CHAPTER 14

Positioning African Women for the United Nation’s 2030 Goals: A Way Forward

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Abstract This chapter highlights the contributions of the authors in the book who have discussed the challenges, opportunities, and successes associated with the empowerment of African women. Suggestions are offered to effectively position the African women to meet the UN’s 2030 SDGs. The chapter concludes with key recommendations on how to position African women to achieve the United Nation’s 2030 goals.

Keywords Empowering African Women • UN SDG2030 Agenda • Gender equality • COVID-19 global pandemic • African girls and Women

INTRODUCTION

Eradicating gender inequality to improve the lives of African women is a goal that can be achieved with the persistent pursuit of United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Africa Union’s “Agenda 2063”. The Beijing Declaration of 1995, SDG Goal 5, and Aspiration 6

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of African Union’s Agenda 2063 have provided the foundation and framework for achieving gender equality. The titles of the chapters in this book and a capsule summary of the contributing authors’ recommendations are presented in Table 14.1. In addition to the recommendations made by these authors, this chapter provides frameworks for strategies that can be instituted to achieve the socially inclusive Africa we desire.

Summary of Insights from the Book

Table 14.1 presents the summary of recommendations from the chapters in the book on how to position African Women for the United Nation’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

SDGs and African Women in 2030: Suggestions and Recommendations

Effective Leadership and Support  Africa’s attainment of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require effective leadership from all national, regional, and local governmental agencies and institutions. Although the political, socio-economic, cultural, and environmental contexts of African countries may appear similar, the circumstances in each country are quite distinct. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the percentage of seats held by females in national parliament in 2020 is 23 percent (Sachs et al., 2020). Though Africa ranks slightly higher than some other regions, each country still needs to improve on the ratio of women representation in the national parliament, and other key establishments. Indeed, effective leadership at national and sub-national levels is important in Africa, where the political will for the design and implementation of policies and programmes relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women is too often met with apathy or acrimony. For the sake of their nations’ futures, leadership at all levels must take ownership of the SDG and Agenda 2063 goals and commit to policies and programmes that assure gender equality. A necessary step is to include women at all leadership levels, a move that will give voice and support to women empowerment programmes and motivate young girls to aspire to leadership positions.

Develop Multilevel Participation  While political and public leaders have substantial roles to play, they cannot achieve the SDG 2030 goals alone; private and third sectors must become active participants in promoting gender equality and women empowerment. This is evident in the fact
## Table 14.1 Practical recommendations from the book’s authors

| Authors | Chapter title | Recommendations |
|---------|---------------|-----------------|
| Chapter 2: Yvonne Uchechukwu Carver | Sustainability of Women’s Empowerment Initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards Achieving the UN’s 2030 Goals | Demographic dividend and transition, self-actualisation, access to energy, access to healthcare, affirmative or positive action, and stakeholder collaboration are required to achieve empowerment of African women. |
| Chapter 3: Charity Ezenwa-Onuaku | Gender Parity Gaps and Poverty: Empowering African Women for No Poverty and Zero Hunger | Targeted initiatives that promote women’s access to resources and capital, access to financial education, and a refocus on agriculture. |
| Chapter 4: Abolaji Adewale Obileye, Joan Mbagwu, Isaiah Adisa | Human Rights as Inalienable Rights: An Assessment of the Realities of African Women | Funds to support women’s education and entrepreneurship. Platforms to fight for women’s rights and against cultural traditions that infringe on those rights. Investments in digital advocacy and programmes to keep girls in school. |
| Chapter 5: Abolaji Adewale Obileye, Oluchi Enapeh | Is Violence Against Women Systemic in Africa? An Enquiry to Change the Status Quo | Increased citizen participation in activism will compel all stakeholders, particularly African women, to raise their voices at all times, in opposition to any form of violence against them. This movement should be encouraged and sustained to become a force to reckon with, in the drive for empowerment and repositioning of African women. Local forums should be created under the auspices of traditional heads to sensitize people on the issue of violence against women. |
| Chapter 6: Chioma Dilichukwu Iféanyichukwu | Towards a Healthy Life for the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) Women | Changing sub-Saharan African healthcare structure. Improved Information Technology (IT). Provision of healthcare facilities, training of healthcare providers, and effective healthcare actions. Strict laws to punish perpetrators of sexual assault. |
| Chapter 7: Ebes Aziegbe-Esho, Friday Osemenshan Anetor | Religious Organisations and Quality Education for African Women: The Case of Nigeria | Identify new roles religious organisations can play in the quest for quality education of African girls and women. |

