Africa Women's Major Group Position Paper on SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17

Women's Major Group

Page of Contents

About the Women's Major Group 3

1. Presented to 4

2. Contributors 4

3. Introduction 5

4. Status of SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14, and 17 for African Women 6

5. Conclusion 27

6. References 28

About the Women's Major Group

The Women's Major Group (WMG) sometimes referred to as the Women's Major Group for Sustainable Development is a self organised collective open to all interested organisations working to promote human rights-based sustainable development with a focus on women's human rights, the empowerment of women and gender equality.

It has the responsibility to facilitate women's civic participation, information sharing and input into the United Nations policy space. The major group's mandate covers Agenda 2030 for Sustainable development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and key indicators. Ensuring that women in all their diversities meaningfully contribute to the review, monitoring progress and influencing key spaces such as the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), members submit interventions and statements to inform gender transformative policies at global and regional levels.

The UN Policy Processes and agreements are for universal application. However, their implementation must be seen locally, nationally and regionally and their impact must be realized and felt locally before being registered as global impact.

On that premise, African Women have a critical role to play in all of the frameworks Africa has committed itself. The AWMG functions as a key part of the Women's Major Group (WMG), which facilitates regional representation for women's civil society in UN processes. As the designated focal point for the Africa region the AWMG ensures a distinct African voice is heard, so that no one is left behind.

Through the AWMG, African women partner with pan African Institutions like the African Union Commission, UN agencies, feminist organizations, networks, and Member States across the continent and globally in designing, implementation and monitoring in the actualization of these frameworks. Members self-organize and participate in regional and global forums to ensure that the concerns and needs of African women are integrated into sustainable development frameworks.
Some of the AWMG activities include preparation and presentation of recommendations to regional forums, such as the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD).

During the 11th session of the ARFSD, the AWMG, through its members listed below collectively worked on this position to influence feminist and intersectional outcomes of the Forum.

1. Presented to

The 11th session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

2. Contributors

COUNTRIES	ORGANISATIONS
Algeria **Cameroon** **Chad** **Democratic Republic of Congo** **Ethiopia** **Equatorial Guinea** **Kenya** **Malawi** **Mali** **Mauritania** **Morocco** **Niger** **Nigeria** **Rwanda** **Senegal** **South Africa** **South Sudan** **Tanzania** **Uganda** **Zimbabwe**	African Women Leaders Network Association du Dévelopement et de la Promotion de Droits de l'Homme Akina Mama wa Afrika AMUFEHB Association des Femmes en Economie Verte Baringo Indigenous People's Organisation Brave Movement Uganda FAMDEV Centre for Human Rights and Climate Change Research, Nigeria CLASP East Africa Congo Biodiversity Network Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA) FAWOPA Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) GDMR Girlkind Kenya Girls Must Uganda Hope Women with Disabilities ISPME Lola Crochet Foundation My People and Culture Association MUSONET National Association AL HIDN Pathways for Women's Empowerment and Development Polycom Girls Purple Royale: Trans Voices Amplified Planned Parenthood Global Rinelead Cadd Niger ROAJELF Mali SDGs Kenya Forum SheVentures Slum Child Foundation Sonke Gender Justice SOUL - GE SPECTRA Rwanda Steward Women Tangaza University The African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET) The African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests (REFACOF) Transparency International Rwanda Tvet4Girls Ug Vintage Dreams Africa Development Initiative Vision Springs Initiative Violet Mbiti Foundation Women Empower and Mentor All Women in Action Platform Women's Rights and Health Project Zamara Foundation

3. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were born from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012, where the 'Future We Want' document was adopted to address the world's environmental, political, and economic challenges, which culminated in the subsequent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development by the United Nations General assembly in 2015. The SDGs replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which started in the year 2000, and for 15 years, they worked towards reducing poverty, increasing access to water and sanitation, reducing child mortality and maternal mortality, and ensuring access to free primary education. At their conclusion, more than one billion people were lifted out of extreme poverty, child mortality had dropped to more than half, school dropouts for children had dropped by more than half, and HIV infection rates had fallen by almost 40%.

The SDGs now come in to move the world towards a more sustainable path and finish what was started under the MDGs by reaffirming international commitment to end poverty, leave no one behind, and ensure global cooperation to build a sustainable and prosperous planet for all. All 54 countries in Africa, through the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), have signed onto the 2030 Agenda, undertaking to implement the SDGs locally and participate in global efforts towards building a sustainable and prosperous planet for all with many countries integrating the SDGs into their national plans and voluntarily reporting on the progress made. UNECA and the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD) have been tasked to oversee the implementation of the SDGs in Africa, and they regularly convene to do just this.

Africa is made up of 54 sovereign states and has an estimated population of 1.54 billion people; it is the second largest continent and the second most populous continent in the world, making up 18.3% of the world's population, with the most populous countries being Nigeria, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Egypt, all of which have populations above 100 million. Africa also boasts of having the world's youngest population, with 60% of its population below 25 years of age. It also has the fastest-growing economies in the world, ranging from 1.3% to 8.1% GDP growth in 2023. Women make up 50% of the population in Africa, and African countries have committed to eliminating discrimination against women and advancing gender equality. Unfortunately, progress on this has stalled, with African women lagging behind their counterparts in almost all spheres. At this pace, UN Women Africa opines that it will take Sub-Saharan Africa 134.7 years and North Africa 142.4 years to achieve gender parity.

In 2025, ARFSD and UNECA will convene in Kampala, Uganda, to consider SDG 3 on good health and well-being, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG 14 on marine life, and SDG 17 on global collaboration. This position paper will consider the progress made by Africa in implementing SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14, and 17 for women in all their diversities and the challenges faced, making recommendations for Africa to stay on track in implementing these SDGs for all women. These recommendations will be presented to the ARFSD for consideration and inclusion in the outcome statement.

