Twenty-five Year Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)+25

Africa Regional Review
Summary Report
2015-2019

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1. Introduction, background and context

1.   The Beijing+25 Review is taking place in a landscape marked by the 2015 adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its related 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), as well as the 2013 adoption of Agenda 2063 by African Leaders as the blueprint for the "Africa We Want". The two Agendas are mutually reinforcing and guide the continent's aspiration for an inclusive, prosperous and peaceful continent, while leaving no one behind. At the same time, the overall context of the Beijing+25 review is to achieve high economic growth, while addressing critical challenges such as pervasive climate change, conflicts and pushbacks on gender equality.

2.   The 12 Critical Areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) emphasize ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls, reducing gender disparities, and enhancing women's access to economic opportunities. These areas are central to generating productivity gains, accelerating sustainable development, achieving the SDGs, and improving development outcomes, including prospects for the next generation.

3.   Empowering women and girls has multiplier effects and helps to drive a country's economic growth and overall development. Gender inequalities in the labour market have been estimated to result in annual economic losses of USD 60 billion for Africa, other than North Africa (Bandara, 2015).

4.   The 48 country reports submitted by African member States to this review show that countries have achieved progress since 1995. More girls are now in school compared to 25 years ago, and gender gaps in primary education have been largely closed, with the ratio of female to male primary enrolment rates reaching 92 per cent on average. Women now make up to 41 per cent of paid workers outside of agriculture, compared to 35 percent in 1990.

5.   Countries have also made considerable progress in incorporating the principles and provisions of global and regional legal instruments on women's human rights in their national constitutions and legislative and policy frameworks, and have set up institutional mechanisms to implement those frameworks. By 2019, three countries, namely Rwanda, Namibia, and South Africa, were among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of women's representation in national parliaments.

6.   In spite of significant progress in Africa since 1995, gains have been uneven across countries and gender inequality remains a key development challenge. Improving women's access to education and healthcare, and removing barriers to their productive employment are essential first steps towards reducing inequalities, improving the poverty-reducing impact of economic growth, and unlocking women's potential for meaningful contribution to Africa's structural transformation.

7.   It is in this context of hope, mixed with important global and regional challenges, but also opportunities for greater progress and potential for change that would accelerate lasting positive transformation, that the Beijing+25 assessment is being undertaken.

8.   Both the 12 Critical Areas of the BPfA and the SDGs aim to build on achievements and respond to challenges, to ensure an end to discrimination against women and girls everywhere by 2030. This report therefore juxtaposes the two so that they should be reviewed together.

9.   This Regional Beijing+25 Review Summary Report has been prepared utilizing national assessment reports. The Report provides an analytical picture of progress Africa made as a region, in each and all of the 12 Critical Areas, highlighting success stories and lessons learned. It also analyses the challenges that the continent faces in implementing BPfA, and identifies priority policy recommendations.

2. Policy coherence

10.   During the review period, African countries have continued to respond to the changing contexts defining development objectives and priorities in the continent. The main development framework from 2000 to 2015 was the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), when African countries joined the rest of the world in integrating sustainable development into development planning. However, countries largely experienced modest attainments against the MDGs, as starting levels, processes, and commitments differed widely in instance.[1] The net effect of the MDG-experience resulted in a need for a new development framework.

11.   The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reaffirms the centrality of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as critical factors conditioning the success of inclusive and sustainable development. This is evident by the fact that 14 out of 17 SDGs have multiple targets and indicators that require collection of reliable and consistent gender statistics. In addition, SDG 5 is a stand-alone goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Agenda 2063 also recognizes the centrality of women's roles in the attainment of its seven aspirations in view of women's important economic and social contributions to the development of the continent.

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[1] Africa Development Bank adjudges the continent to have been off-track in five of the eight Goals. See https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/topics/millennium-development-goals-mdgs/africa%E2%80%99s-recent-mdg-performance

Three mutually reinforcing frameworks

Agenda 2063	BPFA	SDGs
1) A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development	A) Women and poverty	1) No poverty
2) An integrated continent politically united and based on the ideal Pan Africanism and the Vision of Africa's Renaissance	B) Education and Training	2) Zero hunger
3) An Africa of Good Governance, Democracy, respect for Human Rights Justice and Rule of Law	C) Women and Health	3) Good health and wellbeing
4) A Peaceful and Secure Africa	D) Violence against women	4) Quality education
5) An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics	E) Women and armed conflict	5) Gender equality
6) An Africa whose Development is people – driven, relaying on the Potential of African People particularly its Youth and Women and a Continent with well cared	F) Women and the economy	6) Clean water and sanitation
7) Africa as a strong, united and a influential Global player and partner	G) Women in power and decision-making	7) Affordable and clean water
	H) Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women	8) Decent work and economic growth
	I) Human rights of women	9) Industry, innovation and infrastructure
	J) Women and the media	10) Reduce inequalities
	K) Women and environment	13) Climate Action
	L) The Girl Child	17) Peace, Justice and Strong institutions

Figure 1: Policy coherence across frameworks

12.   These policy agendas often elicit new implementation frameworks. Additionally, the monitoring and evaluation of implementation of long-term development strategies, such as the Beijing Platform for Action, realize the need to reform existing frameworks. Consequently, this review looks at instances of revisions of laws and administrative practices.

3. Overview and analysis of achievements and challenges

13.   Major strides have been made in the implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the period after the Ninth Africa Regional Conference (Beijing +20) conference held in November 2014 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This outcome document called for the accelerated implementation of the BPfA twelve critical areas of concern in order to ensure achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A number of persistent challenges have hindered the attainment of gender equality and women's empowerment in the twenty-year period since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

14.   The fact that no country in the world has achieved gender equality is a pointer that the challenges are indiscriminate, affecting both developed and developing countries. In the current review, based on reports from 48 countries, progress is noted in the following areas that had been of concern in the review of Beijing+20: addressing the rights of women and girls in ensuring fundamental freedoms, legal representation, legal literacy and addressing gender-based violence; defining policies and programmes in addressing the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women and girls; measures and action to ensure women's equal access and full participation in power structures and decision-making through legislative measures, mechanisms that allow equal participation of women and the use of gender quotas and other special measures; greater recognition of improved women's

access to vocational training science and technology; tools and technologies to facilitate women's access to finance; and concerted efforts to avail sex-disaggregated data.

15. However, despite the notable achievements in many countries and across sub-regions, progress has been uneven across the continent. The trajectory of development gains, in gender equality and women's empowerment, is not on track to meet the sustainable development goals for many countries.

16. The current implementation status is discussed according to the 12 critical areas of concern and related to agenda 2030 and 2063.

3.1. Critical Area A – Persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women

17. African countries have continued to review, adopt and maintain socioeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty. The diversity in their approaches is reflected in some of the initiatives being embedded into national development frameworks, while others have been very specific towards poverty reduction for women and girls. The language and commitments of these frameworks are common, but often, diversity is in the locus of intervention and implementation details.

18. This continues to remain on the list of priority areas of focus for all governments in Africa. Approaches to eradicate poverty among women and girls entail an array of interventions across different countries in Africa that focus on, inter alia, incomes, decent jobs, savings, and pro-poor and inclusive complementary social protection programmes. In line with SDG1, many governments in Africa either prioritize to implement, or have implemented, a range of gender-responsive social protection interventions, mainly contributory social security systems, non-conditional cash transfers, and public works programs. There are also direct income support programmes that involve direct funding or social grants to vulnerable and excluded groups, such as women and girls.

In addressing malnutrition, many governments have put in place strategies to educate and provide highly nutritious food supplements to affected children (both girls and boys), and pregnant and breast-feeding mothers. There are also governments that promote gender-responsive social investments and budgets in social infrastructure (education and health provision), physical infrastructure (water, sanitation, hygiene, energy, transport, communication etc.), and improved access to social protection. Member States have used basic social investments to assure poverty and inequality reduction, through a combination of social assistance and contributory schemes to individuals, families and social groups in a situation of poverty and vulnerability.

19. Poverty is a mix of chronic and transitory poverty. Most of the poor (82 per cent) live in rural areas, earning their living primarily in subsistence farming and women tend to be overrepresented in agricultural activities. It is therefore expected that women are poorer than men. However, poverty measurement is done at the household level, as a consequence of current data collection methods which assume that members in the same household share equally.

20. A number of governments in Africa have also prioritized increasing agricultural productivity, enhancing value chains for agro-products and food security as a means of eradicating poverty and improving livelihoods, as well as ensuring equality and non-discrimination under relevant laws. For

example, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has estimated that closing the gender gap in agriculture would raise yields by 20 to 30 per cent, enabling the reduction of hunger by 12 to 17 per cent (which translates to supporting 100 million to 150 million people).[2] While strengthening education in modern agricultural practices is one way to ensure higher productivity yields, access to savings and credit institutions, as means of enabling women to overcome part of their constraints to participation in agriculture is another key necessity.

