



Women of Impact:

Inspiring Stories of African Women Leaders



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In Partnership with





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The compendium is a compilation of the stories of 25 impactful women leaders as well as the available legal and policy frameworks and partners' publications related to Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE). However, the partners express their gratitude to all the women leaders who submitted nominations in response to the call made to this initiative.

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The partners look forward to sustaining the collaboration to develop subsequent issues to celebrate the achievements of several other transformational African women leaders across the continent.

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African Union Commission

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FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce the Compendium on the African Women and Girls in Leadership. All across the globe, leadership programs designed and led by governments, civil society organisations, the international communities and private sectors seek to imbue leadership skills in women and girls. However, the potential impact of these programs is undermined by the extremely gendered political, cultural, and social practices of society. Aspiring and existing women leaders face unique challenges, such as lacking appropriate training and financing, violence, insufficient or inaccurate media coverage and fake news. More than 60 per cent of Africa’s population lives in rural areas where these challenges, especially for young girls, are the most pronounced.

To ensure women and girls in Africa have the same opportunities as men to become leaders, African leaders and the international community must address the unique challenges facing them and preventing them from becoming the leaders they are capable of becoming.

Women’s leadership in Africa is not a new phenomenon. Throughout Africa’s history, women have been critical problem solvers, leading militaries during the pre-colonial period, freedom fighters during independence movements, transitional leaders during post-conflict periods, and leaders during some of the worst economic, political, and health crises of the 21st century. Moving forward, Africa must harness women’s knowledge, skills, and talents at all levels of the problem-solving process to reclaim the continent’s future.

Notwithstanding the data, Africa is still a global leader in women’s public leadership. Five African countries are in the top 20 nations for women’s parliamentary representation, and, at 61.3 per cent, Rwanda still leads the world in terms of women in parliament. Four African countries, each with over 45 per cent women’s representation in cabinets, are among the top 20 countries globally. Moreover, African women’s growing presence as public leaders is not confined to national institutions. African women now hold leadership

positions in the World Trade Organization, African Union Commission, and United Nations. More importantly, they directly contribute to and conduct regional and international efforts that address Africa’s most pressing issues today: peace and security, gender justice, climate change, and technology and economic development.

Despite the continent’s long and rich history of female leaders, particularly pre-colonisation, the political, social and cultural systems and beliefs do not currently promote leadership qualities or aspirations in young girls. Concerted efforts over the last two decades have expanded access to quality education and health for many, but women’s political participation must also be a priority to ensure good governance. Half of the population cannot be side-lined in decision-making for continued and more expansive progress on the continent. If only half of the potential leaders are identified and supported, policy solutions remain only halfway forged.

African leaders primarily and the international community have a responsibility to speak out against the challenges facing women and girls’ leadership and support initiatives to eradicate them. This is particularly incumbent upon all leaders in the community, traditional and otherwise. They must lend their voice and authority to promote new traditions that ensure that every child in Africa, gender notwithstanding, is socialised and motivated to become the leaders the continent requires.

Finally, I wish to commend African women and girls who continue to lead such laudable initiatives. May this compendium be an example of African women and girls’ potential and various achievements and how they impact their families, communities, countries, and the world, especially as we face pandemics and climate change-related issues.



Prudence Ngwenya (Ms)

**Ag. Director, Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYD)
African Union Commission (AUC)**



FOREWORD

African women have played integral roles in advancements that have shaped the course of history on the African Continent. They have provided sound leadership as freedom fighters, philosophers, business moguls, human rights defenders, and other change-making roles. In addition, they have been envisioning, motivating, building, and inspiring others to accomplish significant achievements continentally and globally.

Unfortunately, studies and documentation on the continent's leadership history often ignore African women's important past and present achievements. Time and time again, we see stories portraying them as oppressed, voiceless, and powerless. Contrary to ancient historical figures of queens and freedom fighters who were powerful and well celebrated – the narratives are deeply rooted in patriarchal cultures, norms, and practices. Other socio-cultural norms and practices, including harmful practices, especially son preference, child marriage and female genital mutilation, as well as the denial of sexual and reproductive health and rights prevent the full realisation of equal opportunity, further marginalizing women and girls and their crucial voices and leadership.

The United Nations (UN), since its formation almost 80 years ago, has notably made progress in promoting and advancing the human rights of all women and girls and gender equality and women empowerment (GEWE). The adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, more than 25 years ago, represented a comprehensive expression of States' commitments to the human rights of women and girls and the Generation Equality Forum in 2021 created a momentum for defending and advancing these commitments, including supporting feminist leaders, movements and organizations in all their diversity to become sustainable, carry out their work without fear of reprisal, and advance gender equality, peace, and human rights for all. Within the UN system, UN Women was established in 2010 to lead, promote and coordinate efforts to advance the full realisation of women's rights and opportunities. However, the UN General Assembly calls on all parts of the UN system to promote GEWE within their mandates. This call ensures that international

human rights obligations and commitments for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls, empowerment of women, and achievement of gender equality, with women and girls as equal partners and leaders in the context of development, human rights, humanitarian action, and peace and security are realised. Similarly, the UN system is mandated to advance the critical contributions of women and girls in political, socio-cultural, and economic endeavours at all levels.

In this regard, this compendium of the stories of impactful African women leaders sets to translate this mandate to action through a strategic partnership between the African Union and UN system. It provides an opportunity to acknowledge the trajectories of iconic women who are advocates of human rights, gender equality, women empowerment, and inclusive development.

The aim is to document and celebrate the achievements of African women of all ages and identities in areas that have been neglected in the literature. Areas such as governance, human rights, peace and security, financial inclusion, trade and entrepreneurship, environment, agriculture and climate change, infrastructure, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), education, creative industries and sports.

These women leaders strived for the betterment of their communities from the grassroots level to executive positions for tangible success in their respective fields.

They continue to contribute to advancing gender equality to achieve women's full and effective participation and decision-making while overcoming wide-ranging challenges and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as ageism, sexism, and lack of resources. The stories

highlight a collective responsibility required to elevate the next generation of Africans.

As key partners, UNFPA, UNOHCHR, and UN Women, in commemoration of the International Women's month as well as building upon the African Union 2021 theme of the year, **"Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building Africa We Want"**, proposed to promote the need for the documentation of leadership journeys of African women and girl leaders - stories of their lived

experiences and the impact of their contributions. Through this partnership, this compendium will be a living document updated periodically to promote emerging stories and achievements of African women and girls as leaders in their fields. We hope the stories featured can inspire women and girls and testify to the different generations of exceptional women that show and prove that women and girls are an essential and powerful force shaping sustainable development for all.



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ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	African Audio-Visual and Cinema Commission
ACALAN	African Academy of Languages
AFRIMMA	African Muzik Magazine Awards
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AMDC	African Minerals Development Centre
ANWI	African Network for Women in Infrastructure
AU	African Union
AU-CIEFFA	African Union International Centre for Girls and Women's Education in Africa
BpFA	Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme
CEDAW	Conventions Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
DOT	Digital Opportunity Trust
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GROOTS	Grassroots Organisations Operating Together in Sisterhood
GWR	Guinness World Records
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICD	Information and Communication Directorate
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IWD	International Women's Day
MTV EMA	MTV Europe Music Awards
SBV	Sexual-based violence
SDGEA	Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
VAWG	Violence Against Women And Girls
WGYD	Women Gender and Youth Directorate



INTRODUCTION

African Women Leadership: The Context

African women have attained incredible feats in leadership through the years. They envision, motivate, build, and inspire others to accomplish significant achievements worldwide. Their roles and contributions in advancing women's political, social and economic status on the continent are recognised through various national, continental and international milestones, including the International Women's Day (IWD).

Africa has progressive normative frameworks that guarantee gender equality in social, economic and political spheres. Through years of activism, policy changes and legal reforms, women's rights and their status in societies have improved.

Consequently, leaders such as Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first African female president and Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the first female head of the African Union Commission, have emerged. Also, current Heads of States – Sahle-Work Zewde, President of Ethiopia and Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of Tanzania, have all shattered glass ceilings and broken-down barriers in governance and leadership. They serve as beacons and inspirations for generations of future African women leaders.

African Women Leadership: Why It Matters

Studies on the continent's leadership history often ignore African women, with the most publicised images portraying them as poor, oppressed, voiceless and powerless. Contrary to ancient historical figures of queens and freedom fighters who were powerful and well celebrated – the narratives are deeply rooted in patriarchal cultures, norms, and practices.

Other socio-cultural values have further compounded this with women and girls being marginalised because of religious and cultural practices and beliefs, sometimes before birth. Families prefer sons to daughters who they think can pass their names, resources and legacies to their generations. This harmful practice robs women and girls of equal opportunities such as

access to education, which impedes their full potential.

Increasingly, things are changing, with a new generation of African women leaders who are dynamic, strong, and ready to take on active roles in their nations and globally.

Women's leadership in politics has also risen in Africa's legislatures, with Rwanda leading the rest of the world as the first country with 61.3 per cent women in parliament, followed by four other African countries with participation rates surpassing 40 per cent - South Africa (46.3), Senegal (43.0), Namibia (42.7) and Mozambique (41.2) .

