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SUSTAINABILITY MAGAZINE

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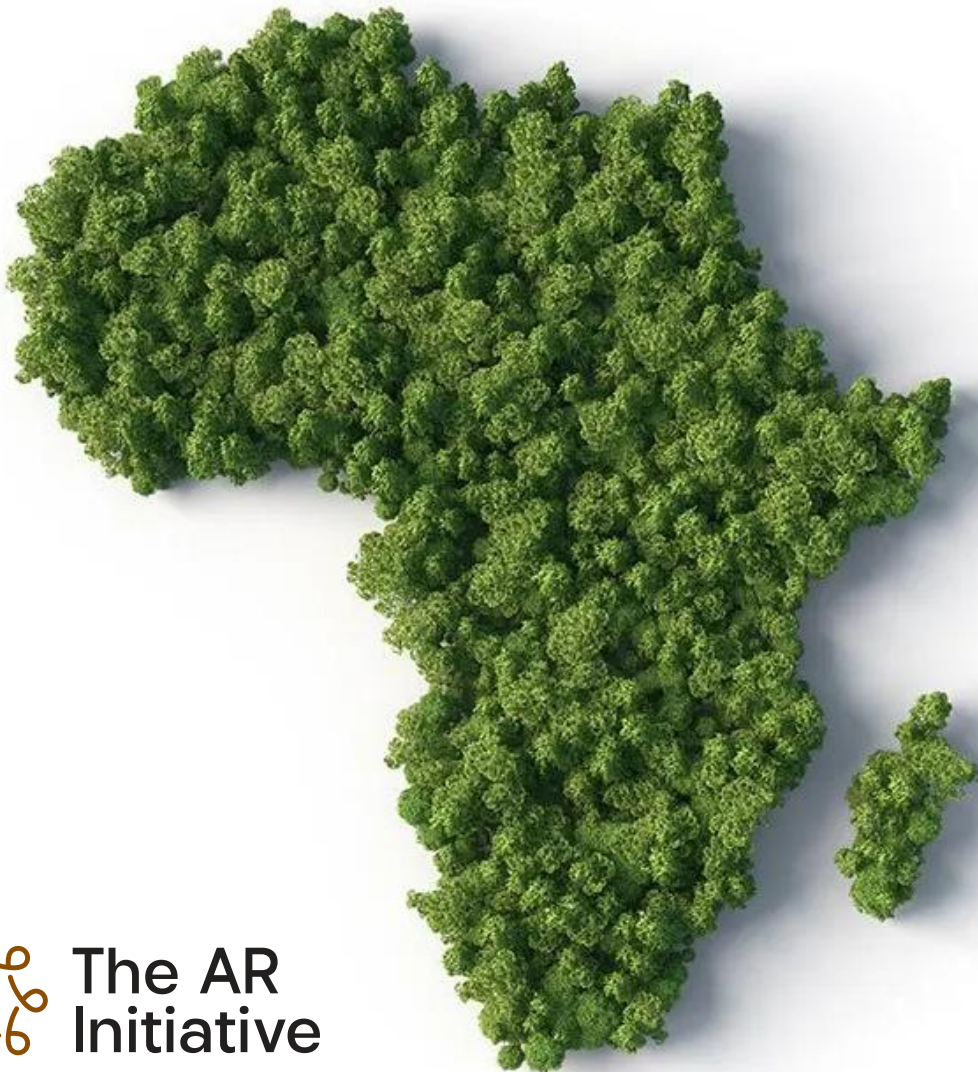


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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

The response to our inaugural issue of The Africa Sustainability Magazine has been both humbling and inspiring. Your engagement affirms our core mission: to reshape the narrative of sustainability in Africa through authentic African voices.

For too long, African stories of development have been cast through a singular lens – one of dependency and deficit. The prevailing narrative positions Africa as a perpetual recipient of aid, overshadowing our rich legacy of innovation and leadership. This magazine is a testament to a different truth: Africa's role as a pioneer in sustainability, with solutions born from deep local understanding and ingenuity.

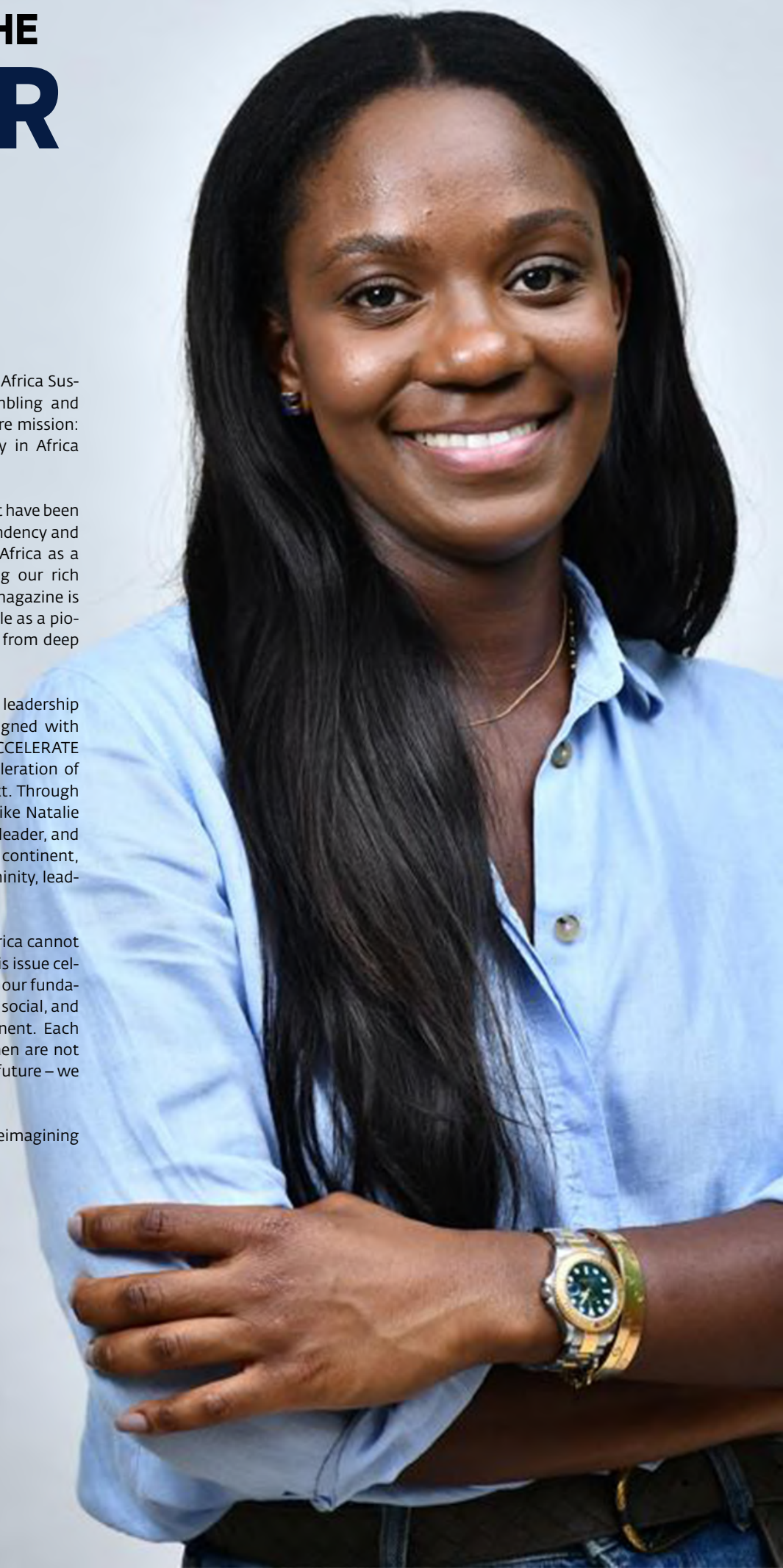
In Issue II, we turn our focus to women's leadership in sustainability across the continent. Aligned with the International Women's Day theme "ACCELERATE ACTION," we examine what genuine acceleration of gender equity means in the African context. Through insightful conversations with trailblazers like Natalie Africa, a distinguished sustainable finance leader, and spotlights on female-led SMEs across the continent, we explore the unique intersection of femininity, leadership, and sustainability in Africa.

The path to sustainable development in Africa cannot be walked without women at the helm. This issue celebrates not just women's participation but our fundamental role as architects of environmental, social, and business transformation across the continent. Each story emphasises an essential truth: women are not merely stakeholders in Africa's sustainable future – we are its driving force.

Thank you for joining us on this journey of reimagining African sustainability narratives. ■

Labake Ajiboye-Richard

Editor-in-Chief



Contents

QuarterlyBrief 5

Each year, 600,000 women and children in Africa die due to limited access to clean cooking.