21.   Therefore, investment in women and girls can be a vehicle to promote long-term prospects for growth and human wellbeing, particularly through providing women and girls with access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions. The region has made progress in the context of strengthening the package of opportunities and resources to ensure the effective participation of women and girls in this development process. In conformity with SDG5.a, most governments in Africa prioritized the provision of start-up capital (credit) and other financial services for women to start and grow their economic enterprises. Through these programmes, women can access funds at no interest to establish their businesses. Further, youth funds target unemployed young people (males and females), while an array of governments have focused on the inclusion of women, youth and rural populations in the financial sector.

22.   Economic growth was robust between 2000 and 2011, standing at an average of 5 per cent per annum, and 4 per cent between 2012 and 2016, before dipping to 3.2 per cent in 2018. However, this economic performance has not been translated into a significant reduction in poverty and inequality. The high levels of inequality especially in Southern and East Africa have diluted the impacts of growth on poverty reduction. Developing gender-based methodologies and conducting research to address the 'feminization of poverty' can provide insights into the disproportionate consequences of economic growth, where more women are often found among the poor, due to various socioeconomic factors. The term 'feminization of poverty' refers to the disproportionate incidence of poverty among women compared to men.[3] This is intrinsically linked to gender inequality, where men and women have different experiences when it comes to inequalities of income and opportunity. These experiences can impact, determine and prescribe socioeconomic outcomes that are often skewed in favour of men. Across the continent, there are multiple initiatives to improve frameworks for such gender-based analysis and other methodologies through census, the collection of new survey or administrative data, or a re-analysis of existing data sets, in order to better understand the gender-based factors and impacts of acute and intergenerational poverty in addition to vulnerability.

23.   Other intersections of poverty, vulnerability and marginalisation across the continent include the occurrence of human and natural disasters, and their subsequent economic shocks including health and hospitalisation costs. These incidents often disturb already precarious livelihoods, causing households to sink deeper into poverty, or push those already living at the fringes into poverty. For

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[2] FAO (2011), *The State of Food and Agriculture*. Rome: FAO. Available at
http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/52011/icode/
[3] See ttps://www.mtholyoke.edu/~abbat22l/classweb/feminizationofpoverty/

example, the Ebola challenge, though it has been intermittent for West and central Africa, is not only taking up additional state resources and redirecting efforts from other areas of development focus, but it is also changing the dynamics of families. In such cases families are losing those members that would normally provide subsistence, such as heads of households and other income earners and caregivers, in addition to children. Drought and other manifestations of environmental degradation that impact the agricultural sector, continue to keep households in poverty while also drawing new ones into it. For example, much of African agriculture's vulnerability to climate change lies in the fact that its agricultural systems remain largely rain-fed and underdeveloped, as the majority of Africa's farmers are small-scale farmers with few financial resources, limited access to infrastructure, and disparate access to information.[4]

3.2.   Critical Area B – Education and Training of Women

24.   In accordance with the SDGs, interventions in all socioeconomic realms should follow the principle of 'leaving no one behind'. Various initiatives in the region have been devised to ensure equal access to education, with varying results. Increasingly however, policy focus has gone beyond mere school enrolment rates to other considerations, including the quality of teaching and learning, school retention, and academic results. For the education sector, relevant data to design the delivery of interventions prescribed by the BPfA, SDGs and Agenda 2063 aspirations, are already available.

25.   While access to education often focuses on school-based learning, the eradication of illiteracy among women necessitates a commitment to many other facets including vocational training, educational reforms and lifelong learning. This is particularly important to women and girls, as they typically receive less formal schooling and training throughout their life course. There has been significant progress in promoting gender equality in education in Africa. Many countries have achieved gender parity in primary education as evidenced by an increase of 5 percentage points in primary school enrolment rate between 2000 and 2017. Despite these gains, Africa remains the region furthest from attaining gender parity at all levels of education, especially in secondary education. There are also lower completion rates at the primary level and lower transition rates between primary to secondary, secondary to tertiary, tertiary to wage employment. In several African countries where secondary school completion rate is below 20 per cent, almost no girl from poor households completes upper secondary education.[5]

26.   With regard to participation in the labour force, unemployment among youths on the African continent is a persisting problem, especially given the youth population bulge. At the same time, formal employment growth has not kept pace with growth in the labour force, particularly in urban areas. Females among such youth are thus likely to be at a disadvantage, exacerbating their marginalization. Female youth are the hardest hit by unemployment in Africa, excluding North Africa, with a labour force participation rate of 46 per cent compared to 57 per cent for their male counterparts. Female youth are mostly disadvantaged in the labour markets due to poor skills, cultural and gender barriers across countries. Thus, the potential benefits of Africa's youth population remain unrealized as two thirds of youth are unemployed, discouraged, or vulnerably employed (AfDB, 2016).

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[4] https://oxfordre.com/environmentalscience/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199389414.001.0001/acrefore-9780199389414-e-292
[5] Ibid

The BPfA's strategic objective in improving women's access to vocational training, science and technology is therefore gaining prominence.

27.   At the macro level, the 21st century economy is profoundly shaped by technologies and influenced by their pace. According to ECA estimates, 90 per cent of future jobs in Africa will require information, communication and technology (ITC) skills, and about 2 million new jobs will be created in the computer, mathematical, architecture and engineering field. The 2015 Global Talent Shortage Survey estimated the shortage at 38 per cent, while the most in need professions (in terms of recruitment) were science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEMs)-related. For women to seize the current and future tremendous employment opportunities in the technologies sector, the wide gender bias in STEMs should be closed.

28.   Africa has the highest levels of unemployment and informal employment in the world. Quality education is a necessary precondition to address unemployment and to equip people with the necessary skills to meet contemporary labour market requirements. The continent is of an urgent need to invest in STEM for women and girls, as well as to invest in achieving parity and completion of secondary education. Tertiary education is another area that require investment focus, as it is indissolubly linked to more employment opportunities, higher productivity, and income.

Table 1: Country examples on education and training of women and girls

| Country	Area	Short description
Madagascar	Literacy	The country's Supplementary School Action Programme for Adolescent Malagasy (ASAMA) which fights illiteracy, has managed a 53 per cent female share of students, with a 90 per cent female teacher cohort.
Congo	Inclusivity	Congo was among the countries that invested in strategies to enhance retention of girls in schools, reviewing curricula for greater gender-sensitivity, raising gender awareness among teachers, while making infrastructure more gender-responsive.
Mozambique	Training	The Science and Technology Ministry introduced training packages to equip women for sustainable self-employment. The activity pioneered biotechnology and bioscience training focused on health and nutrition.
Zimbabwe	Lifelong learning	The country allowed dropped out children to attend afternoon or evening classes at any school of their choice. This resulted in a 2017 enrolment of 137,784 students, 58 per cent of whom were females.
Uganda	Funding	Allocations to the menstrual hygiene programme rose from UGShs 694,000,000 in FY 2015/16 to UGShs 1,204,435,203 in FY 2018/19.
Nigeria	Safe and equitable access	2015 saw the education ministry join up with several development partners to launch the 'Safe Schools Initiative', boosting enrolments. In 2018 too, another federal ministry collaboration with development partners dubbed 'Education Cannot Wait' provided safe and equitable access for 194,000 conflict affected children, 52 per cent of whom were girls.

Source: Submitted national reports

3.3.   Critical Area C – Women and Health

29.   Having access to quality health care is not only a human right, it also enables participation in the economic, social and political life of the community by keeping people productive, preventing illnesses and saving lives. Therefore, increasing women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services is essential. Given that women and girls often bear most of the burden of unpaid work, including caring for sick members of the family, this directly affects the quality of their life.

30.   Health outcomes in Africa have improved substantially from early 2000s. Over the course of a decade and a half, maternal mortality decreased from over 685 deaths per 100,000 live births to 439 deaths on average, infant mortality rate decreased from 50 deaths per 1,000 live births to 39 deaths, child mortality decreased from almost 80 deaths per 1,000 live births to 57, and adult life expectancy at birth reached 62.8 years on average in 2015 while it was under 55 years on average in 2000. These improvements in health outcomes contributed to economic growth and development. According to recent estimates in 2000-2015 period, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita increased by 1 per cent in Africa in response to a reduction in maternal mortality rates by 125 deaths. Similar impact is observed in response to a 9-year increase in life expectancy. While this progress reflects improvements in health expenditures and access to healthcare services by children and women, access is far from universal in Africa and features substantial inequalities between and within countries.

