



The concept of gender in Africa has misconceptions of women being in control and taking over the affairs of what is termed “a man’s responsibilities”. The deep patriarchal nature that exists in African countries is drawn from entrenched cultures and traditions that have existed for centuries. While men and women have different opportunities and experiences, the marginalization of women in decision-making positions has created certain economic, political and social barriers which inhibit the progress and development of Africa.

Women continue to face resistance in reaching their potential due to institutional failure to embrace gender diversity. With this slow progress, Africa will need at least 140 years to close the gender gap². Already the financing gap that exists between men and women is averaged at US\$42 billion, with 70% of women being excluded.

Most African countries are signatories to international conventions and protocols like the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality as adopted by the African Union³. Also, non-discrimination is a recognized principle in their constitutions⁴ however, the implementation and activation of these existing policies requires change across institutions and individuals; it tends to be difficult to bring about such change due to male dominated environments⁵.

Progress has been made in countries such as Rwanda and Tanzania in addressing discriminatory policies through the introduction of legislative and constitutional requirements for the inclusion of women in governance. Rwanda holds a global record with over 60% of its parliament made up of women⁶. The representation of women in cabinets and ministries has also grown from 4% to 20% over the last few years⁷. In this regard, Africa has fared better than most European countries.

Closely related is the number of women that have become presidents in Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius and Ethiopia who have all made their marks at a difficult time in history. Whilst such developments are regarded as progressive and positive in terms of commitment to gender equality, it remains too early to judge the impact of these policies on Africa’s development.⁸

1 With contributions from Valkamiya Ahamdu Haruna.

2 Akintayo et al. (2019). “*The power of parity: Advancing women’s equality in Africa*”. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-africa>

3 UNESCO. (2017). “*UNESCO and Gender Equality in Sub-Saharan Africa*”. Available at: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/AFR/images/3781_15_E_web.pdf

4 African Development Bank Group. (2015). “*Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action*”. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African_Gender_Equality_Index_2015-EN.pdf

5 Ibrahim et al. (2015). “*Integrating Gender in Security Sector Reform and Governance*”. Toolkit for Security Sector Reform and Governance in West Africa. Available at: <https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/112394/2038474/SSRG-West-Africa-Toolkit-Tool-8-EN.pdf>

6 African Development Bank Group. (2015). “*Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action*”. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African_Gender_Equality_Index_2015-EN.pdf

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

These representations have influence on the world stage but do not always transform into the desired change and address the gaps in the under representation of women in decision-making.

Africa still has one of the highest mortality rates in the world, averaging four times any global standard. Women still face challenges through education, digital and economic inclusion and gender-based violence. On education, there is a lack of parity between men and women in attending schools, universities and colleges⁹. Women are often used as economic support to the family; early marriage and long hours of domestic activities can have significant repercussions on the health and education of women.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) has a new Gender Strategy for 2021-2025 with commitments towards gender equality and women's empowerment. The strategy seeks to strengthen key sectors in the continent that will provide equal access and opportunities to men, women, girls and boys - regardless of their background – so that they can benefit from productive resources and supportive services.¹⁰

The future of Africa rests on the decisions of today. It is estimated that the population of Africa will double by 2050 and the continent will experience rapid growth. The potential of gender parity is needed in all parts of society from community level to the highest seat of governance. In this regard, the potential of women must be unleashed for Africa to attain its full potential as a prosperous continent.

9 African Development Bank Group. (2020). *"Africa Gender Index Report 2019 - Analytical report"*. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report>

10 African Development Bank Group. (2021). *"African Development Bank Board approves a new Gender Strategy for 2021-2025."* Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/african-development-bank-board-approves-new-gender-strategy-2021-2025-40153>

Responses to Domestic Violence and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Latin America, MENA and West Africa

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