Unlocking Africa's Potential: 8

The Power of Gender-Responsive Development - A Conversation with Natalie Africa

Op-Ed: 12

The Future of African Wine: Growing Sustainably, Voicing a Continent

Op-Ed: 15

How South Africa Can Overcome Its Energy Transition Challenge

Accelerate Action: 18

The Role of Sustainable Finance in Bridging Gender Gaps

Inclusive Governance and Women's Political Participation: 22

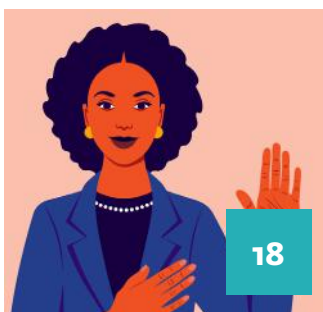
A Catalyst for Sustainable Development in Africa

Startup Spotlight 20

African Women at the Forefront of Sustainable Enterprise

Data & Research Insights 24

The Impact of Women Entrepreneurs on Africa's Economy



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Quarterly Brief

Each year, **600,000 women and children in Africa** die due to limited access to clean cooking.



The issue of access to clean cooking in Africa is an urgent public health and development crisis with far-reaching consequences for millions of women and children across the continent. Each year, an estimated 600,000 African women and children die as a direct result of the lack of clean cooking alternatives.

This staggering number is driven primarily by the use of traditional cooking methods, such as firewood and charcoal, which produce harmful indoor air pollution. The smoke from these methods is detrimental to respiratory health, contributing to fatal diseases like pneumonia, bronchitis, and other chronic respiratory conditions.

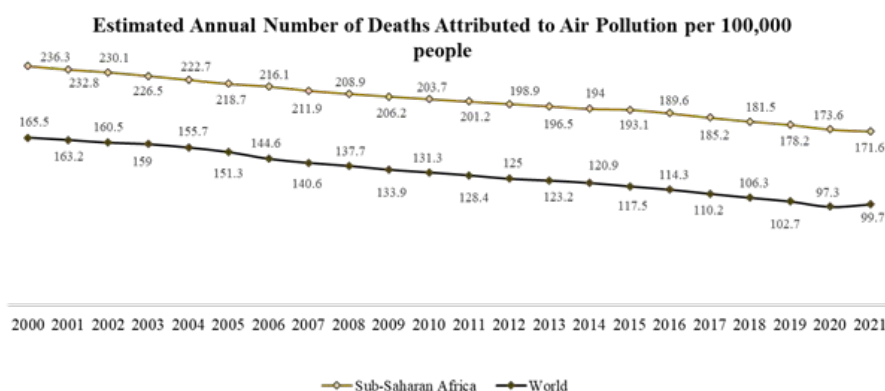
Women are disproportionately affected because they spend much of their time cooking over open flames, while children, especially infants, are at a higher risk due to their proximity to the cooking environment. The situation is

► **ROFIAT HASSAN
FAITH OSAMAYE**
*Researchers at the
AR Initiative*

particularly dire for mothers who carry their children on their backs while preparing food, exposing both themselves and their children to dangerous levels of smoke.

Globally, household air pollution is responsible for 3.7 million premature deaths annually, with Sub-Saharan Africa bearing a disproportio-

tionate burden. Women and children account for 60% of deaths linked to household air pollution in Africa, highlighting the gendered nature of this crisis. The numbers alone tell a harrowing story, but the underlying issue is not just one of numbers; it's a matter of human dignity and health.



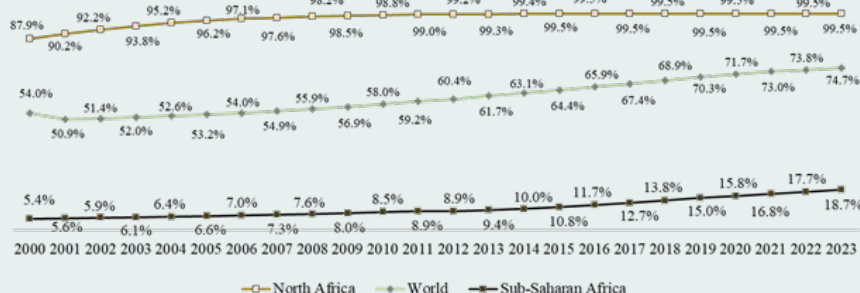
The economic cost of this crisis is equally staggering. The health impacts and time lost due to the lack of clean cooking are estimated to cost \$330 billion annually globally. Women and girls spend an average of 20 hours per week collecting firewood, often walking long distances through remote or hazardous areas. This exposes them to life-threatening risks such as violence, animal attacks, and extreme weather conditions. The strenuous labour of carrying heavy loads of wood also takes a toll on their health, leading to chronic pain and increased vulnerability to injury. This is time that could be spent on education, income-generating activities or even much-needed rest and leisure.

Despite the urgency of the crisis, progress in expanding access to clean

cooking has been slow. As of 2023, only 18.7% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa has access to clean cooking fuels and technologies, compared to the global average of 74.7%.

At the heart of this issue is the push for clean cooking solutions, which are technologies that minimise harmful emissions and promote better health outcomes for families. Clean cookstoves, for example, are designed to reduce the amount of smoke produced by cooking, while clean fuels, such as liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) or biogas, offer safer, more sustainable alternatives. These solutions not only prevent health-related deaths but also significantly improve the quality of life, especially for women, who are typically the primary cooks in many African households.

Share of population with access to clean cooking in the Stated Policies Scenario



As highlighted by the African Development Bank (AfDB) President Akinwumi Adesina, access to clean cooking is not just a matter of energy transition; it is about preserving lives and restoring dignity. The lack of clean cooking options is a critical challenge that African women face daily, compromising their health and well-being in the most basic ways while trying to provide sustenance for their families. The lack of these solutions is also tied to broader gender inequality, as it disproportionately affects women, who already shoulder many responsibilities within their communities.

Achieving universal access to clean cooking across Africa demands a significant financial investment. As mentioned by President Adesina, achieving 100% access to clean cooking across the continent would require annual funding of approximately \$4 billion. While this cost is enormous, it is entirely achievable if the necessary resources are properly allocated. President Adesina's optimism highlights an important point: this challenge can be overcome if we commit to prioritising it. He stated that the AfDB has committed \$2 billion to this effort. Additionally, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, and several other African countries have pledged

to provide 100% access to clean cooking solutions by 2030. However, more support is needed from both governments and international partners. This is a global challenge that requires a united effort from all stakeholders, such as the governments, international organisations, private sector companies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The payoff of this is extensive, as it would save hundreds of thousands of lives, reduce the burden of diseases caused by air pollution, and provide African women with safer, more efficient methods of cooking.

A total of 798 women-led businesses in Africa receive \$3.99 million to support the continent's green transformation

The Invest in Young Businesses in Africa—Women Entrepreneurship for Africa (IYBA WE4A) program saw its second instalment due to the alliance of various international development organisations, including the Tony Elumelu Foundation. The initiative is targeted at empowering female entrepreneurs across African nations and equipping them with the skills needed to contribute to the green economy.

The program takes a leaf from the EU's Investment Plan, which supports women's economic empowerment as part of its Gender Action Plan (GAP III). As part of its second instalment, the IYBA WE4A partners recently selected about 798 businesses led by women across 8 African countries, granting them a total of \$3.99 million. This partnership is about more than just funding; it is an investment in Africa's future, empowering women entrepreneurs with the tools they need to thrive in the green economy. By focusing on gender-targeted green business management, the initiative promotes the intersection of sustainability and economic growth. Women-led businesses in Africa have long been underfunded and undervalued, but this programme shines a spotlight on the critical role women play in shaping Africa's green transformation.

Women entrepreneurs from Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda were selected for their innovative solutions in sectors such as sustainable agriculture, aquaculture, renewable energy, circular economy, eco-tourism, construction and transportation. The programme addresses the unique needs of each region and provides comprehensive training, mentorship and seed capital to build capacity and enable scalability in these green sectors.

The 798 selected entrepreneurs underwent an intensive 10-week training that included business management as well as a custom-designed green curriculum. This training ensured they were fully

equipped to take their businesses to the next level, demonstrating resilience, innovation and sustainability. The programme's rigorous selection process, which involved expert evaluations and pitch sessions, culminated in each entrepreneur receiving \$5,000 in non-refundable seed capital to help propel their businesses forward.

As Somachi Chris-Asoluka, CEO of the Tony Elumelu Foundation, expressed, "Empowered women are essential for economic transformation across Africa. This partnership allows us to take bold steps toward an inclusive, green economy, ensuring that our young women entrepreneurs are the drivers of Africa's sustainable transformation." Her statement underscores the importance of gender equality in economic growth, especially as it pertains to driving green innovation and improving lives in local communities.

Nigerian VP Kashim Shettima says women will drive Africa's \$29 trillion economic ambition.

Nigeria is making a bold move in advancing gender equality, and women playing a role in its economic development. This was evident at the 2025 Gender Inclusion Conference with the theme "Breaking Barriers, Building Resilience for Sustainable Women's Economic and Financial Inclusion," held in Abuja on 30th January 2025. The conference focused on the 2024 Aso Accord for Economic and Financial Inclusion, which demonstrates Nigeria's effort and dedication to achieving SDG 5 goals, which focus on promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. Despite past efforts, Nigeria ranks 32nd out of 35 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa for financial inclusion, underscoring the conference's importance in bridging the financial inclusion gap.