31.   Most maternal deaths in Africa are a result of haemorrhage, high blood pressure during pregnancy, pre-existing medical conditions including HIV/AIDS, infections, unsafe abortions and complications from delivery. Figure 2 provides an overview of the maternal mortality ratio across the region.
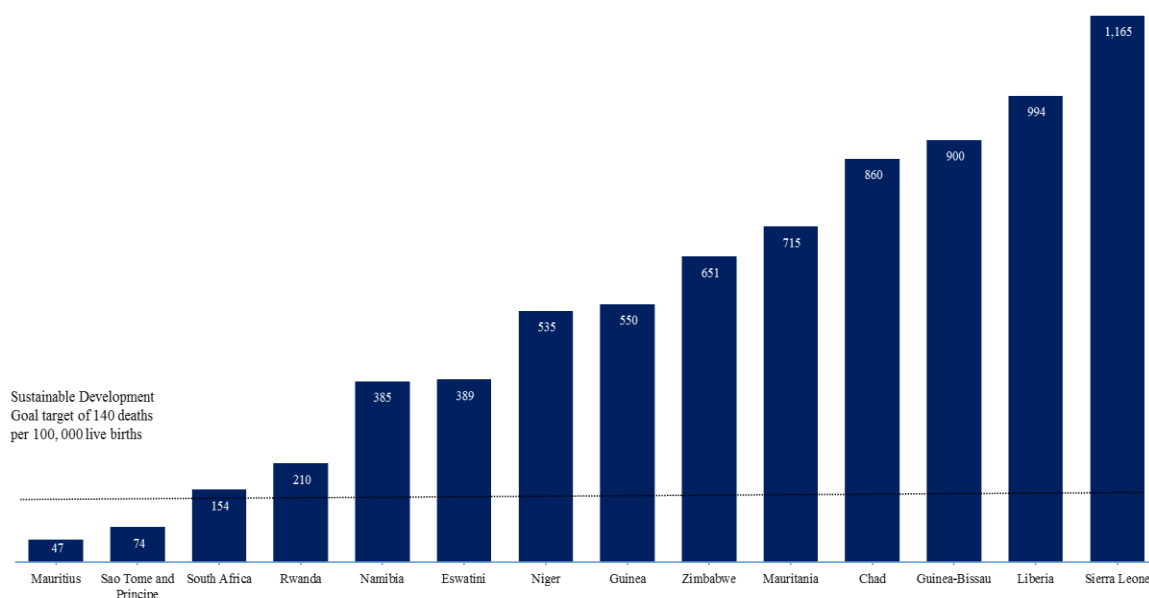
Source: ECA analysis based on data from AGDI National Reports (Mauritius and South Africa), Demographic Health Surveys for Chad (2014), Guinea (2012), Liberia (2013), Namibia (2013), Niger (2012), Rwanda (2014/15), Sierra Leone (2013) and Zimbabwe (2015), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys Guinea-Bissau (2014), Mauritania (2014) and Sao Tome and Principe (2014), and the UNICEF *State of the World's Children 2017* for Eswatini.
Note: Dotted line represents Sustainable Development Goal target for countries of 140.

Figure 2: Maternal mortality ratio, 2011-2015 (deaths per 100,000 live births)

With regards to skilled birth assistance during delivery, generally used as a proxy for maternal mortality, Southern Africa leads the way as a sub region where all countries increased coverage rates and reduced inequalities over the period 2000 to 2015.

32.   With reference to strengthening preventive programmes that promote women's health, across the African region, there is commitment to the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action where member States have committed to implement universal access to a full range of reproductive healthcare services, including family planning by 2015.[6] The main objectives are to provide affordable, acceptable, and accessible family planning services to allow couples to choose the number, spacing and timing of the birth of their children, to prevent unwanted pregnancies, to reduce adolescent pregnancies and the incidence of high-risk pregnancies, and to reduce unsafe abortion,[7] to prevent and reduce the incidence of, and provide treatment for, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS,[8] and to achieve a rapid and substantial reduction in maternal morbidity and mortality.[9] In the global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme in 1999, member States recommended key actions to speed up implementation.

33.   Member States have undertaken gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues, countries reported investments in enhanced routine and supplementary immunisation, and defaulter tracing of TB and HIV/AIDS patients. Countries across all subregions have addressed issues affecting women and girls' reproductive health rights. In line with SDG3 on population health and SDG5.6 on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including family planning, governments have prioritised the health and wellbeing of women, men and children, by pursuing policies that reduce the burden of disease and improve healthy lives.

34.   Inequality to access across income groups and location (rural-urban) are particularly important for two reasons. First, the aggregate figures do not provide enough empirically grounded information for policy action. Second, the inequalities in access are driven by female education among other aspects, demonstrating synergy across goals of health and education.

35.   There is emphasis on women's access to primary healthcare programmes to improve maternal, new-born and child health. The right to access the highest standard of physical and mental health is a human right. Universal access to health care, including for HIV and SRHR-services, is key in achieving health targets within global and regional political commitments, such as the SDGs, the aspirations of Agenda 2063, the African Union Catalytic Framework to end HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria by 2030, the Maputo Plan of Action on SRHR 2016-2030, and most recently the SADC SRHR Strategy 2019-2030.

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[6] United Nations (1996, para. 7.6).
[7] Ibid., paras. 7.14 and 7.44.
[8] Ibid., para. 7.29.
[9] Ibid., para. 8.20.

36.   Still, as recalled in the ground-breaking Resolution of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) on the Role of Parliamentarians on Realizing the Right to Health and Achieving Health Targets in Africa – punitive and discriminatory laws and practices continue to undermine and block access to health and HIV-services for vulnerable groups, including stigma and discrimination to reach vulnerable groups assuring their right to non-discriminatory health care and HIV/SRHR-services - leaving no one behind. Building on the historic PAP resolution a Regional Consultation for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Parliamentarians on Realizing the Right to Health and Ending AIDS, Nairobi 2018.

37.   In promoting research and disseminating information on women's health, continuous research is critical for evidence-based policies and strategies. The close monitoring of the Ebola phenomenon in Sierra Leone has enabled substantive advances against the disease and its socio-economic impacts, which incurs disproportionate adversity on women, especially as care givers. However, despite advances in research and information there remains a need for increased resources, monitoring, and follow-ups to women's health.

38.   In Africa, there is a marked improvement in maternal mortality rates since 2000 with differences across and within countries. The universal access to information and services on sexual and reproductive health requires scaling-up to address underlying causes of emerging non-communicable diseases affecting women and girls ensure socio-economic and cultural traits do not hinder this service.

3.4.   Critical Area D – Violence against Women

39.   Violence against women and children is a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls, while also being a serious public health issue. It encompasses physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence whether occurring in public or in private sphere. It includes sexual abuse of female children in the household, rape, marital rape, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, trafficking in women and forced prostitution. There was diversity noted in the review with some countries reporting progress made in combatting gender-based violence (GBV) in its broad form, while some countries reported specifically on violence against women. Nonetheless, in all its forms GBV remains a critical concern for human rights, health and economic progress in Africa.

40.   Violence against women and girls is deeply entrenched in societies and is mainly fuelled by socio-cultural practices and beliefs which manifest at different levels and in varied forms. In line with SDG5.2, African governments have prioritised interventions to eliminate violence against women and girls and harmful practices. They have made considerable progress in incorporating the principles and provisions of these legal instruments into their national constitutions and legislation, adopting legislation, policies and other measures to combat violence against women.

41.   Member States across the region have undertaken integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women. The measures have been taken within the international, regional, subregional and national frameworks including;

- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), noting that violence against women violates women's human rights.

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), obliging states to "take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children".
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000) requires Governments to adopt legislative measures, establish criminal offences relating to trafficking and to assist and protect victims of trafficking.
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000) obliges State Parties to prohibit the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000).
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women (2003) compelling governments to take the measures necessary to eliminate the practice of female genital mutilation.

42.   Innovative strategies have been noted across the region including robust research and empirical studies on the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures. Across the region, countries have reviewed existing legislation against gender violence, as well as establishing a wide range of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) reporting platforms. Further, countries have undertaken measures to eliminate discriminatory stereotypes and practices that are harmful to, and discriminate against women. Despite the noted progress, violence against women still remains deeply rooted and embedded in the patriarchal social practices. In line with global and regional commitments the region needs to take drastic measures to eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking as a matter of urgency in order to achieve sustainable development goals in totality, but particularly SDG5. The below table shows ratification status of countries across the region to selected instruments dealing with violence against women.

Table 2: Status of ratification of international human rights treaties on violence against women

Country	Convention on the Rights of the Child	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict	Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
Chad	✓ (1990)	✓ (2002)	✓ (2002)	✓ (2009)
Eswatini	✓ (1995)	✓ (2012)	✓ (2012)	✓ (2012)
Guinea	✓ (1990)	✓ (2011)	✓ (2016)	✓ (2004)
Guinea-Bissau	✓ (1990)	✓ (2010)	✓ (2014)	✓ (2007)
Liberia	✓ (1993)	✘ˢ	✘ˢ	✓ (2004)
Mauritania	✓ʳ (1991)	✓ (2007)	✘	✓ (2005)
Mauritius	✓ (1990)	✓ (2011)	✓ (2009)	✓ (2003)
Namibia	✓ (1990)	✓ (2002)	✓ (2002)	✓ (2002)
Niger	✓ (1990)	✓ (2004)	✓ (2012)	✓ (2004)
Rwanda	✓ (1991)	✓ (2002)	✓ (2002)	✓ (2003)
Sao Tome and Principe	✓ (1990)	✘	✘	✓ (2006)
Seychelles	✓ (1990)	✓ (2012)	✓ (2010)	✓ (2004)

Sierra Leone	✓ (1990)	✓ (2001)	✓ (2002)	✓ (2014)
South Africa	✓ (1995)	✓ (2003)	✓ (2009)	✓ r (2004)
Zimbabwe	✓ (1990)	✓ (2012)	✓ (2013)	✓ r (2013)

Source: ECA analysis based on the United Nations Treaty Collection (July 2018).

