L ast two months had been extremely busy for us at GPSPD as we conducted two major reviews – Global Compact on Migration and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Second Review of the GCM, conducted in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Africa Union Commission (AUC), was held on 9 October 2024 at the Skylight Hotel in Addis Ababa. Deliberations by member states and representatives from international organizations, including UN agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders, highlighted the need to ensure that migrants are protected, their rights are recognized, and their welfare is guaranteed. In the closing remarks, we highlighted six actions to support sustainable solutions to migration challenges.

- First, we need an integrated approach that targets both migrants and host communities.

- Second, we need to facilitate the pathway to labour mobility and skills certification.

- Third, we need the African Union and the RECs to establish a comprehensive online platform and database that links skilled African workers with job opportunities across the continent's labour markets.

- Fourth, we need the portability of social protection, including pensions and health insurance, across borders.

- Fifth, we need Member States to understand the push factors for migration such as macroeconomic instability, conflicts, climate change, unemployment, and find solutions for those.

- Lastly, we need more comprehensive data in order to formulate effective migration policies and strategies.

Our other major event was the Review of the Beijing Declaration as we celebrate 30 years since its signing in 1995. In collaboration with the UN Women and AUC, we held the two-day expert group meeting at ECA on 1 and 2 November 2024, while the Ministerial segment took place on 8 November 2024 at the AUC. We celebrated some achievements in education and health, but also dwelled on the many milestones we still need to achieve before we can make the world equal for both women and men. (Read: Time to balance the genders in Africa by Judith Oduol) and Every child needs a mother: Maternal Healthcare in Africa – A Moral Imperative for Change by Berhanu Tesfaye)

As we talk of migrants and women, let us not forget the older people who have so much to offer to all of us. (Read: Learning from the Old and Not Leaving them Behind by Tigist Eshetsu)

In Our Staff Voices, we feature our dear colleague, Judith Oduol, Economic Affairs Officer in the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section, who led the Beijing+30 review report, in an interview with Mamusa Siyunyi, Social Affairs Officer in the Social Policy Section!

Some Recent and Some Old Blogs:

Beyond GDP growth: Quality of life matters, 9 December 2024

The Road to the Second World Social Summit: Re-evaluating the Milestones, 31 October 2024

Bunna with Sweta: A Glimpse into Harnessing Insights and Inspiring Each Other for Africa's Transformation, 22 August 2024

To think or Not to think: UN Economists' Thinking on Global Challenges and Solutions, 16 July 2024

For further inquiries, please contact: eca-gpspd-directors@un.org

TIME TO BALANCE THE GENDERS IN AFRICA

In a village in Northern Kenya, Fatuma, a determined young woman, dreams of starting her own business and inspiring her community. Yet, her aspirations face challenges such as limited access to financial resources, traditional gender roles, and societal expectations.

Fatuma's story echoes the struggles of women and girls across Africa who confront similar barriers.

A beacon of hope lies in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted in 1995 as a global framework for women's empowerment. This roadmap continues to support resilient women like Fatuma, who strive to achieve their dreams. Insights from the Beijing+30 Review—based on national assessments by 41 ECA member States from 2020 to 2024—highlight critical progress and ongoing challenges in gender equality across Africa, offering valuable perspectives on the evolving landscape for women and girls.

Beijing Reviews: Shaping Perspectives and Policies

The Platform for Action sets ambitious goals and commitments to address twelve critical areas affecting women and girls, including education, health, economic empowerment, political participation, environment, and human rights. Since the Beijing+25 review, these areas have been consolidated into six clusters to better align with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development gender equality commitments.

Inside the Beijing +30 Review

In line with the UN General Assembly's Resolution, ECA, in partnership with UN Women and Addis Ababa-based UN agencies, conducted a regional review of the BPfA implementation in Africa. We collaborated with the African Union Commission to forge a Common African position for the Commission on the Status of Women.

The Beijing+30 review holds particular significance as it aligns with major global milestones, including the first decade of the African Union's Agenda 2063, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda.

Resilience Amidst Adversity

Amid economic crises and persistent gender discrimination, the Beijing+30 Review has been a moment of reflection and a call for action. It united governments, civil society organizations, and youth groups to celebrate progress, identify challenges, and drive

initiatives to advance gender equality. This inclusive approach ensures that the rights of women and girls are respected.