In economic development, African women make up 58 per cent of the continent's self-employed population, making the continent a forerunner in women's entrepreneurship.

African women's leadership matters across sectors and at all levels in nations, on the continent and globally because:

1. Women constitute half of Africa's population, and as an expression of their human rights, they are entitled to opportunities that enable them to fully participate in decision-making and implementation of policies, laws, and initiatives on the continent.
2. Women's leadership and full participation in governance and political processes have a trickledown and wide-ranging effect, influencing other sectors and spheres to include more women in leadership roles and positions.
3. Girls and young women need strong role models to look up to and foster their ambitious aspirations.

Whether in politics and governance, business and finance, or civil society, the theme of African women's leadership is improving lives and livelihoods while interrupting and disrupting existing norms that limit and inhibit them. Without any leadership training, African women and girls

¹UN women, "Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation." 15 January 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

²Agu, David, "Africa Leads The World In Women Entrepreneurs: But It's Not Yet Uhuru" Entrepreneur Africa, April 2021, <https://www.theentrepreneuriafrica.com/africa-leads-the-world-in-women-entrepreneurs-but-its-not-yet-uhuru/>

³Country Meters, Africa Population Clock. 17 March 2022, <https://countrymeters.info/en/Africa>

have applied their unique local knowledge for transformative actions which advance gender equality and women's empowerment across the continent and globally.

Overview of Legal And Policy Frameworks

The African Union (AU) Member States are signatory to major international and regional legal and policy frameworks that underpin local, national, regional, and continental commitments. They also promote initiatives that foster Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) and advance African women's leadership. Some of these frameworks include:

4. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979 which is regarded as the women's bill of rights.
5. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 1994. This framework recognised the importance of women's bodily autonomy and right to access sexual and reproductive health services in line with various regional and international GEWE commitments.
6. The Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action (BpFA) 1995. Viewed as the first international framework, the BpFA recognises gender mainstreaming as a major global strategy for achieving gender equality.
7. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security 2000. This landmark instrument addresses the impact of conflicts on women and the importance of women's full and equal participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction.
8. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa 2003. Commonly known as the Maputo Protocol, it reinforces the rights of African women and urges Member States to address all forms of discrimination against women and girls.
9. The 2004 AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) calls for Member States' continual action toward achieving gender equality and reinforcing their commitment to international and regional women's rights instruments.

10. The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015. In particular, Goal 5 seeks to achieve gender equality by empowering women and girls. GEWE is also integral to all other 17 goals and a requirement for achieving sustainable development.
11. The African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 was adopted in 2013. This continental blueprint sets out 7 Aspirations and identifies priorities for their fulfilment. Aspiration 6 explicitly states, "An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying upon the potential offered by people, especially its women and youth and caring for children." It aims to achieve this by prioritising women and girls' empowerment and ending all forms of violence and discrimination against them.
12. The AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) (2018-2028) is particularly critical in underpinning current AU efforts. It sets forth priorities and strategies to realise Aspiration 6 by focusing on outcomes that mitigate and eliminate the constraints hindering gender equality and women's empowerment. Informed by the findings of the evaluation of the 2009 AU Gender Policy, it identifies specific actions and interventions that will generate desired expected outcomes under four pillars which are:
 - Maximising (economic) Outcomes, Opportunities, and Tech E Dividends
 - Dignity, Security, and Resilience
 - Effective Laws, Policies, and Institutions
 - Leadership, Voice, and Visibility.

As governments, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders implement these frameworks, more women and girls can serve in political offices, run public and private sector organisations, and be protected by laws from discrimination, violence, and other barriers to women's leadership.

The leaders celebrated in this compendium have contributed directly or indirectly to implementing these frameworks through various initiatives at different levels in Africa. These GEWE commitments have, in turn, empowered them to pursue their dreams and visions as they are currently doing, changing lives, and creating the Africa they want.



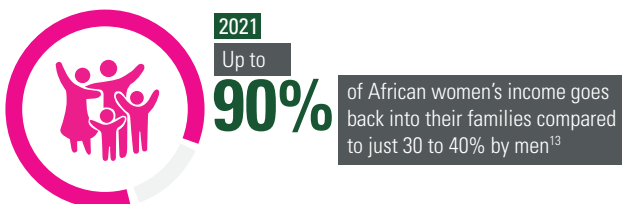
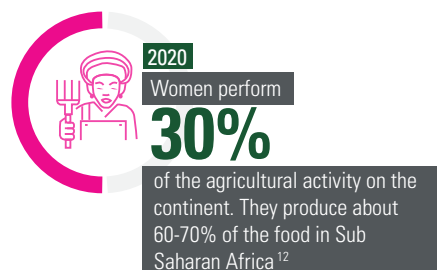
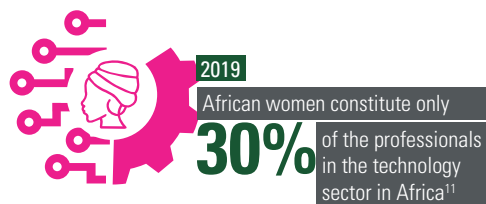
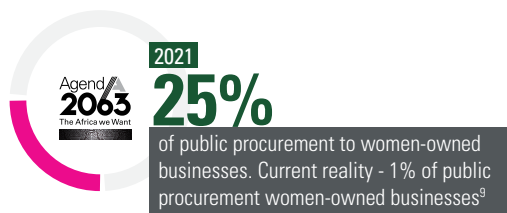
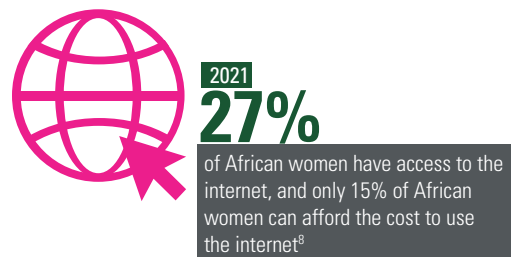
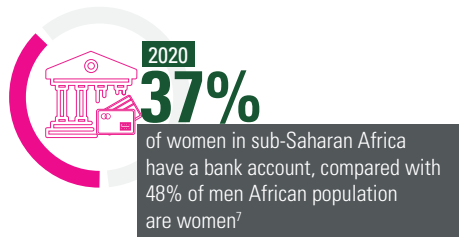
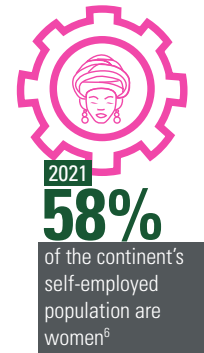
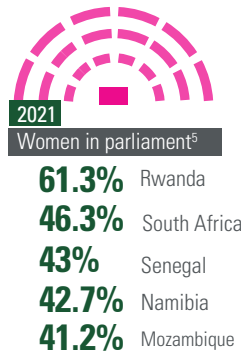
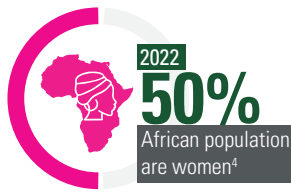
Objective and Scope of the Compendium

This compendium aims to recognise and celebrate African women and girls making a difference through their impactful leadership. It documents their contributions and impacts to inspire aspiring and current leaders and promote enabling environments that advance women's leadership at local, national and continental levels. It highlights their contributions to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects in their communities and countries. It also highlights challenges these leaders identified and their solutions to overcome them.

A multi-partner technical team has undertaken a rigorous selection process to identify these women leaders from the over two hundred submissions and nominations received. They have been recognised for their purposefulness, doggedness, commitment to change, and contributions to society. They represent the spectrum of African women leadership, from grassroots to high-level executives and opinion leaders. These leaders embody African leadership beyond politics or business and include women in governance, women empowerment, finance and entrepreneurship, environment and agriculture, technology, education, creative industries and sports. The categories are loosely linked to the four outcomes of the AU Strategy for GEWE.

Their leadership stories demonstrate what is achievable, especially as more experienced leaders share their wisdom with the next generation through training and mentorships, producing competent and committed women and girls leaders who can deliver on the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

CHARTS AND INFOGRAPHICS



⁴ Country Meters, Africa Population Clock. 17 March 2022, <https://countrymeters.info/en/Africa>

⁵ UN women, "Facts And Figures: Women's Leadership And Political Participation." 15 January 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

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CHAPTER 1

Governance, Human Rights, Peace and Security

Good governance in Africa contributes to the peace, stability, development, and growth of AU Member States. Formidable institutions, influenced by laws, international frameworks, and ideals such as human rights, accountability, and freedoms, connect a state and its people and are essential for sustainability.

One central aspect of governance is a democracy, its processes and the various collective efforts that build and strengthen it on the continent. These can be through groups, social clubs, or non-governmental organisations, prioritising respect for the rule of law and human rights and advocating for the freedom to express interests and opinions in inclusive and tolerant ways.