Notes: ✓ = country has ratified the treaty. ✗ = country has not ratified. Numbers in brackets represent year of ratification. r = country has expressed reservations. Mauritania has general reservation in respect of articles or provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Children. South Africa and Zimbabwe have reservations with respect to article 15(2) of the Protocol. s = countries that have signed but not ratified the instrument.

43. Most African countries have sustained heightened advocacy, reporting, monitoring and evaluation, as well as coordinated efforts to end impunity on violence against women and girls. In order to deter increasing cases of violence against women and girls, there is need to expedite and strengthen integrated support services for survivors of GBV to ensure efficiency, safety and trust.

3.5. Critical Area E – Women and Armed Conflict

44. Concerning the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels, theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that women might have a greater stake in peace than men. For one, the gender division of labour means that women do not readily expose themselves to conflict, partly because they are more amenable to the peaceful resolution of contestations. But as homemakers, women are likely motivated against conflict but the knowledge that they would eventually pick up the pieces.

45. African countries have consciously tried to integrate women into their uniformed cadres, while also providing them with formal capacity to engage in peace-making, conflict resolution and human rights management.

46. One of the ways for member States to show their commitment with the provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (United Nations, 2000b) and subsequent resolutions that deal with the participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution and promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace, is through the development of a national plan of action. It was noted in the Report of the Secretary-General on women, peace and security that for these plans to be effective they will need to have the following elements: "strong leadership and effective coordination, inclusive design processes, costing and allocated budgets for implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as flexibility to adapt to emerging situations."

Box 1. Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women

In western Africa, the Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Training Centre has in Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone, actively engaged women in training on conflict prevention and building peaceful co-existence, and in addressing the root causes of conflict at the community level. The Centre graduates 100 professional annually

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47. Countries have consciously tried to integrate women into their uniformed cadres, while also providing them with formal capacity to engage in peace-making, conflict resolution and human rights management in line with provisions of UN Security Council resolution 1325. This is to promote longer periods of sustained peace, where women play an active role in peace negotiations and peacebuilding.

3.6.   Critical Area F - Women and the Economy

48.   Women's economic empowerment is a process through which women's human, financial and physical capital increase along with their access to and benefits from economic opportunities leading to improved agency and voice. Economic empowerment of women leads to social transformation, substantive gender equality and meaningful changes to women and girls' lives. In addition, it enables investments in education and other productive sectors and creates inter-generational human security.

49.   Governments across Africa have undertaken legislation and administrative reforms to promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources, including access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, credit, inheritance, natural resources, and appropriate new technology. For example, the adoption of relevant laws has provided an expansion of access to land and housing, in addition to a revision of rules for the occupation and acquisition of land and plots favourable to women, in many countries, abolishing previous discriminatory provisions. At the national and local levels, efforts have been undertaken to enhance the potential for income-generation for rural women by facilitating their equal access to and control over productive resources, land, credit, capital, property rights, development programmes and cooperative structures.

50.   In facilitating women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade, women continue to face higher unemployment, informality, working poverty and precariousness in employment across countries. Although women are increasingly educated and present in the labour force, social, legal and institutional measures have not kept pace with these changing realities, further delaying equality and labour market participation in many countries. Women have undoubtedly made strides in the world of work, over the last decades. More women have access to formal employment, and they are steadily engaging in sectors which were traditionally considered as male domains (technical, scientific sectors, construction). However, the pace and path of progress is very slow. The figure below provides an overview of women's participation in the labour force across different sub-regions, showing a low cumulative increase across the region in general where North Africa has the lowest rates of participation among subregions.
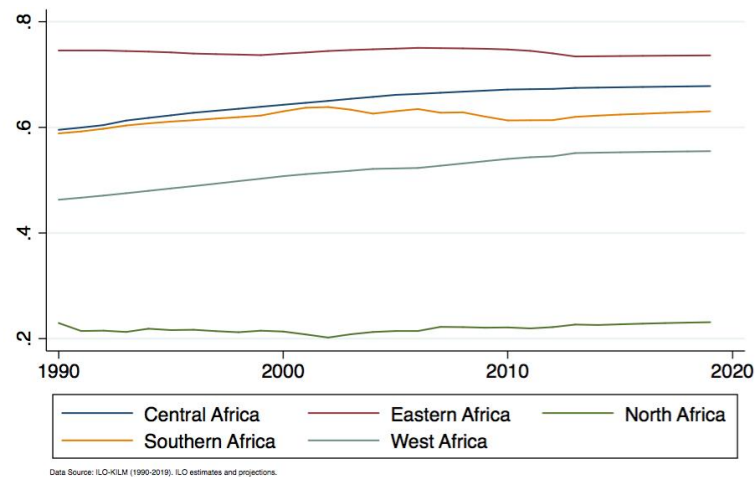
Figure 3: Female labour force participation rate

Source: Aggregated figures of women's employment hide the fact that the majority of working women are concentrated in the informal sector where they represent 74% in Africa (ILO 2016).

51.   Governments across the region are providing business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women. In East and West Africa, some governments have invested in promoting and supporting women's self-employment and development of small enterprises. In addition, they have provided access to credit and capital as well as innovative linkages with financial institutions. In general, over the past three years, improvements in accessibility of financial services have been impressive. Greater proximity of financial services to where people live and greater access to mobile phones have made considerable contributions to this phenomenal growth.

52.   Focusing on the employed men and women, member States face difficult challenges in moving, particularly women, into productive and good quality employment. The major cause of concern in strengthening women's economic capacity and commercial networks, is the proportion of women in vulnerable employment. For example, the number of own-account workers and contributing family workers is extremely high and projected to be 75 per cent by 2020 (see figure below). [10] In 2018, a higher proportion of women (79 per cent) than men (68 per cent) worked in the informal sector in Africa, except in North Africa, where this pattern is reversed. These inequities distort an efficient allocation of human capital in the labour market, with negative implications for productivity, firm profits, and economic diversification.

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[10] ILO-KILM (1990-2020)
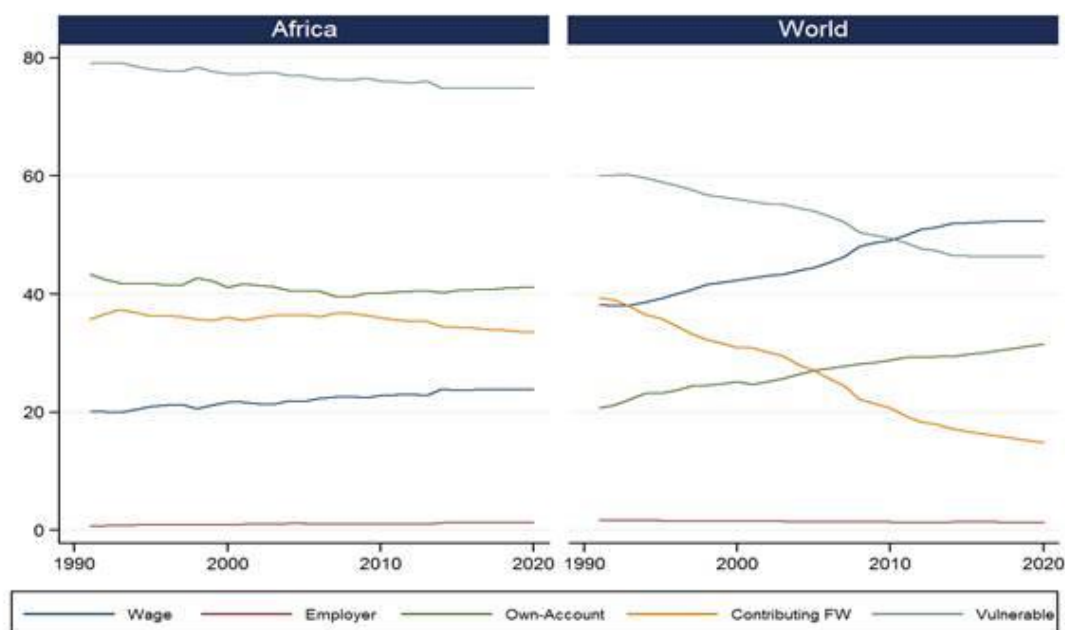
Figure 4: Status of female Employment