Through a regional survey and national reports from 41 of 54 member states, the Regional Synthesis Report was produced to inform the UN Secretary General's global report for the 69th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2025 and shape Africa's Common Position. Key discussions were held at the Experts Group Meeting on November 1-2, 2024, at the ECA, followed by a Ministerial segment on November 6, 2024, at the AUC, culminating in the adoption of Africa's Common Position for the pre-CSW 69.

The revelation: A Journey of Progress

African member States have made significant strides in advancing gender equality since the Beijing +25 review, though much work remains. Here are key areas to consider:

Education: A Double-Edged Sword

While education is a vital tool for empowerment, many girls face obstacles such as early marriages and domestic responsibilities. Cultural norms in some regions often curtail girls' educational opportunities, forcing them to abandon their dreams. The Beijing+30

Review emphasizes the need for targeted initiatives to not only enroll girls in school but also ensure they complete their education, unlocking their potential.

Health and reproductive rights

Maternal mortality rates have significantly decreased, reflecting improved healthcare access and maternal health programs. However, these rates still exceed the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of 70 deaths per 100,000 live births. Rural areas remain particularly underserved, with inadequate healthcare infrastructure hindering progress. Addressing these disparities is essential to safeguard the health and well-being of women and girls.

Women's representation and participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution

Women's involvement in peacebuilding has expanded, with 34 African countries implementing National Action Plans under the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Women are increasingly participating in peace negotiations and security dialogues, yet their representation in decision-making processes remains insufficient. Strengthening their roles in these arenas is critical for conflict resolution.

Legal and Policy Frameworks:

Most countries have integrated global and regional women's human rights principles into their constitutions and laws, supported by robust institutional mechanisms to ensure these rights are not only acknowledged but effectively implemented.

....and Hurdles.

Effective implementation and enforcement of gender equality laws: A panacea to achieving gender equality in Africa

Enacting laws and policies to uplift women and promote equality is not enough without genuine political commitment. This lack of commitment weakens their impact, leaving many women still struggling for their rights. Compounding these challenges is the scarcity of resources – financial, human and data. Underfunding, understaffing, and inadequate disaggregated data by sex, age, location, disability, and socioeconomic status hinder evidence-based policymaking and leave gaps that must be addressed to drive meaningful progress.

Gender-Based Violence: A Persistent Crisis

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive issue, with one in three

women experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. COVID-19 exacerbated this crisis, with reports of increased domestic violence during lockdowns. Addressing GBV requires urgent action, including investment in shelters, and community-based programs that engage men and boys in combating violence.

However, there are pathways to make a change...

Economic Empowerment: Bridging the Gap

Economic empowerment is key to sustainable development. African women face significant hurdles. They have lower labor force participation, limited access to digital tools, and fewer financial assets than men. Many women require male consent for financial activities, and unpaid care work disproportionately falls on their shoulders. Bridging these gaps demands better access to resources like land and credit and recognition of unpaid care work in national statistics.

Political Participation and Representation of Women: A Pathway to Change

While women's representation in parliament has increased, only 15 African countries have surpassed the 30% benchmark for female parliamentary representation, and just two—Rwanda and Namibia—have achieved gender parity. Policies such as gender quotas and mentorship programs can help elevate women into leadership roles, ensuring their voices are included in decision-making processes.

Changing discriminatory and harmful Cultural Norms

Deeply rooted cultural norms often resist gender-transformative policies. Grassroots movements and local NGOs play a crucial role in challenging harmful traditions and advocating for women's rights. Education and awareness campaigns can foster meaningful community engagement in gender equality.

A Call to Action: Moving Forward Together

The Beijing+30 Review offers a roadmap for overcoming these challenges and advancing gender equality in Africa. Key recommendations include:

- Implement the laws, legislations, action plans, and policies that are already in place.

- End discriminatory and harmful gender norms and stereotypes, which can exist even where gender-equality laws are in place.

- Put enough resources to make a dent in enhancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

- Bridge the technological and digital divide that exacerbates inequalities and limits women's access to digital tools and services, which is essential for their empowerment in the modern economy.

- Make women and girls count by making their presence visible through explicit measurement. This requires more disaggregated data on critical issues affecting their well-being, such as violence against women and time use.