Good governance is a foremost requirement in creating sustainable societies, as expressed in Agenda 2063 Aspiration 3, “An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.” In addition, one of the pillars of the AU Strategy for GEWE is “Effective laws, policies and institutions,” with one of its outcomes being institutional gender governance systems.

Therefore, the AU, the leading continental institution, advocates for gender-sensitive and gender-responsive governance systems. These systems should cut across all spheres and sectors and require multi-sectoral partnerships and programs to foster effective institutions, systems and frameworks for gender-responsive governance.

The establishment by the AU of mechanisms such as the FemWise-Africa (Network of African

Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation) and the appointment of the Special Envoy to the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security demonstrate commitment to strengthening the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts. The African Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAP) is also another effort to facilitate the meaningful participation of African youth in peace and security.

African women leaders in this compendium contributed to the localisation of such platforms and initiatives at community, local, and national levels to ensure that societies entrench mechanisms that promote women’s rights and GEWE. They have encountered many challenges, mainly attributed to prejudices and negative stereotypes on female leadership and deep-rooted social norms and cultural practices. However, they believe these are surmountable through:

1. Robust dialogues, social mobilisation, and reforms that ensure societal systems evolve to become more gender inclusive.
2. Women remain resolute in confronting and challenging these existing norms.
3. Increase in women’s activism and interventions.
4. Increase in women networks that foster inter-generational training and mentorship.

These leaders continue to contribute to effective and inclusive institutions and systems, advancing the centrality of gender equality and women’s empowerment to achieve women’s full and effective participation and decision making in public life.



NOËLLA ROSINE AMANG AMAYENE

Central African Republic

Noëlla Rosine AMANG AMAYENE's leadership journey began as an official of the Central African Republic prison service. As the assistant manager in the women's prison in Bangui and Head, Penitentiary Production and Vocational Training Service, she has initiated and implemented projects to promote detainees' human rights and empower them to live crime-free lives after release. Her educational projects teach illiterate inmates basic literacy numeracy skills, and vocational projects train them to sew and make artisan goods to earn a living after their release.

Under Ms Amayene's leadership, the prison won a contract to make school uniforms worth millions, a first in its history. An endeavour she broadened during the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching inmates to make nose masks for their use and donating to two neighbouring prisons.

Her projects have had far-reaching effects as inmates who have left the prison now live independent lives, shun a life of crime, and mentor others.

Noëlla Rosine AMANG AMAYENE is an exemplary leader whose impact in reforming and rehabilitating prisoners is worthy of applause.

JANE AGNES MACHIRA

Kenya



Jane Agnes Machira, popularly known as ‘Mama Amani’ (woman of peace), is a peace crusader, politician, and human rights advocate.

Her career in conflict prevention and peacebuilding has focused on counties inhabited by farmers and pastoralists, adopting a unique approach to peacebuilding that places women centrally. She has trained over 6,000 men and women as peacemakers and mediators to participate in community-led peace efforts.

In 2012, Ms Machira was elected to the Kenyan National Parliament as a women representative. She prioritised sustainable solutions for conflict management, provided boreholes to support household and farming activities, launched a women-table-banking and investment forum, paid bursaries for students, and advocated against the scourge of illicit brews that maim and kill consumers in Kenya. She also lobbied to re-introduce mass livestock branding to reduce livestock theft and taxation of large-scale ranchers to prevent conflict with the local communities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions brought increased harassment of women by law enforcement officers who misinterpreted related policies and guidelines. Ms Machira raised awareness on the issue as an infringement of women’s rights and intervened through legal and official avenues by advocating for redress for women affected in her community.

Jane Agnes Machira builds peace in Africa by raising women mediators and peacebuilders.



SALIMA MUSBAH
Libya

Salima Musbah is a businesswoman, author, and activist whose direct actions have promoted women and youth participation in leadership and public life in Libya.

She founded the 'Libyan Peace Ambassadors Initiative' to implement the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, seeking to empower women to participate in peacebuilding, mediation, and conflict resolution. Since its inception in 2015, Ms Musbah has engaged and built the capacity of 124 women as peacebuilders across more than 33 municipalities and 115 local communities in a hitherto male-dominated area. In addition to their training as peace ambassadors, she established a charter of honour, working with local peace groups to involve more women in reconciliation committees. Some of her peace ambassadors have launched reconciliation initiatives in their local communities, creating platforms for multi-stakeholder community engagements that enable women to participate in governance and emerge as leaders.

Ms Musbah launched a rehabilitation and reintegration project in 2013 for women survivors of the violence and wars in Libya. She opened 7 centres to provide legal, health and psychological services and offer business and career support to more than 20,000 women.

As part of Ms Musbah's advocacy, she brought together a diverse group of women to write a shadow constitution for women's rights, submitting it to the Constituent Assembly of Libya. This document has informed advocacy, with many groups demanding the inclusion of the priorities and demands in the new constitution.

Salima Musbah is a crusader whose advocacy and impact in peacebuilding and women's participation in governance would benefit future generations.



“It is not enough just to open the door to the rooms of power. We have to get inside and rearrange the furniture!”

**Gertrude Mongella,
First President of the Pan-African Parliament**



Investing in African women fund managers is a smart and innovative approach. Female investors have been found to get great returns, and we all get better results in investing in women.

**Paul Kagame,
President of Rwanda**



Leadership is never given on a silver platter. One has to earn it.

**Ellen Johnson Sirleaf,
Former President of Liberia.**



The African Union remains committed to eradicating violence against women and girls in all its ramifications and protecting the girl child from all forms of abuse, including early marriage and other harmful traditional practices.

**Moussa Faki Mahamat,
Chairperson, AU Commission**



The seeds of success in every nation on earth are best planted in women and children.

**Joyce Banda,
Former President of Malawi**



Africa cannot develop when millions of women and young girls continue to suffer violent treatment that is unequal and discriminatory.

**Macky Sall,
President of Senegal.**





CHAPTER 2

An End to Violence Against Women and Girls

Gender equality and women's empowerment are the foundation for sustainable peace and development in every society. However, various impediments such as lack of access to education, health care, opportunities, resources, assets, freedoms and security affect women by diminishing the quality of their lives and curtailing the achievement of Agenda 2063 Aspirations.

In addition, harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and preference for sons inhibit women and girls' rights and contributions in public and private spheres. Most significantly, violence against women and girls (VAWG), including sexual violence, infringes on personal freedoms and constrains women from fully engaging in their communities and society.

The Maputo Protocol has played a significant role in safeguarding and advancing the rights of women and girls in Africa. It is the first continental legal framework that mandates Member States to end gender based violence (GBV) and discrimination and calls for FGM elimination. Article 4 of the Protocol calls for eliminating all forms of GBV and for women and girls to fully enjoy their rights to life, integrity, and security. Forty-two countries have ratified the Protocol, and since its adoption, it has influenced national laws and policies to address violence and discrimination against women and girls. It further recognises women's sexual and reproductive health rights and reproductive rights (SRH and RR) and HIV as an integral aspect of commitments and efforts to end VAWG.

Nevertheless, VAWG persists, and since the COVID-19 outbreak, lockdowns have brought a surge in cases of sexual harassment, child marriage, FGM, domestic and sexual abuse of women and girls. Online learning and working have also resulted in online abuse, harassment, cyber-flashing, and exploitation.

In November 2021, the African Union launched the "Positive Masculinity" campaign, galvanising men and boys as champions for ending violence against women and girls on the continent. Such initiatives and those carried out by the leaders in this compendium attest to the notable efforts to empower women and girls and end all forms of discrimination and violence. These leaders have encountered ageism, sexism, lack of resources, among others and to address these barriers, they propose:

1. Increase in women's representation in decision and policymaking.
2. Women networks to motivate and advocate for each other.
3. Multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaborations on women empowerment.
4. Awareness events and campaigns.
5. Cross-generational leadership in women's advocacy.
6. Online and offline activism.
7. Practical economic empowerment initiatives for women.

OLUWADAMILOLA AKINTEWE

Nigeria



Oluwadamilola Akintewe is the child of a poor farmer who demonstrated academic excellence and leadership ability at a young age. She is now an advocate for women and girls' rights, gender equality, youth participation in governance and eradication of gender-based violence.

Ms Akintewe is the founder of 'Project Rebirth', an initiative providing skills training on eco-friendly fashion and giving collateral-free loans to women in agriculture. Over 140 women have benefited from this. She has also provided scholarship and career mentorship to over 3000 secondary school girls across four states in Nigeria through the organisation 'Girl Up Nigeria' as co-founder and vice president.

Ms Akintewe, an inaugural fellow of the Margaret Ekpo Youth Fellowship, was recognised by Baobab Rights and OSIWA in 2021. She was the youngest leader amongst the top 100 women creating a better Africa list by We for Good International. She was also selected for a 30 under 30 award and became the inaugural winner of the Samantha Singh Award for young people in development policy.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, she launched 'Forbidden Topics', an online platform that amplifies the voices of adolescent girls and young women who have faced social injustices such as period poverty, institutional sexism, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and rape.