Speaking at this event was the Vice President of Nigeria - Kashim Shettima, who emphasised the importance of women in the continent's economic transformation. Shettima affirmed that gender inclusion is not just a goal but the foundation of Africa's economic ambitions, specifically in relation to the \$29 trillion economic transformation projected for the continent.

[Source: References.](#)

**Project
#ShelsIncluded:
Transforming Nigeria's
Economic Landscape**

At the heart of Shettima's announcement was the Project #ShelsIncluded, an initiative to break down the barriers to financial and economic inclusion for women. The project is structured around four key pillars:

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Education and Financial Literacy: Ensuring women are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the financial world and make informed economic decisions.



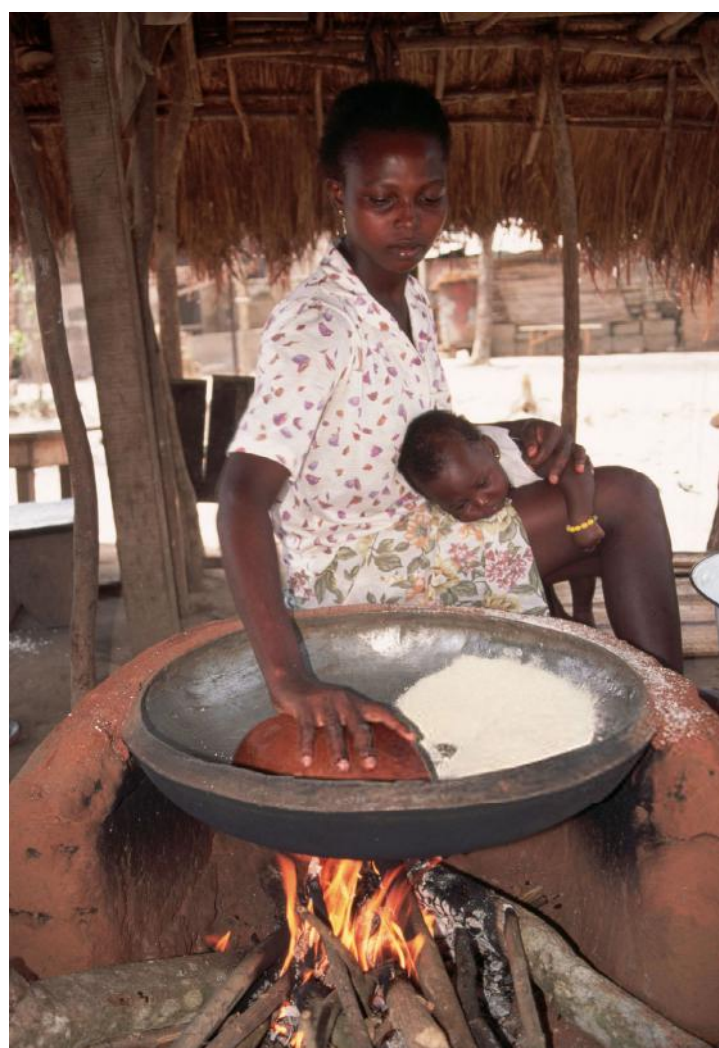
Maternal Healthcare: Recognising that women's health is a key enabler of their economic participation and prosperity.



Gender-sensitive Policies and Programmes: Promoting a policy framework that supports women's economic advancement.



Expanded Economic Opportunities for Women: Ensuring women have access to income-generating opportunities and resources.



The initiative is ambitious, with a goal to reach all 774 local government areas across Nigeria, ensuring that women in every corner of the country have the opportunity to thrive and lead. This commitment is symbolic and speaks to the need for a nationwide commitment to gender equality that involves both urban and rural areas, addressing the diverse needs of women across the country.

A key takeaway from the conference was the understanding that gender inclusion is not a charity but rather a strategic economic imperative. Financial inclusion for women, for instance, is directly linked to economic growth,

poverty alleviation, and community resilience. Research consistently shows that women with access to financial services are more likely to invest in education, healthcare and businesses, driving broader economic development.

In Nigeria, women represent an untapped source of economic potential, but they face significant barriers such as limited access to finance, cultural biases and lack of equal opportunities. The #ShelsIncluded initiative aims to eliminate these barriers, ensuring that women have equal access to opportunities that allow them to contribute meaningfully to the national and regional economy.

Unlocking Africa's Potential:

The Power of Gender-Responsive Development -
A Conversation with **Natalie Africa**

▶ **LABAKE
AJIBOYE-RICHARD**
Principal Consultant,
AR Initiative



the complex landscape of African development, traditional approaches have often overlooked a crucial catalyst for change: women's leadership. "We need to move beyond seeing women as beneficiaries and recognise them as agents of transformation," asserts Natalie Africa, a voice that commands attention in development circles.

Drawing from nearly two decades of experience across some of the world's leading institutions – from the International Finance Corporation to the UN Foundation, as well as stints in the financial sector – Africa brings unique insights to this conversation. As a South African national who has led transformative initiatives across three continents, she now serves as interim director at the Gates Foundation, focusing on economic opportunity in Africa.

Her message is clear: the path to sustainable development in Africa requires a fundamental shift in how we view women's role in development. "The issue of gender is so cross-cutting that anything affecting our continent will affect women more profoundly," she explains, "yet their potential to lead solutions remains largely untapped." In this wide-ranging conversation, Africa shares her vision for transforming the continent's development landscape. From reimagining financial systems to harnessing technology, from clean energy to agricultural innovation, she outlines practical pathways for putting women at the centre of Africa's sustainable future.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE: MAPPING AFRICA'S SUSTAINABILITY LANDSCAPE

From your extensive experience across sectors, what are the most pressing sustainability challenges facing Africa today?

▶ "There are many sustainability challenges facing the continent, and you could look at them with different lenses." Some of these critical dimensions, Africa explains, are governance, capital and climate change. "From the public sector perspective, there's a big challenge around governance and having the fit-for-purpose governance that can drive development and sustainability outcomes that we need in the continent. There is also a big capital crisis which challenges the sustainability of the continent's development. We're all talking about the debt crisis – in some countries,

high debt payment rates risk default, squeezing funds from governments which could otherwise be driven into development. That's a huge sustainability challenge for us." In Africa, interest payments have risen by 132% over the last decade, forcing governments to spend more on servicing debts than on development efforts.

"From a development sector lens," Africa continues, "climate change and climate resilience are probably the biggest sustainability challenges we'll be facing in the years to come. We're already facing it. Many countries are affected by the climate crisis, and within that, populations that are already more vulnerable when it comes to development, such as women and youth, are being affected even more so."

Africa's analysis of the impact of the climate crisis on women is incisive: "The issue of women and gender is so cross-cutting that anything that affects our continent or our societies will affect women more because of the structural disadvantages women have in society. We saw this during the COVID-19 pandemic – women were affected more in terms of loss of income and jobs because they are more in the informal sector and tend to do more retail service-oriented jobs. When those were shut down, women lost their incomes at a much higher rate than men."

In response to gendered inequalities on the continent, Ms Africa highlights the importance of gender-inclusive budgets as a strategic instrument. However, gender is still not being prioritised in most national budgets. "When you look at how budgets are structured in countries, most of the time, they're not gender-inclusive budgets, which really take time to look at how money is allocated and how it affects women in particular."

SECTOR ROLES AND PARTNERSHIPS: ORCHESTRATING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

One of Ms Africa's most compelling insights is her clear delineation of how different sectors must work together for sustainable development. She presents a practical framework that defines precisely how each sector's unique strengths can drive sustainable development. Drawing from her experience across public, private, and nonprofit sectors, she articulates a vision where success comes from coordinated effort, with each sector playing to its core competency. What is clear from this framework is that it recognises that sustainable development cannot be achieved through aid or policy alone. It must harness the engine of private sector growth while being shaped by meaningful regulation and catalysed by nonprofit advocacy and innovation.

How do you see the roles of different sectors in driving sustainable development?

▶ "I firmly believe that sustainable transformation and impact has to be led by the private sector," Africa asserts. "If you just look at the reality in terms of how economies are structured, how GDP is created – it's in the private sector. That's where production happens. The public sector is very important as a partner, creating the enabling environment and policy frameworks. The nonprofit sector is crucial for capitalising, innovating, testing, and advocacy. But the private sector has to mainstream the means of driving development because that's where growth and productivity actually happens."

Elaborating on what makes this approach successful, she adds, "The sweet spot is where you find the nexus of driving transformational change, especially for those who are poor and marginalised, and a business's ability to create innovative solutions that are also profit-making. You can call it shared value business, inclusive business models, or social enterprise. What matters is creating that nexus between transformational change and business incentives."

This method has already shown success across the continent. "Africa has actually been a great example of some

1. Cash, Daniel. "To Fix Africa's Debt Crisis, Reform Credit Ratings." *Development Matters*, 6 Dec. 2024.
2. M-Pesa is a mobile money service and fintech platform operating in Africa.

of these models," she notes, citing M-Pesa in Kenya as a pioneering case. "It was a form of democratising the ability for people to transact financially digitally. M-Pesa created a market by recognising an unbanked, excluded population and providing a solution through digital and mobile phones." This model has since proliferated across the continent, with fintechs like Moniepoint, Piggyvest and Paystack enabling digital finance for savings, loans, and transactions.