4. Status of SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14, and 17 for African Women

4.1 SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

4.1.1 Health funding

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined Universal Health Coverage to mean that everyone has access to quality health services that they need without risk of financial hardship. In 2001, the African Union adopted the Abuja Declaration with member states undertaking to allocate 15% of their national budgets towards the health sector, 24 years down the road, only South Africa and Cape Verde have consistently been able to accomplish this target with the rest of the African countries spending an average of 7.4% of their total national budgets on health with huge discrepancies across the board.

The WHO Africa Regional Office reported that Africa spent $145 million on health in 2023, with countries spending on average 5% of their GDPs on health, which is way below the global average of 10%. They also noted that while African governments had increased their general health expenditure as a share of government expenditure, these increments remain way below global averages and are often minimal moreover, there exist huge discrepancies from country to country, ranging from 2.1% to 12% necessitating efforts to close both these regional and global gaps in health financing.

According to the WHO Africa Regional Office, even with the limited funds made available, those earmarked for specific groups—such as women, girls, and marginalized communities—are often misappropriated due to weak accountability mechanisms. A significant portion of health budgets intended to support maternal health, reproductive care, and other critical services for women and girls are frequently subjected to embezzlement and mismanagement. This is largely due to the absence of stringent oversight frameworks that track and regulate the use of these resources. Strengthening monitoring systems, enforcing anti-corruption measures, and enhancing financial accountability are, therefore, essential to ensuring that health funds reach their intended beneficiaries and contribute to equitable healthcare access.

The gross underfunding of the health sector and misuse of funds demonstrates African countries' limited capacity to raise domestic revenue for health and has led to a heavy reliance on external sources to cover the budget deficits with no clear plan for sustainability; WHO Africa Regional Office reports that external sources contribute an average of 20% to the current health expenditure in Africa with varying degrees of discrepancies. South Sudan has the highest dependence on external support, with two-thirds of its health funding coming from external sources, Uganda, Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe follow closely after, with more than 40% of their health funding coming from external sources. The limited internal resource mobilization by African countries has been driven by among others unfair global tax systems that have relegated African governments to relying on consumption taxes as they lose billions in illicit financial flows every year. Also, global financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have implemented austerity policies which have worked to reinforce structural adjustment program policies like deregulation and privatisation paving the way for aid dependence.

The gross underfunding of the health sector has led to high out-of-pocket expenditures on health; Human Rights Watch reports that, on average, every African household spends over 10% of their household budget on healthcare and that one-third of all healthcare services are financed from out of pocket. Health Policy Watch also notes that annually 8.2% of Africans incur catastrophic healthcare costs, pushing 15 million of them into poverty as a result of this out-of-pocket expenditure. For a continent with the highest levels of poverty in the world, this is way too high and places strain on the finances of already poor people, which has led to a common saying in Africa that 'you are one disease away from poverty' highlighting the impact sickness has on one's financial stability. Women in Global Health argues that women are disproportionately affected by this because they also bear the burden of taking care of the sick as part of unpaid care work, with a failing health system, they have to do more labour to ensure their loved ones survive the system.

Some African countries like Rwanda, Ethiopia, Senegal, Tanzania, and Mali have tried to address the funding gap in health expenditure by implementing community-based health insurance schemes where community members contribute to a shared fund to cover health costs. Such initiatives have proved successful in protecting members against financial hardships brought on by healthcare costs and offer a pivoting from reliance on external funding for health to domestic resource pooling. Also, several African countries like Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Gabon, Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia have adopted national health insurance schemes to address health funding gaps while others like Burkina, Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mali, South Africa, Togo and Uganda are in the process of setting up national health insurance schemes. These innovations will go a long way in ensuring that health expenditures do not drive people into poverty.

4.1.2 Access to health information and services

Africa has made strides in improving the health outcomes of its population, with our life expectancy increasing to an average of 64 years as a result of better management of malaria, improved reproductive health services, and robust HIV interventions. But even with these improvements, the region continues to carry 23% of the global disease burden, with epidemics like Ebola, HIV, Monkeypox, and so many others continuing to plague the continent. Also, essential health services often needed by women, like abortion, family planning, and assisted reproductive technologies, are usually denied and or neglected, depriving women of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Health Policy Watch reports that only 48% of Africans have access to the health care they need, the rest grapple with poor quality health care that is caused by a heavy reliance on imported health goods and poor funding to the health sector, which has led to limited investment in the health workforce, persistent drug stock-outs, poor infrastructure, and low-quality medicines.

Access to health information and services is also aggravated by legal and institutional barriers that criminalise people for who they are. Laws like the criminalisation of abortion, the criminalisation of sex work, the criminalisation of same-sex relationships, the criminalisation of HIV, and the requirement for parental consent for adolescents to access sexual and reproductive health services have hindered these groups of people from accessing healthcare. For example, on the question of abortion, only 4 African countries (Angola, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, and South Africa) permit abortion at will during the first trimester, other countries have some form of stringent restriction denying women access to care and leading to unsafe abortions while Senegal, Mauritania, Madagascar, Guinea Bissau, Gabon, and Congo completely prohibit abortion under all circumstances. On the question of sexual and gender minorities, 31 African countries continue to criminalise homosexuality, with 10 of them having stand-alone laws targeting this group of people and legalising and institutionalising discrimination against them. This means that the essential health needs of people affected by such laws are neither prioritised nor met.