We stand with our African sisters and daughters, striving to amplify their voices, celebrate their presence, and unlock their full potential. Fatuma's journey reminds us of our shared duty to empower future generations. Together, we can create a world where every woman and girl can dream big and achieve those dreams without barriers. The time for action is now; let us commit to making gender equality a reality!

EVERY CHILD NEEDS A MOTHER: MATERNAL HEALTHCARE IN AFRICA — A MORAL IMPERATIVE FOR CHANGE

Biologically, women tend to live longer than men. Their life expectancy in Africa has increased from 43 years in 1960 to 66 years now against 61 years for men. Despite this progress, it is really unfortunate that African maternal mortality remains the highest in the world. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for about two-thirds of global maternal deaths, with an estimated 533 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to the global average of 223 (WHO, 2024). The human cost of these figures is even more staggering—communities lose mothers, families are left broken, and the cycle of poverty deepens.

There are many factors that contribute to the current state of maternal health in Africa: First, adolescent pregnancies: in some countries (like Mozambique and Chad), adolescent pregnancy rates are double the global average (Maharaj, 2022). These young mothers, often without access to healthcare or family planning, face significantly higher risks during childbirth. Second, access to healthcare remains a significant barrier, especially in rural areas (Demographic Profile of Africa 2024). Many women must travel long distances to reach healthcare facilities that are frequently understaffed and poorly equipped. The absence of skilled birth attendants leads to preventable complications such as hemorrhaging, infections, and obstructed labor. Third, high fertility rates put additional pressure on already overwhelmed healthcare systems. Lastly, poverty further limits access to care, as women with lower levels of education, particularly in poorer households, tend to have higher fertility rates and less access to healthcare services, deepening the cycle of risk.

An easy start to tackle this challenge is by addressing the key aspects of maternal health, i.e., expanding access to reproductive health services and investing in healthcare infrastructure. Rwanda and Ghana serve as promising examples of progress in this area (WHO, 2015).

However, much more is needed, as maternal health in Africa is not just a healthcare issue—it is a matter of human dignity and justice; it is about dignity, justice, and the fundamental right to life. In the words of the philosopher

Immanuel Kant—safe motherhood is not a privilege; it is a basic human right. Similarly, John Rawls would argue to care for women who are the most vulnerable members of our society.

While the path to a sustainable healthcare system is complex, the conversation on improving maternal healthcare must begin now. It is our moral obligation. It is not only about reducing mortality rates but about ensuring that every woman is treated with dignity and care. As Nelson Mandela once said, "Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression." Ensuring safe motherhood is one of the most powerful ways to honor this vision and build a future where every woman can not only survive but thrive!
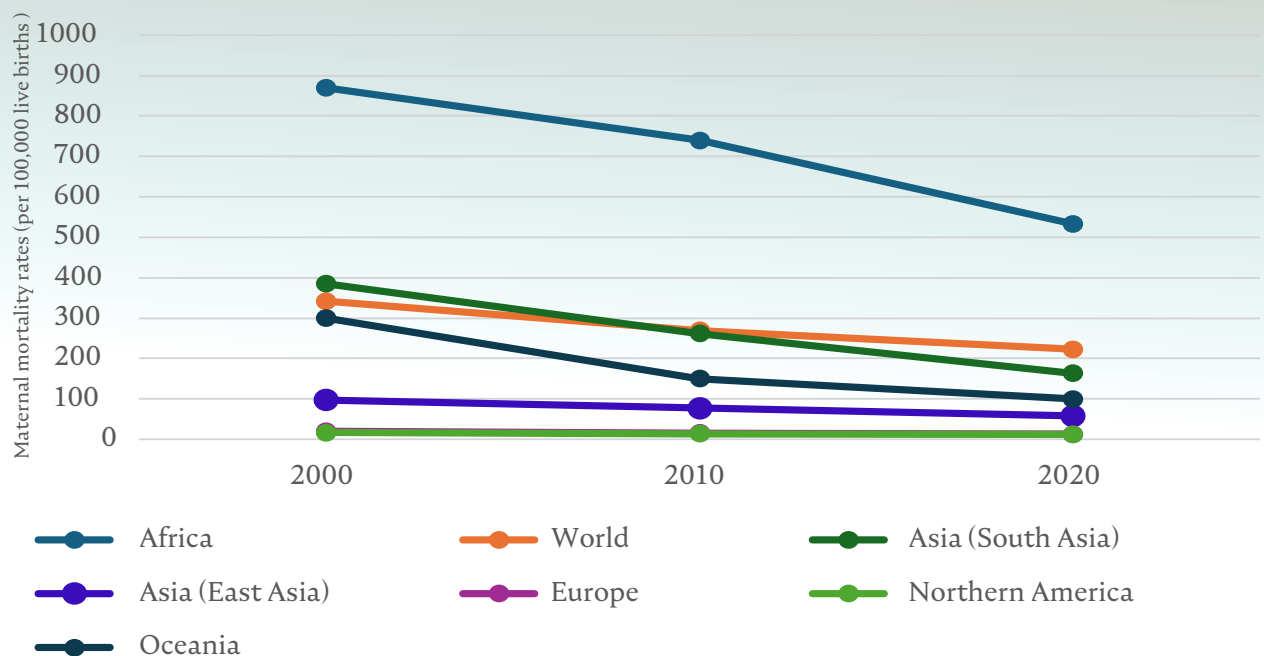
Source: These estimates are taken from the WHO's 2020 Maternal Mortality Report