Ms Akintewe also organised the Project Safe School to bridge the educational inequality gap for children in rural communities by creating socially distanced physical classes in clusters with volunteer teachers deploying to five Nigerian states targeting over 500 students.

Oluwadamilola Akintewe is a young leader whose goal is to see African women and girls dismantle the patriarchal structures that have hindered women's leadership in all sectors.



CATHERINE KIAMA

Kenya

Catherine Kiama has the Global Girls' Bill of Rights as her proudest work, a declaration of the rights all girls are entitled to, written by girls, for girls. Over 1000 girls contributed to the bill of rights presented to the United Nations during the International Day of the Girl Child in 2019.

At the age of twenty-two, she set up 'Sisterhood Initiative', a mentorship program directly impacting over 2000 girls in Kenya. Ms Kaiama is the Director of Programs at 'She's The First' organisation, where she designs programs that meet the felt needs of women and girls. She has used her first-hand experience to support organisations like the Nike Foundation, Amref's Youth in Action Program, Akili Dada, and Make Every Woman Count. She designed the Women in International Affairs Network online mentorship program, which allows young women in the development sector to access mentorship for seven months.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, in addition to advocacy actions, she and her colleagues took pay cuts to meet their obligations to partners. Their efforts enabled mentors to reach 7,867 girls with adapted materials and methods, taught sexual health and reproductive rights classes to 6,780 girls, and increased access to technology for 1,340 girls. Through the COVID-19 Response Fund, they delivered care kits (food, water, and menstrual supplies) to over 1,000 girls and families in more than 60 communities.

Catherine Kaiama is an inspirational leader who stands head and shoulders above her peers.



ESTHER MWAURA-MUIRU

Kenya

Esther Mwaura-Muiru began her feminist journey at the 1995 UN Women Conference held in Beijing. She founded GROOTS Kenya (Grassroots Organisations Operating Together in Sisterhood) - a feminist grassroots movement organising over 200,000 informal sector workers impacted by HIV/AIDS and climate change for alliance building, peer to peer support, and community-led advocacy.

In the 1990s and 2000s, she organised a home-based alliance for caregivers to support their effective response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, evolving into a campaign for the inheritance rights of widows and orphans. Under her leadership, these groups won the Red Ribbon Award by UNDP.

Ms Mwaura-Muiru's efforts have changed grassroots women's roles and perceptions in Kenya. Women are not seen as recipients of charity and development targets but as change agents who drive community transformation among policymakers, funders, investors, and development practitioners.

Ms Mwaura-Muiru championed financing for grassroots organisations, and as a result, 3,500 women advocacy community organisations now exist. Through GROOTS, Ms Mwaura-Muiru has organised women and girls into more than 5,000 grassroots organisations and one national solidarity network with linkages and alliances to regional and global activist bodies. She inaugurated leadership development activities for women and supported them to get high-level national and international positions, establishing the UONGOZI Centre - a transformational leadership development centre for grassroots women.

She campaigned for land reforms, ensuring gender equality in land access, control and ownership, influencing Kenya's national land policy.

She also designed multiple initiatives to increase access to financial credit in the Community Resilience Fund - a revolving fund managed by grassroots women for resilience building, and the Agri-Business Fund - a \$1 million credit guarantee scheme for rural women farmers. She established the first-ever grassroots women-only cooperative - GROOTS Saving and Credit Cooperative Society.

Esther Mwaura-Muiru is a champion whose foresight has elevated and transformed the lives and livelihoods of thousands of African women.



CAROLINE OWASHABA

Uganda

Caroline Owashaba is an advocate and ambassador for social justice, gender equality and equal opportunities. She is the founder of Action for Youth Development Uganda, an indigenous, non-profit making, youth-focused organisation and initiator of the 'Girl Talk Leadership Club', a social transformation initiative that trains and mentors girls ages 10-16.

In the last three years, Ms Owashaba has trained over 650 girl child ambassadors, 66 community leaders, law enforcers, and schoolteachers in leadership and mentorship skills. In turn, the girl child ambassadors have trained over 4000 others to do the same.

Through her club, Ms Owashaba has returned girls to school, advocated for girls' safety and education, and lobbied district leaders to enact a by-law that aims to end child marriages.

Ms Owashaba also runs financial literacy and climate programs through her initiatives. She created a climate-smart agriculture program in primary schools to teach girls to identify environmental community challenges and propose innovative solutions for them. Her 'Know Your Budget' campaign has helped equip young women leaders with the financial skills to ensure government accountability for budgeted funds.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms Owashaba developed several partnerships to build a new coalition - the 'Girls not Brides Uganda Western Alliance'. This new coalition advocates against child marriages and GBV and promotes health services for girls due to the school closures. Ms Owashaba also developed the agriculture and education policy statements for Uganda's national policymakers through the National Youth Advocacy Forum to mitigate the specific effects of the pandemic on women and girls.

Caroline Owashaba is a leader who is determined to end harmful practices on women and girls in Uganda.

AIMEE LAETITIA UMUBYEYI

Rwanda



Aimee Laetitia Umubyeyi's vision is for a gender-inclusive Rwanda and building economically strong young women. She advocates for gender equality and to eliminate GBV.

Ms Umubyeyi is the founder of the UMUBYEYI initiative, which focuses on practical enterprises to empower women economically. Through her piggery project, she gives women a pig each as capital to set up an agricultural business, and they, in turn, must return two pigs to help others. In three years, 874 women and girls have benefited from this.

Ms Umubyeyi's advocacy against GBV comprises educating young men to respect women and enlightening young girls against teen pregnancies. She also rehabilitates abused teen mothers and reconciles them with their parents.

She was recognised as a Young Rwandan Achiever of the year in 2017 by Her Excellency First Lady of Rwanda, Janet Kagame and the Ministry of Youth and Culture. Her URUBOHERO project, which supported 237 vulnerable women and promoted women and girls' rights, earned her the Best Young Innovator in Rwanda Award by the Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) in 2017.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms Umubyeyi organised a three-day retreat with 60 teen mothers, 30 young girls under eighteen and 10 members of the Children Council to illuminate the impact of the pandemic on GBV victims. She also created a website that teaches women and girls about adolescent sexual and reproductive health and other skills about GBV, trauma, and mental health. The system sends weekly teachings to registered beneficiaries and stores their information to provide help in the future.

Aimee Laetitia Umubyeyi's trailblazing projects are raising strong women who will build the future of Rwanda.



With **42** out of **55** Member States having ratified the Maputo Protocol on women's rights, I urge the remaining 13, who are yet to ratify the Protocol, to do so as a matter of urgency.

**Nana Akufo-Addo,
President of Ghana**



If the history of Africa was written by Africans and by women, I think we would find many unsung heroes.

**Sahle-Work Zewde,
President of Ethiopia**



Agenda 2063 calls for the allocation of at least 25% of public procurement to women-owned businesses, yet women owned-businesses are given less than 1% of procurement. We have to change this. It is not unreasonable to advocate for preferential public procurement legislation to the advantage of women-owned businesses.

Cyril Ramaphosa, President of South Africa



We must develop our narrative and challenge conventional thinking and paradigms

**Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma,
Former Chairperson of AU Commission**



As our march to empower women and girls continues, let us remember this: there is no gender equality without sexual and reproductive health and rights, and no sexual and reproductive health and rights without gender equality.

**Natalia Kanem,
Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund**



Gender inequality is a question of power. And something I've learned over time is that power is not given. It must be taken.

**António Guterres,
Secretary-General of the United Nations**





CHAPTER 3

Financial Inclusion, Trade and Entrepreneurship

Financial inclusion, trade and entrepreneurial opportunities are the trio essentials for economic growth and development in the modern world of knowledge and digital-based economies. Women and girls need access to affordable financial services that enable them to easily make transactions, make payments, make savings of their earnings, and access credit and insurance.

African women are disproportionately affected by a lack of access to finance. Only 37 per cent of women in sub-Saharan Africa have a bank account, compared with 48 per cent of men. In North Africa, the gender gap for access to finance is 18 per cent, the largest globally. However, they especially need access to financial services as a foundation for their economic empowerment, especially in keeping with continental Aspiration 1 for “A prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.”

Whether through entrepreneurial pursuits or work in the formal or informal sectors, women need empowerment to fight poverty and gain financial independence. This requires collaborations, partnerships, and interventions among AU Member States, the private sector and civil society organisations and other stakeholders.

The African Union declared 2020 to 2030 as the “Decade of African Women’s Financial and Economic Inclusion” to promote the scale-up of actions that enhance women’s financial inclusion towards sustainable development. This aligns with one of the outcomes of the four pillars of the AU Strategy on GEWE - economic empowerment and financial inclusion through income autonomy and social protection.

The African Union Fund for African Women has supported community-based women’s organisations by mobilising financial resources for development programmes and projects. It supports

women’s initiatives that aim to eradicate poverty, close the gender gap and halt the marginalisation of women. The Fund also encourages the sharing of experiences and best practices on economic, political and social empowerment of women as well as strengthening the capacities of women in leadership, management and entrepreneurship.