The key, she emphasises, is creating the right environment: "If we can continue to incentivise business around these solutions, take away policy or regulatory hurdles while still protecting the consumer and ensuring none of these practices are predatory, that's where the government becomes an important partner. Development shouldn't just exist in the minds of a few NGOs – it needs to be an endeavour that the whole society believes in."

REIMAGINING LEADERSHIP IN CLEAN ENERGY AND WATER

Sustainable energy and clean water access are sectors that receive significant climate financing in Africa. Natalie Africa challenges us to shift our focus from only the financial instruments, to consider also who leads these initiatives.

"Sustainable energy and clean water are critical enablers," she explains, "A leading development finance bank recently restructured their women's economic empowerment work to focus on sanitation and clean energy because women said these are the most critical things for driving their economic empowerment. These are areas where you can make an enormous amount of change because they're at the basis of health and productivity."

However, there is a crucial disconnect in current approaches to leadership in these sectors: "These sectors have often been seen as the domain of folks outside of women's agency. But if you look at the household level, women are already the leaders in these areas – they're the ones getting firewood for energy, fetching water for their homes."

Thinking of the work of Professor Collins Airhihenbuwa, she adds, "The development gaze often looks at others with a deficit mentality. We look at the woman fetching firewood and water, and the deficit mentality makes it seem like she's suffering; she's not enough. Instead, we should be looking at her as the leader in these sectors because she is able to show how she is responsible, resourceful, and creative around these areas."

Ms Africa suggests a transformative approach instead, to financing and partnerships. "Instead of just seeing an individual woman in that role, we need to think structurally about having women as leaders in these areas. When it comes to financing ecosystems, testing innovations, finding solutions, and building capacity, we need to put women at the centre of these sectors."


This shift is not just about inclusion but about effectiveness. "Women will lead these initiatives successfully because they know this is a priority for them. They understand the challenges firsthand," she emphasises. "We need to actively search for solutions that build women's capability to be leaders in these areas and ensure that institutionally, they are the ones leading the partnerships around building the ecosystem and financing."

While acknowledging that examples of such women-led initiatives in clean energy and water are still too rare, Africa sees this as an urgent opportunity: "There are probably many voices in this space that are not adequately tapped because people tend to look at the same type of folks when it comes to recognising leadership. This is something we need to change if we want to meet these challenges head-on in the future." For example, In 2004, Wangari Maathai became the first African woman to receive a Nobel Peace Prize for her work on sustainability, showing early leadership by African women in this space.

BREAKING DOWN SYSTEMIC BARRIERS: THE CULTURE QUESTION

What systemic barriers hinder women's full participation in

sustainable development across Africa?

 "The first one is culture. Cultural stereotypes cut across all sectors – public, private, whichever sector you're in," she explains. "The cultural stereotype around women and women's leadership is a big hindrance that spills over into so many other things: access to finance, access to property, access to information, access to opportunities."

This cultural barrier can undermine even well-designed initiatives; she says, "You could create a financial facility for women entrepreneurs – and we do that, many organisations do that. However, if you're not working at the same time on the cultural context, you could end up with situations where women access finance, but then it's diverted by a male family member who feels 'I'm the leader.'"

But, Africa emphasises while culture is challenging to change, it's not immutable. "We know our cultures have gone through so many changes over the years. We're seeing young people use their voices more, we're seeing young people in the streets protest. Culture does change, and we have to be part of making it happen." With mindful design, you can create cultural change to remove that systemic barrier."

She advocates for a more comprehensive approach to addressing these systemic barriers: "A multidisciplinary approach is so important to development, where you don't just look at the intervention, but you look at the culture, the sociology, issues like leadership and wealth. We tend to come up with a very interventionist approach in development and say, 'I have a solution. This will be the silver bullet,' but we don't always look at the full context, and then we wonder afterwards why solutions don't work."

From her experience in agricultural projects, Africa describes how this works in practice: "I've worked on projects where we wanted to increase women's leadership in supply chains, and we actually started with groups of men before starting the intervention. Sometimes, in these communities, there was a lot of damage done to men

3. Collins Airhihenbuwa is a professor of health policy and behavioural sciences at Georgia State University, with over 30 years of experience advancing research on culture, identity and health. His work emphasises the importance of seeing "beneficiaries" without a "deficit gaze", but rather as leaders and agents of their communities.

themselves - alcoholism and other issues. You have to understand what the cultural issues are in that society that can then impact the ability of women to take on leadership roles."

Technology and Innovation: Bridging or Widening the Gender Gap?

▶ When it comes to technology's role in advancing gender-responsive development, Natalie Africa sees enormous potential and significant risks. Her perspective is shaped by years of observing how digital innovations can either empower or further marginalise women.

"Technology can be a huge game changer," she says, "Looking at successful inclusive business models where businesses have seen opportunities to reach untapped markets - many of them actually have involved digitalisation in some way. Technological innovation, whether it's around digital or renewable energies, has huge potential to crowd in women and create more equity. But there is also a danger that these technologies do the opposite because right now the playing field isn't level. In Kenya, for example - home to M-Pesa and champion of digital finance - while phone ownership between men and women is nearly equal, which is fantastic, there's a huge drop of about 30% difference in usage because access to data and internet is expensive."

The challenge goes beyond simple access to technology. "Education levels and comfort with technological solutions is often higher with men than with women," she explains. "Even if you put interesting apps on the phone, like information for women farmers, they may not feel as comfortable trying something new straight away. Their comfort with technology and language may not be the same as men because of socialisation - it goes back to culture, how long girls stay in school, and everything."

As artificial intelligence enters the development landscape, Ms Africa emphasises the need for careful consideration: "There's a lot of optimism that AI could help us leap forward in Africa around content and training. But we need to make sure we're not

leaving others further behind who will not have access to these technologies because they're already not at the same level as others."

Her solution? A thoughtful, staged approach to technological implementation: "It comes back to mindful design and making a full diagnosis before we apply any solution. If you need to do some bridging before applying that technological solution, then you need to ask: what bridging do we need to do first? Maybe we need to close that gap before introducing solutions on a mainstream level."

Scaling Gender-Responsive Finance: From Revolution to Reality

A pioneer of gender mainstreaming at the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Natalie Africa provides a compelling perspective on transforming Africa's financial systems. "When we first introduced gender mainstreaming at the IFC, it was revolutionary," she recalls. "People didn't see finance as having a gender component. And yet it's huge."

Africa emphasises the strong business case for gender-responsive finance: "Women have higher repayment rates on loans. In most countries, women actually have a higher rate of starting businesses. They just don't always manage to succeed because of some of the factors we've spoken about. There's a huge incentive for the financial sector to do things differently."

She outlines a two-pronged approach to scaling solutions: at the policy level, policy tools should be used as forcing mechanisms to extend financial access to women. At the market level, a more deliberate application of a gendered lens is needed for infrastructure, agriculture, and transport projects.

"We could be pushing the boundaries even more; African development finance institutions can be more deliberate in how they approach advising governments and the private sector. We need to get the impact that drives real development across the continent."

LOOKING FORWARD: EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSFORMATION

There are new opportunities for transformation, not only among emerging technologies but also in some traditional sectors that, Ms Africa says, are in need of transformation. "Agriculture isn't new, but it needs transformation. Since independence, most African countries, especially those that are mineral-rich, haven't given priority to agriculture. Now, people are realising we need to turn more attention here - to modernise, digitise, and build stronger financing systems that recognise the contributions of women and youth in a meaningful way."

She identifies three key areas of opportunity, "Renewable energy is going to be huge as Africa's energy needs grow and fossil fuels decline. The digital space, particularly women in tech, will become increasingly important. AI will enable new opportunities in education, hospitality, and tourism - and women are particularly adept at this because they are often natural communicators who excel at information sharing."

What excites Africa most is the potential for women's leadership across these sectors: "It's about bringing women in as owners, leaders, and agents of change," she emphasises. "Young people are very digitally savvy. We need to encourage them and build an ecosystem, including financing for AI-enabled initiatives. There's an enormous amount of learning and opportunity ahead."

Her message is clear: Africa's transformation will come not just from new technologies but from putting women at the centre of both traditional and emerging sectors as leaders and innovators.



Op-Ed: The Future of African Wine:

Growing Sustainably, Voicing a Continent



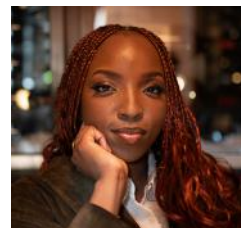
Sustainability in African Wine: Rooted in Tradition, Growing for the Future

Africa is a continent of boundless creativity, heritage, and environmental diversity. But when it comes to wine, much of the world's attention remains fixed on South Africa. As the continent's only major wine producer, South Africa has built a vibrant industry that champions not only fine wine but increasingly sustainable practices. However, Africa's wine story is more than just South Africa. It is a tale of challenges, opportunities, and innovation shaping a truly sustainable future across the continent.