53.   Globally, women in the workplace face greater share of various discrimination than men, ranging from occupational segregations, gender pay gaps, sexual harassment and maternal and paternal leave. The inexistence of progress measures on gender equality within the workplace makes it difficult to address the elimination of occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination. When women access the formal labour force, far often, persistent occupational segregations results in their overwhelming representation in sectors that are linked to their domestic care work. Generally, men tend to be employed in sectors that are capital intensive and that require higher education, while women are dominant in the services sector including Wholesale and Retail Trade and Hotels and Restaurants, as shown in figure below.
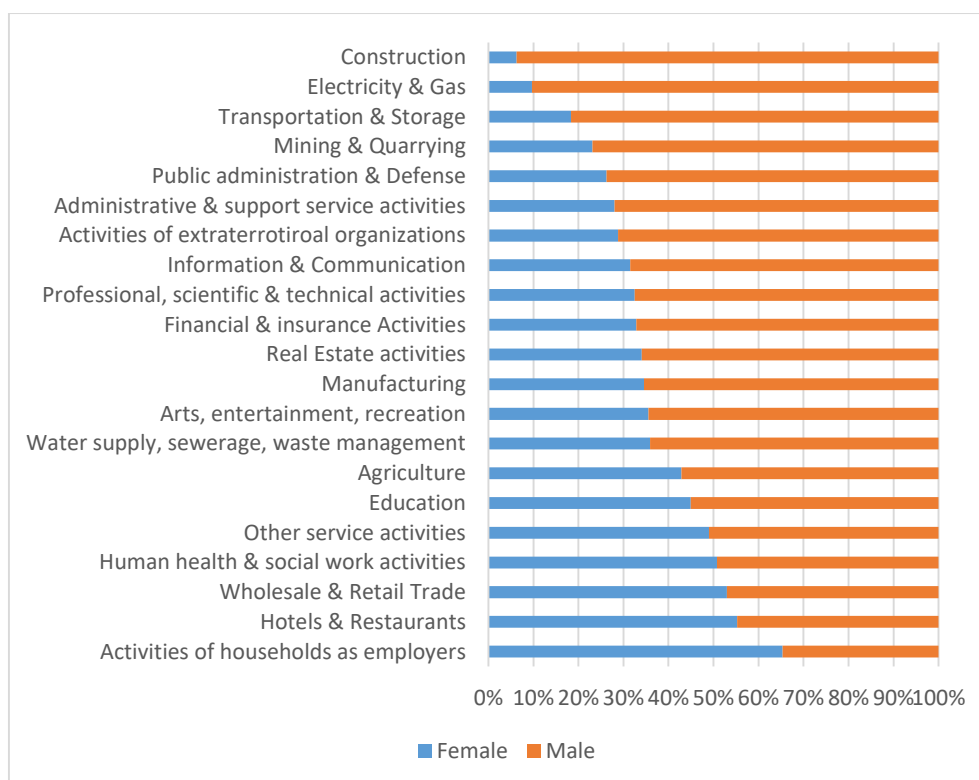
Figure 5: Gender Sectoral Segregation in Africa

54.   The challenges in promoting harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men are often rooted in time-use and subsequent the time-poverty experienced by more women. Time poverty is a major constraint on women's contribution to national economies such that women spend four hours on average on daily unpaid work, while men on average spend slightly more than one hour.[11] The cumulative effects of which can take up a significant amount of time that could otherwise be dedicated to productive tasks related to market activities and paid employment.

55.   Africa's economic growth has not reflected a reduction in poverty and inequality. Further, women have not sufficiently benefitted from such recent trends in economic growth. Labour force participation rates remain low where women continue to face higher unemployment, informality, working poverty and precariousness. Promotion of women's enterprise and the facilitation of business growth, from start-up capitals and micro enterprises into SMEs and big businesses, provides an avenue for substantive economic empowerment.

56.   Women across the region dominate rural and agricultural production, as a result of sectoral segregation, where subsistence necessitates entrepreneurship. There is need to facilitate a transition into productive sectors that promote enterprises of opportunity which focus on quality production and high yield products and services. Digitalisation and the use of technologies provide low-cost and efficient solutions for transformation and transition into other industrious sectors.

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[11] AUC Gender Scorecard (2016)

57.   In the last five years, majority of working women in Africa have remained concentrated in the informal sector, where elements of decent work are often lacking, including protection and representation. In particular land tenure security and rights remain a concern, which require robust policy and legislative action.

3.7.   Critical Area G – Ensuring women are involved in power and decision-making

58.   The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action highlight the importance of promoting the participation of women in political and public life by *"redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences, and providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues."*[12] It sets a target of 30 per cent for women in decision-making. The findings of the review show that countries in the region have prioritized women's participation in leadership and political roles and are taking measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. In some instances, countries have made progress through legislative initiatives, while others have made deliberate attempts through appointments, but progress remains uneven.

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[12] Paragraph 182 of United Nations (1995). Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*. Sales No. 96.IV.13.
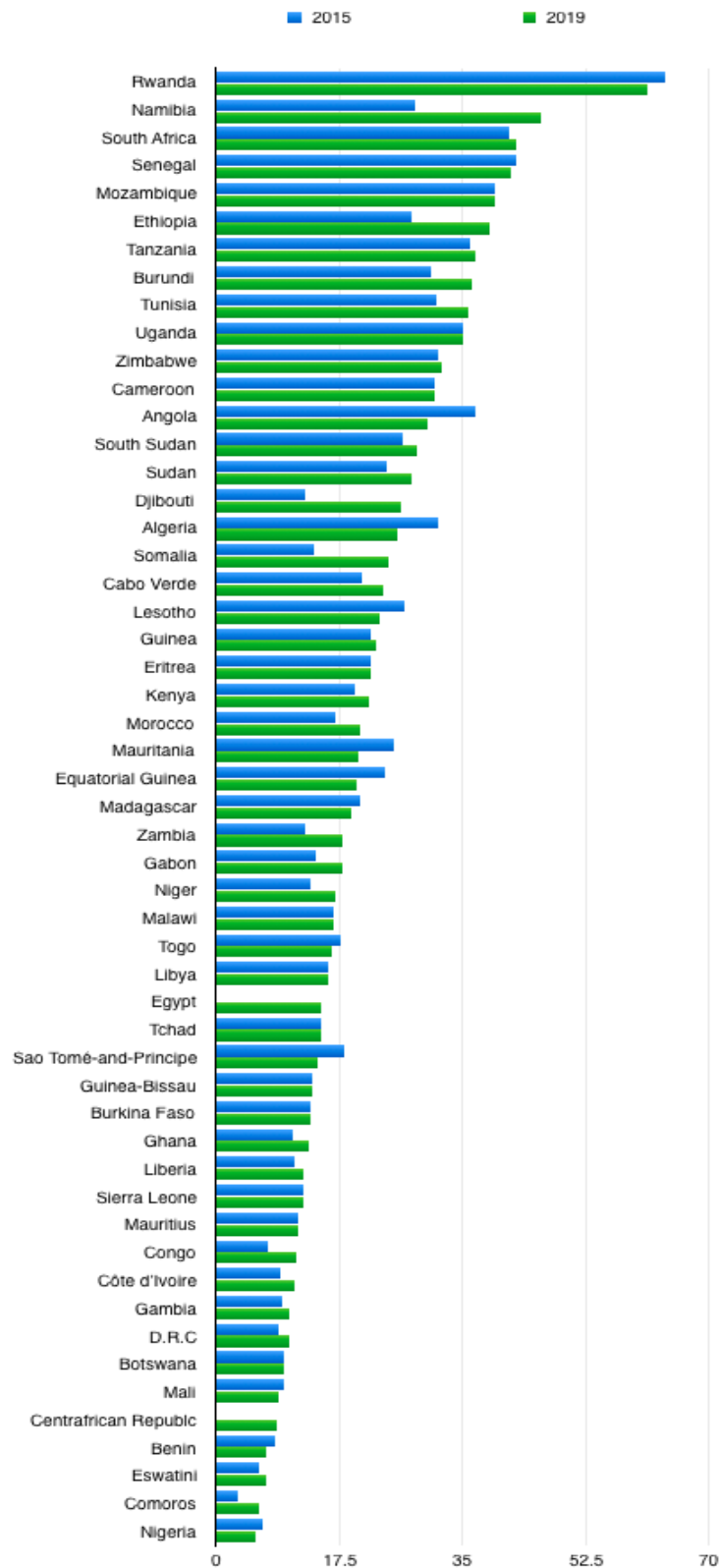
Figure 6: Proportion of women in parliament, Inter-Parliamentary Union

59.   Figure 6 shows that as at the beginning of January 2019, thirteen countries (Rwanda, Namibia, South Africa, Senegal, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Burundi, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Cameroon and Angola) – had reached the target of at least 30 per cent of women in the national parliament, a target that was set in the Beijing Platform for Action. These countries all have quotas and proportional representation electoral systems. According to data compiled by the Inter-

Parliamentary Union, Rwanda was consistently ranked first in the world in terms of the proportion of women in parliament in since 2015.

