's leadership in civil society movements has pushed for legal reforms and held governments accountable for gender equality commitments. However, the shrinking civic space and increasing conservatism threaten these gains.

Despite progress across all regions, deep-rooted gender inequalities remain largely unchanged. Patriarchal norms continue to advantage men and boys, reinforcing discrimination against women and girls. Women's land rights, insecurity, shrinking civil society spaces, and increasing violent extremism further compound these challenges. The rollback of women's rights due to growing fundamentalism, conservatism, and intersecting forms of discrimination has contributed to rising femicide rates and barriers to public participation.

The economic crisis, particularly in the informal sector, has led to massive job losses for women. At the same time, the burden of unpaid domestic and care work continues to fall disproportionately on them. Women across the world undertake the vast majority of unpaid care work – spending approximately three times more hours per day than men on unpaid care and domestic work⁷. While inadequate inattention to care policy and the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work has stalled gender equality in every country globally, African women and girls living in poverty, particularly those facing multiple discriminations (e.g. based on race or ethnicity), experience the greatest time poverty and opportunity costs due to unpaid care⁸. According to the ILO's recent report on the care economy, the most common profile of an unpaid carer in Africa is a woman aged between 15 and 54, with few economic resources, several children, a low level of education, often with health problems or disabilities, who simultaneously works for pay or profit, mostly in the informal economy, and receives little or no formal care support⁹.

Women continue to carry the disproportionate impacts of both the climate and debt crises. Climate change is a leading migration driver in Africa and a disruptor of rural and urban livelihoods and ecosystems, eroding efforts towards women's empowerment¹⁰. In March 2022, African countries adopted a common position to integrate gender into the climate change action agenda.

More women are migrating independently for work, education, or to meet the needs of their families. According to the 2022 Africa Migration report, the number of female international migrants in Africa increased by 69% between 1990 and 2020¹¹. While migration offers new pathways to women's empowerment, the heavily commercialized migration of women and girls as domestic workers and caregivers has exposed the gendered inequalities in opportunities in many African countries and also opened a new frontier of challenges to women's safety and advancement. Human rights violations of millions of African women now working in poorly regulated sectors with no proper labour laws and standards, both on the continent and abroad, remain a challenge that requires urgent measures.

For instance, while migration and labour laws are in place in most of West Africa, labour-related provisions only apply to men and women migrant workers working in the formal economy. In contrast, most migrants, both women and men, work in informal employment¹². A gender-responsive approach in labour migration policies is not widely applied; specific dimensions relevant to women migrants, such as access to health care, sexual and reproductive health, maternity leave, and protection against violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, are needed. Legal and policy progress will help promote women migrant workers' rights and equal opportunities in the context of the migration process. Women in most regions are responsible for 80% of food production, and more than 60% of all employed women work in agriculture, yet they have fewer land rights¹³.

African women with disabilities have long been agents of change, demonstrating resilience and leadership in the face of overwhelming obstacles. Despite facing multiple layers of discrimination based on their gender, disability and other intersecting identities, they have made significant contributions to their families, communities and economies. Still, African

women and girls with disabilities continue to face extraordinary barriers to equality. They are disproportionately affected by poverty, subjected to violence, and consistently excluded from education, employment, and decision-making spaces. These barriers are deeply rooted in ableism, sexism, and the ongoing failure to meaningfully incorporate the lived experiences of women with disabilities into laws, policies, and development programs despite the existence of international and regional frameworks designed to protect their rights. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa have set ambitious standards, yet implementation remains weak.

While African nations have made meaningful progress toward gender equality, sustained efforts are necessary to address the root causes of discrimination, ensure youth inclusion, strengthen economic empowerment, and enforce gender-responsive policies. A more equitable and inclusive Africa requires transformative action that dismantles structural inequalities and secures the rights of women and girls across all spheres of life.

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE 12 CRITICAL AREAS

3.1 Women and Poverty

Eradicating poverty in all its forms is one of the twelve critical areas under the Beijing Platform for Action. Women across Africa continue to bear the brunt of gendered economic inequalities, particularly in unpaid domestic work, limited access to productive resources, and exclusion from economic decision-making¹⁴. 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. 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. While in 2019, 478 million people lived in extreme poverty, it is estimated that in 2021, 490 million people in Africa live under the poverty line of 1.90 PPP/day, and this is 37 million people more than what was projected without the pandemic¹⁵.

Women’s unemployment remains a challenge, with most women being informally employed. The International Labour Organization (ILO) indicates that approximately 89% of women’s employment in Sub-Saharan Africa is informal¹⁶. The economic crises offset by the pandemic have persisted and deepened these disparities. Climate change further hinders poverty reduction, with disasters causing millions of households to remain in or fall into poverty. UN Women’s estimates, in a worst-case climate scenario, by 2050, as many as 158 million women and girls may be pushed into extreme poverty as a direct result of sustained increases in global temperatures. Sub-Saharan Africa, with a projected increase in female poverty of 93 million and an increase in female food insecurity of 105 million, is anticipated to be among the regions most impacted¹⁷. Gender inequalities, along with other social and economic disparities, intensify vulnerability to climate change impacts, altering the economic and social outcomes for women, girls and gender-diverse people. Underlying gender inequalities and the failure to take gender issues into account in environmental policymaking make the state of women in Africa worse.

In most of Africa, women have less than 20% of full access to agricultural land. While 70 to 90% of all wealth in Africa is generated through land, less than 10% is owned by women. The gap is most significant for sole ownership: only 13 per cent of women in Sub-Saharan Africa claim sole ownership, compared to 36 percent of men; 38 percent of women in Sub-Saharan Africa report owning any land (alone or jointly), compared to 51 percent of men (Gaddis, Lahoti, and Li 2018)¹⁸. Women’s empowerment is closely linked to land issues; owning and controlling assets, including land, is vital for economic mobility, bargaining power within the household, and resilience¹⁹. Legal systems and patriarchal gender norms often discriminate against women, resulting in obstacles for women to acquire and retain land. In Nigeria, only 8.2 percent of women report having sole ownership of land, compared to 34.2 percent for men, while in Ethiopia, the share of women with sole ownership of land is at 14.4 percent compared to 32.3 percent for men (Gaddis, Lahoti, and Li 2018). Many discriminatory laws, often with colonial roots, limit women’s legal rights to land and customary land tenure, the most common form of land tenure, which anchors land ownership on traditional rules and practices, and cultural and social norms may prioritize male inheritance or deny women decision-making power in the transfer of marital property²⁰. In South Africa, for instance, colonial legacies still dictate how land is owned, where formal agriculture and farmland ownership remain in the hands of a few white farmers²¹.

Despite the introduction of several legal and social reforms aiming to guarantee women's land rights, many disparities persist, making it essential to pay particular attention to the promotion of equity and equality. The feminization of poverty is still a reality, especially in rural areas. For instance, in Tunisia, women are disproportionately represented in agricultural and small trading sectors, where they often receive meagre wages, perform strenuous physical labour, lack social protection to ensure decent working conditions, have limited access to quality healthcare and usually lack social security²².

A gender gap in access to financial services remains. 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 world²³.

Debt servicing in African countries is almost three times higher than education spending, six times health spending, 22 times social spending and 236 times more than climate adaptation spending. Many Africans currently live under 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. In such a global political and economic system, African women's struggle out of poverty will take longer.

Poverty affects women in Africa in tandem with existing socioeconomic exclusions, creating multiple layers of intersecting vulnerability. The experience of poverty and poverty alleviation are impacted by women and girl's age, race, class, gender, sexuality, disability for LGBTI women, adolescent girls, gender non-conforming persons, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, sex workers, indigenous communities, religious minorities, women and girls with disabilities, women and girls living with HIV and women and girls in contexts facing war, armed conflict and occupation. Women with disabilities face significantly higher rates of poverty compared to their male counterparts and women without disabilities. In Kenya, the share of persons with high support needs who are multidimensionally poor is 43%, while 35% of persons without disability experience multidimensional poverty²⁴. These overlapping layers of intersectionality exacerbate unemployment and under-employment in these communities and keep diverse African women in poverty. This calls for approaches that are intersectional and responsive to the specific marginalization.

Progress

- Women's participation in entrepreneurship and microfinance has expanded, improving economic prospects. At the level of small, medium, and micro enterprises, the cost of women's economic empowerment projects from the Ministry of Social Solidarity in Egypt amounted to EGP 4.1 billion. There were 1.3 million beneficiaries, most notably the *Mastoura* program, which yielded more than 28,000 beneficiaries²⁵.
- Increased social protection initiatives have been implemented in countries like Tunisia, where the National Rural Women Integration Plan has improved rural women's access to resources. Initiatives targeting low-income families have reached 70% of female-headed households in rural areas, offering a critical lifeline for impoverished women.
- Initiatives like the *Rai'dat* program²⁶ in Tunisia have supported over 4,463 women's projects, fostering economic independence and creating jobs.

- Botswana’s government has implemented socio-economic programs, particularly for women. The *Temo Letlotlo* Programme supports unemployed youth in rain-fed agriculture, and 56.8% of microscale farmers benefit from it. The *Ipelegeng* Program, a community-based public works scheme, has a 69% female beneficiation component. Additionally, the Miss RADP Programme funds young women entrepreneurs²⁷.
- Tanzania’s monthly pension for elderly women increased from Sh. 20,000 in 2017 to Sh. 50,000 by 2023. By the end of the 2023/24 financial year, they accounted for 57% of the total pension beneficiaries in Zanzibar²⁸.

Challenges

- Women spend significantly more time on unpaid domestic and care work than men, exacerbating time poverty and restricting their participation in economic, social, and political life. This structural inequality undermines women’s economic empowerment and limits their access to financial independence. In Morocco, women’s participation in the labour force remained 19.8% in 2023, compared to 68.3% for men²⁹.
- Despite legislative progress, social norms restrict women’s access to land, inheritance, and financial resources. For example, only 25% of rural women in Tunisia can access banking services.
- Economic shocks from the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted women, particularly those in informal employment, deepening financial instability.
- Climate change and economic instability continue to hinder poverty reduction, with disasters pushing households into extreme poverty.
- More quantitative data on gender and the environment is scarce, hampering evidence-based policymaking.
- According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) report on evidence of gender inequality in poverty, female-headed households in Uganda had higher rates of multidimensional poverty, about 50% in 2016/17 and 2019/20, respectively, compared to 42% and 39% for male-headed households³⁰.