(continued)
| Authors                          | Chapter title                                                                 | Recommendations                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chapter 8: Yetunde Anibaba, Godbless Akaghe | African Women’s Participation in Business and Politics: Challenges and Recommendations | Social and economic empowerment, greater access to education, and policy enactment to support women participation in business and politics. A more gender-inclusive culture advocated in business and political terrains. |
| Chapter 9: Patience Aku Bruce, Nathaniel Boso | Realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of Entrepreneurial Activities of Women and Disadvantaged Groups | Eliminate extreme poverty and inequality in sub-Saharan Africa. Revisit socio-cultural institutional structures on the continent, injecting a modernisation process that facilitates entrepreneurial activities of women and other disadvantaged groups. |
| Chapter 10: Lydia Aziato, Merri Iddrisu, Priscilla Y. A. Attafuah, Joyce B. P. Pwavra, Lillian A. Ohene | African Women in Academia Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Towards Attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals | Provide young female academics with tools for mentorships, work-life balance, and self-reflection to encourage bounce back from adverse life’s events. Policy directions and legislation in African universities that ensure opportunities for leadership positions for women at every level of decision-making, to reduce the gender inequalities/gap, are recommended. |
| Chapter 11: Ewoenam Afua Afenyo-Agbe, Ogechi Adeola | Promoting Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Through Tourism in Africa: Towards Agenda 2030 | Periodic tourism-related gender-sensitive research. Gender-sensitive tourism policy frameworks. Innovative financial products for women-owned tourism-related micro- and small-scale businesses. Collaborative learning networks or self-help groups. Creation of gender-specific support centres. |
| Chapter 12: Benjamin Mwanzia Mulili | Financial Inclusion as a Tool for Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa: Achieving UN’s 2030 SDG | Financial inclusion to be achieved by including the interests of women and youth in formulating financial policies, promoting financial literacy, creating stable jobs, and initiating profitable pathways of achieving financial goals. Close the digital divide by putting in place articulate and targeted gender-sensitive policies and frameworks given the fast-changing global context. |
| Chapter 13: Ogechi Adeola | The Digital Gender Divide and Women’s Empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Achieving the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals | |
that the advanced technologies and management systems required to attain most of the SDGs reside in the private sector. Opportunities to participate abound through women-friendly human resource policies in recruitment, training, staff welfare, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. According to a recent research of the African Capacity Building Foundation, private sector participation is critical to SDG implementation, particularly as key participants in the development discourse (ACBF, 2019). The onus falls on Africa’s national governments to invite and motivate participation from all sectors to collaborate in an investment in developing human capital and build capacity for the implementation of economically and socially beneficial programmes.

**Establish Laws and Institutions** Laws and institutions that align with and promote gender equality and women empowerment are long overdue. Laws must be passed and enforced to criminalise domestic violence, child marriage, and other harmful practices against girls and women. National and local agencies should monitor the implementation of SDGs and Agenda 2063 goals and be given legal backing—laws that validate their enforcement powers. It is said that human rights are women’s rights, and those rights require legal protection, especially in African countries, where girls and women are disadvantaged in almost all aspects of life. In some African countries, for example, female children have fewer inheritance rights than male children. They often lack access to education and health. They are also generally victims of discriminatory practices rooted in cultural and religious beliefs. Legal backing is required to abolish these malevolent practices, mete out justice, and exact punishments when necessary. However, it is not only laws that are geared towards the eradicating harmful practices that are required. Laws should also include provisions that legitimise work-life balance and women’s access to employment and leadership positions in government, business, and private sectors.

**Build Capacity** The implementation of SDGs will require human and institutional capacity; African countries appear limited in either capacities (ACBF, 2019). If people, especially leaders, are going to design, plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate initiatives that assure women
empowerment projects, they need technical and managerial training to enhance their project management skills. Africans in the diaspora who already have the requisite human capacities can partner with agencies to provide their services. Governments can collaborate with and provide resources for local, national, and international educational institutions to provide training and development, even to those at the grassroots levels. Staff of government agencies responsible for projects directly related to SDGs should be the primary beneficiaries of this training. Because issues of gender inequality are particularly vulnerable to local contexts, capacity building should incorporate knowledge of local systems, structures, and social/cultural influences.