● The Wine Belt: Where Africa Fits

Wine grapes are famously picky. They grow best between 30 and 50 degrees latitude north or south of the equator - an area known as the "wine belt," where mild climates, consistent seasons, and ideal rainfall enable viticulture. South Africa, at the continent's southern tip, sits comfortably within this zone, with regions like Stellenbosch, Paarl, and Swartland basking in Mediterranean-like conditions perfect for grape cultivation.

But much of the rest of Africa isn't as ideally placed. Closer to the equator, nations like Nigeria and Ghana face intense humidity and heavy rains, which encourage vine diseases like mildew



► **FIKAYO IFATUROT**
Founder, Cellar Atelier

and rot. Even with modern irrigation and pesticides, growing grapes in these tropical climates comes with significant environmental costs and quality concerns. Instead, these

regions are better suited to crops like cassava, yams, and cocoa, which thrive naturally.

In North Africa, the story is different. Countries like Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria share a Mediterranean coastline, similar to southern Europe. Morocco alone has over 50,000 acres under vine, with regions like Meknès showing real promise. Wines like Tandem are exciting examples, yet sustainability challenges such as water scarcity and desertification remain hurdles. Some wineries are tackling these issues with drip irrigation and drought-resistant grape varieties, but production remains modest compared to South Africa.

● South Africa: Leading Africa's Wine Sustainability Movement

In South Africa, sustainability isn't just a trend - it's becoming the industry standard. Over 95% of vineyards are certified under the Integrated Production of Wine (IPW) system, a framework ensuring responsible farming and winemaking. The sustainability seal, known as the 'bus ticket,' ensures that wines meet strict environmental and ethical guidelines. The country's

diverse climates, from the sun-soaked Swartland to the cool, ocean-cooled Hemel-en-Aarde, allow for sustainable practices like dry farming, which relies on natural rainfall instead of irrigation. Many wineries are also fostering biodiversity, planting native flora alongside vines to reduce the need for chemical herbicides.

For example, Sadie Family Wines, led by Eben Sadie, is celebrated for its organic and biodynamic methods. Sadie's philosophy centres on farming the soil to keep the land healthy for future generations. Similarly, Restless River in the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley benefits from cooling ocean breezes, allowing for early harvesting that preserves acidity without excessive water use. Their low-intervention approach produces some of South Africa's most refined Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs.

Another pioneer, Alheit Vineyards, is known for revitalising old, dry-farmed bush vines. Specialising in Chenin Blanc, they believe in letting the Cape's terroir shine. As they put it, "We love old vineyards. We love dry farming. We believe that beauty in wine comes from the vineyard."

But sustainability in South Africa isn't just about the land - it's about people. Historically, Black South Africans have been the backbone of the wine industry, often working as vineyard labourers with little representation as winemakers or landowners. The high cost of vineyard land remains a barrier, perpetuating inequality.

Encouragingly, some wineries are shifting the narrative, empowering Black South Africans to take on leadership roles and integrate African identity into winemaking. Through the use of indigenous plants and spices like rooibos and fynbos, they are creating wines that tell uniquely African stories. This not only resonates with local and global audiences but also drives social sustainability, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation in agriculture. The Gérard Basset Foundation is playing a role by raising funds and providing educational opportunities for Black and African professionals in world-class wine institutions like Chateau Latour, Vega Sicilia & Ridge Vineyards.

A standout example is Ntsiki Biyela, South Africa's first Black female wine-maker. Raised in Mahlabathini, she won a scholarship to study oenology at Stellenbosch University, where lectures were conducted in Afrikaans - a language she had to learn to pursue her passion. After graduating, she founded Aslina Wines, named in honour of her grandmother. Her journey is a testament to resilience and innovation, making her a key figure in South Africa's wine story.

● Beyond South Africa: The Sustainability Dilemma

In East Africa, countries like Kenya and Uganda are experimenting with wine production in high-altitude regions. Kenya's Rift Valley, for instance, has vineyards at over 1,800 metres above

sea level, a strategy akin to Argentina's high-altitude winemaking. While these ventures hold promise, they face challenges, from a lack of winemaking expertise to ethical concerns around land use. In regions where food security is a pressing issue, prioritising vineyards over staple crops like maize and beans can feel misaligned with local needs.

This highlights an essential truth: sustainability isn't just environmental - it's ethical. African wine, wherever it's made, must balance global market demand with the needs of local communities, ensuring vineyards support rather than displace essential agriculture. Can we provide opportunities in the wine space?

The Future of African Wine

Africa's wine story is still unfolding, and sustainability is at its core. From South Africa's sunlit vineyards to Morocco's arid terrains and Kenya's highlands, each region offers lessons in resilience, innovation, and collaboration.

As the industry evolves, Africa's wines are poised to capture the world's imagination - not just for their flavours but for the legacy they leave behind. Because great wine isn't just about what's in the glass; it's about the soil, the people, and the future it shapes.





Op-Ed:

How South Africa Can Overcome Its **Energy Transition Challenge**



The author picked alongside Colliie community leader Mick Murray in front of Colliie's open-cut coal mine.

► **MICHAEL SHELDRIK**
Co-Founder of Global Citizen and Author of *From Ideas to Impact: A Playbook for Influencing and Implementing Change in a Divided World*

Africa's energy future is shifting towards renewables—not just for climate goals but because solar and wind are now the cheapest and most scalable sources of new electricity. According to the International Energy Agency, Africa holds 60% of the world's highest solar potential, giving it a natural edge in low-cost, independent energy. With global energy security under pressure, Africa has a unique opportunity to accelerate its

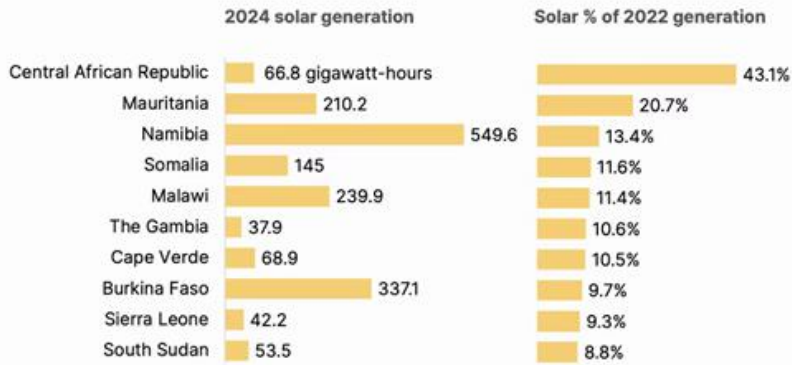
transition—if the right investments and policies are in place.

And those investments are already happening. Despite uncertainty over U.S. climate policy under Trump 2.0, investment in African renewable energy continues to gain momentum, driven by economics rather than politics.

Mike Silvestrini, co-founder of Energea, a renewable energy investment platform, puts it bluntly: "Who occupies the White House won't affect renewable deployment—solar, wind, or hydropower—in Africa."

Small grids, high penetration

Solar is more than 10% of 2021 power generation levels in 8 sub-Saharan African countries



January 2025

81



native financing mechanisms essential to a just transition.

Carbon Markets: South Africa's Opportunity

Instead of relying on grants and loans, South Africa—and its entrepreneurs—can turn emissions reductions into taxable revenue by selling carbon credits. Simply put, this means getting paid to cut emissions—or, more bluntly, keeping coal in the ground instead of burning it.

But investment alone won't make the transition successful. Solar and wind farms won't automatically create jobs for coal and oil workers. Without a clear plan for these workers—especially in fossil fuel-dependent economies like South Africa, where coal is deeply embedded in both the power sector and labour market—public backlash could slow the very transition investment aims to accelerate.

South Africa's Energy Crossroads

Nowhere is this challenge more urgent than in South Africa, where the energy transition is complicated by deep reliance on coal. Even as cheaper alternatives emerge, coal still generates 80% of the country's electricity.

More than just an energy source, coal supports up to 108,000 mining jobs and 200,000 total jobs across power generation and transport. In Mpumalanga province alone, coal accounts for 5% of total employment—making the transition a high-stakes economic challenge.

In my book, *From Ideas to Impact*, I explore how coal communities either transitioned—or collapsed. One example stands out: Collie, Western Australia.

Collie secured public investment, attracting private commitments to offset coal job losses from its power station closures. These investments are bringing in new industries, including green exports, battery storage technology, and tourism, alongside worker retraining programmes.

Tesla recently announced Australia's first battery remanufacturing facility in Collie—ensuring energy-sector jobs aren't lost but repurposed for a post-coal economy.

The author picked alongside Collie community leader Mick Murray in front of Collie's open-cut coal mine.

Unlocking South Africa's Transition

Western Australia projects a 2024-25 budget surplus of A\$2.6 billion (USD \$1.7 billion), while South Africa faces a R336 billion (USD \$18 billion) deficit.

Meanwhile, the \$8.5 billion Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP)—designed to fund South Africa's shift away from coal—has seen uneven implementation. Given these financial constraints, large-scale public investment will likely prove difficult, making alter-

Carbon credits can fund worker retraining, new industries, and job-creating infrastructure alongside other funding sources. This ensures the shift to clean energy is a just transition—not just an energy transition.