60.   In the world of work, participation in decision-making organs and processes allows women and men to voice their specific needs and advocate for change. It is crucial that women occupy meaningful space at national and local levels, as well as in the public and private sectors. A recent cross-country study by the African Development Bank shows that women hold only 12.7 per cent of board directorships (364 out of 2,865) in 307 listed companies in 12 African countries. In addition, about one-third of African companies have no women on board and another one-third have only one female director.[13]

61.   Notwithstanding the strides made by some countries, women are still underrepresented at decision-making levels, including in the parliament, judiciary, in senior leadership positions in the civil service, and at the ministerial level. Systematic barriers persist that impede women's equal participation in political life, including negative cultural attitudes, lack of quotas for women and lack of capacity-building of potential candidates. It is therefore imperative to continue increasing women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

Box 2. The use of gender quotas and other special measures

- The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women recommended the use of "temporary special measures" to achieve equality in participation in political and public life[14]. These measures include the use of gender quotas.
- Many African countries including Angola, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Swaziland and Zimbabwe among others, have constitutional- and legislative-mandated quotas for either the number or proportion of women in the national parliament. Although having no mandatory quota, the main political parties in Namibia and South Africa have voluntary quotas.
- However, gender quotas alone will not be effective in promoting women's participation in political and public life if not supported by a conducive institutional environment, which includes enforcement mechanisms.

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62.   Slow and uneven progress was noted across the region, in the representation and participation of women in decision-making at all levels. This calls for urgent, accelerated and coordinated continental strategy to even out progress across Africa. The strategy would be in line with commitment to implement article 9 of Maputo Protocol, where Member States undertook to 'ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making'. There is also a need to revisit the past 50/50 campaigns in order to re-energize efforts for increased participation of women in politics and decision-making.

3.8.   Critical Area H: Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

63.   The BPfA calls for institutionalization of women's interests in all areas and sectors of policy at all levels. The national machinery to promote gender equality is an institutional structure to promote

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[13] African Development Bank, 2015 "Where are the women? Inclusive Boardroom in Africa's Top Listed Companies?"
[14] United Nations, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee) (1997). *General recommendation No. 23: Political and public life*.

women's advancement and to ensure the full enjoyment by women of their human rights. Its main function is to monitor and to ensure the implementation of the principle of non-discrimination and equality between women and men. BPfA stipulates that the national machinery must be located at the highest possible level of government, have sufficient resources, and have the mandate to develop gender sensitive planning of all government policies. It is also tasked with the generation and dissemination of gender-sensitive data.

64.   Across the five subregions, gender mainstreaming has been used as a strategy to integrate gender into all sectors of the economy. All African countries have a national gender machinery in the form of a government ministry or contact institution within government where coordination, and leadership for policy formulation and implementation for gender equality and the advancement of women are led. The national gender machineries are entrusted with ensuring that gender main-streaming is implemented through gender focal persons in the different line ministries and ensure that gender equality remains in clear focus and is a priority in public policy.

65.   Across the region, there seem to be political commitments to gender reforms, but implementation remains a challenge in terms of pace and depth. These obstacles are compounded by the complex relationships between laws, customs and other values held individually or collectively, notwithstanding a clear declaration of the supremacy of a country's constitution. Countries have revised policies, laws and strategies to overcome such obstacles, but they do not measure up to implementation.

66.   The African region has made progress regarding strengthened national machineries that support institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, especially in east, central and southern Africa sub-regions. Despite the observation that among this group of countries, some have made efforts to produce statistics and put in place institutional mechanisms, it must be recognized that much work remains to be done in this area, especially in the areas of: elaboration of laws, regulations or programmes/strategies on statistics; development of centralized online databases and/or dashboards and also strengthening users' statistical capacities to enhance appreciation of statistics and the use of gender statistics. East and Central African subregions registered progress in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects. The Southern Africa subregion has enacted legislative reforms, approved policies and implemented programmes for the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

67.   Many countries have invested in the collection of quality sex-disaggregated data; significant progress has been achieved at the regional level, espousing gender-based methodologies whose outputs enable improved targeting of policies and interventions. Such data is a *sine qua non*[15] of good budgeting, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Critical to assessing the situation of gender inequality in African countries and the progress made on the various global and regional commitments on gender equality is the availability of reliable, policy relevant statistics.

68.   Gender data and statistics have been instrumental to shed light on issues that were long underestimated, unveiling structural inequalities and holding stakeholders accountable for delivering on their commitments. Across the continent most countries are involved in a development partner-driven of home-grown initiatives to establish general and/or gender disaggregated data sets with

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[15] An essential condition

which to define the gender inequality problem and to design adequately resourced, time-bound, and interventions that can be monitored. Based on countries' national reports, while western African countries have a weak gender mainstreaming capacity amidst persisting gender inequalities, in southern Africa, the inadequacy of data for the development of M&E indicators is compounded by a weak division of labour within countries over BPfA and SDG data.

69.   Data is important in shaping policy positions in the gender agenda. While collection of gender sensitive data remains a persistent policy challenge; the African countries have made strides in this regard. The West African countries report progress on parameters ranging from mechanisms to deal with collection and collation of data, budgeting and monitoring and evaluation among others. The East and Central African region has reported progress in this regard as well. In this group of countries, the majority have defined a national set of indicators to monitor progress on the SDGs.

70.   National reporting on this priority area reveals mixed successes. East, Central and Southern subregions have reported progress in the creation, or strengthening, of national machineries aiming at advancing women. While commendable progress has been achieved in the last five years in setting up and strengthening national gender machineries in almost all countries in Africa, such institutions require extensive support as they lack adequate resources to make the requisite impact needed for achievement of agendas 2030 for SDGs and the AU 2063. A genuine commitment for revisiting the roles and responsibilities of these national gender machineries is needed to turn them around as strong institutions that exercise their coordination mandate effectively. Across the region, progress in strengthening the institutional mechanisms for gender equality is notable but is but it is intermittently shadowed by lack of adequate financing to make measurable impact and often involves reprocessing of existing data, originally not disaggregated by sex. The region is in need of better quality data that reveal the needs of women and girls. With regards to integrating gender perspectives in legislation, public policies and projects, several African countries have made strides in enacting legislative reforms. There is, however, a pressing need to align contrasting definitions, especially concerning definitions of a child.

71.   There is merit in revisiting and redefining the role of gender focal points in sectoral ministries. This would enable the gender focal persons to serve as catalysts for change and effective integration of gender into programmes and activities of the various line ministries. It would be prudent to establish a criterion for the choice of the identified focal points, formalize their work with job descriptions, well-defined objectives to be achieved and the establishment of monitoring and evaluation methods for their activities. Taking into account the high staff turnover and job mobility, there would be value to have gender focal groups (several people) rather than gender focal points.

3.9.   Critical Area I – Human Rights of Women

72.   Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birth-right of all human beings; their protection and promotion are the first responsibility of governments. African governments have worked actively to promote and protect these rights through the full implementation of all human

rights. This is reflected in the efforts to review their constitutions, laws and policies and by ratifying the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

73.	Equality and non-discrimination before the law and in access to justice, including elimination of discriminatory norms, is another area of priority; African governments have committed in their constitutions to comply with human rights obligations as per the various human rights instruments. Across all African subregions, the changing negative social norms and gender stereotypes remains an important area of focus in view of the fact that they are still a major constraint in guaranteeing women's and girls' equal rights. Most governments have also taken specific actions in favour of the fundamental rights of women and girls, especially in terms of providing them with quality education, training and lifelong learning. Protecting girls against premature marriage and female genital mutilation is another area where African countries have achieved significant progress.

74.	In East Africa, there are efforts towards creation of independent national institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights and development of comprehensive human rights program to raise awareness among women and others on the rights of women, a stride in achieving legal literacy. Similarly, governments in Southern Africa invested in strengthening, or creating, independent national institutions for the protection and promotion of women's rights in addition to reviewing the national laws, policies and practices as obligated by the international human rights law. In some countries, national laws, including customary laws and legal practices in areas of family, civil, penal, labour and commercial law have become much more gender-responsive.