This chapter features women leaders in finance and entrepreneurship who contribute to African women’s economic empowerment and enhanced financial inclusion for a prosperous continent. They have had to overcome wide ranging challenges and have proposed recommendations to catalyse women’s full participation in these areas.

1. Make financial education a part of leadership capacity building for women.
2. Increase business and financial mentorship for girls and young women.
3. Increase advocacy for inclusive financing for women businesses.
4. Increase funding for gender programs.
5. Encourage financial literacy for young women in rural communities.
6. Refocus on women as key economic drivers post covid.
7. Ensure women’s participation as resource persons at continent-wide conferences.

These are the stories of finance and entrepreneurial leaders, drivers of change who empower others and maintain a commitment to lifelong learning, capacity building and full economic inclusion for women and girls in Africa.

¹⁶ Hanan Morsy Access to Finance: Why Aren’t Women Lending In? Finance & Development, March 2020, Vol. 57, No. 1, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2020/03/africa-gender-gap-access-to-finance-morsy.htm>



**DR. MILLICENT
OMUKAGA**
Kenya

Dr Millicent Omukaga is a finance and gender professional who has held leadership positions in civil society and public and private sector financial institutions. She is driven by creating economic opportunities for the women and youth of Africa, especially in her country Kenya and is actively engaged in the mentorship of the next generation of finance leaders.

As the head of programs in a pan-African network of financial institutions, Dr Omukaga established the Fin4Ag platform, revolutionising financing for smallholder women agribusinesses in rural communities.

As the General Manager at a women's microfinance bank, she oversaw a credit portfolio of over \$200m, growing it by 40% with a repayment rate of 98% targeting over 400,000 women who received customised capacity building over two years.

As a chief operating officer in a state-owned financial institution, she launched the Women Affirmative Access-to-finance Window (WAAW) to accelerate access to finance for women in agri-businesses.

As Policy Advisor on Women Empowerment and Affirmative Finance at the African Development Bank (AfDB), Dr Omukaga established a credit guarantee scheme to de-risk women's business enterprises. She also set up the Bank's Gender Equality Trust Fund (GETF), a vehicle to push women's empowerment across the continent.

She has received various awards, fellowships and commendations, including the Angaza Award by Kenyan Wallstreet as one of the women shaping the financial landscape in East Africa and the Kenyan First Lady award for economic empowerment and financial inclusion for women and girls during the 2021 International Women's Day celebrations.

Dr Millicent Omukaga is an optimist whose dream is to see all African women become economically independent and empowered.



SEUN SHOKUNBI

Nigeria

Seun Shokunbi is an educator, speaker, data analyst, and grants manager empowering women and girls through technology and social entrepreneurship.

She founded the Karfi Foundation, which connects social entrepreneurs to resources, spearheading three flagship programs through capacity building workshops for young people in one of the largest urban slums in Kibera, Nairobi. Ms Shokunbi has also led virtual multi-country pan African social entrepreneurship programming for participants across Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, the Karfi Foundation partnered with the University of Chicago and venture capital firms to launch its IRON incubator program to provide free training and mentorship for over 50 female survivors of GBV in northern Nigeria.

Ms Shokunbi broadened the scope of the Karfi Foundation, matching venture capitalists and mentors with under-resourced women entrepreneurs for a chance to access a minimum of \$15,000 in seed funding. She used WhatsApp as a platform to educate women on ways to pivot their businesses to tackle the challenges of the global economic downturn.

Seun Shokunbi is a visionary leader obtaining and sustaining resources for future business and social leaders on the African continent.



JAYNA WIATTA THOMAS

Liberia

Jayna Wiatta Thomas is the founder of 'Dare to Innovate', a non-profit incubator that invests in the entrepreneurial ecosystem to ignite social change in Guinea.

Since its inception, Ms Thomas's incubator has invested in various programs like the 'AgriHub', which uses a social franchising model to develop and manage agricultural value chains allowing entrepreneurs to focus on production. Over 60 businesses depend on 'AgriHub' to combat the high import rates of food products in Guinea.

Ms Thomas also co-founded 'AquaFarms' Africa (AFA) to replace imports with locally and sustainably grown produce and fish using efficient aquaponics systems. Women own all their franchises and constitute seventy per cent of their management team.

She is also the founder of 'Natri', a farm-to-table supply chain business 'Spark Rise Ventures', an investment fund for African ideas and 'AWE, Inc.', a sustainable mineral trading and commodities company.

Jayna Wiatta Thomas is a serial entrepreneur, keen collaborator, and an advocate of the empowered African woman.



As the calls and solidarity for debt relief mount, any COVID-19 relief offered must help lift the disproportionate poverty burden from the shoulders and backs of women. New budgets must prioritise ending inequality between women and men

Bineta Diop,
Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union
Commission on Women, Peace and Security



I believe that when you find problems, you should also find solutions.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala,
Director-General of the World Trade Organisation.



Leadership is never given on a silver platter. One has to earn it.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf,
Former President of Liberia



Education is the best antidote against child marriage. The longer a girl stays in school, the higher her chances of greater economic achievement in life. We must end all forms of child marriage. Here's to the men: marry your age mates, leave our girls alone.

Dr Akinwumi Adesina,
President of the African Development Bank



We must design a future that is shaped by women and girls that realises their rights and aspirations to a world where equality is a reality.

Amina J Mohammed,
Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations



Greater female representation in decision-making posts can inspire new generations of women leaders and narrow the financial inclusion gender gap.

Dr Monique Nsanzabaganwa,
Deputy Chairperson, African Union Commission





CHAPTER 4

Environment, Agriculture and Climate Change

Climate change is an existential threat to the modern-day world as it impacts the environment, agriculture, food security, nutrition, water scarcity and conflict. Its effects on Africa are particularly egregious as the continent contributes the lowest greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions but is poised to face the worst of its consequences.

The AU strategy for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment identifies climate change as one of the root causes of gender inequality, affecting women's lives and livelihoods. Women depend on the environment, especially in agriculture, involving food production, food security, and other related ventures and are most reliant on natural resources. Yet they have the least capacity to respond to distressed climate occurrences such as increased temperature, variability in rainfall, extreme weather, crop failure, pest and disease outbreaks, and general degradation of lands and water resources.

As part of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, the world's focus is to protect the planet from degradation by shining the light on sustainable consumption and production of its natural resources while promoting sustainable management and taking urgent action on climate change.

These ideals are only achievable when women become part of any decisions, policies, plans, actions, and solutions in mitigating the climate crisis. As front liners, they can share knowledge

from their practices - unique perspectives often missing in policy discussions but needed to paint a holistic picture of the lived experiences of the grassroots women who bear the brunt of climate crises. Such inclusive engagements would also drive the realisation of the African Union Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), enabling AU Member States to address key transformational issues in agricultural development.

This chapter highlights the achievements of women leaders who implement innovative gender-sensitive adaptive solutions and advocate for change. Their relentless determination enabled them to overcome challenges such as prevailing societal gender inequality that impedes their efforts. However, they stay firmly on their course, often seeking to advance solutions such as:

1. Increase women's participation in politics and decision making in public spaces.
2. Increase women participation in solving climate problems.
3. Increase sensitisation on climate change issues and their effects.

Their stories highlight the collective responsibility required to build sustainable environments for future African generations.

¹⁷ Union africaine, Stratégie de l'UA pour l'égalité des sexes et l'autonomisation des femmes 2018-2028



FIHIMA MOHAMED

Djibouti

Fihima Mohamed's crusade to prevent famine in her home country, grow food economically and empower others began after she witnessed the deprivation of the Somalian war.

She is the founder of the Plant Tree Plant Hope Foundation. This organic farming project restored abandoned farms, planted over 8000 trees, and created more than 1000 jobs, further influencing the Djiboutian government to plant 100,000 trees in a reforestation initiative.

Ms Mohamed is an education and gender advocate who has granted over 100 girls from impoverished families scholarships that helped keep the girls in school. Further interventions for these schoolgirls included giving free pads while advocating for 0 per cent taxes on menstruation hygiene products. In January 2021, the government reduced taxes from 33 per cent to 0 per cent.

She is also the founder of the 'Women Initiative', a 100 per cent female platform set up to mentor the next generation of women in Djibouti. In 2019, as part of her 'One Program', 820 girls found suitable universities or fellowships to further their education.

Fihima Mohamed is an inspirational leader whose goal is to open the first institution to train Djiboutian women in politics and leadership.



FORGET SHAREKA

Zimbabwe

Forget Shareka is an agronomic engineer, entrepreneur and innovator who advocates for climate change and sustainable agri-businesses in Zimbabwe.

She is the founder of 'Life Hope Future Association (LiHFA)', a community-based organisation offering vocational agribusiness and entrepreneurship training. So far, the LiHFA organisation has supported 45 farmers in Mbire District. She is also the co-founder of 'Chashi Foods', a social enterprise using innovative food processing to minimise food loss and waste, training more than 250 farmers on home drying technologies.

Ms Shareka is a member of the Campaign For Female Education (CAMFED), on which platform she advocates for girls' education to solve climate change issues.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Chashi Foods made a market breakthrough for more than 150 farmers in five communities, preventing five tons of fruits and vegetables from wasting.