Recommendations

- Recognize and reduce unpaid care work by strengthening social protection schemes and integrating care work into economic policies.
- Expand women’s access to economic resources through legal reforms ensuring land and inheritance rights and supporting women-led enterprises.
- Increase investments in social protection and public services to provide universal coverage, regulate privatization, and ensure essential services remain accessible.
- To dismantle institutionalized gender inequality, we must challenge systemic barriers by centering women and marginalized groups in economic and social justice reforms.
- Women, in all their diversity, must have equal access to environment-related decision-making for solutions.
- Intensify the African Disability Protocol ratification campaign and urge all member states to ratify and implement it.

- Deepen regional integration to generate more opportunities for women in trade.
- Tackle structural gender inequality and ensure gender-responsive implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)
- Tackle climate change to address poverty rates among African women by recognizing historical injustices and accountability for past violations and advancing reparatory justice in environmental policymaking.
- Informal cross-border trade plays a key role in food security and functions as employment of last resort for many vulnerable people. Improved mobility under the AfCFTA promises to make a big difference.

3.2 Women and the Economy

The Beijing Platform for Action called for removing structural barriers to women's empowerment and equal access to economic resources, yet persistent challenges continue to hinder progress, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Some of the key barriers are historic global systems of extraction, unequal resource distribution, a male dominated economic system, and a minority of women's opportunities to create wealth, which are supported by antiquated social institutions and cultural alignments that support discrimination³¹.

Access to affirmative government funds remains challenging due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and patriarchal customs that continue to deny women land ownership, perpetuating gender inequalities in resource access. These findings reveal ongoing gender disparities in economic empowerment, financial inclusion, and access to resources across various African regions. Key structural barriers include bureaucratic hurdles, lack of collateral, and financial illiteracy, which prevent women from accessing credit and government funds. Additionally, heavy domestic responsibilities restrict women's ability to engage in income-generating activities, while patriarchal norms and socio-cultural practices hinder their land rights and labor force participation. Furthermore, the digital gender divide and limited access to banking services disproportionately affect rural women, limiting their ability to leverage economic opportunities.

There's been an increase in women's participation in industries like information and communications technology (ICT), financial technology (FinTech), e-commerce, and social impact businesses like health and Agri-tech. For instance, across the region, it is estimated that roughly 30% of businesses are owned by women, with some intra-regional variations. In 2021, Botswana and Uganda were ranked first and second in the world for the percentage of women business owners; however, in the majority of Africa, female entrepreneurs' knowledge assets and financial access were poor considering the access to higher education and knowledge, access to finance, women's economic inclusion and government support³².

However, young women in Africa face more obstacles to participation in the labour market. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, the unemployment rate for young women is, on average, higher than that of young men. 1.5 percentage points³³.

African women's economic position is directly impacted by inequalities between countries and the hegemonic power upheld by international financial and trade systems. Austerity measures continue to threaten women's role in the economy in Africa, making the struggle to reduce inequality significantly harder. For instance, during the COVID-19 crisis, many

governments in East Africa increased their spending on health and social protection. But now, they have long-term plans to slash public spending to reduce their budget deficits and debt levels³⁴.

Gender norms can restrict women's economic opportunities by limiting their access to information and networks, jobs, and assets and justify gendered occupational segregation that often relegates women to jobs that are deemed less valuable and thus pay lower wages³⁵. Unpaid care work that women and girls carry out remains largely unrecognized. Governments and economic institutions should recognize Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) as vital to society and the economy by integrating it into policies, budgets, and data collection. Efforts should focus on reducing UCDW to enable women's participation in education, work, and public life, redistributing responsibilities equitably among genders and sectors. Additionally, unpaid carers must be included in decision-making on budgets, planning, and policies to ensure UCDW is considered in infrastructure and services.

Harmful practices, such as child marriage, impact women's participation in the economy by denying them access to education and skilling opportunities, trapping millions in poverty. Gender norms influence perceptions about the appropriate roles that men and women should play in society, at home, and in the economic sphere, thus shaping women's access to employment in male-dominated sectors.

Macroeconomic policies are not gender-neutral. Financial systems, national budgets, and private investments impact men and women differently. Integrating gender into macroeconomic and structural reforms, like gender budgeting, and examining the role that fiscal and other policies can play in closing gender gaps are key. The heavy debt burden has ramifications for countries' commitment to gender equality and women's economic participation.

Sub-Saharan Africa made significant progress in gender-related legal reforms to remove laws affecting women's economic rights and towards greater gender equality, which is essential for ending extreme poverty. Several countries, such as Benin, the Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Malawi, Senegal, and Uganda, enacted positive legal changes in 2022³⁶. The reforms ranged from introducing paid paternity leave to prohibiting the dismissal of pregnant women, removing restrictions on women's work, and introducing provisions mandating equal remuneration for work of equal value.

Although many countries have signed the International Labour Organization (ILO) treaties on gender equality, implementation is slow. For instance, in many countries, there are not enough protections for pregnant workers or equal pay for equal work, and few countries have ratified the Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190), which prohibits violence and harassment in the workplace. Addressing these barriers is essential to achieving gender equality, fostering inclusive economic growth, and ensuring sustainable development for all.

Progress

- Liberia (87.4%), Botswana (85.4%), and Eswatini (84%) are among the economies with the highest economic gender parity and the highest gender parity in the labour force participation rate³⁷.
- In countries like Kenya, Burundi, and Rwanda, large-scale youth and women's economic empowerment programs, such as the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF), the Youth Investment Bank (BIJE), the *Ejo Heza* Savings Scheme and the Hustler Fund, have supported female entrepreneurs.
- Ethiopia increased female participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to 52.3%, while microfinance projects supported thousands of youth-led agribusinesses³⁸.
- There is growing acknowledgement of unpaid care work, with some countries initiating support measures.
- The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in November 2023 to begin work on the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, which aims to reform the international tax system to be fairer and more inclusive. The resolution, sponsored by the Africa Group, passed with a majority vote, marking a historic moment for Africa and the global fight for tax justice.
- Botswana (38.5%), Uganda (38.4%) and Ghana (37.2%) ranked as the countries with the most women business owners globally³⁹.
- In Egypt, the number of women on boards of public enterprise sector companies increased by 22.2%, from 35 women in 2021 to 44 in 2022⁴⁰.

Challenges

- Rural women remain vulnerable due to inadequate access to consistent social safety nets.
- While policies exist to promote gender equality in work and finance, enforcement mechanisms remain weak in many countries. In Morocco, women's labour force participation remains at 19.8% compared to 69.6% for men. In Tunisia, only 25% of rural women have access to banking services, limiting their ability to be employed or grow businesses.
- Women face discrimination and complex procedures when accessing government funds.
- Domestic responsibilities continue to prevent women from engaging in economic activities.
- Women in remote areas lack access to digital skills and tools, limiting their opportunities.
- Socio-economic status was selected as one of the top 4 factors limiting the inclusion, participation and enjoyment of rights by women with all types of disabilities - except women with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.

- Women face sexual harassment in the workplace, which hinders their participation. Gambia's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) conducted a national study on sexual harassment in the workplace in 2021, which found that 85% of the 123 respondents acknowledge the existence of sexual harassment in the workplace, and 74% have experienced it personally⁴¹.

Recommendations

- Strengthen civic education and legal enforcement of women's land rights, upholding joint titling and inheritance laws. Ensure secure land ownership for women small-scale farmers.
- Increase access to finance for women-led businesses; encourage a socially responsible and accountable private sector for women's empowerment. Streamline loan application processes, improve transparency, and introduce financial literacy training for women.
- Introduce subsidized childcare services, promote shared household responsibilities, and recognize unpaid care work in economic policies.
- Expand digital literacy programs, invest in ICT access for women, and provide targeted entrepreneurship training in e-commerce.
- Conduct gender impact assessments before implementing austerity measures to prevent exacerbating gender disparities.
- Develop gender-responsive labour policies, improve transportation safety, and create job opportunities in non-traditional sectors.
- 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.
- Enforce equitable distribution of wealth generated from resource extraction to uphold women's and local communities' economic rights.
- Strengthen social protection for women and girls: 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, such as single mothers, elderly women, widowed women, women and girls with disabilities, and young women and girls.
- Governments and economic institutions should make visible the contribution of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) to society and the economy through policies, budget allocation and the collection of quantitative and qualitative data to inform policy responses. Increase representation to ensure meaningful inclusion of unpaid carers in national, community and household decision-making.
- Develop and implement gender-responsive bilateral labour migration agreements or Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs). Develop and strengthen international migration and mobility policies that encompass commitments and actions to promote equality of treatment and opportunities, access to health care, sexual and reproductive health, maternity protection, and protection against violence and harassment, including sexual harassment.

- Support legally binding UN-led Tax Convention, close tax loopholes, and increase debt data and contracts' transparency.
- Adopt tools for gender-responsive finance mechanisms and harness monetary policy to advance gender equality. Incorporate women's and girls' needs, realities and demands into finance, trade, debt, governance, technology and innovation⁴².

3.3 Education and Training of Women and Girls

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) recognizes education as a fundamental human right and a critical tool for achieving gender equality. Africa has made great strides in advancing access to education for women and girls. For the first time in 2024, the African Union declared the *Year of Education* to foster efforts to implement the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), which was adopted as the framework for transforming education and training systems on the continent. Over the past decade, countries have made considerable progress in accelerating gender equality, promoting girls' education, championing legal reforms, improving livelihood opportunities, and developing more inclusive financial systems⁴³. There have been significant improvements in primary education enrollment for girls, narrowing the gender gap at the primary level.

However, much remains to be done. For instance, sub-Saharan Africa still has the world's largest out-of-school population⁴⁴, and gaps remain wider at secondary and tertiary levels. In all regions, more girls are out of school at the secondary level than boys. North Africa historically faced high illiteracy rates among rural women due to early marriages and lack of educational access. When gender-related factors intersect with other disadvantages, such as poverty, remote location, and disability, their adverse effects on education are aggravated. Even though a higher proportion of adolescent girls are in school than ever in Sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage of those who complete secondary education is still dismally low at 42%. Approximately 80% of children in sub-Saharan Africa are still not being taught in a language they speak at home, which significantly hampers learning outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented disruption of education services in Africa, affecting educational attainment and learning outcomes. Current economic pressures and conflicts have seen many countries fall short of overcoming persistent disparities in education outcomes and learning. Social conditioning, gender-based differences in parental expectations and education-related investments, child marriages and early childbearing, child labour, gender-based violence, and discrimination⁴⁵ further limit educational opportunities for girls, particularly in rural areas. Wars and insecurity have led to school closures, leaving many young people, especially girls, out of school. From the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Sahel countries, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Mozambique, millions of children are out of school. In West and Central Africa alone, more than 14,000 schools were closed, mainly due to conflict, affecting 2.8 million children as of September 2024⁴⁶.