LEARNING FROM THE OLD AND NOT LEAVING THEM BEHIND

"**Leaving No One Behind" (LNOB)** is the commitment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a specific focus on supporting the most vulnerable amongst us – and these include older persons. There is reference to older persons in most of the SDGs, including Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 11, 16, and 17, underscoring that achieving the 2030 Agenda requires inclusive policies that meet their needs. Effective support starts with understanding the demographics of older populations, allowing governments to design informed, responsive policies.

According to the UN's 2024 World Population Prospectus, the world's population is expected to grow from the current 8.2 billion to 10.2 billion people by 2100. As life expectancy increases, the proportion of older persons (65+ years) globally will also grow from 10 percent in 2024 to almost a quarter at 24 percent at the end of the century. Africa will not be able to buck the trend, even when currently it has comparatively a youthful population. Hence, the size of the older population in Africa is expected to increase more than 3-fold from 3.9 percent in 2024 to 15.8 percent at the end of the century.

Africa's population is projected to more than double from the current 1.5 billion to 3.8 billion by 2100. This growth will have significant implications for both population density as well as demographic profile. Currently, Africa is home to two of the top ten most populous nations in the world– Nigeria and Ethiopia (ranked 6th and 10th, respectively), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the United Republic of Tanzania will join the group in few years due to their rapid population growth.

In terms of the demographic profile, these populous nations are also expected to host a high proportion of older persons. For instance, by the end of the century, Nigeria will be the 4th most populous country in the world, with a projected 477 million people of which 12.3 percent will be older person (65+ years). This means Nigeria will have more than 58 million people in this category. Following closely, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is expected to be the 5th most populous nation, with a population size of 431 million and with 10.9 percent older persons. Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania are anticipated to rank 7th and 9th, respectively,

Figure 1: Trend in population of older persons (65+) in Africa as a share of Africa's total population, 1950–2100
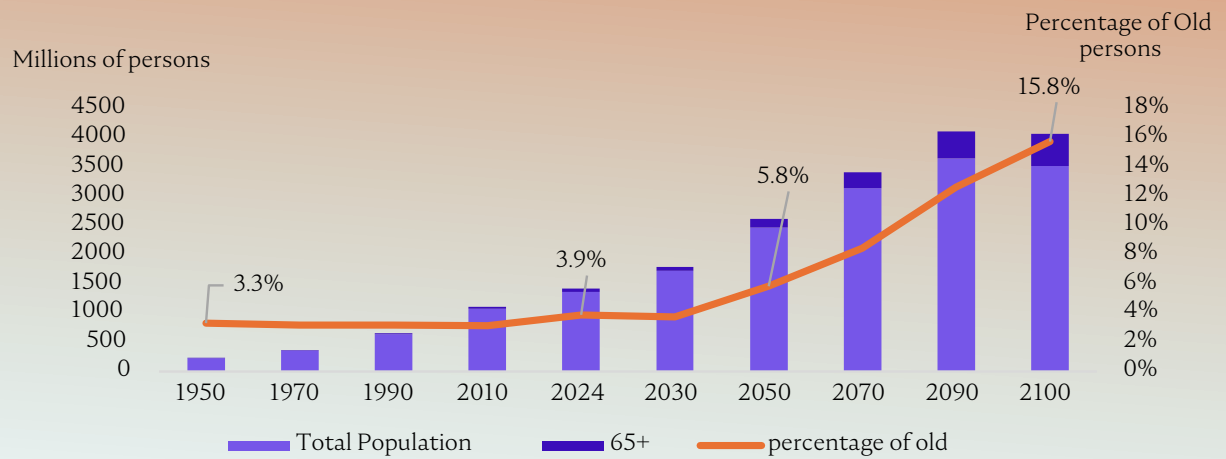
Source: 2024 World Population Prospectus