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Access to healthcare also remains a class issue where the rich are often guaranteed access to quality healthcare, but the poor are often side lined. The inequitable coverage of essential health services is also demonstrated in the wide discrepancies that exist between African countries on national expenditure on health. This means that those who are poor (who are the majority) and those in conflict-prone areas will often fail to access quality healthcare because they cannot afford it. As a continent, we still have a long way to go to reform our health systems to guarantee universal health coverage for all Africans regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, economic status, and age.

4.1.3 Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

One of the targets of SDG 3 is to ensure access to sexual and reproductive rights for all, including women. In 2003, the African Union adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, commonly known as the Maputo Protocol. The Maputo Protocol has been lauded as one of the most progressive laws on women's rights globally and yet 21 years after its adoption, many African countries have failed to fully domesticate this protocol and others maintain reservations on certain clauses, especially on Article 14 which recognizes reproductive rights for women.

Under Article 14, the Protocol guarantees women's right to health, including sexual and reproductive health, which guarantees women's right to control their fertility, the right to access abortion services in instances of sexual violence, and the right to access sexual and reproductive health services. Unfortunately, these guarantees have seen limited implementation in Africa, with some countries (Burundi, Kenya, Libya, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, and Uganda) placing reservations on Article 14. Even the countries that have no reservations on Article 14 continue to drop the ball by failing to prioritise access to sexual and reproductive health services for women on the continent. In addition, women and girls with disabilities have limited access to sexual and reproductive health services due to physical, communication, and attitudinal barriers with health workers often lacking training on disability-inclusive health services, leading to discriminatory treatment.

UNAIDs reports that over 25.7 million people are living with HIV in Africa, with 1.1 million new infections every year, 62% of which are for women and girls, with East Africa having the highest infection rates, they also note that Africa has an average Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) coverage of 56% which is still quite low.

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Also, several African countries like Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Gabon, Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia have adopted national health insurance schemes to address health funding gaps while others like Burkina, Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mali, South Africa, Togo and Uganda

The maternal mortality rates in Africa are on a steady decline, with the regional average, according to WHO Africa Regional Office, now at 531 deaths for every 100,000 births, although this remains way above the SDG target of reducing maternal deaths to 70 deaths for every 100,000 live births. There also exist huge discrepancies across the region, where 30 countries saw a decrease in their maternal mortality rate while 17 saw an increase. Cape Verde, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Algeria had the lowest maternal mortality rates, which are all below 90 deaths for every 100,000 births, while South Sudan, Chad, and Nigeria had the highest maternal mortality rates, which are all above 1000 deaths for every 100,000 births, it is also estimated that 5.2% to 17.2% of these maternal deaths are due to abortion. Most of these deaths are preventable and are caused by poor health-seeking behaviours, delays in getting to a health facility where most African countries have no adequate ambulance system or transportation, delays in decision-making where health decisions are made jointly with family members, and delays in getting treatment.

Access to family planning services on the continent has also improved over time, with 78% of women being able to access family planning services, although the contraceptive prevalence rate remains low at 28%. For adolescents, access to family planning services remains low largely because of ignorance and lack of comprehensive sexuality education, lack of resources, and a lack of youth-friendly health services that target them; we also have legal barriers that prevent adolescents from receiving comprehensive sexuality education and contraceptives without parental consent, and yet they continue to have sex. WHO Africa Regional Office reports that, annually on average, 33 abortions happen for every 1000 women in Africa among these, 57% happen among girls aged 15-24 because they lack access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services. Africa prides itself in being a young continent, with over 60% of its population being under the age of 25, and yet the continent is failing to invest in the health and well-being of its young people.

4.1.4 Key Recommendations

- **Increase domestic funding for the health sector:** African countries must prioritize fast-tracking increases in domestic funding for the health sector to align with the Abuja Declaration to ensure sustained access to robust health information and services for all Africans.

- **Prioritise Universal Health Coverage:** African governments need to strengthen their health systems to provide affordable and quality health services for everyone but more so for those within rural and conflict-affected areas. This should be done by investing in primary healthcare and the health workforce, including community health workers, ensuring access to medicines and quality and modern technologies, practicing good governance and resourcing, and building evidence to inform decision-making through data collection.

- **Escalate the establishment of national health insurance schemes:** African countries should escalate the establishment of national health insurance schemes and community-based insurance schemes to address the persistent health financing gaps and ensure that health expenditure does not drive people into poverty.

- **Invest in accessible and inclusive healthcare services:** African countries should invest in inclusive healthcare services for women and girls with disabilities, including sexual and reproductive health services, and also take into consideration the 15% for 15% commitment of funding from the Amman Berlin declaration of 2025 at the Global Disability Summit

- **Eliminate legal barriers affecting access to healthcare:** There still exist several legal barriers within the region that impede access to healthcare. These legal barriers should be eliminated through law reform to guarantee unfettered access to healthcare for all Africans, regardless of who they are.

- **Guarantee access to sexual and reproductive health information and services for adolescents:** African Governments need to remove legal, institutional, and social barriers that hinder adolescents from accessing sexual and reproductive health information and services such as contraceptives and abortion.

- **Eliminate implementation of austerity measures imposed by global financial institutions:** African countries should work towards eliminating austerity measures imposed by global financial institutions that require governments to reduce funding to healthcare and other social services.

4.2 SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

4.2.1 Political Leadership

SDG 5 aims to achieve 50% women's representation in political leadership by 2030. Africa Barometer reports that 41 out of the 54 African countries have in place some sort of affirmative action for women to hold political leadership positions, but even with these incentives, women are only 26% of the 13,057 parliamentarians that exist on the continent in 2024, with a 1% increase from 2021. East Africa has the highest number of women representation at 36%, while Central Africa has the lowest number of women representation at 18%. In terms of countries, Rwanda has the most women in parliament, making up 61% of their house representatives, while Nigeria has the lowest number of women representatives, with them making up only 4% of their house representatives.