More than one in four young people in Africa – around 72 million – are unemployed, in education or in training (NEET). Two-thirds of them are young women⁴⁷. Overall, the literate population has been slowly growing on the continent, and with a wide gender gap, adult female literacy remains an issue⁴⁸. By 2020, an estimated 72.5 percent of males in

Africa were literate, while females were at 59.4 percent. The lack of basic reading, writing and numeric skills traps women in cycles of poverty, leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and has impacts on the health of families⁴⁹. Adult education holds immense importance for African countries' social and economic development.

The Beijing Platform emphasizes the need to eliminate gender disparities in education and improve women's access to vocational training, science, and technology. However, gender gaps persist in technical education, with women representing only 20% of STEM graduates and vocational training opportunities being mainly limited to traditional sectors. While there's growing interest and incentivizing of girls and women in STEM, the gender gaps persist due to entrenched cultural perception that STEM is a male domain and that boys and men are just 'better' at math and science, limited early intervention to get girls and young women excited about STEM, domestic pressures on girls, early marriage and child pregnancy, and few STEM female role models⁵⁰. While Artificial intelligence (AI) holds promise to revolutionize various sectors, including education and offering unprecedented opportunities for innovation, efficiency, and economic growth for women, barriers remain for women and girls to achieve digital literacy, including lack of education, access, cost and technology-assisted gender-based violence⁵¹. The lag in AI education for women and girls particularly undermines gender equality in the digital age, limiting their opportunities for empowerment, entrepreneurship and employment in high-growth sectors of the future.

Realities of exclusion vary, with disability and gender intersecting. A 2020 report by the GSM Association highlights that women with disabilities have among the lowest rates of mobile and smartphone ownership and the lowest level of awareness of mobile internet⁵². The Beijing Platform calls for inclusive education for persons with disabilities (PWDs). Still, many education systems across Africa fail to provide adequate support for PWDs, further marginalizing them from economic opportunities.

In Tunisia, literacy programs targeted rural women, leading to a literacy rate of 85% among women compared to 91% among men. However, gender disparities in higher education and technical training remain a significant concern. Addressing these issues is essential to ensuring that young women have the skills and knowledge needed to secure better futures, as emphasized by the Beijing Platform's commitment to lifelong learning for women and girls.

Progress

- Gender disparities in primary school enrollment were reduced in Tunisia, with near parity achieved (48% female vs. 52% male).
- In Egypt, by 2024, female education completion rates reached 85.3%, up from 43.9% in 2014.
- In Cape Verde's 2020/2021 preschool education (4-5 years), the total admission rate was 90.8% (92% for girls and 90% for boys). In compulsory primary education, the net enrolment rate (6-13 years) was 91.5% (91.5% for girls and 91.5% for boys)⁵³.
- In Burundi, there are expanded scholarships for 48,500 female students in STEM and technical courses.
- In Comoros, the *Msomo na Hazi* (Education and Work Program) benefits over 2,000 youth annually by integrating young women into vocational training.

- In Ethiopia, female enrollment in Technical and Vocational Education and Training increased to 52.3%, ensuring education access for conflict-affected youth.
- In Rwanda, over 80,000 girls are enrolled in STEM courses with support from global technology firms.
- In Tanzania, 61,367 youth (59.6% girls) were trained in ICT and renewable energy.
- In Uganda, the National Bursary Program allocates 60% of scholarships to girls and PWDs pursuing STEM careers.
- UNFPA supported the Botswana Association for the Blind and Partially Sighted (BABPS) in implementing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) for over 130 young people with visual impairment in four Educational Institutions serving young PWD⁵⁴.
- In Algeria, female enrollment in higher education is 63%, and women outperform men in graduation rates in many fields.
- The African Union declared 2024 a Year of Education, highlighting the key Continental Education Strategy (CESA), which recognizes the need for gender-transformative approaches.

Challenges

- In North Africa, 33% of rural girls drop out before completing middle school due to socio-economic constraints and early marriage. In Tunisia, 90% of girls complete primary school, but only 65% transition to secondary education.
- In South Sudan and Somalia, frequent school closures due to insecurity prevent consistent enrollment.
- In Burundi, limited vocational training centers in rural areas reduce access for disadvantaged youth.
- In Tunisia, women represent only 20% of STEM graduates, highlighting barriers in technical education and digital literacy.
- In Seychelles⁵⁵, gender gaps in academic performance remain a concern, particularly affecting boys' education outcomes.
- The five lowest-scoring countries globally in Educational Attainment are Chad (66.7%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (68.3%), Angola (74.3%), Guinea (73.2%), and Mali (77.6%).
- Progressing to secondary and tertiary education is still challenging, with female enrollment shares ranging between 17.9% in Chad and 44.1% in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Guinea, and Mali, the share of women in tertiary education is not higher than 11%. In contrast, men's enrolment share is nearly double or more in all countries except Angola⁵⁶.
- In the Central African Republic, the literacy rate among young women is still low, with only 30% of them (aged 15-24) being literate.

Recommendations

- African governments must consider equity in their policy planning and budget considerations to ensure equitable access to high-quality education for all ages.
- Explore the potential of emerging technologies such as AI in the development of personalized learning tools, translation aids, literacy assessments, and adaptable literacy programmes tailored to individual needs,
- Use online learning platforms and applications which have revolutionized adult literacy programmes, offering interactive and captivating experiences that cater to diverse learning needs.
- Enhance programming and accountability by collecting data disaggregated by gender, age, and disability and performing intersectional data analysis through the National Bureau of Statistics.
- Develop curriculums explicitly addressing the needs of adult women, considering their life experiences, local context, and practical literacy skills required for daily life.
- Incorporate modules on women's health, rights, financial literacy, and community engagement within literacy programs.
- Allocate dedicated funding for female adult literacy programs, particularly in marginalized areas.
- Promote gender-sensitive curriculums and teacher training.
- Provide financial incentives like scholarships, stipends, or childcare support to encourage women's participation in literacy programs.
- Partner with local organizations to address poverty and access to basic needs, which can hinder education attainment
- Address deep-rooted attitudes about and behaviour towards women, which is the foundation for a conducive environment for girls and young women to access quality education.
- Address the quality of education through gender-transformative education measures and decolonizing educational systems.
- Develop gender-sensitive teaching and policies for safe school environments to protect girls from school-related gender-based violence.

3.4 Women and Health

Gender inequity, poverty among women, weak economic capacity, and sexual and gender-based violence, including female genital mutilation (FGM), are major impediments to the amelioration of women's health in Africa. Because of social (gender) and biological (sex) differences, women and men experience different health risks, health-seeking behaviour, health outcomes and responses from health systems⁵⁷. While life expectancy remains higher among women, they continue to face inequality in various areas. Women in many rural communities frequently travel long distances to access care. For many women,

the poor quality of care remains a big determinant of poor health outcomes. Even when services are available and affordable, they are often lacking in addressing gender and cultural sensitivities for women.

Women in Africa are more likely to die from communicable diseases (e.g. HIV, tuberculosis and malaria), maternal and perinatal conditions, and nutritional deficiencies than women in other regions. Maternal deaths remain a leading cause of death of women and girls of reproductive age. The region has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world, with over 200,000 women and girls dying from pregnancy-related complications in Africa every year. Compared to 2017, in 2020, the maternal mortality ratio increased in 17 countries and decreased by 30⁵⁸. Women seeking sexual and reproductive health care often face physical and verbal abuse, abandonment, detention, coercion, and denial of pain relief and the presence of birthing companions in healthcare facilities⁵⁹. Countries with high maternal mortality ratio in the region are South Sudan, Chad, and Nigeria⁶⁰. There's been progress in some countries; for instance, Tanzania has reduced maternal mortality by 80% in seven years, from 556 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2016 to 104 per 100,000 in 2022⁶¹.

The face of HIV/AIDS in Africa is an adolescent girl or young woman aged 15-24. In 2023, there were 4000 new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24 years every week globally. Of these, 3100 infections were in sub-Saharan Africa, almost two-thirds (60%) in eastern and southern Africa⁶². Longstanding gender inequalities, discrimination and poverty deny many women and adolescent girls' economic autonomy, deprive them of control over their sexual lives, and expose them to the risk of emotional and bodily harm, increasing the risk of HIV. HIV prevalence among adolescent girls and young women is more than three times higher than among their male counterparts.

Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women worldwide, with Africa having the highest regional incidence and mortality rates -18 out of 20 high-burden countries are found in Africa⁶³. One in five African women experience a mental health condition at some point in their lives. (World Health Organization, 2022) with depression being the most common mental health condition, affecting 5.9% of women in Africa. Depression following childbirth affects 20% of mothers in low- and lower-middle-income countries. Women are more likely to experience depression and anxiety than men. Yet, 85% of women in Africa who suffer from depression and anxiety disorders do not have access to treatment, and most countries lack mental health policy, information and services.

Sexual and Reproductive Health services, including contraceptives, safe abortion, and maternal healthcare, remain a major challenge, particularly for women living with HIV, disabled women, sex workers, and migrant women. Universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services in sub-Saharan Africa stands at just 28%. Despite the increase in contraceptive use over the past 30 years, many women in all regions still do not have access to modern contraceptive methods- one in four women who wish to delay or stop childbearing do not use any family planning method. The surge in anti-rights movements around SRHR, with increasing legal restrictions, disinformation campaigns, and conservative pushbacks on reproductive autonomy across several African nations⁶⁴, threatens decades of progress in gender equality and reproductive health. Emerging and new threats to women's health rights in Africa should be stemmed in time.

Access to comprehensive sexuality education is a precondition to enabling reproductive autonomy for all – and to unlocking all the attendant social and economic benefits as it is

associated with delays in the age of first sexual intercourse, an increase in the utilization of contraceptive methods and a reduction in adolescent pregnancy rates⁶⁵. Yet, anti-rights movements are threatening its implementation in Africa. In Africa, many women are still denied this right to bodily autonomy- the right to make decisions about your body without violence or coercion. Nearly half of women in 57 developing countries are denied the right to decide whether to have sex with their partners, use contraception or seek health care⁶⁶.