**Build Strategic Partnerships** Strategic partnerships within and from outside the continent are needed to address all facets of SDG achievement; no African government can do that on its own. Such strategic partnerships should be driven primarily by Africans rather than expatriates, who will, in most cases, lack the local knowledge to function effectively. Random partnerships are less likely to succeed than partnerships born out of collaborative capacity-building agreements made with private- and third-sector links (e.g., businesses, the civil society, faith organisations, and non-governmental organisations [NGOs]). The utility of these partnerships lies in the strength of their network and their adeptness at reaching and navigating local grassroots partners.

**Financing** Because financing is *sine qua non* to achieving the SDGs, Africa’s approach to financing has to change. Financing of SDGs must go beyond voluntary assistance from rich countries to developing countries, and Africa must strive to be less reliant on foreign development partners. Research shows a dichotomy between what African countries identify as their priorities and what their global development partners identify as priorities for Africa (ACBF, 2019). Historical accounts also confirm that receiving financial support from foreign sources sometimes shifts project ownership from Africa to these sources. SDGs are long-term goals even though they have a shorter time horizon than Agenda 2063. Repayment terms should, ideally, match the timeline associated with the attainment of the goals.
As the world currently continues to suffer the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, a recession is inevitable in many countries. This is likely to adversely affect external funding for women empowerment programmes in Africa. However, the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic and its long-term effects on the economy suggest that African governments must not rely solely on foreign sources. Regional financial institutions within the continent may prove to be more viable sources.

**Provision of Infrastructure** Energy, transportation, water, education, and health facilities are basic requirements for achieving the SDGs. For example, in 2017, only 44.4 percent of the population in SSA had access to electricity (Sachs et al., 2020). While lack of infrastructure affects all, it affects young girls disproportionately due to African societies’ traditional cultural beliefs and norms. Research has linked the lack of education of young girls to lack of access to adequate infrastructure. Young girls in some African countries must trek long distances to fetch water for their families or attend school, often on untarred roads and difficult terrains. A consequence of inadequate infrastructure is an increase in the cost and effectiveness of programme delivery. Infrastructure can be creatively provided when conventional methods are not available. Electricity to power lights and water pumps can be provided using cheaper solar energy. Information technology harnessed via satellite can provide affordable access to education and healthcare. The provision of infrastructure must go beyond urban communities to rural areas, where gender inequalities are usually more prevalent.

**Innovative Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)** ICT holds tremendous promise in fostering implementation of the SDGs. Apart from its obvious use for enabling communication, disseminating information to the masses, and enhancing cheaper and easier access to education and health, ICT can be used to build capacity and skills of Africans given its capacity to generate, analyse, and disseminate big data, thereby enabling collaboration among partnerships. Urban populations’ access to connectivity infrastructures is more readily available than in rural areas. Skills for creating applications and assuring maintenance are also
greatly lacking in many rural areas. African countries must realise that poor implementation of SDG initiatives using ICT will increase, rather than reduce, the digital divide when the result is to “intensify the inequalities they seek to fight against” (UNESCO, 2019, p. 3). While investments in ICT can boost communication and implementation of SDG-related programmes, the investments should complement investments in human capital, capacity, and infrastructure. ICT is a tool and not an end in itself. Girls and women traditionally lack access to ICT—a major contributor to the digital divide. Closing that divide will require putting in place targeted gender-sensitive policies and frameworks.

Tourism and Economic Empowerment for Women Tourism generates a ripple effect that finds its way into all other sectors of the economy, promoting local economic development and the social inclusion of women (Kimbu & Tichaawa, 2018). Women, especially young females, can be empowered through tourism, an industry that consists mostly of small- and medium-sized enterprises that require less capital, an advantage for women who typically have limited access to capital. Education and training in running a successful small business would increase the participation of women as entrepreneurs or job seekers. Few educational institutions offer tourism-specific courses designed for women, a reality that could be turned around with the advent of local or regional training centres.

Africa’s tourism industry has recently reported cases of sexual harassment in many communities. Two actions must be taken to eradicate this blight on the continent: (1) enact and enforce laws that criminalise sexual harassment, and (2) educate women and girls on their human rights to safety, peace and justice, and a decent work environment.