with Ethiopia projected to have about 64 million older persons (17.4 percent) out of a total of 367 million people.

The future always seems further than it truly is! These projections are a clear indication that we need to prepare for an age structure which is vastly different from the existing one. Governments and policy makers in African countries need to incorporate this change and begin to plan now to ensure that older people are taken care of and have access to what they need. While the young may provide the bread, the elderly offer invaluable knowledge about our heritage, our culture, and our traditions. They need to be preserved above anything else!

OUR STAFF VOICES

Personal questions:

Mamusa: What inspired you to pursue a career as an International Civil Servant, and now that you are a staff of the UNECA, what do you enjoy most about your job?

Judith: After nearly 20 years of being immersed in applied research, I felt it was time for a change from my usual routine. I began my career at the Kenya National Agricultural Research Institute, now known as the Kenya Agricultural Livestock and Agricultural Research Organisation. From there, I moved on to work with a regional organization focused on agricultural research in Africa, where I served as an impact assessment economist and postdoctoral researcher. My most recent role before I moved to ECA was at the World Agroforestry Centre, which has since become CIFOR-ICRAF and was formerly part of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

One of my greatest frustrations was that many of our research findings and policy recommendations seldom reached the desks of policymakers, despite the numerous policy briefs and peer-reviewed articles we produced. It's important to clarify that this issue had nothing to do with the quality of our work; rather, it stemmed from our lack of an appropriate platform to engage closely with institutions with the mandate to influence policy-making processes, such as the ECA and AUC.

I have a strong passion for working with numbers, particularly in analyzing large datasets, to generate evidence that informs policy design and implementation. I take great pride in seeing the results of my analyses published and referenced by others in the field. A particularly rewarding experience was my recent involvement in the Beijing +30 Review, where I had the privilege of leading the drafting of the analytical report that contributed to the African Common Position. It is particularly gratifying to witness research findings effectively shaping important policy discussions.

Mamusa: Looking at your professional journey, what have been some of the most important lessons you've learned throughout your career?

Judith: Since moving to ECA, one significant lesson I've learned is the importance of flexibility. Career paths often don't unfold the way we expect. For example, I joined the UN, specifically ECA, in November 2021, starting my journey in the Executive Secretary's office, where the focus was primarily on policy advocacy and convening functions rather than policy research. While I gained tremendous knowledge in those areas, the transition wasn't entirely seamless. Part of me still longed to work with the large datasets I had enjoyed in my previous research roles.

Fortunately, in April of this year, I was able to move to the Gender, Poverty, and Social Policy Division, where I could pursue my passion for policy research. I found a home in the gender equality and women's empowerment section, despite my background in agricultural and impact evaluation economics. The initial phase was quite challenging, as this section deals with aspects of economic-social and human rights. However, I've realised that being flexible and adaptable is crucial. Now, I'm completely engaged in the work we do. The main takeaway from my journey is to never say never and to embrace stepping outside of your comfort zone; you never know when certain skills and experiences might turn out to be invaluable.

Work related questions:

Mamusa: Let's talk about the work you have been doing in ECA, how can the Gender equality and Women Empowerment agenda be linked to no-poverty goal and why is it important to take gender concerns into account in programme design and implementation?

Judith: Gender equality and women's empowerment are crucial to achieving the no-poverty goal. When women have equal access to employment and financial services, for instance, they boost economic productivity and growth, lifting families and communities out of poverty. This is because women tend to reinvest their earnings into their families and communities, fostering economic stability and growth. Policy interventions designed to reduce poverty can have varying effects based on gender and disability status. Specifically, women, boys, girls, and even women with disabilities may experience different outcomes from these initiatives. Therefore, it is crucial to integrate gender perspectives into policy and program design to effectively achieve the goal of poverty eradication. Gender-sensitive policies ensure resources are effectively allocated, addressing the unique needs of all genders and promoting sustainable development. By integrating gender perspectives, we uphold human rights and foster a more equitable and prosperous society for everyone.