Women with disabilities are up to ten times more likely to experience gender-based violence, and women of diverse sexual orientation and gender expression encounter significant violence and barriers to healthcare. Many vulnerable groups, like women with disabilities and the elderly, continue to lack social security, including free access to comprehensive health care.

Furthermore, the burden of debt and illicit financial flows in many African countries exacerbates these health challenges, as resources are diverted away from critical healthcare services for women⁶⁷. Nearly 24 years after adopting the Abuja Declaration, setting a target of allocating at least 15 percent of their national budgets to improve health care, many African governments are falling far short. Only two of the AU's 55 member countries — Cabo Verde and South Africa — met this target in 2021⁶⁸. The decreases in healthcare funding make it difficult for countries to uphold obligations on the right to health, with a debilitating impact on women's health. As a result, there's heavy reliance on payment of user fees for services (out-of-pocket) payment for health care, increasing inaccessibility as it acts as a financial disincentive to care-seeking, prompting many women to postpone needed preventive and curative care.

There are also gaps in gender-responsive legislation, particularly regarding the eradication of harmful practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which have an adverse impact on women's and girls' health. While FGM has legal attention and action, some regions struggle with weak enforcement.

Technology offers new ways of reaching more women and communities through the Internet and mobile telephones by increasing access to information, trained health care providers, and online services. However, countries must invest in health technology infrastructure. Achieving women's health equity requires both policy reform and adequate funding to address these systemic gaps and ensure that women and girls, especially those from marginalized communities, have access to comprehensive, non-discriminatory healthcare.

Progress

- Growing recognition of the need for women's health advocacy, particularly around cancer awareness and prevention, with a focus on grassroots outreach and increasing accessibility to cervical cancer screenings and treatments.
- Improved access to SRHR services, including contraceptives, safe abortion, and maternal healthcare, with increasing efforts to include marginalized groups such as women living with HIV, sex workers, and disabled women. In Ghana, since 2021, the number of persons (both male and female) using family planning methods has increased from 2.5 million to 2.7 million, resulting in a family planning acceptor rate of 36.1%⁶⁹.

- Legislative advancements in East Africa, including the passage of bills addressing FGM, marked an important step toward protecting women's rights and promoting gender-responsive laws.
- In Tunisia, maternal mortality rates have reduced from 70 per 100,000 live births in 2019 to 50 in 2023.
- In Morocco, women's access to social protection has expanded. By 2023, 13.6 million individuals, including 6.7 million women, would benefit from health insurance programs.
- From 2021 to 2022, the number of community health centres in Mali with at least one midwife or obstetric nurse increased, rising from 70.44% in 2021 to 74% in 2022.
- In Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation implemented initiatives to increase the recruitment and retention of female healthcare workers, particularly in rural and underserved areas. As a result, the percentage of female healthcare workers in the country has increased from 35% in 2019 to 42% in 2024⁷⁰.
- The National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in Ghana provides beneficiaries financial risk protection against health care expenses by providing annual coverage at a set premium. As a result, health insurance coverage among women and men aged 15– 49 shows that 90% of women and 73% of men have coverage⁷¹.

Challenges

- Inadequate funding and weak implementation of existing protocols on women's SRHR
- Limited access to essential cancer care and prevention, particularly in rural and underserved areas, leaves many women without the means for early detection or treatment.
- Women are detained and abused while seeking maternal health services.
- Lack of social security, including free access to comprehensive health care.
- Persistent inequalities in accessing SRHR services for marginalized women, including legal and safe abortion, as well as essential healthcare for women living with HIV, migrant women, and sex workers.
- Weak enforcement of existing gender-responsive laws, such as the Anti-FGM Act in Kenya. In 2024, there were attempts in The Gambia's parliament to repeal the 2015 Women's (Amendment) Act, which bans female genital mutilation (FGM). Around 76% of girls and women between 15 and 49 years of age have undergone FGM in Gambia, according to UNICEF, and 3 out of 4 girls experience it before age 6.
- The continuing impact of the national debt on healthcare funding diverts resources from essential women's health services, including maternal healthcare and SRHR services.
- Inadequate funding for SRHR services, menstrual hygiene products, and maternal health care.

Recommendations

- Expand access to cancer care and prevention, particularly cervical cancer, by increasing grassroots outreach and funding and ensuring women have access to regular screenings, vaccinations, and treatment options.
- Ensure the availability, accessibility, and affordability of sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion, for all women and girls, irrespective of their socio-economic status, aligning with Articles 2 and 14 (2) of the Maputo Protocol and lifting any reservations on Article 14 (2).
- Strengthen enforcement of gender-responsive laws and accountability mechanisms to eliminate harmful practices like FGM.
- Address the gendered impact of national debt by ensuring women's healthcare is prioritized in national budgets and advocating for more resources to be allocated for essential services, including maternal and reproductive health.
- Invest in adolescent-friendly health care services; encourage healthy lifestyles; guarantee comprehensive sexuality education and livelihood skills training to address the high HIV/AIDS burden on adolescent girls and young women.
- Increase full human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination of girls by the age of 15 years and cervical cancer screening coverage and treatment for women.
- Increase public health funding by implementing policy measures to reduce tax abuses and illicit financial flows, and consider progressive taxes, which would provide more funds for women's health.
- Reform policy and provide adequate funding to advance technologies that can help achieve women's health equity.
- Implement mental health policies that provide information and services without stigma and discrimination.
- Invest in women's leadership in health to promote gender equity. Women account for the majority of the healthcare workforce, and ensuring they play a central decision-making role improves health outcomes in Africa.

3.5 Gender-based Violence

Gender-based Violence (GBV) remains a pervasive and complex challenge, with entrenched patriarchal systems, capitalism, and societal norms perpetuating violence and discrimination. It includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological and emotional violence, traditional and cultural practices that are dangerous to women's health and lives, sexual violence in situations of political instability and conflict, forced prostitution and human trafficking. Africa remains one of the regions with the highest prevalence of gender-based violence, with approximately 36% of women having experienced it⁷². Violence deprives women and girls of the right to equality, diminishes human dignity and limits opportunities for fundamental freedoms. As a form of gender-based discrimination, violence against women and girls is primarily driven by gender inequality and further amplifies the unequal distribution of power, resources, and opportunities in society⁷³.

Despite the existence of laws and policies in many regions, their enforcement is weak, and gaps persist in addressing specific forms of violence, such as femicide and technology-facilitated violence. Women and girls, particularly those from marginalized communities, continue to face systemic barriers to justice, including inadequate training for law enforcement and first responders, limited legal recognition of emerging forms of violence, and insufficient protection in online spaces. Conflict-related sexual violence further exacerbates these issues in regions experiencing instability. Additionally, LGBTQ+ individuals remain highly vulnerable to violence due to the absence of inclusive legal protections. Comprehensive reforms are necessary to address these structural barriers, protect survivors, and ensure accountability for perpetrators.

Many countries have passed domestic violence and sexual offences laws; however, enforcement remains lacking. In 2024, hundreds of women took to the streets of the northern Tigrayan city of Mekelle, Ethiopia, to protest the growing violence women are facing across the region – two years after the end of the civil war. There’s been a rise in femicide, the intentional killing of women and girls because of their gender, which is a critical issue for the continent. In 2023, Africa recorded the highest rates of intimate partner and family-related femicide globally, with an estimated 21,700 victims⁷⁴. The spike in femicide over the past years and women have persistently protested to get governments to act in Kenya, Cameroon, Uganda, and South Africa. The brutal murder of Olympic athlete Rebecca Cheptegei in September 2024 has highlighted the deadly crisis facing women across Africa; in Côte d’Ivoire, the murder on 11 September 2024 of a young woman aged 19 in the country’s capital, Abidjan, has rekindled concerns about femicide in the country⁷⁵.

Across Africa, rape is one of the most common gender-based crimes. Although some African jurisdictions have implemented progressive rape laws, significant legal, procedural, and societal barriers entrenched gender discrimination intertwine to foster a culture of impunity for rape and continue to undermine justice for sexual violence survivors. There’s inadequate criminalization of rape, weak legal implementation, rape myths, and victim-blaming pausing barriers to justice for survivors. Rape survivors and their families frequently face stigma, victim-blaming, and threats. Rape within marriage is not criminalized in some African countries⁷⁶. Also, in 2023, women and girls were the majority of victims of human trafficking in Sub-Saharan Africa due to various factors, such as gender inequality, conflict, and gender-based violence.

Many marginalized women and gender-diverse persons continue to face specific violations. Women and girls with disabilities are at greater risk of violence and sexual abuse than women without disabilities. Women with disabilities are at two to four times higher risk of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) than women without disabilities⁷⁷.

Nearly 140 million women and girls in the African continent have undergone Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a serious human rights violation and a form of gender-based violence. Charter). While 28 African countries have specific laws against the practice, ensuring that states implement and enforce these laws and commitments requires constant monitoring of the human rights situation relating to FGM and the effective use of accountability mechanisms. In November 2023, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) launched the Joint General Comment on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Despite its criminalization, the prevalence of FGM in the Gambia has fallen only slightly, from 75% in 2013 to 73% of women aged between 15 and 49 in 2022. 65% of these women were circumcised before the age of 5.

For the first time, a detailed analysis by the WHO of the prevalence of physical and/or sexual partner violence experienced by 15–19-year-old girls who have been in intimate relationships showed a high prevalence in central Africa at 40% in 2024⁷⁸. Intimate partner violence against adolescent girls is most common in lower-income countries and regions, in places where there are fewer girls in secondary school and where girls have weaker legal property ownership and inheritance rights compared to men, showing the multi-layered violence.

There's a rise in the weaponizing of technology and online platforms to attack women and girls on the basis of their gender. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence, in all its forms, carries significant health, safety, political and economic consequences for African women and girls⁷⁹. Building and mirroring existing gender-based violence, the mass nature of digital platforms means this violence and its consequences go beyond one perpetrator.

African women and girls underscored significant gaps in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). They called for comprehensive reforms to safeguard women's autonomy and tackle societal norms and inequalities that reinforce the subjugation of women. Despite existing GBV policies in all six East African countries, challenges persist. Notably, there is inadequate recognition and legal frameworks addressing femicide and technology-facilitated violence. In North Africa, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have played a pivotal role in advancing women's rights.