This works because major polluters—whether required by law or choosing to act—must offset emissions they can't immediately cut. As government-backed carbon markets grow in the EU, China, and parts of the U.S., demand for high-quality credits is rising, though voluntary markets remain less predictable.

If South Africa builds a credible carbon market, it can tap into this demand—financing its transition while reinvesting in workers and communities relying on coal.

South Africa on the World Stage

For carbon markets to succeed, they must be well-run, transparent, and trusted by investors. Without strong verification, South Africa will struggle to compete with countries with stricter regulations.

In November 2025, when South Africa hosts the G20 Leaders' Summit, it has a

prime opportunity to position itself as a global leader in carbon markets. Its Scaling Up Renewables in Africa campaign, in partnership with the EU, will culminate in a major event ahead of the summit—a key moment to showcase top-tier carbon projects to investors.

Africa's clean energy transition is growing, but it risks pushback without a plan to

support workers and coal-dependent communities—as seen in other countries.

A well-regulated carbon market could be a game-changer—funding the transition while ensuring no one is left behind. Now is the time for policy-makers, businesses, and investors to scale high-integrity carbon markets and invest in Africa's clean energy future.



Accelerate Action: The Role of Sustainable Finance in Bridging Gender Gaps

Interviewer: Thank you for joining us. Before we dive in, could you introduce yourself and share a bit about your background?

Executive Secretary: Thank you for having me. My name is Emmanuel Etaderhi and I have had the privilege of leading FC4S Lagos as its Executive Secretary from its inception to date. My background is rooted in Electrical Engineering, Research, Oil & Gas, Finance and Sustainability, with years of experience in driving Policy Advocacy, Financial Innovation, and Climate-Resilient Initiatives across Africa. At FC4S Lagos, the 23rd member of the global network of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Financial Centre for Sustainability, our mission is to accelerate sustainable economic development by galvanising capital to create new opportunities and increase prosperity for all.

Interviewer: As we celebrate International Women's Day with the theme #AccelerateAction, let's start with an overview of FC4S Lagos. What is your mission, and how does it intersect with sustainability?

Executive Secretary: At FC4S Lagos, we are at the forefront of mobilising sustainable finance to drive impactful change and our mission is to create a financial ecosystem that supports green and inclusive economic growth. Since our inception in 2019, we have championed climate adaptation, resilience-building, and access to finance for businesses aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals ("SDGs").

One of our core beliefs is that sustainable finance must be inclusive, which means ensuring that women, who play a crucial role in economic development, have equitable access to financial opportunities. Women's participation in sustainability is not just about fairness; it's about effectiveness. Studies consistently show that when women are included, outcomes improve across industries, from Agriculture to Renewable Energy.

Interviewer: FC4S Lagos has spearheaded numerous initiatives in Sustainable Finance. Can you highlight some of your key projects and their impact, particularly in the context of gender inclusion?

Executive Secretary: Absolutely. Over the years, we have designed and executed several strategic initiatives that bridge the gap between Sustainability and Finance.

Firstly, FC4S Lagos signed the UNDP Gender Charter in 2023 at the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Dublin, Ireland, with other members in the FC4S Global Network. The Gender Chart provides a workable tool and template for the integration of Gender Balance into the global corporate and financial world.

Again, one of our key projects in 2024 was facilitating the establishment of the Climate Change Fund ("CCF"), a sovereign climate investment fund. This initiative aligns with Nigeria's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2060, as outlined in the Climate Change Act of 2021. In collaboration with the National Council on Climate Change ("NCCC") and with support from the UK-Nigeria Infrastructure Advisory Facility ("UK-NIAF"), FC4S Lagos organised an Executive Breakfast Session on March 8, 2024, to discuss key steps toward setting up the Climate Change Fund. This Fund is a critical milestone in Nigeria's sustainable finance journey, designed to mobilise private investment, leverage technical assistance, and integrate Environmental, Social & Governance ("ESG") principles into climate finance. Our stakeholder engagement ensured that the Fund's business plan complements existing market solutions and investment strategies.

The session provided a platform for key industry players to share insights on fund design, structure, investment thesis, and green finance solutions, drawing from their experiences in sustainable investments. By actively shaping

this Fund, we are reinforcing Nigeria's financial ecosystem for climate resilience while ensuring that women-led enterprises are not left behind in green investment opportunities.

Another impactful initiative is the Growth Stage Impact Venture ("GSIV") Project with the United Nations Development Programme ("UNDP"), which has raised over \$15 million for sustainability-driven ventures. A fundamental requirement for project beneficiaries has been gender balance meaning businesses led by women or with a significant female workforce received priority funding. This is crucial because access to finance remains one of the biggest barriers for women entrepreneurs in emerging markets. It is noteworthy that 44% of the businesses that qualified for the GSIV project were led by women entrepreneurs. We also presented two of these female-led businesses to impact investors at the Building Bridges Conference in Geneva in 2023.

Additionally, we annually host the Naija SDGs Fintech Hackathons, where over 40% of participants are women innovating solutions in financial technology and sustainability. Women have been at the forefront of designing circular economy solutions that address critical SDGs, proving that when given the opportunity, they deliver transformative ideas.

Interviewer: Those are significant milestones. Why do you believe gender inclusion is such a vital part of sustainable finance?

Executive Secretary: It is really simple; sustainability is about long-term resilience, and you cannot build resilience by excluding half the world's population. Women make up 49.58% of the global population, 43% of the global agricultural workforce and up to 60% in parts of Africa. Yet, they face disproportionate barriers to resources, land ownership, and capital. A World Bank report recently highlighted that women in rural Sub-Saharan Africa spend an average of 30 minutes per trip fetching water, time that could be reinvested into education or economic activity. In Finance, we see similar disparities. The International Finance Corpora-

tion ("IFC") reports that while climate tech ventures received over a quarter of all Venture Capital ("VC") funding in 2022, only 11% of startups securing seed funding in emerging markets were led by women. This isn't just an issue of fairness; it's a missed opportunity. Women-led businesses have been shown to drive higher sustainability outcomes and more inclusive economic growth. By integrating gender into financial decision-making, we unlock the untapped potential that benefits society as a whole.

Interviewer: FC4S Lagos is launching the African Women Innovation Network. Can you tell us more about this initiative and what it aims to achieve?

Executive Secretary: The African Women Innovation Network ("AWIN") is one of our Gender-Focused projects initiated in partnership with a Canada-based female innovator and board director, and we are incredibly excited about its potential. AWIN is designed to provide women with access to finance, capacity-building, and mentorship opportunities in critical sectors such as renewable energy, power, agriculture, and environmental sustainability.

One of the key challenges women face, especially in sectors like Clean Energy and Climate Technology, is access to funding. AWIN seeks to bridge this gap by creating direct financial linkages between women-led enterprises and funding sources. Beyond financing, AWIN will serve as a knowledge-sharing platform where women entrepreneurs can connect, collaborate, and scale their solutions. We envision AWIN as a catalyst for women-led innovation that accelerates Africa's sustainability agenda.

Interviewer: Looking ahead, what more can be done to empower women in sustainability, both locally and globally?

Executive Secretary: We need to address access to finance as a systemic issue. Financial institutions should embed gender-lens investing into their portfolios. Governments and regulators must introduce policies that actively

promote gender-inclusive financing. Additionally, mentorship and capacity-building are crucial. Many women entrepreneurs have brilliant ideas but lack the technical and financial literacy to scale their solutions.

On a global level, we must continue to spotlight and support women who are driving sustainability. The International Renewable Energy Agency ("IRENA") has reported that women-led agricultural initiatives have pioneered efficient irrigation systems that reduce water usage by 25% while improving crop yields. These are the types of solutions we need to amplify. At FC4S Lagos, we are committed to doing just that by fostering an ecosystem where women's contributions to sustainability are not just recognised but actively supported.

Interviewer: As we close, what message would you like to share with our readers, especially women looking to make an impact in sustainability?

Executive Secretary: My message is simple: we cannot afford to leave anyone behind in the journey toward a sustainable future. Women are not just participants in this movement; they are leaders, innovators, and game-changers. Whether you are an investor, a policymaker, or an entrepreneur, recognise that the most effective solutions for a thriving economy come when we unleash the full potential of all talents available in the economy.

To women in sustainability, keep pushing. Your work is driving real change. And to those looking to enter this space, the time is now. At FC4S Lagos, we are here to support, collaborate, and ensure that the sustainable finance ecosystem works for everyone. Together, we can accelerate action and build a more inclusive, resilient future for Africa and beyond.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time and insights. We look forward to seeing the continued impact of FC4S Lagos.

Executive Secretary: Thank you, it's been a pleasure.

Inclusive Governance and Women's Political Participation:

A Catalyst for Sustainable Development in Africa



► **AGATHA
AFEMIKHE**
*Consultant,
The AR
Initiative*

Inclusive governance is a critical driver of sustainable development in Africa—empirical evidence suggests that even a modest increase in women's political participation can lead to measurable economic and social benefits. Studies by UN Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) indicate that every 1% rise in female parliamentary representation is associated with significant improvements in policy responsiveness and, in some contexts, measurable increases in GDP growth. This article explores how empowering women to assume leadership roles can transform governance, spur economic growth, and ultimately foster more resilient and inclusive development across the continent.