Mamusa: Your thoughts on what the commission needs to do better in order to support and build capacity of member States to put in place robust social policies? Your thoughts on what your division can do better?

Judith: To effectively support and build the capacity of member States to establish robust social policies, ECA should strive to be actively involved in their design and implementation. Achieving this will require a significant investment of both time and financial resources to back our think tank initiatives that advance these policies. Working collaboratively with member States on research will be crucial to fostering broader acceptance and ensuring the successful implementation of these policies.

When it comes to the capacity building of member States, it's important for us to take a moment to reflect on the impact of the various initiatives we've implemented over the years. This assessment will help us craft tailored capacity-building programs that cater to the distinct economic, social, and

political contexts of each member state. By aligning these initiatives with the development goals of individual member states, we can ensure that our efforts are both relevant and effective.

Furthermore, it is important for us at ECA to acknowledge that enhancing capacity alone is not sufficient to ensure the effective implementation of adopted policies. Many member States face challenges in accessing critical resources, particularly financial ones. Therefore, we should direct our efforts towards facilitating connections with suitable partners—whether from the private sector or among potential donors—to enable them to secure the necessary funding for successful policy implementation.

Our division is truly the powerhouse of the commission! We are at the forefront of pivotal initiatives that will determine whether our continent achieves vital global milestones like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063—the Africa We Want. To make a real impact, we must adopt a dynamic, integrated approach to policy research. We need to mainstream social policy, gender considerations, and urbanization into every subprogramme in the Commission to supercharge the effectiveness of our interventions and drive transformative change across the continent.

Closing questions:

Mamusa: Do you ever imagine yourself in another occupation? If so which one and why?

> **Judith:** I would unequivocally say no! Throughout my career, I've had the chance to dive into a wide range of experiences. As I mentioned before, I started my journey in applied research focused on agriculture and agroforestry, exploring various facets such as value chain

development, enhancing market access for women and marginalized communities, and researching cost-effective approaches for scaling technologies while assessing the impact of these interventions. Beyond my research, I ventured into teaching at the university level and took on the rewarding challenge of supervising and mentoring postgraduate students. Currently, I am deeply involved in policy research with a strong emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment. While the idea of serving as an adviser to my government might seem appealing, I've come to understand that engaging in the politics necessary to navigate this field isn't my forte. Instead, starting a consultancy firm appears to be a more suitable path. This would allow me to leverage my experiences to mentor aspiring researchers while providing independent advice to governmental bodies.

My aim is to remain relevant in the realms of impact evaluation and agricultural research to enhance policy uptake and implementation. Establishing my own company would offer the flexibility to do just that. I am particularly interested in assessing how policies translate into tangible developmental outcomes, enabling me to advise not just my government but also other African nations in customizing interventions to maximize their impact on people's lives. I see this venture as part of my retirement plan; even though I still have several years ahead of me, I feel a strong urge to give back to society far more than I have in my previous roles and my current position.

Mamusa: If you could change one thing about working here, what would it be?

> **Judith:** I envision the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) at the forefront of generating innovative research in our priority areas that effectively influence policy decisions. While I commend the existing efforts dedicated to our think-tank function, it is imperative that we enhance our capabilities to ensure our recommendations resonate with both global and continental contexts. Achieving this requires a proactive stance in staying abreast of emerging economic, social, and environmental issues that directly impact policy adoption and implementation.
>
> Investing additional time in policy research is crucial for ECA, as it significantly supports our primary role of facilitating intergovernmental processes.

Moreover, I firmly believe that an investment in behavioural science can greatly enhance the adoption of ECA-recommended policies, tools, strategies, and methodologies. Although the integration of behavioural science remains largely theoretical, it is essential that we move towards fully incorporating it into our subprograms.

While providing capacity-building and advisory services is vital, it is equally important to examine the root causes of low adoption of policies and ECA tools and methods. This analysis is necessary to design demand-driven interventions that may extend beyond traditional capacity-building efforts. Embracing this approach is essential for maintaining our relevance and effectiveness in serving our member States.