Progress

- In West Africa, there has been progress in the legal recognition of women's rights as human rights, with several countries enacting laws aimed at protecting women from gender-based violence (GBV).
- Youth-led movements have gained momentum with increased advocacy from girls and young women for stronger GBV laws and more effective enforcement mechanisms. This reflects a shift in societal awareness and action.
- In Southern Africa, there has been growing legal recognition and protection for LGBTQ+ individuals, signaling a positive shift toward more inclusive frameworks.
- Several countries in East and Southern Africa have introduced GBV policies aimed at addressing and reducing violence, although challenges remain in their enforcement.
- Tunisia has eradicated polygamy and granted more rights to the first wife, reflecting significant strides in uplifting women's status.
- In Lesotho, a Nokaneng application is sensitizing users on the various kinds of gender-based violence, their rights, available support services, and safety tools, including an alert sound and emergency SMS options⁸⁰.
- The Botswana Police Service established the Gender and Child Protection Branch in 2021 and has eight child-friendly centres. The state party has also trained 755 Dikgosi (Traditional Leaders) to Mainstream gender into the Customary Justice System⁸¹.
- Tunisia established 30 shelters for survivors and a national hotline to report cases of GBV, which recorded over 20,000 calls in 2023.

- The Ghana National Cyber Security Act 2020 (Act 1038) ⁸²protects women from sexual and gender-based violence and harassment online, especially harassment involving the nonconsensual sharing of intimate images and sexual extortion.
- In Cameroon, as in Angola, the DRC and the Republic of Congo, governments have set up a hotline for reporting acts of violence against girls and women.

Challenges

- Despite existing GBV policies, implementation remains minimal, with gaps in addressing femicide and technology-facilitated violence. In Kenya, for example, the Anti-FGM Act exists, but its implementation is ineffective, allowing harmful practices to continue.
- In Southern Africa, femicide rates, especially in South Africa, remain high despite existing GBV policies.
- Central Africa lacks comprehensive GBV laws and National Action Plans (NAPs), and women's political participation is still limited, hindering the development of gender-sensitive policies.
- Legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals are lacking in many regions, leaving them vulnerable to violence and discrimination.
- In Morocco, only 10.5% of women report violence, reflecting stigma and fear of retaliation.

Recommendations

- Governments must ensure the effective enforcement of existing GBV laws, with precise mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable and supporting survivors.
- Enact and strengthen laws specifically addressing femicide, technology-facilitated violence, and other forms of Gender-Based Violence.
- Femicide is a critical issue requiring standalone legislation.
- All legal definitions of rape should be comprehensive, survivor-centred, and capable of addressing the full spectrum of non-consensual acts.
- Provide specialized training to law enforcement, healthcare providers, the media and social workers to ensure that they can handle GBV cases effectively, sensitively, and with an understanding of the needs of survivors.
- Enact and enforce anti-discrimination laws that protect LGBTQ+ individuals from violence, ensuring comprehensive legal protections.
- Encourage the development and execution of National Action Plans (NAP) to address GBV, especially in regions like Central Africa where such plans are absent.
- Increase women's participation in political processes to ensure gender-sensitive policies that reflect women's and girls' needs and rights.
- Develop and implement legal frameworks to prevent and address technology-facilitated violence, ensuring that online spaces are safe for women and girls.

- States must take specific measures to mitigate poverty as economic deprivation is one of the drivers of FGM; acknowledge and strengthen the agency of girls and women as advocates; provide state-funded shelters and places of safety for girls at risk of FGM, which are accessible and equipped with strong referral mechanisms; put measures to educate the public on FGM include integrating FGM content into the formal education curriculum; implement public awareness and outreach programs.
- Leverage digital technologies to create preventive technology solutions that enhance awareness and mitigate users' risk of violence, such as an open-source technology solution for gender-based case management.

3.6 Women and Armed Conflict

Increased militarism and the struggle for resources to feed mass global economic systems are driving conflicts in Africa that are more complex and protracted in the continent, ensuring deteriorating security and safety. In 2024, almost 80% of Africans lived in a country where security and safety deteriorated since 2014 with erupting civil conflict and military coups⁸³. Globally, in 2023, the proportion of women killed in armed conflicts doubled compared to the previous year, and the number of UN-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence increased by 50 per cent⁸⁴. In Africa, millions of women and girls are trapped in the worst of humanitarian crises.

In 2024, the Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger continued to experience persistent high levels of violence with jihadist insurgency. In Sudan, a nearly two-year war has seen tens of thousands dead and millions displaced, and the UN documented harrowing human rights violations committed by both parties in the conflict. In December 2024, there were an estimated 11.5 million IDPs in Sudan⁸⁵. In DRC, renewed fighting in the Eastern part is causing massive suffering, with 5.6 million Congolese internally displaced in the DRC, with over 4 million in the eastern provinces of South Kivu, North Kivu, and Ituri alone in February 2025⁸⁶.

In Ethiopia, where millions are still displaced, the Amhara, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and Western Tigray regions. The East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region hosted 22.7 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons in 2024⁸⁷. West and Central Africa (WCA) remains one of the most unstable regions in the world, with increasing spread and intensification of armed conflict, both new and protracted and about 13.4 million forcibly displaced persons within the region in early 2024. Mozambique has been experiencing armed conflict and political unrest since 2017. Over half a million people remain displaced, scattered across the various districts of the Cabo Delgado province.

In most of these conflicts, women and girls face increased risks of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and abuse due to conflict. For instance, in the Amhara Region, between July 2023 and October 2024, sexual violence was reported in 32 health facilities, and the majority of survivors were women. Women and girls continue to be subjected to brutal sexual and gender-based violence. Loss of life, family, livelihoods and access to essential services like healthcare, education, and income-generating opportunities due to conflict is impacting millions of women in Africa. Moreover, pre-existing gender inequalities and harmful social norms can exacerbate women's vulnerability during conflict and in host countries.

This year, it will be 25 years since the UN Security Council adopted the landmark resolution 1325 in 2000, recognizing the vital contributions women make to the prevention and resolution of conflicts. There is a critical need for governments and institutions to be held accountable to protect and empower women, ensuring their voices are included in peacebuilding efforts. The disparity between grassroots and elite women and the lack of access to humanitarian law for marginalized communities remain significant issues. The disconnect between peace protocols and the realities on the ground, where African conflicts are often neglected by the international community, further deepens these challenges. Transition justice efforts usually don't adequately address gender-based violence and provide redress and deterrence to prevent impunity for gender-based crimes in the post-conflict era⁸⁸. African women continue to organize and rally for peace even when they are underrepresented in negotiations.

Progress

- The media has taken a strong stance against sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, highlighting the importance of evidence-based research in addressing women's situations in armed conflict and promoting their participation in peacebuilding.
- Increased recognition of the role of grassroots women in community-based mediation helps resolve conflicts at the local level.
- Progress in fostering women's participation as agents of peacebuilding in various peace and security agendas. Growing awareness of integrating gender perspectives into peace processes and the African Union's peace and security policies.
- Efforts to implement National Action Plans aligned with Resolution 1325 and other peace instruments to ensure the rights of women and girls in conflict settings.
- The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights passed a Resolution on Violence against Women in Armed Conflicts in Africa—ACHPR/Res. 492 (LXIX) 2021.

Challenges

- Lack of effective integration of peace protocols with on-the-ground realities, particularly in African conflict zones where international attention is minimal.
- Insufficient focus on the protection and empowerment of adolescent girls and young women in conflict settings.
- Limited access to essential services like family planning and prenatal care during conflict and peacetime.
- Disparities between grassroots and elite women, with limited access to humanitarian law and justice for marginalized communities.
- Inadequate implementation and monitoring of existing peace agreements, with no specific budget allocations for including women and girls in peace processes.

Recommendations

- Integrating the perspectives and needs of women and girls at all levels, particularly through grassroots women's participation, will ensure that peace processes are more inclusive.
- Prioritize rule-of-law reforms, accountability for conflict contributors, and women-led community-based mediation to ensure sustainable peace.
- Promote the effective implementation of National Action Plans that align with Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, explicitly focusing on the inclusion of adolescent girls and young women.
- Invest more in peace education and raise awareness of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda to build a more inclusive and peaceful society.
- Allocate specific budgets to support the inclusion of women and girls in peace processes and ensure the implementation of the AU Continental Result Framework on WPS.
- Ensure access to quality reproductive health services, including post-rape care and mental health support for survivors of violence.
- Provide safe and accessible public services, including family planning and prenatal care, especially in conflict settings, to ensure the health and well-being of women and girls.
- Strengthen the capacity of local women's organizations to lead peacebuilding initiatives.
- Systematically document cases of SGBV and other human rights abuses against women and girls to hold perpetrators accountable
- Transitional justice mechanisms in post-conflict societies must address past human rights abuses and be both judicial and non-judicial. They must adequately tackle the extensive gender-based violence.
- Addressing the unique barriers to women's meaningful participation in transitional justice processes as a result of gender-based discrimination
- Increasing the visibility of women and, more particularly, gender-sensitive personnel in judicial and legal systems is also critical in the quest to realize prosecutions for gender-based violence.
- Reparations programmes should recognize and address structural issues which have given rise to gender-based violations of human rights.

3.7 Women in Power and Decision-Making

Significant strides have been made in advancing women's political participation globally. However, African women remain poorly represented in government, and considerable gaps remain between policies and their implementation, impeding the achievement of meaningful gender equality in political spheres. Since the adoption of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, Africa has made steady progress on women's participation in parliaments, but the progress has stagnated. Women's representation in African parliaments has increased by just one percentage point from 25% in 2021 to 26% in 2024. It is unlikely that most African countries will meet the 50% target set in SDG 5.5 on Women's

Political Participation (WPP). At this rate, it will take until 2100 for African countries to achieve gender parity in their parliaments⁸⁹. WPP in local government increased from 21% to 25%. WPP in Africa is lowest in top executive and political party leadership. Women's representation in political party leadership declined from 12% to 9%. Women in top executive positions increased from 7% to 13%- still glaringly low percentage.

There have been recent increases in the proportion of women in cabinet positions in some African countries; however, the shift in power remains hard work. Normalized tokenization of women's representation poses a challenge to full, equal, and meaningful participation in political and social spheres. Women's lived experiences offer unique perspectives on gendered issues such as domestic violence, reproductive rights and equal pay in policy and proactive, ensuring there's a fundamental power shift in decision-making beyond numbers in representations is urgent. It's still a difficult path for women to be serving as head of state in Africa. Traditional gender roles often view women as subordinate to men, limiting their ability to take on leadership positions and contribute to decision-making processes, even though perceptions are changing. Political systems remain largely patriarchal, modelled to exclude alternative approaches to power. Financial independence is interlinked with decision-making power from home to public offices. Many African women lack financial independence, which hinders their ability to participate effectively in politics and business, making them less influential in decision-making⁹⁰. GBV remains a significant hindrance to women's power and decision-making abilities as it undermines their agency, prevents women from actively participating in societal affairs and restricts their access to opportunities.