Table 3: Country examples on human rights of women and girls

Country	Area	Short description
Nigeria	Human rights implementation	Nigeria has ratified 9 global human rights frameworks out of the 13, two of which (Protocol to prevent trafficking in persons and the Convention on the Rights of the Child) have either been domesticated or integrated as part of the country's national and state laws.
Côte d'Ivoire	Human rights implementation	The "Roadmap for the implementation of the recommendations of CEDAW" and the creation of the UPR Monitoring Committee (the action plan for Resolution 1325) was revised in 2019. Further, the Accelerated Plan to combat premature marriage was revised in 2018 along with the National Strategy Against GBV. All these documents are linked to the National Development Plan (NDP) 2016-2020.
Kenya	Human rights response	The country has prioritized cases of medical attention to SGBV in all County facilities with dedicated staff and units where SGBV is treated as an emergency response. The Government of Kenya has undertaken to strengthen the capacity of both county governments and health systems to respond to SGBV cases through capacity building on standard operating procedures for Gender-based Violence Recovery Centre committees in the counties. There is on-going awareness creation of women's and human rights on Zero Tolerance for FGM, and 16 Days of Activism Against GBV during the commemoration of UN days.
Malawi	Human rights	The government strengthened/enforced laws and workplace policies and practices that prohibit discrimination in the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the public and private sectors, and equal pay legislation.
Congo	Legal literacy	Congo established a National Human Rights Commission which has an equity and gender sub-committee responsible for collecting international and national data and legal information on gender. The

		objectives of this sub-committee are to create a reliable, up-to-date database; identify the rights and obligations of the gender component of populations; ensure that populations, and especially the men and women, know their rights.

Source: Submitted national reports

75.   The region has seen great achievements in human rights for women and girls in terms of criminalization of GBV, the right to inherit, the legal representation of women and, to some extent, legal literacy. Nevertheless, cultural norms in some African countries still put women and girls at a disadvantage. There is a call for increased efforts in informing people, especially men and smaller communities, about the rights of women. Changing negative social norms and gender stereotypes often requires the use of male champions in the form of high-level male leaders, traditional leaders and their spouses, as custodians of customs and traditions, to act as agents of change.

3.10.   Critical Area J: Women and the media

76.   The media can provide a powerful channel of information, when harnessed ,to bring forward issues of gender equality, women's rights, and advocate for the instruments guaranteeing them. The media can transmit messages that challenge social norms and gender-based stereotypes, participation in women's empowerment, and mobilization of people to take positive actions towards gender equality. Therefore, increasing the participation and access of women to expression and decision making in and through the media and new technologies of communication, is important in reinforcing the visibility and voice of women through their inclusion as reporters as well as sources in the stories produced on a variety of topics.

77.   In 2015, African news had the highest overall proportion of stories highlighting gender equality concerns. In 2015, 20 per cent of major topics in the news raised equality issues, rising from 5 per cent in 2010. In Africa, the promotion of women's participation and leadership in the media gained prominence. There was a 7-point increase of stories in newspapers, television and radio newscasts that are reported by women, making the gender gap narrow by 11 per cent. Women report 30 per cent of political news in Africa, make 30 per cent of the traditional media news, scoring higher than the global average.

Table 4: Stories where gender equality issues are raised, by major topic, by region

	Africa
Politics and Government	19%
Economy	18%
Science and Health	19%
Social and Legal	25%
Crime and Violence	21%
Celebrity, Arts and Media, Sports	10%
OVERALL	**20%**

Source: Global Media Monitoring Project, 2015

78. However, imbalances in the quality of coverage remain, including in terms of women and their perspectives. It is important therefore to train female and male journalists on gender-sensitive reporting and ensure that women journalists are given similar opportunities than their male counterparts. Otherwise, the media will participate in perpetuating gender norms and stereotypes by spreading the wrong messages. Cooperation between media agencies and the civil society can allow to regulate media treatment of women and girls.

79. Moreover, there remains the need to strengthen women's access to and ownership of the media and ICTs. Women's ICT literacy is still low, even when priority actions have focused on initiatives to strengthen women's knowledge and capacities in the area of ICTs. Nonetheless, these activities have led to the creation of several start-ups headed by women.

80. Regarding internet usage, while the gender gap has narrowed in most regions since 2013, it has widened in Africa. The proportion of women using the internet is 25 per cent lower than the proportion of men using it. This has impacted women's access to social media, due to infrastructure, costs and persistent discriminatory social norms.

81. Despite such progress, the gender gap in mobile ownership remains low, as reflected in figure below, where a growing number of women including those in remote areas are using mobile phones as an essential means of communication.
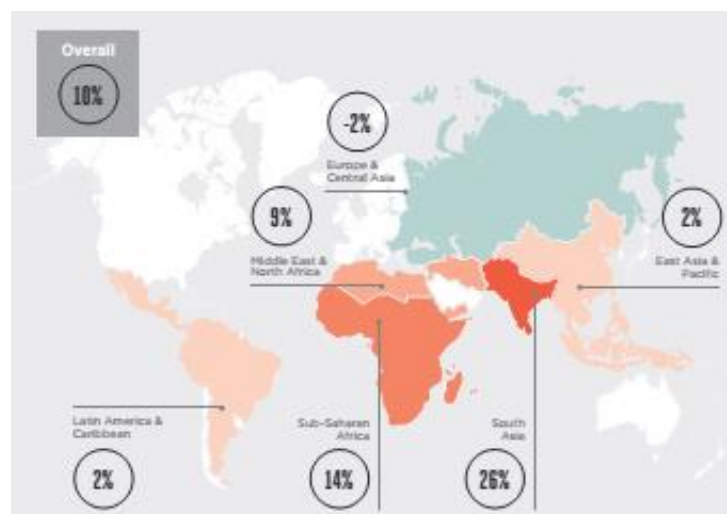
Figure 7: The gender gap in mobile ownership in low- and middle-income countries, by region

Source: The Mobile Gender Gap Report, 2018

82. Internet and social media have proven to be platforms for women activists to express themselves freely by bypassing traditional media, raise awareness by sharing experiences and mobilize attention on challenges to gender equality. Hashtag activism has helped to mobilize public attention on women's rights such as the Twitter #BringBackOurGirls campaign in 2013, that reached over 1 million tweets, to help rescue abducted Nigerian schoolgirls. However, the extent to which women's online activism has been able to impact decision-making processes and influence policy making remains unpredictable.

83. Social media can also pose major challenges when virtual spaces are used to perpetuate direct attacks on women and girls, causing psychological harm, damaging reputation and creating barriers

to their participation in the society. This calls for more attention by member States to address these challenges, especially where they intersect with cyber bullying, stalking and other forms of harassment.

84.   Countries have made concerted efforts in the representation of women across the media, where visibility is being addressed in positive ways to ensure women's inclusion and expression across sectors and different media platforms. Social media is providing access for women in terms of communicating messages and promoting a balanced portrayal of women. However, more needs to be done in terms of two-way communication, such that interactive media remains mindful of gender dimensions and free of gender stereotypes, where protection against harassment, cyber bullying, online grooming and cyber security, are appropriately addressed. Training in the appropriate use of ICTs and social media, as a means of communication and as a reflection of real-life interactions, can help both men and women to utilize media in positive ways, where emotional detachment to messaging and anonymization do not facilitate negativity but promote respect. With increasing digitalization and the access that mobile phones and the internet provide, a concerted effort must be made to ensure that every women has a phone, this is where corporations and media giants, can play a critical role.

3.11.   Critical Area K: Women and the environment

85.   African countries have continued to make strides in involving women and girls in environmental decision-making at all levels, including conservation, protection and rehabilitation. Their involvement in such processes adds value to environmental programmes and facilitates the collection of gender-disaggregated information, enhancing the validity of such programmes, in order to integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development

86.   Some African countries took steps to incorporate gender-responsive dimensions into basic services and infrastructure in line with SDG7 on energy for all, SDG9.1 on infrastructure and SDG6 on water and sanitation. Others have also developed gender-responsive laws, policies and strategies for oil and gas, climate change, environment and natural resources as well as water and sanitation.

87.   Based on the national reporting of East and Central African countries, there have been achievements in integrating a gender perspective into environmental policies. Women and girls in some countries in the region are not only involved in leadership, management and governance of environmental and natural resources, but also participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of environmental policies and sustainable infrastructure projects on women and girls. Africa has also made progress in strengthening the evidence base and raising awareness of the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to environmental degradation and disasters.

Table 5: Country examples on women and the environment

Country	Area	Short description
Namibia	Inclusivity	Namibia continues to implement the Environmental Management Act 7 of 2007 and the 2013 National Policy on Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM). The emergence and growth of the

		CBNRM movement has brought many benefits to communities, including increasing the involvement of women in tourism and natural resource management. In the country, conservancies have large numbers of women employees and this together with women's participation in decision-making is considered a model for other sectors.
Zimbabwe	Inclusivity	One of the guiding principles the country's Climate Policy, 2016 is that it be a policy wholly owned by all Zimbabweans and particularly that it be gender sensitive.
Liberia	Assessing the impact of climate on women	The National Disaster Policy (NDP), the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) Act and the National Disaster Management (NDM) Act recognize the important role played by women in development and the burden they carry during disasters. Consequently, the Acts provide for all activities implemented by the government and all its partners before, during and after disasters, to proactively and consciously include the participation of women and other vulnerable groups.