Women in top leadership positions, which include presidents, vice presidents, and prime ministers, paint an even grimmer picture since they make up only 13% of all top leadership positions in 2024, although there is a marked increase in this number from 7% in 2021. With the top leadership, East Africa has the highest number of women representation at 28%, while North Africa has no women representation at top leadership levels. With these findings, Africa Barometer found that it is unlikely that the majority of African countries will meet the 50% target in SDG 5 and that it will take until 2100 for Africa to achieve gender parity on this issue if they continue to move at this pace.

Africa is not short of legal frameworks, or policies which promote women's political leadership and participation. The United Nations General Assembly in 1981, instituted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The framework is an international treaty adopted and ratified by over 189 states, including African countries. Regionally we have the African Charter on Human and People's Rights as well as Agenda 2063, AU African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, the 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation (A/RES/66/130); and the recently held Generation Equality Forum. While there is an array of legal and policy frameworks that have been put in place to promote women's participation in politics, there has been little effort to address violence against women in politics.

Some of the barriers hindering women from actively taking on political leadership roles include deeply seated societal expectations that require women to prioritize reproductive and nurturing roles as wives and mothers, forcing them to forfeit any other ambitions that they may have. Women also bear the burden of domestic and care work, which creates tension between their private and professional lives, where they more often than not have to sacrifice their professional lives to fulfil these roles. Women also face a lot of violence, harassment, and abuse, both physically, sexually, and online, when they take up political positions with weak legal and institutional frameworks to address and curb such harassment and abuse.

It also does not help that politics is often viewed as a man's world, and most political parties are set up based on deeply patriarchal systems that seek to invisibilize women and their issues, often treating them as tokens with no real power in that even when they get into these political positions, they often fail to execute their mandate effectively. African countries must demonstrate a commitment to increasing women's political participation by ensuring that women have the numbers and are also able to effectively participate, not leaving them out to dry as the underprepared minority. African countries therefore need to adopt and scale up feminist approaches to building democracy and accelerate implementation of existing instruments that advance women's participation in politics.

4.2.2 The rise of anti-gender groups

We note a worldwide backlash against women's rights and gender parity in all sectors - legislature, corporations, and civil society. The rise in anti-gender and anti-rights groups is undermining the consensus built on women's rights over time. These groups seek to codify and enforce a 'natural' order of life based on traditional and religious interpretations of gender roles. Predominantly driven by religious and conservative factions, they have launched attacks on human rights both globally and regionally, using the rights of marginalized individuals as a stepping stone. This movement contributes to a rise in authoritarianism and undermines human rights systems worldwide and locally, attacking gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the rights of sexual and gender minorities. They exploit the guise of fighting for 'family values' to strip women, girls, LGBTQI+ individuals, and other minorities of their human rights.

Many of these anti-gender groups are based in the United States of America (USA) but have been spreading their influence to other parts of the world including Africa by establishing and or financing organisations locally that purport to uphold 'African values'. The Global Philanthropic Project reports that Africa alone received $162 million of such funding between 2013-2017 and within this time we have seen increased backlash for women's rights and laws cropping up all over the continent to undermine sexual and reproductive health and rights.

These anti-gender groups advocate for a legal and social system based on patriarchal values where women are subservient to men and are essentially treated as second-class citizens whose only value is in giving birth to children. They reduce women to their reproductive capacities, mandating them to reproduce regardless of choice by restricting access to contraceptives and abortion and also seeking to restrict divorce regardless of violence and

abuse. This attack on women's rights must be stopped if Africa wishes to achieve SDG 5, the agency and autonomy of women are not up for debate and compulsion. African countries must take steps to curb these groups and fully protect the human rights of women and girls in all their diversities on the continent.

4.2.3 Gender-based violence

SDG 5 seeks to eliminate all violence against women. Gender-based violence is harm perpetuated against a person based on gender norms and unequal power relations, with women and girls being disproportionately affected, and it includes sexual violence, domestic violence trafficking, and female genital mutilation, to mention but a few. The World Bank reports that 42% of African Women report having experienced some form of physical or sexual violence during their lifetime. UN Women Africa also reports that approximately 27% of African women have experienced some form of physical and or sexual violence from an intimate partner during their lifetime, a rate which is higher than the global average of 30%.

Africa also had the highest number of reported femicides in 2022, totalling 89,000 women or girls killed, with an average of 133 women or girls killed every day by a family member. Gender-based violence is caused by harmful socio-cultural norms that are often informed by culture and religion, which relegate women to being second-class citizens, and violence is frequently used to put them back in their place whenever it is perceived that they have stepped out of line. Gender-based violence is also caused by alcohol abuse and poverty and is sustained by a lack of adequate legal protections for survivors who often struggle to access justice through the formal legal system that is usually riddled with corruption, is poorly funded and is manned by people who carry societal biases against women.

We also see the persistence of harmful practices that are often perpetuated against women, like female genital mutilation, child marriage, early pregnancy, virginity testing, breast ironing, child sacrifice, child labour, and payment of bride price, with limited efforts to address them. UNICEF reports that despite noteworthy improvements globally, Africa still has the highest levels of both child marriage and female genital mutilation, with over 40 million girls having undergone both harmful practices. Up to 130 million African girls were married off as children, with the highest rates of child marriage being recorded in Niger, the Central African Republic, Chad, Mozambique, and South Sudan, all of which have above 50% of their girls married off as children. The countries in

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Africa that have almost eliminated child marriage include Tunisia, Algeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Namibia, Eswatini, and Djibouti. While many countries criminalise child marriage in some form, these laws are barely implemented.