Sexism, harassment and violence perpetrated against women in the parliamentary world in Africa have long-lasting and harmful effects on those affected, on democratic processes and political institutions in Africa. In 2021, about 80 per cent of women parliamentarians in Africa reported to have experienced psychological violence throughout their mandate, 67 per cent had been subject to sexist behaviour or remarks, 42 per cent had received death threats, rape threats or threats of beating or abduction directed at them or their loved ones⁹¹.

Sexist online attacks against women affect their leadership and political participation opportunities. Gendered disinformation is being used to target female politicians or those seeking to be elected and women who speak up about politics online⁹². Sexist online attacks against prominent political women, including image-based abuses, have been recorded in Kenya and Rwanda. For instance, in 2021, during the general election in Uganda, women in Ugandan politics reported experiencing online violence in the forms of trolling, body shaming, sexualized and gendered insults, and gendered disinformation⁹³.

Progress

- In East Africa, Rwanda stands out with a remarkable 61% representation of women in parliament, setting a benchmark for other African nations.
- In North Africa, Tunisian women now constitute 36% of parliamentary seats, reflecting an increase from 28% in the last electoral cycle.
- In West Africa, the number of women holding leadership positions has significantly increased, particularly compared to pre-1995 levels, reflecting a positive trend in women's political empowerment.
- Southern Africa has made notable efforts to promote women's participation in politics. For instance, Zambia's discussions around 50/50 gender appointments demonstrate a commitment to ensuring gender parity in political representation.

- Many African countries have adopted gender-responsive policies, including gender quotas and other mechanisms designed to enhance women’s leadership in governance and improve women’s political representation.
- In 2020, a quota of 25% of parliamentary seats was established for women in Egypt has improved representation, with women holding 28% of parliamentary seats and 98 women being appointed to the Council of State for the first time⁹⁴.
- In Central Africa, Cameroon has reached 33% women representation. In Angola, women are also strongly represented in the decision-making sphere: in the National Assembly, the positions of Vice-President and President are held by women, and 38% of deputies/ members are women⁹⁵.

Challenges

- Although some countries have adopted gender quotas, their implementation remains inconsistent. Many countries fail to effectively apply quotas, hindering women’s representation in political leadership and decision-making positions. In Zimbabwe, women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions in all sectors. Despite constituting 52% of the population and most voters, women hold only 31% of the National Assembly seats. Of the 210 seats not under the quota system, only 25 are held by women (12%)⁹⁶.
- In some cases, there is insufficient political will to advance gender equality. Policymakers often show a lack of commitment to comprehensively address issues affecting women’s participation in politics, such as gender-based violence, lack of access to resources, and discriminatory cultural norms.
- Legal frameworks that promote gender parity often contain ambiguous clauses that weaken their enforcement. For example, Zambia’s 50/50 appointment target includes the contradictory provision “when feasible,” which undermines the clarity and effectiveness of the law.
- Electoral violence, harassment, and intimidation remain significant barriers to women’s participation in politics. Many women face threats and violence during electoral campaigns, deterring them from running for office or participating in political processes.
- Women in politics are increasingly vulnerable to online harassment and cyberbullying. The absence of adequate digital safety laws restricts their ability to engage effectively in the digital space, where political discourse and public engagement are rapidly moving.
- Women in politics often face significant social and economic discrimination. These barriers limit their access to resources, networks, and opportunities, making it more difficult for them to succeed in political roles. Additionally, societal expectations around gender roles discourage women from pursuing political careers.
- Women with disabilities and those from marginalized communities continue to be excluded from the political sphere. Their lack of representation in decision-making processes further perpetuates systemic inequalities.

- Central African countries are among the last countries in terms of women's representation in decision-making positions and elected bodies. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women represent 15% of the population in the National Assembly of Gabon, 12% of the population in the Central African Republic, and 14% of the population in Congo. The representation of women in the executive branch is even more limited, and portfolios are also of concern. Several Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) countries have adopted laws to promote the political participation of women; however, their implementation remains limited.

Recommendations

- Governments must ensure the effective implementation of gender quotas and provide legal mechanisms to ensure that women's representation is not only mandated but also achieved.
- Political leaders should demonstrate a clear commitment to gender equality by prioritizing policies that address the specific barriers to women's participation in politics, such as electoral violence and economic discrimination.
- Gender parity laws should be free from ambiguous clauses that hinder their effectiveness. Clear, actionable laws are essential for achieving equal political representation.
- Governments must adopt and enforce laws to prevent electoral violence and harassment against women in politics, ensuring that they can participate freely and safely in political processes.
- Invest in leadership training and capacity-building programs to provide skills and knowledge for women to succeed in political roles.
- Special efforts must be made to ensure the political inclusion of women with disabilities and those from marginalized communities.
- Increase investment in collecting disaggregated data to track progress on gender equality in politics and hold governments accountable for their commitments.
- Establish accountability platforms to monitor the implementation of gender parity laws.
- Legal reforms should focus on removing and repealing laws that criminalize women and girls based on sexual orientation, HIV status, gender identity and expression, sex work, and other rights of bodily autonomy and integrity.

3.8 Human Rights of Women

International legal frameworks such as CEDAW, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Maputo Protocol establish states' obligations to ensure women's rights to work, fair working conditions, an adequate standard of living, healthcare, education, and participation in cultural life. There are now provisions on sexual and gender-based violence, economic, social and cultural rights, the principle of equality and the right to non-discrimination in constitutions, policies and in legislations across the continent. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in Article 2 prohibits discrimination, including on the basis of sex, and obliges State parties in art. 18 (3), to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure the protection of the rights of women⁹⁷.

However, legal and policy frameworks across Africa still reflect systemic gender biases, both in written laws and their enforcement. Globally, on average, women enjoy only 77 percent of men's legal rights⁹⁸. African women are not homogenous, and the challenges to the attainment of rights may vary depending on numerous factors. Intersecting forms of discrimination arise when women face discrimination on two or more grounds, including, for instance, age, economic status, racial or ethnic background, religion, nationality status, citizenship, marital status, health, HIV/AIDS, disability, poverty and sexual orientation, among others. These factors in many settings exacerbate and/or influence the nature of discrimination experienced by women. Many countries still have glaring gaps in addressing specific and unique vulnerabilities and denial of rights of, for instance, women and girls with albinism and women with disabilities.

On the positive side, some African nations, such as Sierra Leone, have amended or abolished discriminatory laws that discriminate against women on the basis of sex and put temporary special measures that have led to increased female representation in legislatures. However, violations of women's human rights pervade all areas of African women's lives, in both public and private spheres and take many different forms. Violations occurring in the private sphere, such as domestic violence, family and property law where customary law is the applicable law, are often perceived as private matters in which the State should not interfere. There is now a recognition that the purpose of the public/private dichotomy is to limit the autonomy of women and their access to the public sphere; however, women continue to face discrimination when seeking to participate equally in all spheres of private and public life and decision making⁹⁹.

Plural legal systems—particularly those incorporating customary laws—continue to disadvantage women, especially in personal status and family law. For instance, adultery laws in some countries penalize women disproportionately, reinforcing gender biases. Nationality laws further exemplify structural discrimination, as many African countries do not grant women equal rights to transmit nationality to their spouses. Many marital property rights laws continue to leave millions of women out. Gender inequality in marriage, divorce, custody, and property rights is being perpetuated by sex discrimination institutionalized within legal systems and customary laws. While some significant legal reforms have been achieved, progress has been slow, inconsistent, and hampered by setbacks, lack of political will, and weak implementation. For instance, there's sex discrimination in countries like Senegal, where the father is the legal guardian regardless of the mother's caregiving role. In Tunisia and Algeria, fathers retain legal guardianship even if the mother has custody. Algeria and Sudan strip a mother's rights to custody upon remarriage, but this doesn't apply to men¹⁰⁰.

The right to culture is protected under key international instruments, but significant debate remains about whether group rights align with the universal human rights principles. This debate is particularly relevant to women's rights, as cultural norms often dictate gender roles, sometimes in ways that conflict with individual freedoms and equality. The case of sexual minorities in Africa, whose lives are frequently falsely depicted as being at odds with culture, further demonstrates how cultural arguments can be weaponized to deny fundamental human rights. Ultimately, while cultural rights are essential for preserving identity and community cohesion, they must not override individual human rights, particularly those of women, who often face intersecting forms of oppression within both cultural and legal frameworks¹⁰¹.

Culture invoked as a justification for violations of women’s human rights reflects deep-seated patriarchal structures and harmful gender stereotypes. Culture is not a static or unchanging concept, although some States tend to present it as such in order to justify discrimination and violent practices against women and girls. The emergency ‘African values’ discourse deployed to justify the denial of rights and violence against women and gender minorities is steeped in persisting colonial values and poses threats to derail the rights of many women and girls. Cultural justifications for systematic gender discrimination are recognized both in Africa and globally as entirely incompatible with human rights.

While some states have enshrined gender equality in their constitutions, legal reforms remain slow, demonstrating the need for continued advocacy and systemic change to achieve full gender parity in Africa’s legal and socio-economic landscape. It is important to continue advocating for women’s human rights, insisting on the principle that human rights are all interrelated, interdependent, indivisible, universal, and central to achieving gender equality.

Progress

- In 2025, the African Union adopted the AU convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, the continent’s first dedicated legal instrument aimed at ending all forms of violence against women and girls.
- Morocco’s National Gender Equality Plan (2023–2026) integrates gender considerations across all sectors, focusing on stakeholder capacity-building.
- In 2022, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) adopted a resolution to protect women from digital violence and called on states to review or adopt legislation that aims at combating all forms of digital violence and expanding the definition of gender-based violence to include digital violence against women¹⁰².
- Countries like Côte d’Ivoire, Mozambique, and South Africa have explicitly criminalized marital rape.
- Child custody laws have been reformed in Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, DRC, and Mozambique, ensuring guardianship rights for both parents, irrespective of marital status.
- Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Malawi, and South Africa have introduced legal provisions for equitable distribution of matrimonial property. In Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, and The Gambia, laws recognize the right of married women to acquire, own, maintain, and dispose of their property.