The Economic and Social Benefits of Inclusive Governance

The correlation between women's political participation and economic performance is well documented. Research published in the *Journal of Economic Studies* in 2022 offers robust evidence that policy shifts driven by increased female participation in government—particularly those affecting

social welfare and public service delivery—can yield significant long-term economic benefits. In the study, the authors analysed cross-country panel data spanning three decades and found that even a modest one percentage point increase in female representation in parliament is associated with an average increase of approximately 0.25% in public spending on social services. This uptick in social expenditure, they argue, translates into measurable improvements in human capital and long-term GDP growth rates of up to 0.3% per annum over extended periods.

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2022) similarly highlights that countries with higher levels of female representation in government exhibit stronger economic performance and greater social equity. The report presents cross-country comparisons that provide an annual snapshot of gender disparities across countries and underscores the economic benefits of closing the gender gap in political leadership.

These improvements are particularly significant in Africa, where many economies seek to overcome developmental challenges. Gender inclusive policies fundamentally enhance the contributions women make to national economies and drive sustainable development through several interconnected mechanisms: By removing systemic barriers—such as wage disparities, lack of access to childcare, and limited financial services—gender inclusive policies empower more women to participate fully in the formal economy. For instance, countries that implement equal pay legislation and provide family-friendly workplace policies see higher female labour participation rates, boosting overall productivity and economic output. Gender-inclusive policies also stimulate Entrepreneurship and Innovation. When policies ensure equitable access to credit, education, and training, more women can start and expand businesses. Female entrepreneurship not only generates jobs but also diversifies the economy. This expansion of the entrepreneurial base is critical for sustainable economic growth, as evidenced by research from the African Development Bank, which shows that women-owned business-

es contribute significantly to GDP in countries like Nigeria and Kenya. When governments integrate gender perspectives into policy-making, there is a demonstrable impact on economic productivity and social equity. "Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world," notes former UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (UN Women 2020). This sentiment underlines the argument that inclusive governance directly contributes to broader economic stability and growth.

In many African countries where gender-inclusive policies are lacking and women remain underrepresented in politics, several detrimental outcomes have been observed and theorised - suboptimal economic growth, increased social inequality and gender gaps, limited policy innovation and responsiveness, ineffective public service delivery, persistent political instability etc. When women are not adequately represented, policies may overlook or undervalue issues such as the gender wage gap, access to education, and healthcare needs specific to women. This perpetuates systemic inequalities, limiting social mobility and reinforcing poverty cycles.

Case Studies: Rwanda and South Africa

Rwanda is a leading example of inclusive governance. With over 60% of its parliamentary seats held by women—the highest percentage in the world—Rwanda has leveraged this gender balance to drive social policy reforms and economic inclusion. The country's commitment to gender parity has translated into robust social programs and national initiatives such as the Community-Based Health Insurance scheme (Mutuelles de Santé) that have expanded access to healthcare across the country, contributing to sustained GDP growth—Rwanda has maintained an average annual GDP growth rate of approximately 7% over the past decade; improved health outcomes - for one, Rwanda's maternal mortality rate has dramatically decreased from over 1,200 per 100,000 live births in the mid-1990s to around 210 per 100,000 live

births in recent years, a transformation partly attributed to policies that prioritise women's health and welfare, and accelerated economic development, showing that women's leadership can result in tangible progress.

South Africa's journey toward inclusive governance has coincided with measurable improvements in its social and economic policies. Following the 2019 general elections, when women came to constitute nearly 45% of parliament, the country embarked on a series of legislative reforms that have not only advanced social justice but also bolstered economic development.

For example, in the wake of the increased female presence, South Africa's government enhanced the Sexual Offences Act in 2020. This reform expanded legal protections for victims of gender-based violence and strengthened support mechanisms—a change largely credited to female MPs who championed more comprehensive victim support measures. Concurrently, reforms in the education sector—such as amendments to policies addressing gender-based violence in schools and increased funding for girl-child education—have been implemented over the past two years, leading to improved school attendance and better educational outcomes.

Economically, the influence of female legislators is evident in the nation's increased public investment in key social sectors. According to the World Bank, South Africa's public healthcare spending has risen by approximately 8% annually since 2019, a change attributed in part to advocacy for more robust healthcare services from women in parliament. These increased investments have resulted in better service delivery, contributing to improved health outcomes and, ultimately, to sustained economic growth.

Collectively, these reforms illustrate that gender-inclusive policies—by ensuring that women's voices are heard in policy-making—can lead to tangible progress. Not only do they elevate policy quality and responsiveness, but they also create conditions for long-term, inclusive economic development.

Critical Barriers to Women's Leadership in Africa

Despite these successes, numerous barriers continue to hinder women's political participation across the continent:



Leadership roles.

In many African societies, traditional gender roles and stereotypes discourage women from pursuing political careers.



Economic Constraints:

Limited financial resources and lack of access to campaign funding present significant obstacles. Women candidates frequently face higher fund-raising challenges compared to their male counterparts.



Institutional Barriers:

Structural challenges within political institutions, such as biased electoral systems and insufficient legal frameworks to support gender quotas, impede progress.



Political Violence and Harassment:

Women in politics are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and intimidation, which further discourages their participation.

Young African girls aspire to leadership, yet these barriers often strike a stark imbalance in political representation. For instance, while some African parliaments now approach 40–60% female representation, others lag significantly behind, with female representation below 20%.

Comparing Developed and Less-Developed Nations in Africa

When comparing nations within Africa, evident disparities emerge. Rwanda and South Africa, as highlighted above, have made commendable progress in institutionalising policies that promote women's leadership. In contrast, several countries in West and Central Africa continue to grapple with entrenched patriarchal systems and weak enforcement of gender-sensitive policies. For example, despite constitutional guarantees, nations like Nigeria (with female parliamentary representation of around 2%) and Cameroon (approximately 33%) frequently report slower progress on social reforms and persistent gaps in service delivery, outcomes that many studies attribute to the underrepresentation of women in political decision-making. These examples highlight that including female lawmakers leads to stronger, more responsive policies and governance, catalysing sustainable development.

Institutional and Government Commitments to Bridging the Gap

Many governmental and international agencies are committed to bridging the gender gap in political leadership across Africa. For example, Tunisia has implemented candidate list quotas that have steadily increased the number of women in its national assembly, driving progressive policy changes aimed at reducing inequality and enhancing social justice.

Senegal, too, has taken steps by adopting legal frameworks and advocacy programs that aim to boost women's political participation at both national and local levels. Complementing these national efforts, intergovernmental agencies such as UN Women and the African Union Commission are actively supporting these initiatives through technical assistance, funding, and policy guidance. Notably, the African Union's Agenda 2063 explicitly prioritises gender equality, calling for increased representation of women at all levels of government to drive inclusive development. Collectively, these efforts demonstrate that both African governments and intergovernmental agencies are making tangible, sustained commitments to bridge the gender gap in political leadership, thereby fostering more inclusive and resilient societies.

Moreover, initiatives such as the UN Women Africa Strategy and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) work closely with African governments to promote legislative reforms and capacity-building that support women's political participation.

At a global level, governments and organisations are implementing policies aimed at reducing barriers to entry for women in politics. For instance, several European nations have adopted mandatory gender quotas, a model that over 20 African countries are beginning to emulate. The success of these policies underscores the need for a multifaceted approach that combines legal reform, economic empowerment, and cultural change to achieve meaningful progress.

The introduction of electoral gender quotas in more than 100 countries around the globe has led to a substantial increase in the number of women holding political office and has been associated with a significant rise in women's political representation, contributing to more inclusive governance and policy-making.

Inclusive governance and enhanced political participation by women are indispensable for Africa's sustainable development. The empirical evidence is clear: increased female representation in decision-making not only leads to more responsive and equitable policies but also drives economic growth. By addressing the critical barriers that hinder women's leadership—ranging from cultural biases to financial and institutional constraints—Africa can unlock significant developmental potential. As evidenced by countries like Rwanda and South Africa, where progress in gender parity has yielded tangible social and economic benefits, the continent's future depends on a committed and coordinated effort to empower women in governance.

Despite socio-cultural limitations, limited access to finance, resources, mentorship opportunities, and market access, women entrepreneurs across Africa are pioneering “innovative businesses” that tackle climate challenges, promote economic empowerment, and drive lasting change in their communities.

From sustainable agriculture to renewable energy, female-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are leading the way in creating impactful, sustainable solutions that support economic growth and address pressing societal and environmental issues. These women-led enterprises are advancing sustainable business models and breaking barriers in male-dominated industries, proving that innovation and leadership transcend gender boundaries.

This issue celebrates remarkable women building Africa's sustainable future. Through our Startup Spotlight, we share the stories of two visionary companies led by women who turned bold ideas into transformative enterprises. Their journeys showcase what's possible when talent meets opportunity.

We sat down with Gabrielle Carelle Ossinga, Co-founder of SeaH4, and Siphwe Lukama, who leads Kasenga Agro Solutions. These entrepreneurs are pioneering climate-resilient solutions while transforming their communities. Through candid conversations, they share their journey of building impactful businesses, navigating challenges, and pursuing ambitious visions for a sustainable Africa.