Her extensive work on climate change and climate smart agriculture has earned her various accolades and awards, including the Ellie Maxwell Award at the University of Edinburgh in 2021, Young Entrepreneur Award, Green EnterPrize Innovation Challenge in 2020, Net Impact Climate Ambassador and the UNFCC Climate Fellow in 2019.

Forget Shareka creates opportunities for Zimbabwe's youth, women, and farmers, helping them attain their full potential through viable agribusinesses.



CHAPTER 5

Infrastructure and Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

Africa's rich natural resources and its supporting extraction industries create formidable sectors that require modern technology and infrastructure to function effectively for economic growth and development. These highly technical sectors are usually male dominated, with limited female participation and fewer female leaders needed to reach their overall peak productivity. African women constitute only 30 per cent of the professionals in technology. Most notably, in infrastructural planning and projects, women's input is necessary to balance any negative consequences.

The AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment proposes full inclusion of women and girls in information, communication and technology. However, certain factors such as availability, affordability, capacity, and skills hinder information and communication technology and create gender gaps.

Efforts to address these gaps include platforms such as the African Network for Women in Infrastructure (ANWI) that promote African women's participation in infrastructure development at the national, regional, and global levels. In addition, the African Union Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA-2024) aspires to raise Africa's role in global research, technology development and transfer, innovation and knowledge production as key enablers of socio-economic development and growth.

Bridging these gaps also begins with girls' education in STEM and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as a prerequisite

for enhancing their skills relevant to contributing and leading in digital-based economies.

The leaders in this chapter recognise the imperative of STEM education for girls and its far-reaching impact on future jobs in technology and infrastructure. Through their initiatives and partnerships, they seek to bridge gender gaps in these sectors and, for the overall increase in female participation. They recommend the following key actions:

1. Increase awareness about the gender gap in technology.
2. More diverse programmes to support women in technology.
3. Increase advocacy on girls' science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) study.
4. Improve digital infrastructure and access for women and girls in rural and urban areas.
5. Advocate against toxic work environments in technology and infrastructural sectors.
6. Celebrate more role models in STEM and infrastructure to encourage young women.

These leaders encourage women and girls to see themselves as capable enough to pursue careers in these futuristic sectors of Africa's economies. They are pathfinding innovators of Africa's today and tomorrow.

¹⁸ UNDP Africa January 31, 2019, Creating A Level Playing Field For Women In Technology In Africa <https://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2019/creating-level-playing-field-for-women-in-technology-in-africa.html>



**OREOLUWA
ABIODUN LESI**
Nigeria

Oreoluwa Abiodun Lesi is an economist, social entrepreneur, global expert in information technology, and the founder of the Women's Technology Empowerment Centre (W.TEC), a non-profit organisation committed to building a more inclusive technology ecosystem.

She has designed high-quality programming for over 31,000 women and girls, teaching students to create and use technology safely and productively. She also supports women using technology for entrepreneurship, career development, learning and leadership activities.

Ms Lesi was selected to design the Nigerian government's first nationally coordinated technology club for girls, with over 1,200 girls participating. In addition, among many awards, she was recognised as a Champion by the World Summit on Information Society in 2020 and has received the Anita Borg Change Agent Award.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms Lesi designed and launched practical, successful online programmes for secondary school girls using low-resource platforms like WhatsApp to allow them to continue their education. She also launched a weekly mentoring and inspirational podcast to encourage young women to find and pursue their purpose through work.

Oreoluwa Abiodun Lesi is a pioneering technology champion whose work and legacy will be remembered for many generations.



DR OLATOKUNBO ARINOLA SOMOLU

Nigeria

Dr Olatokunbo Arinola Somolu's legacy stands tall in Nigeria's capital city Abuja in the iconic Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Towers. A structural engineer, educator, and STEM advocate, she is the first Nigerian woman to receive a doctorate in any field of engineering in Nigeria.

Dr Somolu spent five years as a senior lecturer in her early career, rising to become the head of the civil engineering department at the Yaba College of Technology. She has continued to train and mentor other engineers through engineering student associations, impacting the lives of over 1500 engineers.

For most of her career, Dr Somolu worked at the NNPC, rising to become the first female Group General Manager to head the Engineering and Technology Division (ETD). She was the engineer and project manager for many notable projects, including landmark office complexes, the Atlas Cove Jetty, and the NNPC mega stations and floating filling stations. The latter was the first of its kind to be built in concrete anywhere in the world.

Dr Somolu has also served as a board member of several government agencies, including the Federal Emergency Road Management Agency (FERMA) and the Nigerian Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA). She is also a fellow in the Nigerian Society of Engineers and the National Academy of Engineering. She was honoured as one of the top 50 Nigerian Women of Distinction by the First Lady as part of the 50th independence anniversary celebrations in 2010.

Dr Somolu is a trustee on W.TEC, a board member, and a resource person on various programs that promote STEM study and professions. She is a renowned mentor for female engineers across generations all over Nigeria.

Dr Olatokunbo Arinola Somolu is a pioneering leader with inspiring impact in a male-dominated sector.



Never ever accept 'Because You Are A Woman' as a reason for doing or not doing anything.

**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie,
Nigerian Writer**

We cannot continue to ignore the courageous acts and achievements of women who continue to be strong despite the hardships that they face today in our societies. It is up to all of us to make this world a better place by ensuring that women are part and parcel of the progress being made and that no one is left behind.

**Dr Ibrahim Mayaki,
Former Prime Minister of Niger**



We Africans have to be able to deal with our problems. Help from outside is alright, but we have to learn to be responsible for our own attitudes.

**Angelique Kidjo,
Beninese Singer - Song Writer**



We continue to underline that democracy must ensure the participation of all, including the marginalised - the youth, women, people living with physical disabilities.

**Bankole Adeoye,
African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs
Peace and Security**



Solidarity between women can be a powerful force of change and can influence future development in ways favourable not only to women but also to men.

**Nawal El-Saadawi,
Egyptian feminist writer, activist, physician, and psychiatrist**



CHAPTER 6

Education

Education is the bedrock of social and economic development and the foundation of modern societies. Education and care work through compulsory and free education for women and girls aged 3 to 18, and market oriented vocational training and literacy programmes for youth and women are key priorities of the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment.

Educating young women is a vital and effective way to prevent unwanted pregnancies, minimise abuse, tackle poverty and disease and empower them to make better long-term decisions that affect their lives, families, and communities. Girls' access to education is still a challenge in Africa, with 52 million of them as of 2019 not in school, and 4 million of them will never attend school, which is double the rate for boys. African girls are more likely to be permanently excluded from education and at a higher risk of being left behind .

Africa's education and training systems need a transformation that prioritises access and retention of girls in schools through innovation and technology, especially to counter teenage pregnancies, early marriages and other things that keep girls from schools. The African Union has developed a comprehensive ten-year Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) to set up a qualitative system of education and training to provide the continent with efficient human resources adapted to African core values, capable of achieving the vision and ambitions under Agenda 2063 and other relevant commitments. The establishment of the African Union International

Centre for Girls and Women's Education in Africa (AU-CIEFFA) as a specialised institution of the African Union contributes to promoting girls' and women's education in AU Member States.

In this chapter, these leaders championed strategic education priorities through projects targeted at women and girls. They recommend some of the following to address the gender gap in education in Africa.

1. Enhance more multifaceted support (financial, psychological, solidarity etc.) for women leaders in the education sector.
2. Advocate for funds specifically dedicated to the education of girls and young women.
3. Increase opportunities for online learning.
4. Increase more opportunities for women to acquire vocational skills.
5. Step up sensitisation campaigns on the importance of girl child education at all levels.
6. Create educational institutions that are gender-inclusive and void of any discrimination.

Like others in this compendium, these leaders are focused on elevating the next generation of Africans through sustainable and inclusive education initiatives. They are empowering students to change the continent's future.

¹⁹ Bissoonauth Rita Girls' rights to education: African traditional and religious leaders commit to changing mindsets Global Partnerships September 26, 2019, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/girls-rights-education-african-traditional-and-religious-leaders-commit-changing-mindsets>



HANOU KAFUI AMEKO

Togo

AMEKO Hanou Kafui is the founder of 'Woman for Young Women's Association'. The organisation promotes the empowerment of young women through formal and non-formal education, thereby creating a community of visionary women and girls' leaders who contribute to social, economic and public life and improve living conditions in their communities.

Ms Ameko also created the 'School of Vision', a first of its kind, holistic educational training encompassing emotional, spiritual, economic, and social perspectives. They teach women and girls between the ages of 18 to 35 to draw a vision of their lives by integrating the notion of balance based on their personalities, capacities, skills, interests and values. So far, without external support, over 300 girls have been impacted to emerge as leaders, entrepreneurs, bloggers, journalists and advocates of social causes.