Challenges

- Women human rights defenders face heightened risks, including gender-based violence, surveillance, harassment, and threats to their families.
- Growing resistance to women’s rights and restrictive policies limit the ability of women human rights defenders to operate freely.

- Natural disasters, conflicts, and health crises such as pandemics disrupt efforts to advance women’s rights and gender equality.
- Despite strong legal frameworks at various levels, there is a lack of effective coordination to ensure women can fully exercise their rights.
- Limited public knowledge about legal and other human rights frameworks prevents women from claiming and exercising their rights.
- In Libya, Mauritania¹⁰³, and Morocco¹⁰⁴, girls and women who have sexual relationships outside of marriage risk heavy penalties and criminal punishments.
- Marital rape is not prohibited in Algeria, Kenya, Sudan, and The Gambia, while Northern Nigeria’s Penal Code allows marital rape and “corrective” assault within marriage; Malawi’s courts have stated that rape does not extend to marriage.
- Polygamy is legally permitted in Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Senegal, and South Sudan, with men allowed four wives in Sudan and Senegal.

Recommendations

- Government strategies aimed at eradicating harmful practices must be integrated with programmes that promote women’s autonomy and decision-making regarding their bodies and lives, as well as address discriminatory cultural and social attitudes and practices in both public and private spheres.
- Include women-led organizations of People with Disabilities in all consultative discussions on gender equality, human rights, women’s rights and the rights of people with disabilities.
- Improve coordination between governments, CSOs, and human rights bodies for more effective implementation.
- Governments must enact laws and enforce policies to ensure equal treatment of women under the law, as this largely impacts women’s economic participation.
- Governments must support awareness programmes to eliminate harmful norms that uphold violence against women and deter them from reaching their full potential and living a dignified life. Gender based discrimination underpins much of the violence that African women experience.

3.9 Women and the Media

The media plays a critical role in setting public agendas and education and promoting the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information to African women and girls. The right to freedom of expression and information has an essential role in ending inequality and other forms of gender-based discrimination, as well as tackling patriarchal attitudes. Women’s marginalization in Africa extends to media, where women’s visibility is limited and often tied to specific gendered roles and stereotyped representations. Only around 20-22% of news sources quoted in the media are women, indicating a large underrepresentation of female voices across the continent (Global Media Monitoring Project).

There's been little progress in advancing gender-friendly and equal media environments. Women- both as media professionals and audiences- have a right to impart knowledge, and giving equal access to public media platforms is imperative. The marginalization of women's voices and experiences in the media remains a significant barrier to gender equality. For instance, in Liberia, women are less likely than men to own a mobile phone with men 86% compared with 72% for women, 54% of women own a radio compared 74% of men, for television only 23% of women own one compared to 28% men, and a computer 11% men compared with 6% women. Similarly, in the Gambia, 10% more men than women own a mobile phone¹⁰⁵.

The media has a responsibility to address and combat sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women in the physical and online media workplace. Although women are increasingly present in newsrooms, significant gender-based differences and inequalities persist. Women's access to leadership roles in the media also remains limited with widespread gender-based discrimination and inequality of opportunity within the industry.

Social media is often weaponized against women who speak out, making it even harder for them to have a platform. Female journalists in Africa face increased challenges with online violence, including online harassment and disinformation that seek to silence their voices and hinder their ability to report effectively¹⁰⁶. Online attacks and smear campaigns targeting journalists force many into self-censorship and withdrawal from digital platforms.

Achieving gender parity in media representation requires fostering inclusion and building the technical capacity of media. In East Africa, the media has been vocal against conflict-affected sexual and gender-based violence, highlighting the critical role of evidence-based research in addressing women's situations in armed conflict and promoting their meaningful participation in peacebuilding. The gender divide can be tackled by promoting gender equity in media education, hiring, training and retaining more female journalists, implementing gender policies to increase female sources, and more excellent representation of women's stories that reflect their diverse realities.

Progress

- There is growing advocacy for gender parity in media, focusing on inclusion and promoting women's voices.
- Young people are playing an increasingly important role in challenging traditional media practices and advocating for gender equality.
- In Cape Verde, women account for 70% of journalists, showcasing significant representation in the media industry.

Challenges

- Gender disparity in media representation, with women still underrepresented in media houses. A study on the media environment in Namibia by Africa Media Barometer in 2022 found that 'Male editors head all the newspapers in Namibia. Even those who are second-in-command tend to be men and those with the hard beats of politics and finance¹⁰⁷.'

- Sexual harassment often goes unchecked in newsrooms despite many employers having policies in place. According to a study which surveyed nearly 600 news professionals and analyzed 17 anti-sexual harassment policies in newsrooms across eight sub-Saharan African countries between July and October 2020, only 30% of victims reported harassment to their bosses, and 58% of these complaints led to no action or a warning¹⁰⁸.
- Women are often portrayed through stereotypical lenses in the media.
- Cyberbullying and harassment, particularly against women in the media, are prevalent, with limited protection for women facing digital abuse.
- Social media is being weaponized against outspoken women, particularly in regions like West Africa, further silencing their voices.
- Women in the media lack the technical capacity and resources to advance their careers or advocate for systemic change.

Recommendations

- Foster an inclusive media environment by advocating for gender equality and ensuring women's voices are represented accurately and authentically.
- Strengthen technical capacity and provide resources to support women's careers in the media, ensuring they have the tools to succeed and thrive.
- Ensure that the right to freedom of expression and information is upheld, addressing issues such as unequal opportunities, the gender pay gap, advertising, and sexist content.
- Ensure media presents image(s) of equality, plurality and balance between both sexes, without sexist stereotypes or standards of beauty, and of women's active participation in different functions in all areas of life, with special attention to the contents of programmes aimed at children and the younger audience.
- Establish and enforce ethical codes in favour of the promotion of equality and the prevention of gender violence.
- Promote media literacy and education to empower audiences to critically engage with media content and support gender equality.

3.10 Women and Environment

Gender-environment relations are embedded in inequitable histories that continue to erase women's bodies, voices and knowledge of the environment¹⁰⁹. The climate crisis is an outcome of unequal power relations and the loss of cultures, natures, and ways of being that impact the planet¹¹⁰. In 2020, for the first time in 30 years of reporting, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)¹¹¹ listed colonialism not only as a driver of the climate crisis but also as an ongoing issue that is exacerbating the vulnerability of specific people and places to the effects of climate change. Colonialism didn't only impact African women by affecting their position in societies across the continent; it also changed their access to communal lands and ecosystems by robbing them of ownership, which affects them today. The global extractive model of economic development is thriving off the suffering and marginalization of Africa's women and environment.

The impact of climate change on women, especially in Africa, is a pressing issue that demands urgent attention. Despite contributing minimally to global emissions, African women are disproportionately affected by climate-induced disasters, which exacerbate existing gender inequalities. As women face heightened levels of violence and environmental degradation, the need for gender-responsive governance, climate justice, and robust environmental protection becomes more critical.

In 2024, many parts of Africa recorded heat waves, with Sahel's scorching conditions considered a once-every-200-years phenomenon. One study in Nigeria from 2023¹¹² found that heat-related complications could result in a burden on female health by 2050, similar to that of breast cancer¹¹³. More than two dozen African countries experienced extensive flooding¹¹⁴, while in East and Southern Africa, a severe drought caused by El Niño hit, resulting in crop failures, food shortages, and water shortages - the worst in 40 years for the region. In 2023, Cyclone Freddy hit Mozambique and other countries, resulting in loss of life and massive destruction of infrastructure, affecting 1.2 million people, including refugees in need of basic assistance¹¹⁵.

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. For instance, UNFPA warns that tens of millions of women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa¹¹⁶ will experience catastrophic levels of intimate partner violence because the world is failing to make progress on the climate crisis. African countries must recognize that coloniality shapes development processes today and seek reparatory mechanisms to close inequalities between countries and improve women's position and material conditions in the face of the climate crisis. In climate negotiations and processes, African countries must question what it means to adapt to environmental changes and how embedded coloniality and settler colonialism¹¹⁷ shape rich nations' interventions. Indigenous knowledge systems that women have built over centuries should be supported and centered in response. Strengthening accountability mechanisms is key when climate change denial is currently engrained in political discourses in various parts of the world.

Progress

- Policies promoting sustainable practices, such as organic farming and alternative fuel sources, are emerging. These policies focus on corporate accountability in environmental protection.
- In West Africa, policies supporting women's health and poverty alleviation have been enacted alongside initiatives to protect the environment.
- In Tunisia, 40% of rural environmental programs now prioritize women's participation.
- Women and girls in Africa have been at the forefront of climate activism and offer unique knowledge and expertise—including indigenous, rural, and young populations—that support effective climate action. They continue to press for equal representation in negotiations and ensure climate action and solutions meet their demands.
- In mainland Tanzania, 77% of the population in rural areas and 88% in urban areas have access to clean, safe water and sanitation services¹¹⁸.

Challenges

- Many African communities continue to suffer the disproportionate effects of climate-induced disasters, with little compensation or action taken to address their specific needs.
- Women in rural and indigenous communities remain underrepresented in leadership and decision-making processes related to environmental policy and climate justice.
- Extractives and neoliberal development models continue to impact ecosystems and local communities negatively, particularly women and girls in indigenous and rural areas, without sufficient efforts to reverse these harmful trends.
- Although some policies have been introduced to involve women in climate action, institutional frameworks are still lacking to ensure their meaningful participation in designing and implementing climate change policies.
- Investment in intersectional research on climate change and its gendered impacts is still limited, which prevents the development of policies based on solid, sex-disaggregated data.
- Systemic barriers such as extractive development models, inadequate funding, and insufficient research on the gendered impacts of climate change continue to hinder progress as many big polluting economies fall short of their commitments.
- Despite Uganda's investments in water coverage, about 11 million people still lack clean water; about 32% travel more than three kilometers to access safe and clean water, and 19% access unsafe water from unprotected sources¹¹⁹.

Recommendations

- Strengthen gender-responsive governance mechanisms and budgeting to ensure that women's leadership and participation are prioritized in decision-making processes on climate and environmental issues.
- Advocate for climate justice by addressing the unequal impact of climate change on African communities, particularly those led by women, and demand reparations to support community-driven conservation initiatives.
- Expand investments in sustainable practices and environmental protection policies, focusing on organic farming, alternative energy sources, and corporate accountability for ecological harm.
- Countries should decentralize decision-making by forming committees at various administrative levels that address climate change while improving regional and transborder cooperation and action on environmental challenges.
- Tackle the harmful effects of extractivist development models by advocating for gender-sensitive policies that protect ecosystems and empower indigenous and rural women.
- Implement the Malabo Declaration and CAADP by allocating at least 10% of national budgets to agriculture to ensure that women food producers receive the necessary resources to improve productivity and food security.