A lot of progress has been made in slowing female genital mutilation, especially in Egypt, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia, but even with these improvements, Africa still has 140 million girls or women who have undergone female genital mutilation with countries like Somalia, Guinea, Djibouti, and Mali having over 90% of their female population undergo female genital mutilation. On the flip side, countries like Uganda, Cameroon, Ghana, Niger, Togo, Tanzania and Benin have almost eliminated female genital mutilation. Most countries have laws that prohibit female genital mutilation, but these laws have received limited application and countries like Gambia now want to introduce laws that allow female genital mutilation.

Disabled Women in Africa report that women and girls with disabilities face higher risks of gender-based violence and often lack access to justice and protection services. Women and girls with disabilities experience gender-based violence at disproportionately higher rates and in unique forms as compared to women without disabilities. It is estimated that 83% of women with disabilities will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. Unique forms of violence include forced sterilisation, forced contraception, and deprivation of necessities, mobility, and sensory devices, exacerbated by systemic ableism and sexism. Disability is often left out of gender equality policies, leading to their exclusion from empowerment programs.

Gender-based violence often intersects with survivors almost always suffering more than one form of violence. It impacts the health, well-being, autonomy, and education of survivors, leaving long-lasting impacts that hinder the growth and stability of an individual. The World Bank also reports that Gender-based violence costs countries up to 3.7% of their GDP and needs to be addressed as a matter of national priority. In 2017, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted the Guidelines on Combatting Sexual Violence and its Consequences in Africa to act as a benchmark for countries to adopt legal frameworks that take a survivor-centred approach toward access to justice for survivors of sexual violence, but so far there has been limited domestication of the same.

4.2.4 Wars and conflict

According to the Geneva Academy, Africa has the second largest number of armed conflicts per region in the world with 35 active conflicts currently ongoing in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. These armed conflicts are often between non-state armed groups and state security forces often fighting for power and control of resources. They are also often limited to fighting within the country save for the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo which has spilled over into other countries.

Human Rights Watch notes that African leaders have not prioritized ending wars and conflicts on the continent and ensuring justice for those affected. The regional mechanisms put in place to end conflict and establish peace are weak and lack political will and leadership with conflicting countries often preferring peace negotiators from outside the continent which unnecessarily prolongs these conflicts leaving many civilians vulnerable to violence, death, and displacement. Women are also often left out of peace negotiations and processes where only 9.6% of peace negotiators worldwide are women, this means peace deals are often not gender aware and yet research shows that peace deals that involve women last longer.

Africa also had the highest number of reported femicides in 2022, totalling 89,000 women or girls killed, with an average of 133 women or girls killed every day by a family member.

Wars and conflicts in Africa greatly impact women, increasing their risk to violence and death. It also hinders their access to education, health especially reproductive health services, and economic opportunities. These conflicts also heighten gender-based violence with many women finding themselves subject to sexual violence. Displacement and forced migration are also one of the major impacts of wars and conflict with 8.2 million African women affected making up 65% of displaced populations. It is therefore imperative that wars and conflicts on the continent are ended to allow peace to flourish.

4.2.5 Unpaid care work

SDG 5 seeks to recognise, redistribute and value unpaid care and domestic work. Women bear the burden of providing care and domestic work for their families, such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, the elderly, and the sick, collecting firewood, emotional labour, and so many other tasks that are often viewed as part of their natural role within society and receive no monetary compensation. The World Bank reports that women in Africa, on average spend 2.86 hours on care work more than men which when added to their formal work means they spend 1.2 hours working more than men per day. This labour is often neglected and yet greatly impacts women's participation in the public sphere of life making it hard for them to achieve a balance between their private and professional lives.

4.2.6 Economic opportunities

SDG 5 seeks to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources. Many African women face economic disparities even as they have the highest participation within the workfo rce, where African women makeup 62% of the workforce compared to the global average of 47% and contribute 44% of household needs. Even with this contribution, 1 out of every 10 women globally lives in extreme poverty, the majority of whom live in Sub-Saharan Africa. There is a big gender pay gap due to a general lack of minimum/living wage and minimum/ living wage legislations on the one hand and investment laws that prioritize investor interests over the welfare and needs of the labour force, on the other.

As such, women in Africa have less access to resources and, therefore, lag when it comes to economic opportunities given that they largely rely on their labour for survival. African women have some of the highest entrepreneurship rates globally, mainly due to limited employment opportunities and their socially assigned care responsibilities which place a disproportionate burden on them to innovatively find ways of meeting their dependents' needs, forcing them to come up with creative ways to earn an income. Despite this entrepreneurial spirit, African women suffer a plethora of challenges, such as low-profit margins, unpaid care work, low education and skills, limited access to markets, delayed payments, low land ownership, and high cost of capital and financial services, which stifle financial growth and entrepreneurship.

A case in point is access to financial services, where the World Bank found that 70% of African women are excluded from financial institutions and only 47% of women in Africa have a bank account compared to 60% of men, which leaves so many women out of accessing formal financial services and impacting their access to credit. This is one of the reasons why only 13% of women in Africa are reported to have borrowed through formal channels as opposed to 16% of men, with many women reporting that they mostly borrow informally through friends and family. There is light at the end of the tunnel, though, where it is noted that there is not much difference in the use of mobile money accounts, with mobile money revolutionising access to financial services in Africa by bringing these services closer to marginalised people including women although the heavy taxes imposed on such transactions hinders its full use.