Source: Submitted national reports

88.   The region has seen women's increased involvement in decision-making on matters concerning the environment and climate. It has also seen better provision of infrastructure, as well as enhanced access to water and sanitation, giving national policies a heightened gender perspective. National reports also focus on women's continued vulnerability during climate-related crises. These are not limited to practices that put women and girls in danger during or after disasters (such as exploitation or trafficking), but also including them in post-disaster recovery processes. Disaster-related data and statistics also need to be strengthened and become disaggregated by sex, to better assess the needs of women in crisis situations.

3.12.   Critical Area L: The girl-child

89.   African countries have made efforts towards protecting the rights of the girl child within the review period. In line with SDG5, a majority of countries have placed emphasis on implementation of policies and programmes aimed at reducing and ending child marriage, premature marriage and forced marriage; and also implementing policies and programmes aimed at eliminating violence against girls.

90.   Awareness raising interventions have been directed at changing the mind-set and attitudes of the guardians of negative traditions and cultural practices that undermine the rights of the girl child. Measures to promote and protect the full range of the rights of the girl child have further included ensuring availability of dignity kits for women and adolescent girls to manage their special hygiene needs and menstruation.

Box 3. Tackling FGM in Kenya

In Kenya, the involvement of elders in the fight against FGM has subsequently brought on board more men in the fight against FGM, who have become champions of protection of the rights of girls and their education. Moreover, the provision of Alternative Livelihoods for reformed circumcisers has enabled certain communities to abandon the FGM practice. In addition, the Government established the Anti-FGM Board in 2013 to coordinate the implementation of the Prohibition of the Female Genital Act, 2011. To this effect, the board has designed programmes such as the inclusion of anti-FGM key messages in school curriculum and scaled awareness creation interventions, training and engagement of community leaders.

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91.   Countries have made progress towards improved education outcomes and skills of the girl child through various strategies and programmes. They have formulated and reviewed education

policies from a gender perspective to ensure integration and mainstreaming of gender in the education sector policies, programmes, budgets and work plans.

92.   The region has also taken measures to improve the education environment. Measures taken include: to strengthen the curriculums to make them more gender-sensitive; having standard school construction regulations with separate latrines for girls and boys; facilities for disabled; and the supply of dignity kits for girls. Also worthy of note, there have been awareness-raising programmes for teachers on gender equality.

93.   Some countries have taken the initiative to integrate sex education in teaching curriculums. In addition, some governments constructed second chance schools for girls who have left school or not had any schooling. Girls studying in the scientific and technical branches have been provided with incentives such as the ECOWAS Excellence Award to enhance their skills and training in new and emerging fields, especially in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

94.   In line with SDG 3, the region has also made progress in increasing girls' access to appropriate, affordable and quality healthcare and related services. Adolescent fertility is important on both health and social grounds. Teenage mothers are more likely to experience adverse pregnancy outcomes and are more constrained in their ability to pursue educational opportunities than young women who delay childbearing.

95.   Member States have undertaken innovative actions to tackle norms and practices undermining the rights of the girl child. Such initiatives include; promotion of sanitation and hygiene management for girls through provision of free sanitary kits for girls and creation of separate latrines and toilets, among others. Further, progress has been noted in ensuring provision of appropriate healthcare services, and narrowing the gender gap in access to quality education, as well as building gender-friendly school environments. Promotion of STEM education and training for girls is a growing trend and has been incentivized in many countries.

4. Summary of findings

1) Strong economic growth in Africa has not led to a commensurate drop in poverty. The inequality of opportunities faced by women exacerbates their vulnerability to poverty.
2) Quality education is a necessary precondition to address the high levels of unemployment and informality across Africa.
3) Promotion of STEM education and training for girls is growing and has been incentivized in a number of countries.
4) There is marked improvement in maternal health as evidenced by a reduction in mortality ratios across the region.
5) Advocacy on violence against women has heightened across the region whilst reporting, monitoring and evaluation still remains a challenge.
6) Countries have consciously integrated women into their uniformed forces, while also providing them with formal capacity to engage in peace-making, conflict resolution and human rights management in line with provisions of UN Security Council resolution 1325.

7) Labour force participation rates remain low where women continue to face higher unemployment, working poverty and job precariousness.

8) The majority of working women in Africa are overly concentrated in the informal sector, where elements of decent work are often lacking, including protection and representation.

9) Land tenure security and rights remain a concern, which require robust policy and legislative action.

10) Slow and uneven progress was noted across the region, in the representation and participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels.

11) Across the region, progress in strengthening the institutional mechanisms for gender equality is notable but is intermittently shadowed by lack of adequate financing to make measurable impact.

12) African countries have made strides in enacting legislative reforms, public policies and programmes.

13) The production of data and statistics continues to be one of the essential elements where despite slow progress in this sector there remains much to be done.

14) The region has registered great achievements in human rights for women and girls in terms of criminalization of GBV, the right to inherit, the legal representation of women and, to some extent, legal literacy. Nevertheless, cultural norms in some African countries still put women and girls at a disadvantage.

15) Countries have made progress in the representation of women across the media, to ensure women's inclusion, expression and positive portrayal across different sectors and platforms.

16) The region has seen women's increased involvement in decision-making on matters concerning the environment and climate.

17) Member States have undertaken innovative actions to tackle norms and practices undermining the rights of the girl child. Such initiatives include; promotion of sanitation and hygiene management for girls through provision of free sanitary kits for girls, among others.

18) In line with SDG 5, a majority of countries have placed emphasis on implementation of policies and programmes aimed at reducing and ending child marriage, premature marriage and forced marriage; and also implementing policies and programmes aimed at eliminating violence against girls.

19) Countries reported investments in enhanced routine and supplementary immunisation, and defaulter tracing of TB and HIV/AIDS patients.

20) Across the region, major challenges in data collection, use and management remain, making it difficult to assess development and policy performance. Inadequate financial resources, weak capacity and poor coordination impact quality, timeliness and production of valuable disaggregated, and relevant data.

5. Key messages and priority actions

96. For achieving gender equality, transformative policies and actions, along with adequate and predictable financial resources are needed to empower women and girls to overcome structural and institutional barriers.

I. **Disrupting negative stereotypes, social norms and harmful and traditional practices that perpetuate inequalities among societies is a game changer for gender equality and women's empowerment:**
   - Changing negative social norms and gender stereotypes often requires the use of male champions, in the form of high-level male leaders and traditional leaders, as custodians

of customs and traditions, to act as agents of change (learning from the #HeforShe campaign).

- Launch a campaign to end violence against women and girls, building on the experiences and good practices of the Africa #unite campaign.
- Expedite and strengthen integrated support services for survivors of gender-based violence to ensure efficiency, safety and trust.
- Address intersectional discrimination and violence against women and girls, particularly among women living with disabilities, the elderly, refugees and internally displaced women.
- Ensure universal access to health care, including for HIV and SRHR-services.

II. **Sustained and predictable financial resources is critical for implementing commitments, policies and programmes that advance gender equality and women's empowerment:**
- Specific allocation to gender equality and women's empowerment across all sectors of public finance.
- Secure high-level commitment and funding through official development assistance.
- link SDG funding, as well as climate finance, to implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.
- Initiate, and where they exist upscale and extend, innovative financing for women entrepreneurs.

III. **Investing in innovative and technology-based tools, procedures and methods can revolutionise data management and usage:**
- Harness the benefits of digital data, such as real-time data, to incorporate gender-responsive data into programme cycles, from planning to evaluation.
- Harness ICT technologies to reach mothers to register births at the initial step in obtaining legal identity.
- Invest in technology and ICTs to transform data collection and analysis.
- Strengthen national statistical systems to generate, manage and disseminate gender-responsive data from, and across, data ecosystems.
- Strengthen collection and use of disaster-related gender statistics, to better assess the needs of women in crisis situations.

IV. **Unlocking the potential of institutions will support women's rights across all sectors**
- Re-visiting and redefining the role of gender focal points in sectoral ministries to catalyse for change and effective integration of gender into programmes and activities of the various line ministries.
- Harness public-private-partnerships for advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

V. **Employing digital technologies can provide low-cost and efficient solutions to transform women's access to services and transition women into industrious sectors:**
- Support access to mobile phones and the internet, for rural and urban women to access services, markets, finance and other critical information.

- Invest in STEM education and training for women and girls to provide foundational skills necessary for utilising digital technologies, contributing to digital innovations, as well as navigating contemporary labour market requirements.

VI. **Accelerating and coordinating continental strategies can support implementation and accountability of agreed commitments on women in power and decision-making:**
- Reignite the women's movement for agency, voice and influence.
- Implement the 50/50 principle, affirmative action and quota system, for increased participation of women in politics and decision-making.

VII. **Effective implementation, reporting and accountability of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 fosters a culture of peace and women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution:**
- Existing national action plans need to be costed, budgeted for and implemented, while countries without need to develop their action plans.
- Increase the participation of women in peace negotiations and mediation.
- Integrate a culture of peace into formal and civic education.