Ms Ameko has received several awards, including the UNHCR Award for Women Contributing to Community Development 2021, Influential Woman Award from the Network of Influential Women in Africa, UNFPA Woman in Africa Award 2021, AGIR Foundation Prize 2020 and the Deborah Prize For Best Social Innovation in Africa 2019. Her work has been showcased on Radio France Internationale (RFI), Amina Magazine, Ocean's Magazine, Diane Magazine, etc.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she launched EssôXome or Maison de la Vision, a fund to help finance the projects of women and girl innovators and entrepreneurs. She also piloted a 'Visionary Resilience' project within the framework of covid, training people on developing resilience in times of crisis.

AMEKO Hanou Kafui is an African visionary who continues to help build communities that eliminate all gender-based inequalities.



**GRACE
CHUNDAMA**
Zambia

Grace Chundama is an economist, social development planner and educator who set up the 'Karis Foundation' to contribute to initiatives to meet the educational needs of women, children and youth.

Ms Chundama built a school block in Shankalu village, which has become the centre for all education and training in this community. She donated a borehole to combat water shortage and built four fishponds for youth unemployment and skills development. Beyond rural development, Ms Chundama also implemented economic empowerment programs that teach women vocational skills impacting the lives of over 50 women. Her contributions to this community have directly impacted over 1000 lives.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms Chundama embarked on several intervention programs to include sensitisation on the need to attend socially distanced schools impacting the lives of over 200 girls. With the increase in teenage pregnancies, she created sponsorship schemes to encourage girls to return to and remain in school. She collaborated with the 'Lusaka Helps Organisation' to support the most vulnerable communities by providing essentials for homes, women's prisons and other correctional facilities.

Grace Chundama is a leader whose influence on rural Zambian communities is wide-reaching and deserving commendation.



MOTUNRAYO DEBORAH FATOKE

Nigeria

Motunrayo Deborah Fatoke is a United Nations Millennium Fellow, social entrepreneur, activist, and global youth ambassador who is the Director of Operations at 'Aid for Rural Education Access Initiative' and founder of 'LearnAgain'.

Ms Fatoke promotes quality education for underserved children and provides empowerment opportunities for women in rural communities. She currently manages projects valued at over \$100,000, reaching over 5000 direct beneficiaries, creating alternative learning opportunities for the poorest children in northern Nigeria and increasing school-age children's enrolment and retention in the southwest of Nigeria.

Ms Fatoke has collaborated with international organisations such as ENACTUS, Their World, UNICEF, YALI Africa, and Millennium Fellowship. As co-founder of Philanthropy Circle, she raises funds for non-profits focusing on education.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, Ms Fatoke and her team launched the 'Cyber Girls Fellowship', a 10-month opportunity for underserved girls to gain knowledge and skills for a career in Cyber Security.

Motunrayo Deborah Fatoke's education and women empowerment efforts are exceptional and noteworthy.



RAFFAELLA GOZZELINO

Cape Verde

Dr Raffaella Gozzelino is an educator, academic, and professor and is the first Dean and the Coordinator of the Sea Campus of the Atlantic Technical University, Carpe Verde.

Dr Gozzelino is also Deputy Director at the 'Association of Women Entrepreneurs in Europe and Africa' and Director of 'Angels and Heart', organisations supporting causes to improve elementary education and facilitate the provision of medical equipment and infrastructure in disadvantaged communities. She was honoured by the Cape-Verdean Embassy in Lisbon for scientific merit and dedication as a Woman in Science.

As coordinator of the All-Atlantic Blue Schools in Cabo Verde, Dr Gozzelino promoted sustainable scientific education in elementary schools, setting up the ocean literacy program to teach children about ocean biodiversity, conservation, health, biotechnology, and other relevant science subjects.

In the fight against COVID-19 in Cabo Verde, Dr Gozzelino supported doctors by translating scientific materials into Portuguese while contributing to papers about the country's COVID-19 status. She also organised explanatory scientific sessions, provided relevant materials such as protective equipment, reagents and consumables, extraction kits and pipettes for COVID tests to the National Institute of Health. As the Deputy Chairman of the Fiscal Council of the Diaspora Health and Solidarity Association, she fundraised to purchase an ultra-freezer to store vaccines and patient samples for future research.

Dr Raffaella Gozzelino is a symbol of education, innovation and change, inspiring female scientists and academics everywhere.



MELATWORK TIBEBU MENGESHA

Ethiopia

Melatwork Tibebu Mengesha is a scientist, writer, activist and a PhD fellow at Addis Ababa University. She is the founder and program director of 'WhatNext' and president of the YALI (Young African Leaders Initiative) Ethiopian Alumni Association.

Through WhatNext, Ms Mengesha runs weekly empowerment and mentorship programs that is distinctive in that it trains young professional women to approach success through achieving work-life balance. It does this by helping them develop leadership skills in a multi-dimensional manner and providing a safe platform to connect, interact and learn from one another while building their competencies. The curriculum is on leadership training, soft skills, scholarship application tips, relationships, reproductive health, mental health and personal branding. The sessions are carried out in Addis Ababa over four months. The training comes with an option for certification if they meet specific requirements.

So far, in four program cycles, 90 per cent of all trainees have been certified, and 860 young women have been directly impacted and still participate in their Telegram self-development book club.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she organised special virtual mentorship programs on mental health and GBV, the two critical issues affecting women in the lockdowns and restrictions.

Melatwork Tibebu Mengesha's achievements in women empowerment tell of a better African tomorrow.



DR. SARA JEROP RUTO

Kenya

Dr Sara Ruto is a researcher, teacher, advocate for children's rights and social justice, with her work impacting millions of children across the African continent and beyond.

In 1995, Dr Ruto co-founded the Women Educational Researchers of Kenya (WERK), focusing on education research for reforms in Kenya, co-editing the first-ever documentation of women leaders in Kenya titled 'Promises and Realities'.

In 2008, Dr Ruto adapted the Uwezo Learning Assessment from ASER-India, becoming the most extensive study conducted in East Africa, involving 30,000 volunteers and assessing over 5 million children across Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Through Uwezo and other initiatives, governments adopted large-scale literacy and numeracy interventions that have benefited over 20 million children across East Africa.

Dr Ruto established the People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network to improve learning outcomes through assessments and remedial interventions in 14 countries across 3 continents.

Dr Ruto has also served as the Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development board chair, where she reformed the national curriculum to ensure that it is fully competency-based. The new curriculum is currently in use in all 25,000 primary schools in Kenya.

During the pandemic, Dr Ruto was appointed as the Chair of the COVID-19 Education Response Committee and charged with exploring ways to restore normalcy in the primary education sector's academic calendar and developed best practices and recommendations to prevent future education interruptions for Kenyan students.

Dr Sara Jerop Ruto's contribution to education is unmatched. She towers as a model for African women, building Africa through its educational systems.



There are several policies and platforms to advance women's inclusion in democratic governance, peacebuilding and development. The missing link remains the level of implementation of these instruments. If we actively measure women's participation in governance and actively hold governments accountable, then we should be able to make progress

Hanna Tetteh,
**Special Representative of the Secretary-General
to the African Union**



We know from empirical evidence that women, young Africans and SMEs, confront significant challenges when attempting to benefit from trade agreements. I, therefore, intend to take concrete steps to ensure that women and young Africans are at the heart of the implementation of the AfCFTA.

Wamkele Mene,
**Secretary General of the African Continental
Free Trade Area Secretariat.**

This is a great continent. I went to primary school on this continent, secondary school, university. I've worked on this continent, and I think that it's a great disservice that, for whatever reason, people have usurped an imagery of Africa that is absolutely incorrect.

Dambisa Moyo,
Zambian Economist and author



We know that what needs to be done requires political will, and we know what needs to be done to promote women's role in public life. The most important aspect is to institute special measures, like well-designed and effectively implemented gender quotas and targets

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,
Former Executive Director of UN Women

Economic empowerment on the African continent can only be attained if women occupy high political and social positions. We must make efforts in a number of areas to ensure women achieve education and take advantage of the emerging opportunities in science and technology.

Assetou Koite,
**Former President of the Pan-African Women's
Organisation.**





CHAPTER 7

Creative Industries And Sports

In May 2020, more than one hundred artists and celebrities from across the continent participated in an online concert that raised awareness on the COVID-19 pandemic. Big names such as Grammy-winner Angelique Kidjo and South Africa's Sho Majodzi were among the female artists who performed live and broadcasted online and on television channels across the continent. The power of the creative sector to leverage celebrity and star power for positive influence is a value recognised by the AU Member States as espoused under Aspiration 5 of Agenda 2063, "to create an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics."

The creative industry refers to the arts, media, music, film, culture, and other enterprises that create and celebrate cultural knowledge and information using innate talent and skills. Africa is brimming with such talent of young technology savvy stars leveraging social media and streaming platforms to connect with people in the farthest parts of the world using their fame as a force for good.

Initiatives such as the African Muzik Magazine Awards (AFRIMMA) have been implemented in partnership with the AU to reward and celebrate African artists and music annually. The AU also designated 2021 as the Year of the Arts, Culture, And Heritage: Levers for Building The Africa We Want. Such commitment by the AU Member States attests to the relevance of continental policy frameworks, such as the African Charter for African Cultural Renaissance and the African Union Plan of Action on Cultural and Creative Industries. In addition, the adoption and implementation of the AU Model Law on the Protection of Cultural Property and Heritage will underpin the revolution of Africa's creative industries and boost the development of the creative economy.