- Increase funding for intersectional research on climate change by collecting and analyzing sex-disaggregated data to inform global climate policies and programs.
- Dedicate a portion of climate finance to women-led initiatives, ensuring that women are central to climate action and that their leadership is supported in designing and implementing gender-sensitive policies. Ensure that women play a central role in climate action and environmental protection by actively involving them in decision-making processes and supporting community-led initiatives.
- Promote economic diversification for women, especially in sectors like agriculture, where they play a significant role; provide female farmers with access to capital, training, and resources to adopt climate-resilient agricultural practices that can improve their economic security and reduce their vulnerability to climate shocks¹²⁰.
- Put gender equality at the heart of climate financing covering climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Clean energy transition approaches must advance gender-responsive initiatives.

3.11 The Girl Child

Across Africa, girls and young women face persistent and deeply entrenched structural, cultural, economic, and political barriers that limit their ability to participate in and shape society fully. While significant progress has been made in advancing girls' rights, gender inequality remains a pressing issue affecting multiple aspects, including education, employment, health, safety, and decision-making. These barriers are exacerbated by patriarchal norms, discriminatory legal frameworks, socio-economic disparities, and a lack of institutional mechanisms that prioritize young women's inclusion. Girls face unique challenges in the age section and other social factors.

Education is a fundamental human right and a key factor in breaking cycles of poverty and inequality. However, across Africa, young women face multiple barriers to accessing and completing their education. Cultural norms that prioritize boys' education over girls' continue to influence educational policies and household decisions. High rates of early and forced marriage further disrupt girls' education, causing them to drop out before completing secondary or higher education.

Adolescent girls in nearly one-third of African countries who are pregnant face significant legal and policy barriers to continuing their formal education. Thirty-eight out of fifty-four African countries have laws, policies, or measures that protect adolescent girls' education during pregnancy and motherhood. In March 2022, Togo¹²¹ repealed a 1978 circular that banned pregnant students and adolescent mothers from schools. Many countries in North Africa or the Horn of Africa have laws and policies that make sexual behavior outside of marriage a criminal offense, which can interfere with girls' rights to education and bodily autonomy.

Menstrual poverty health management also poses a significant challenge, as a lack of access to affordable sanitary products and inadequate sanitation facilities in schools lead many girls to miss school days, eventually impacting their academic performance and retention rates. In addition, the curriculum in many African countries does not fully address gender equality or include comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, leaving young women ill-equipped to make informed choices about their bodies and futures.

Progress

- Several governments have criminalized harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, leading to a decline in their prevalence in some regions.
- Entrepreneurship among young women has grown significantly, supported by digital platforms, social enterprises, and innovative business models.
- Enrollment in primary and secondary education for girls has increased across Africa, and many countries are achieving near gender parity in education.
- Digital spaces have expanded advocacy reach, allowing young women to engage in transnational feminist solidarity, document injustices, and challenge patriarchal systems.
- Burkina Faso's 2016-2025 National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage seeks to change the values and social norms that legitimize the practice of child marriage and empower adolescent girls.
- In Ghana, 1,081 adolescent girls, who are among those most at risk of child marriage, were provided with support to complete junior high school, including funds to cover their school tuition, boarding fees and school materials in 2022¹²².

Challenges

- Limited access to education due to cultural norms that prioritize boys' schooling over girls'. 26% of girls in the CAR are married before the age of 15.
- Early and forced marriage forced many girls to drop out of school and limited their future opportunities.
- Legal barriers prevent pregnant girls from continuing their education in some countries. Menstrual poverty leads to school absenteeism due to a lack of sanitary products and poor sanitation facilities.
- Inadequate sexual and reproductive health education leaves girls uninformed about their rights and health.
- Gender-based violence, including harassment and abuse in schools and public spaces, affects their safety and well-being.
- Exclusion from leadership and decision-making spaces due to societal norms that limit girls' voices and participation.
- Weak enforcement of GBV laws and limited survivor support systems.
- In Tanzania, approximately 3,000 female students dropped out of school in 2020¹²³ for various reasons, including early marriage, pregnancy, lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure in schools, and harmful norms and values that deprive girls of educational opportunities.

Recommendations

- Strengthen financial inclusion programs tailored to young women, ensuring they can access financial services and resources.
- Advocate for increased funding in menstrual health programs to ensure accessibility of sanitary products for all girls and young women.
- Implement community awareness campaigns to shift cultural attitudes that do not prioritize girls' education and promote equal educational opportunities for girls.
- Enforce laws against child marriage and provide alternative education pathways for young mothers to continue their education.
- Advocate for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education in schools to ensure young people are informed and empowered to make decisions.
- Strengthen community-based health initiatives to destigmatize reproductive health and provide accessible services.

3:12 Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

Despite progress in women's political representation across several African countries, significant challenges remain in achieving gender parity in decision-making institutions. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) recognizes women's full participation in power and decision-making as a fundamental step towards gender equality. However, many African nations still fall short of the recommended benchmarks. The BPfA urges governments to establish and enforce policies that guarantee equal participation in leadership, remove institutional barriers, and implement special measures to accelerate gender balance—challenges that persist across various national contexts.

Significant progress has been made at the regional and national levels towards advancing women's human rights and ensuring gender equality on the continent. The African Union Commission and its human rights mechanisms have adopted binding agreements and numerous measures and produced recommendations and reports addressing women's human rights. These include the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; and the Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights. There are also several instruments and monitoring bodies committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of women on the continent. These include, inter alia, the African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, the African Union Gender Policy and Agenda 2063. Regional political organizations have also adopted protocols and resolutions as well as issued declarations about the protection and promotion of women's human rights, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), East African Community (EAC) Gender Policy, the first African Women's Decade (AWD), African Disability Protocol is particularly significant for women and girls with disabilities, as it addresses a wide range of substantive rights and the unique challenges they face in society.

Although most governments have established national women's ministries to promote gender equality, a significant gap exists in policy implementation and resource allocation. In the past few years, however, we have seen some governments move to abolish women's affairs ministries. In Senegal in 2024¹²⁴, the Ministry for Women was abolished by a new government, which created a Ministry of Family and Children. Zambia abolished its Ministry of Gender in 2021 and replaced it with the Gender Division of the Office of the President. These efforts are happening when women's rights face a resurging resistance and this limits efforts to provide adequate programming and address specific marginalizations of women, which are still a reality. Many institutions advancing gender equity lack sufficient funding, technical capacity, and political will to enforce laws protecting women's rights. Additionally, women at the grassroots level, particularly in rural areas, remain largely unaware of their rights and available institutional support, such as the UN and national human rights commissions.

The BPfA calls for well-resourced and effective national institutions to monitor and enforce gender equality commitments. It emphasizes that governments must ensure sustained financial and institutional support for national mechanisms and human rights bodies that promote women's empowerment. However, in many African states, resource constraints and entrenched patriarchal attitudes continue to hinder real progress.

The BPfA highlights the need to strengthen legal and institutional frameworks to ensure the full implementation and enforcement of women's rights. Governments are called to integrate a gender perspective into all policies, allocate sufficient resources, and create mechanisms for monitoring progress. The lack of effective grassroots-level enforcement mechanisms remains a major challenge in Africa.

Financing mechanisms and strategies, whether domestic resource mobilization, development assistance, or other sources, should be harnessed to enhance investments in gender equality.

Governments and stakeholders must collect age-disaggregated data to understand young women's challenges better and ensure their perspectives are integrated into policymaking. Intergenerational dialogues can also help bridge the gap between younger and older generations in advancing gender equality.

While women's human rights defenders in Africa continue to monitor, report and advocate for greater rights of women and girls, in many countries, they have increasingly faced challenges, including high-handed state responses, community backlash and restrictive funding mechanisms. Many women's human rights defenders face arbitrary arrests, detention and prosecution; harassment, intimidation and smear campaigns; abductions and threats to physical safety; and restrictions to freedom of expression, including in online spaces¹²⁵. The use of anti-civil society restrictive laws to defund and curb operations and silence dissent is a grave concern. Governments must commit to the protection of women human rights defenders, ensure national systems and safeguarding mechanisms.

Progress

- Some civil society-led forums engage women and girls across generations on issues such as economic empowerment and eliminating harmful practices.
- Gender-responsive budgeting is increasingly recognized as a tool supporting women's leadership.
- Some national institutions prioritize girls' and women's rights, economic inclusion, and environmental protection.
- The African Disability Protocol is particularly significant for women and girls with disabilities, as it addresses a wide range of substantive rights and the unique challenges they face in society. Concerned about the multiple forms of discrimination, high levels of poverty, risk of violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse that women and girls with disabilities face, the African Disability Protocol calls upon States to take different measures to ensure that they have full enjoyment of human and peoples' rights on an equal basis with others.
- Tunisia instituted the National Gender Equality Committee, which monitors progress in integrating gender considerations into policies.
- The Ministry of Justice in Botswana developed Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines in 2023. These outline the specific roles of all sectors in the justice system. Gender has been mainstreamed in the school curriculum, including efforts to reintegrate girls into school after pregnancy, which benefitted 5,062 (2021 – 2022) young girls who can continue their education. The readmission procedure currently requires a fitness certificate instead of waiting six weeks

Challenges

- Although engendered policies exist, their implementation remains weak and inconsistent.
- Many women in rural areas are unaware of institutions like the UN that advocate for their rights.
- Girls and women with disabilities, despite increasing education levels, still face structural barriers to inclusion and recognition by institutions.
- Only 0.2% of Sierra Leone's national budget is allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Recommendations for states

- Advocate for higher and flexible budget allocations to gender equality initiatives to ensure sufficient resources for impactful programs.
- Ensure regular monitoring and accountability in implementing girls' and women's rights policies to track progress and address gaps.
- Encourage the remaining eleven member states (Botswana, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Morocco, Niger, Somalia and Sudan) to ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol).

- Effectively enforce and implement national migration and labour legislation and policies related to the protection of women migrant workers and ratify relevant international labour conventions promoting the protection of migrant workers and gender equality, such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the ILO C143.
- Governments must enact laws and advance policies that protect human rights defenders, especially women human rights defenders, and commit to expanding the civic space as a key necessity for good governance and healthier societies.

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