Digital Engagement and Advocacy One of the ways of informing the public about their human rights is through digital advocacy. With over 3.8 billion users across the globe, social media is creating a world of its own. Engaging the strength of social media to advocate for a gender-sensitive society is likely to result in a positive outcome. Digital advocacy can also be used as an instrument of social change by advocating for government policies that will be geared towards women empowerment, girl-child education, and the participation of the private sector in women’s social inclusion. Digital platforms can be created by governments, NGOs, and private
organisations to address issues related to the abuse of women, gender discrimination, and promotion of women empowerment programmes.

*Education and Health for the Girl Child*  The girl child in Africa generally does not have equal access to education. The enrolment rate in all tiers of education for females is worse than that of their male counterparts. For instance, in 2018, the ratio of female-to-male mean years of education received in SSA was 68.3 percent (Sachs et al., 2020), ranking lowest compared to other world regions. Many female children drop out of school because of child poverty and are frequently victims of dangerous cultural practices such as genital mutilation. Unlike the boy child, the girl child is faced with early marriage and its consequences, which include increased risks of sexually transmitted diseases, cervical cancer, death during childbirth, and obstetric fistulas (Nour, 2006). Sachs et al. (2020) reports that in 2017, the maternal mortality rate stood at 51.4 percent per 100,000 live births in SSA. It is necessary for governments to conduct extensive grassroots media campaigns that educate parents on the need for girl-child education and protection from dangerous, life-endangering practices. Financial incentives would encourage poor parents to send their daughters to school. Apart from the provision of general education, girl children, especially in rural areas, need access to health facilities and programmes that promote healthy and hygienic practices.

*Policy Direction to Reduce Vulnerability of Women to Climate Change and Natural Disasters*  Climate-related disasters and their immediate and long-term effects on women need to be documented with the aim of protecting this vulnerable population. African countries, as it was shown in a 2014 report by the World Health Organization, are too often unprepared to shelter and care for their people during natural disasters (WHO, 2014). Women are among the most vulnerable victims of these weather events and in greatest need of assistance, as they seek birthing shelters, infant/child care protection, food and clean water for their families, and help care for elderly family members. A plan to mitigate the effects of displacement, disease, unemployment, and infrastructure damage would reduce these female vulnerabilities. UN SDGs that address this goal include SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, and SDG 13: Climate Action.
Climate change policies are needed to assure the stability of Africa’s economy and social/cultural traditions and values. The initiatives will incorporate gender-sensitive approaches to disaster management and address gender-differentiated vulnerabilities, particularly in rural areas. Research is needed to identify and assess the usefulness of adaptive interventions acceptable to both women and men. Research findings will provide a foundation for projects designed to establish vulnerability-reduction initiatives with specific strategies in place for targeting women’s needs.

**Research and Data** In implementing the suggestions elaborated in this chapter, and indeed the entire book, the importance of timely, accurate, and reliable data cannot be overstated as a requirement for effective monitoring and evaluation. African countries will need to devise means of collecting and analysing credible local data on various aspects of the state of young girls and women and on the effectiveness or weaknesses of women empowerment programmes. It would be useful, for example, to disaggregate data based on gender. Reliance on big global agencies to provide local data should be avoided; the capacity of local research institutions within Africa should be elevated, giving those organisations preferential status.

**Concluding Remarks**

Females, women and girls, make up over 50 percent of Africa’s population (World Bank, 2018). To effectively position these African women to achieve the UN SDG 2030 Agenda, African nations must proactively address gender inequality issues through deliberate gender-aware frameworks, policies, procedures, and practices. African women who attain leadership positions should champion women empowerment and gender equality initiatives, but this fight must not be left solely to women. Most leadership positions are occupied by men, who must be persuaded of the value of solving gender-based societal challenges, if not for the sake of the economy then for their sisters, wives, and daughters striving for a better life. Leaders in the third sector, such as faith leaders and educators, can be of tremendous help in impressing upon their constituencies the benefits to be derived from the implementation of the SDGs, especially because many gender-discriminatory practices are based on religious and cultural beliefs.

Working towards achieving the SDGs demands the strategic collaboration of governments, civil society, entrepreneurs, academics, scientists, and
other stakeholders. Despite the adverse impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on most world economies in 2020, creating an equal-opportunity world for African girls and women is possible. It is a task that must be done.

The Africa We Want is achievable.

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