The different sectors of work are also siloed, with women being drawn into female-dominated sectors like tailoring, market trade, retail, beauty, and cosmetics while shunning male-dominated sectors like fishing, forestry, agriculture, and manufacturing where they often provide

Disabled Women in Africa report that women and girls with disabilities face higher risks of gender-based violence and often lack access to justice and protection services. Women and girls with disabilities experience gender-based violence at disproportionately higher rates and in unique forms as compared to women without disabilities.

labour but mostly do not own such businesses. For the agriculture sector, women provide 60% to 80% of all agricultural labour but do not own the land and this agriculture is often for subsistence and is unpaid. The female-dominated sectors are mostly informal and attract low-profit margins, which has contributed to the gender wage gap in Africa. The informality of these businesses also means that they have limited legal protections and access to credit. Many of the programs established to catalyse economic growth within countries do not target women-led businesses, nor do they have quotas reserved for women which have left women struggling to maintain and grow their businesses.

4.2.7 Key recommendations

- **SDG 5 should be reviewed every year:** In the 2022 Africa Sustainable Development Report, it was noted that SDG 5 is a cross-cutting issue among all other SDGs and yet up to this point it is still reviewed as a stand-alone SDG. We recommend that going forward the ARFSD reviews SDG 5 on an annual basis similar to SDG 17 given that both are deeply embedded within all the other SDGs.

- **Urgently repeal discriminatory laws and policies against women and girls in all their diversity:** Many laws and policies across the region still limit women's autonomy, access to land, access to credit, access to education, and leadership positions and these need to be repealed. African countries also need to strengthen and put in place mechanisms for the implementation of the existing legal frameworks that advance gender equality.

- **Step up and fight against corruption:** African governments must recognize and address the gendered impacts of corruption, which often manifest as discriminatory corruption and sexual corruption, further exacerbating the discrimination of women and girls. To combat this, governments should reinforce and implement gender-sensitive anti-corruption policies in alignment with the African Union (AU) Gender Agenda, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), and international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by integrating gender-responsive anti-corruption measures into national anti-corruption strategies and policies.

- **Deliberately invest in women's entrepreneurship:** Governments must prioritise investing in women's entrepreneurship by establishing quotas for investment portfolios to invest in women-led businesses but also include women within businesses. They should also set up women's investment programs to ensure that women have access to credit to enable them to sustain their businesses.

- **Domesticate the Guidelines on Combatting Sexual Violence and its Consequences in Africa:** African countries need to prioritise the domestication and implementation of these guidelines to address the scourge of sexual violence and address the health needs of survivors within the region.

- **Enforce laws against harmful practices:** Many laws have been passed across the region to curb harmful practices like female genital mutilation and child marriage, but these laws have scarcely been enforced. It is, therefore, imperative for African countries to collectively and urgently enforce laws against harmful practices to ensure justice for the survivors and also to repeal those laws and policies that allow these harmful practices to continue.

- **Mainstream disability in all gender equality efforts:** African countries should mainstream disability in all gender equality efforts ensuring that women with disabilities are at the centre of decision-making processes.

- **Strengthen women's leadership:** African states need to strengthen women's leadership by improving protections for women, implementing affirmative action, and providing incentives to encourage women's leadership.

- **Stop excusing discrimination using culture and 'African values':** A lot of abuse and discrimination against women in Africa is justified and explained away using culture and 'African values' as an excuse. Culture is very much valued, but if it turns women into second-class citizens and contributes to their oppression, then such culture must be rejected fully and the human rights of women upheld.

- **Work towards ending civil wars and conflicts on the continent:** African countries need to prioritise ending wars and conflicts and ensuring that peace prevails. The thirst for power and greed must be curbed, and the region has to establish strong mechanisms for early warning of pending conflict, dissuading war, and establishing and maintaining peace on the continent. African governments must also adopt and update or renew their commitments towards National Action Plans for the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women's Peace and Security.

- **Encourage the full domestication of the Maputo Protocol:** African states need to lift all reservations on this protocol and fast-track the domestication of the Maputo Protocol to ensure African women can enjoy the full breadth of their human rights.

- **Engage men and boys as allies:** The engagement of men and boys in transforming social and gender norms to advance gender equality is very critical. Male engagement to address unpaid care work is essential, especially if it is done through a feminist systems change lens that challenges existing patriarchal norms.

- **Promote digital inclusion:** The digital divide needs to be closed by reducing the cost of internet access and curbing online gender-based violence to ensure women have access and can freely participate in the digital space.

- **Adopt and implement gender-responsive budgeting:** It is critical to secure adequate funding for gender-responsive programs and institutions to enable them to fulfil their mandates effectively. Additionally, building capacity for gender budgeting and empowering subnational and local actors to adopt and integrate gender-responsive budgeting into budget development, implementation monitoring, and expenditure analysis is crucial for meaningful progress.

- **Recognise, redistribute and value unpaid care work:** African countries need to recognise, redistribute and value this labour and attach value to it instead of minimising and diminishing this contribution. A socialized, public-sector response is therefore essential to reverse the deeply entrenched, unequal distribution of care work in Africa.

- **Enhance regional and continental cooperation to achieve Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063:** With the rest of the world moving towards prioritising national interests, African countries need to strengthen not just the African Union but all other regional economic mechanisms to support the localization of SDGs with a gender perspective and make them part of their priorities moving forward.