AU institutions such as the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), the African Audio-Visual

Commission (AACC), the Vehicular Cross Border Language Commission (VCLC), and the Centre for Linguistic Studies and History through Oral Traditions (CELHTO) equally play a key role in elevating discussions and championing the development of policies and programmes to build Africa's artistic and cultural heritage.

Similarly, Africa has many stars participating in various sports worldwide. They play in teams in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, using their fame and popularity to inspire others. The women leaders recognised in this chapter strive to realise continental commitments on arts, culture, and sports. They recommend the following key priority actions towards this end:

1. Enhance access to opportunities for women in sports management and participation in national and international organisations.
2. Recognise and leverage the role of creative sectors to promote human rights, GEWE, development, peace in communities and societies in Africa.
3. Increase partnerships and collaborations to support women's role and contributions to arts, culture, and sports as levers of development.
4. Amplify women's varied realities using arts and cultural practices.
5. Increase research and documentation of women's role in advancing African cultures, arts, and sports.
6. Exploit all media platforms in telling authentic African women's stories.

These leaders are galvanisers of actions and influencers of political, social, and economic change, making them forces for good.



AGNES MAKENGI KAPINGA

Democratic Republic of Congo

Agnes Makengi Kapinga, aka Mère Malou's, is the first international female soccer referee in the DRC. Her ultimate dream is for an African woman to officiate as a referee at the FIFA World Cup or Olympics final.

She became a referee when she answered a call for female referees on the radio after mastering the seventeen laws of football and training herself to pass the physical tests, including running around the field twelve times in a row. She was made an international referee for women's soccer in 2002 by FIFA, officiating games in Tanzania, Ghana, the Republic of Congo and South Africa during pan-African competitions.

Since then, she has earned several awards and recognition, including the National Order of Leopard of the Chancellery, the highest honorific decoration in the DRC, in addition to accolades from FIFA and CAF.

She has trained and mentored younger trainee referees and advocates to ensure that women become key stakeholders in the football industry on the continent.

Agnes Makengi Kapinga is a revolutionary leader who has demonstrated that success is beyond physical but requires strength of character and resilience.



MARIATU KARGBO

Sierra Leone

Mariatu Kargbo, aka 'Black Pearl of China', is a beauty queen, singer and dancer introducing African culture and music to the people of China.

Ms Kargbo is a China-Africa goodwill and cultural exchange ambassador who performed at the 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Gala in Beijing for the Chinese President, First Lady, African Presidents and First Ladies. She is known for her excellence in traditional Chinese arts and mastery of 'face-changing' Chinese art, which had hitherto not been taught to women and foreigners.

Ms Kargbo is the first person from her country to achieve a Guinness World Records (GWR) title with the Largest outdoor Samba dance in 2012. Her second GWR title happened in 2015 when she achieved the 'Most contributions to a charitable campaign in 24 hours' raising funds for over 400,000 meals for people affected by the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea.

She advocates for girls' empowerment through educational interventions by providing school fees and textbooks for over 600 girls in Sierra Leone.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms Kargbo, as the Sierra Leone China Friendship Association founder, introduced a new Chinese language learning method called Smallsmallchinese, broadcast on TV in Sierra Leone and available on multiple streaming platforms. This project allowed students to learn one of the most complex yet important languages for Africa's future.

Mariatu Kargbo is a bold and brave leader who breaks barriers and bolsters others.



JANE MOKOENA
South Africa

Jane Mokoena is a leader who believes that training and empowering women in rural areas can go a long way in eradicating poverty and empowering generations. As a fashion designer and educator, she has trained more than 500 unemployed women and youth.

Ms Mokoena established Khaya Dressmaking CC, a fashion training school in 2001 offering dressmaking, tailoring and hat making courses to women and girls, focusing on specific underserved black communities. Her training programs suit various literacy levels, budgets, and time schedules.

Her women empowerment programmes also include leadership and business training, allowing her alumni to open their businesses and become financially independent, promoting black enterprise.

As a reputable fashion training services provider within South Africa, she has built strategic partnerships with key stakeholders to replicate her programs and increase similar institutions that train and encourage women's fashion business ownership.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Jane trained women to make masks and personal protective equipment (PPE), donating them to medical centres and vulnerable communities.

Jane Mokoena envisions a South Africa where women are equal partners in social and economic development.



**NKIRU 'KIKI'
MORDI**
Nigeria

Nkiru 'Kiki' Mordi is an Emmy-nominated investigative journalist, filmmaker, writer, radio presenter and gender equality advocate.

Her online show on the eviction patterns amongst the slum dweller community in Nigeria led an NGO to bring a lawsuit against the Lagos State government to end such practices. Her documentaries 'Life at Bay' about fisherwomen on an island in Lagos and the 'Sex for Grades' exposing corrupt lecturers at the Universities of Lagos and Ghana sparked protests, investigations and change. The latter film received an International Emmy nomination in the news and current affairs category in 2020.

As an advocate, Ms Mordi uses films to highlight GBV, sexual harassment, and inequality. She collaborates with the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission to effect change within government structures.

During the pandemic, Kiki launched 'Document Women', an online media platform focused on combating the erasure of women and their contributions from history. Here, she and her team document real-life women's experiences in audio and visual forms seeking to immortalise their impact in society.

Nkiru 'Kiki' Mordi is a champion of women and their causes, rewriting and preserving the legacy of their history for future generations.



Harnessing girls' education for the Africa we want implies developing mechanisms and strategies so that at the political, administrative and community level, the right to education of the girl child is implemented adequately at the level of African education administrations.

Dr Rita Bissoonauth, African Union/ International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA)'s Coordinator



Women's rights are human rights, and the ratification, domestication and implementation of key gender-responsive global and regional human rights instruments should be prioritised. We need to act with a common purpose, shared urgency, and with bold steps to translate and bring the promises from these instruments to women's lived reality.

Wamkele Mene, Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Africa

This is a great continent. I went to primary school on this continent, secondary school, university. I've worked on this continent, and I think that it's a great disservice that, for whatever reason, people have usurped an imagery of Africa that is absolutely incorrect.

Dambisa Moyo, Zambian Economist and author



Despite women making up about 50% of the African population, they remain largely underrepresented in leadership roles across financial, investment and entrepreneurial markets. As a result of these longstanding gender gaps, the continent loses over 20% of its GDP every year.

Dr. Véronique Tognifode Mewanou, Minister of Social Affairs and Microfinance of Benin

We talk about technology, but only 27% of our women in Africa have access to the internet, and only 15% of them can actually afford the cost to use the internet. This also means our young girls are mostly left out of online learning. We need to be able to respond to that.

Dr. Vera Songwe, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa





CONCLUSIONS

The AU strategy on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment highlights salient priorities for the accelerated realisation of gender equality and women's empowerment on the continent across all sectors. The women leaders in this compendium have demonstrated the practical ways these commitments can translate to concrete benefits for women, girls and African citizens generally.

Their stories attest to what is achievable in the lives of tens of people in local communities to hundreds, thousands and millions across societies illustrating the crucial point that African women's leadership experiences are similar and have a wide-reaching impact.

They have had to leap many hurdles to achieve their impact, and in all their experiences, they have identified a few overarching challenges facing African women on the continent. They are:

1. Limited educational opportunities – women and girls often lack access to the education and learning needed to build their capacities.
2. Lack of access to resources – women leaders lack funding and other resources required to build and grow their visions and endeavours.
3. Lack of work/life balance – women leaders struggle with balancing their work with family responsibilities, especially as society deems them the primary caregivers.
4. Harmful and discriminatory norms and practices – women leaders face barriers to realising their potentials due to social norms, prejudices, stereotypes and cultural beliefs that discriminate against them and their endeavours.
5. Limited mentorship opportunities – women leaders lack guidance and adequate support systems in official spaces, which inhibit their emergence as leaders.
6. Low levels of self-confidence – women often lack the confidence to take leadership positions because of little or no education or experience.

However, they suggested the following priority actions as prerequisites to create a better continent for more girls and young women to emerge as leaders.

7. Increase training and mentorship opportunities for women and girls across sectors and professions.
8. Increase advocacy against all forms of gender-based discrimination, violence and marginalisation leveraging online and offline media platforms.
9. Increase inclusive approaches to engaging women in education and workplaces.
10. Bridge the digital divide for rural and urban women as an opportunity to leapfrog African women's leadership.
11. Promote and support multifaceted services and opportunities for women leaders - financial, psychological, networking, legal and capacity strengthening.
12. Increase and strengthen partnerships to support African women leadership, including women's organisations and networks across sectors, generations and stakeholders.

African women's leadership journey is evolving, as the stories in this compendium have shown, requiring concerted multi-stakeholder efforts to achieve equal representation across all sectors as stipulated in Agenda 2063.



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