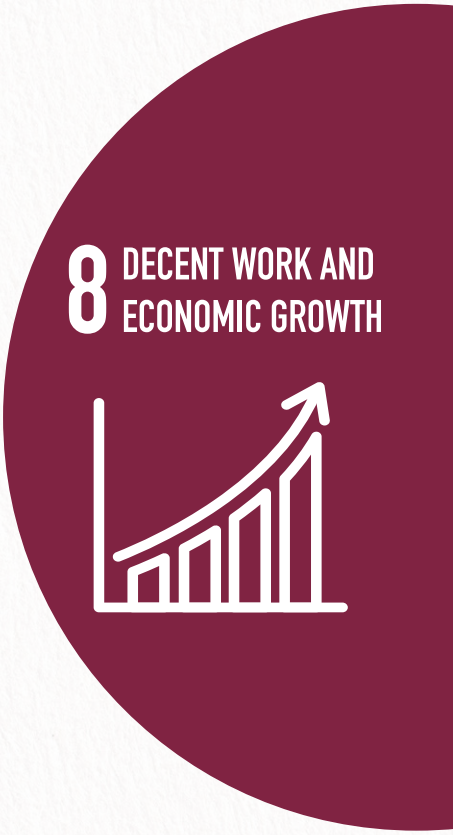
- **Introduce Progressive Tax systems:** African countries need to increase progressive tax revenues and avoid regressive taxes like VAT and excise duty on consumption goods and services on which the majority of women and low-income earners rely. For example, they should increase taxes on corporate profits, financial activities, wealth, property, imports/ exports, natural resources, and digital services or end special economic zones and other tax exemptions/ breaks to big corporations instead of taxing life necessities.

A case in point is access to financial services, where the World Bank found that 70% of African women are excluded from financial institutions and only 47% of women in Africa have a bank account compared to 60% of men, which leaves so many women out of accessing formal financial services and impacting their access to credit.

4.3 SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

4.3.1 Informal work

As stated above, African women have the highest participation in the workforce globally making up 44% of people who are employed in Africa meaning that they are crucial in the development agenda of most countries. Unfortunately, 64% of women find themselves working informally and in vulnerable employment. The World Bank defines informal work as unregistered jobs and small-scale unregistered businesses. Many African women opt for informal work because of the need for flexible working hours since they bear the social burden of unpaid care and domestic work and also often have limited marketable skills.



Girls are the most vulnerable when it comes to informal work because they find it harder to access education, training, and employment opportunities. Girls have high rates of unemployment and slow rates of transitioning from school to work, with the World Bank reporting that by 2021, over 30% of girls in Africa between 15 and 24 years of age were neither in school nor in employment. Their opportunities to work are mostly affected by a lack of skills, limited access to finance, lack of networks since most young people require help to get work, discrimination, and limited mobility, thus forcing them into informal work.

Informal work, because of its nature, restricts access to non-monetary benefits of employment such as annual and maternity leave, mandatory working hours, days off, and a set criterion for termination. Informal work also leads to lower earnings, no contributions to retirement funds, and no legal protections, making women who work there lack social protection and leaving them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation making it critical for African countries to address this issue.

4.3.2 Dignified work

SDG 8 seeks to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men. Dignified work provides stability, purpose, respect, fair wages, good working conditions, and job security for the worker. Many African countries have laws, policies, and programs to protect workers within their jurisdiction, but these laws usually only protect those doing formal work and those in full-time employment. These laws also fail to address the burden of unpaid care and domestic work that many women carry. The laws also provide very little social security for women in Africa with only 8% of women having some sort of formal social protection, behind men who are at 26.5%.

The lack of dignified work is largely because most African women work in the informal sector, which has limited legal protections. There are also high rates of unemployment and underemployment, which means people are willing to take on exploitative jobs to earn a living. There are also issues like sexual harassment within the workplace that remain unaddressed, with many women suffering sanctions and harassment for reporting their bosses for sexually harassing them.

Women are also underrepresented in corporate leadership positions, with only 16% of companies in Africa having female top managers, while only 24.3% of company board seats have women, although these statistics are higher than in most regions in the world, they still demonstrate a huge gap in leadership for women in corporate spaces requiring redress.

4.3.3 Key recommendations

- **Improve social protection systems:** African countries must invest in and expand formal social protection systems to ensure that unemployed people, those with disabilities who cannot work, pregnant women, new mothers, orphans, and so many other vulnerable people are supported to live dignified lives within this capitalist society. This can be done by adopting, domesticating, and implementing the International Labour Organization Violence and Harassment Convention of 2019. They must also expand maternity leave to at least six months, guarantee affordable childcare, provide health insurance, and build social safety nets for citizens.

- **Improve legal protections for women in the informal sector:** Many women in Africa work within the informal sector, which has little to no legal protections for people who work there. African governments need to urgently establish laws that protect women within the informal sector by guaranteeing a minimum wage, granting maternity leave, prohibiting sexual harassment, and ensuring compulsory contributions to retirement funds by employers.

4.4 SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

4.4.1 Marine conservation efforts

African women play a critical, often undervalued role in managing and conserving marine resources, encompassing activities from fishing and processing to conservation efforts and policy advocacy. They are particularly vital in post-harvest activities, often comprising the majority of fish processors and traders, and are actively involved in sustainable fishing practices and community-based marine conservation initiatives. They also possess deep local knowledge of marine ecosystems and resources, which is crucial for developing sustainable conservation strategies. They are also actively engaged in community-based initiatives aimed at protecting marine environments, such as mangrove restoration and protecting reef ecosystems. African women are also increasingly taking on leadership roles in marine conservation efforts, advocating for policy changes and engaging local communities in conservation activities.

Many African women rely on fishing, making up 60% of those handling fish once landed, water collection, and processing of aquatic resources for their livelihoods and food security. They are often at the forefront of collecting water, especially in areas with limited access to clean water, and are vital for water management and sanitation. Women are also key in fish processing, a vital part of the food chain, and often face challenges in accessing markets and fair prices for their products. They are also disproportionately affected by the impact of environmental degradation and climate change and their contributions to marine conservation are often overlooked necessitating increased participation and funding.

4.4.2 Key recommendations

- **Enhance women's participation in the management of ocean resources:** Women are part and parcel of the marine life ecosystem but are often neglected. African countries need to increase women's involvement in the management of ocean resources and also in the implementation of such policies at local, national, and regional levels.

- **Promote marine conservation initiatives:** African countries need to support the upscaling of promising marine conservation initiatives that address cultural and systemic change to ensure equal and inclusive access for women and girls to traditional natural resources and support gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation programs in communities close to water bodies.

- **Facilitate women with finances and technical capacity to own and manage fish preservation:** This will lead to improved fish hygiene and preservation and could reduce wastage. This can be done by supporting the establishment of local cooperatives for women to help with organising, mobilising, and marketing.

- **Mainstream gender in the education, forestry, and environmental sectors;** for example, support the elaboration of gender-sensitive and climate change-friendly curricula at all levels of the education systems to ensure equal chances and climate change responsiveness at earlier stages of education for boys and girls

4.5 SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

4.5.1 Global aid cuts

One of the key targets of SDG 17 is to secure additional financial assistance for developing countries and ensure countries fully meet their official development assistance commitments. Unfortunately, this target has been affected by the change in government in the US following the 2024 elections, which saw Donald Trump become president. Donald Trump has taken an America-first approach and has gutted the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and drastically reduced funding to the US Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and many other aid programs. These entities have been funding healthcare, agriculture, and education in Africa, funding which no longer exists and has left a huge gap in access to social services for marginalised groups including women and girls.

These aid cuts are not just being implemented by the US, but also European partners have been systematically cutting aid for some time, with countries like France, Germany, Britain, Sweden, and the Netherlands announcing aid cuts to redirect resources to national expenditures. 80% of Africa's funding for HIV and Malaria comes from foreign aid, and 30% of Africa's health expenditure comes from foreign aid. The aid cuts have now been reduced from $81 billion to $25 billion in 2025 creating a crisis for African countries to meet the health needs of their populations.

CDC Africa anticipates that between 2-4 million Africans are likely to die because of these aid cuts, and 39 million people in Africa will further be pushed into poverty because of increased out-of-pocket expenditures. African countries relying on this aid are also expected to run out of ARVs within months of the aid cuts being implemented. Experts project that this trend in reducing foreign aid will likely reverse 20 years of achievements in reproductive health, child health, and infectious diseases. It does not help that African countries are heavily in debt and are often servicing these debts, leaving them struggling to cover these funding gaps. There is, therefore, a need for African countries to focus on alternative funding to meet the needs of their people.

4.5.2 Key recommendations

- **Strengthen tax systems:** Taxation is a powerful tool for building economic resilience and tackling systemic inequalities. However, the way tax systems are designed and implemented often deepens existing disparities, placing a heavier burden on women and marginalized groups, especially in the Global South. There is a need for countries to strengthen their efforts toward domestic resource mobilisation by putting in place measures to curb illicit financial flows, eliminate harmful tax incentives and exemptions, and further introduce or increase progressive taxes on wealth. These strategies are bound to increase revenue collection to fund development and gender equality efforts.

- **Provide incentives for corporations to fund social programs locally:** In the face of massive cuts to global aid that have impacted social services like health and education across the region, African governments must start incentivising private corporations operating locally to fund social programs within their countries. This can be done by providing tax cuts for those who do this by way of corporate social responsibility and also by collaboratively encouraging corporations to fund social programs to improve their brands.

- **Improve gender-disaggregated data collection:** There are a lot of gaps in existing data on SDGs within the continent and we need to ensure that regional and international partnerships prioritise the collection of data on gender disparities to inform evidence-based policymaking instead of relying on assumptions and stereotypes of what is happening on the continent. They should also accept and rely on citizen-generated data that speaks to the lived realities of people instead of disregarding it as inauthentic.

- **Fast track the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement:** This Agreement was adopted in 2018 to ultimately create a borderless Africa and ease trade and movement restrictions across African Countries but has seen limited application to date. African States must genuinely commit to implementing this agreement and foster true collaboration amongst African countries to thrive.

- **Adopt finance for development strategies to ensure sustainable development:** African countries should focus on developing and implementing finance for development strategies to ensure that resources are prioritized to address development challenges like strengthening social services (read health and education among others), addressing poverty, and combating the impact of climate change instead of these resources being used for individual gain.

- **Establish a regional accountability framework:** African governments, in partnership with the African Union and regional bodies, should put up a regional accountability framework to track how international commitments such as ODA, climate finance, and debt relief are being honoured and implemented at the national level. This should include public dashboards, country-level scorecards developed by civil society coalitions, annual civic audits, and data partnerships with national statistical offices and citizen-generated data initiatives. By empowering CSOs to lead transparent, participatory monitoring, this framework will strengthen trust, ensure resources reach intended beneficiaries, and position Africa as an active steward of sustainable development commitments.

5. Conclusion

From the discussions above Africa is not on track to achieving Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 for African women often lagging behind their counterparts in other continents. The Africa Gender Index of 2023 shows a slight improvement in Africa in gender equality from 0.484 to 0.503 between 2021 and 2023. The improvement is noted in areas like access to education, healthcare, and political representation, but there remain challenges in achieving gender parity in Africa with wide discrepancies across the region. To achieve Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 African countries need to take advancing gender equality more seriously and increase investments in gender-responsive programming. They also have to unequivocally guarantee and protect the rights of women and girls in all their diversities across the region.

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