SeaH4 - Transforming the transportation sector from the shores of Cape Town, South Africa

Founded in 2021 and based in Cape Town, SeaH4 is transforming Africa's energy landscape through innovative seaweed farming. SeaH4 is pioneering a new path



Startup Spotlight

African Women at the Forefront of Sustainable Enterprise

► **IFUNANYA
ONUIGBO**
Business
Operations
Associate, AR
Initiative

in sustainable energy by farming seaweed at scale to generate biomethane through anaerobic digestion. Unlike conventional biogas methods, SeaH4's approach doesn't compete with food production or disrupt carbon capture systems. Their process combines solar power with seaweed farming to produce two vital outputs: high-grade CO₂ for the food sector and e-fuels - including methanol and sustainable avia-

tion fuels (SAFs) - to help decarbonise transport.

SeaH4's groundbreaking work earned them a nomination for the prestigious Earthshot Prize in 2024, recognising their potential to transform Africa's energy future. The same year, they won Best Startup at the Global Startup Awards Africa, secured their first investment, and launched a test facility producing 500 litres of biogas daily.

SeaH4
ALGAE-BASED BIOFUELS

At the helm of SeaH4's Biogas-Hydrogen division is co-founder Gabrielle Carelle Ossinga, whose expertise drives SKORPIO, SeaH4's 10-hectare pilot project in Namibia. Spanning 10 hectares of coastline, this facility combines seaweed farming with wave energy to produce sustainable fuels while creating jobs and strengthening local economies.

As a young African scientist, Gabrielle acknowledges the hurdles of working in a traditionally male-dominated sector. Yet her focus remains clear: building an energy-independent Africa while uplifting communities. Her advice to emerging innovators carries the weight of experience: "Be resilient. Be patient. Be bold. The journey is long but worth it."

KASENGA AGRO SOLUTIONS - Empowering Women Through Sustainable Beekeeping

In Kasenga, a rural community 40 kilometres from Lusaka, Zambia, Sipiwe Lukama founded Kasenga Agro Solutions in 2020. The company combines organic honey production with sustainable forest management, creating a model that tackles both environmental conservation and rural economic development. Their innovative approach



transforms former charcoal traders and small-scale farmers - those most vulnerable to climate shocks - into skilled beekeepers and environmental stewards.

Through a comprehensive training program in sustainable forest management, financial literacy, and beekeeping, Kasenga has established over 100 bee farms, with honey now reaching markets in Botswana and Malawi. The company's out-grower model leverages partnerships with local cooperatives, who provide land for beehives while gaining valuable skills. Kasenga aims to scale its impact five-fold, training 500 outgrowers annually.

Despite challenges common to women in African agriculture - from limited access to finance to scarce resources - Lukama has built a thriving enterprise through persistence and continuous

learning. She turned these obstacles into opportunities, creating pathways for other rural women to gain independence through sustainable agriculture.

"Kasenga is more than honey," Lukama emphasises. "It's about creating opportunities, independence, and lasting impact. Together, we can build a future where women thrive, nature flourishes, and communities grow stronger."

These two entrepreneurs represent a growing movement of women across Africa, turning sustainability challenges into opportunities for change. From Cape Town's shores to Zambia's rural communities, women are building enterprises that tackle pressing environmental issues while creating economic opportunities for their communities.

Their stories challenge the traditional narrative of African business. Through SeaH4 and Kasenga Agro Solutions, we see how innovation emerges from a deep understanding of local needs - whether it is transforming seaweed into clean energy or helping charcoal traders become environmental stewards. These women demonstrate that sustainable solutions don't just protect our environment; they create jobs, strengthen communities, and open new paths for future generations.

As Africa faces mounting climate challenges, it's clear that women entrepreneurs will play a crucial role in building resilient, sustainable futures. Their ability to combine environmental stewardship with community empowerment offers a powerful model for sustainable development across the continent.



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SCAN ME





Data & Research Insights

The Impact of Women Entrepreneurs on Africa's Economy



Did you know that Sub-Saharan Africa boasts the highest rate of women entrepreneurs globally,

with 26% of adult women engaged in entrepreneurial activity?)] Or that women contribute up to 13% of Africa's GDP?)

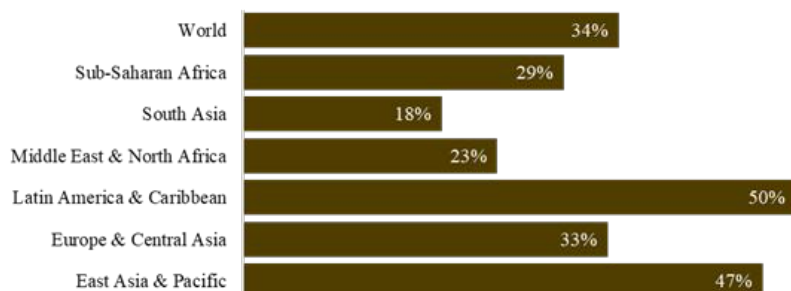
Women entrepreneurs in Africa are not just participating in the economy; they are transforming it. Women constitute approximately 58% of Africa's self-employed population, with a significant portion running small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Roland Berger's Women in Africa Entrepreneurship Study (2018) noted that women entrepreneurs contributed between US\$250 billion and US\$300 billion to African economic growth in 2016, which was equivalent to about 13% of the continent's GDP. In 2022, Africa's collective GDP was approximately US\$3.1 trillion, of which female entrepreneurs contributed 11% (about US\$340 billion). However, their contribution has declined steadily since 2000, from 18%

► ROFIAT HASSAN
FAITH OSAMAYE
*Researchers at the
AR Initiative*

to 11%. This decline is due to persistent gender inequality in education, limited access to finance and credit for women entrepreneurs, and cultural norms that restrict women's economic participation, especially in rural areas.

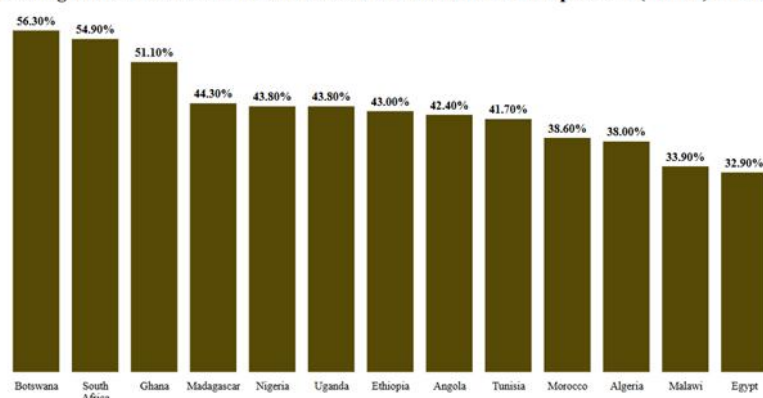
Globally, one in six women plan to start a business, while in Africa, that number rises to one in three, indicating that African women have a stronger entrepreneurial drive. Regarding business ownership, only one in three SMEs worldwide are owned by women. The rate varies across regions: in the Middle East and North Africa, it's as low as 23%, while in Sub-Saharan Africa, it stands at 29% (Fig.1). In Nigeria, 39 out of every 100 businesses are female-owned, representing a 39% female business ownership rate, higher than the sub-Saharan African average of 29% and the global average of 34%.

Share of small, medium, and large firms with a woman among the principal owners (%)



In 2021, the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE) listed Botswana, Uganda, and Ghana as the top three countries globally with the highest percentages of women business owners, at 38.5%, 38.4%, and 37.2%, respectively. Botswana also led as the top African country for fostering women's entrepreneurship, scoring 56.3 points, followed by South Africa (54.9) and Ghana (51.1) (Fig. 2). According to MIWE, these nations not only have a high percentage of female-owned businesses but also formally support women entrepreneurs. These rankings highlight the strong entrepreneurial spirit of women in Africa.

Leading African countries in the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE) in 2021



Job Creation and Economic Growth

Women entrepreneurs are powerful catalysts for economic and social transformation. Women-led SMEs account for 40% of small and medium-sized enterprises, which is crucial in job creation and economic stability. SMEs, many of which are led by women, generate 80% of jobs in Africa, making them essential to employment and economic stability. Beyond business, women reinvest up to 90% of their income in education, health, and nutrition, far more than the 40% reinvested by men. This reinvestment strengthens families, improves public health, and enhances education, creating a ripple effect that drives long-term development.

Women are key players in trade and industrialisation, driving economic growth and regional integration. They make up 70% of informal cross-border traders, facilitating commerce and supply chain connectivity, yet their contributions remain undervalued.

Women and Innovation

Women entrepreneurs are pivotal in fostering innovation and agriculture. UNESCO and the Africa Women's Forum survey revealed that 23.9% of female African entrepreneurs have engaged in innovation. This means that almost one in four women entrepreneurs in Africa have introduced new ideas, products, or services within their businesses. These businesses generate profits and address pressing challenges like climate change and food security.

Funding and Investment in Women-Led Businesses

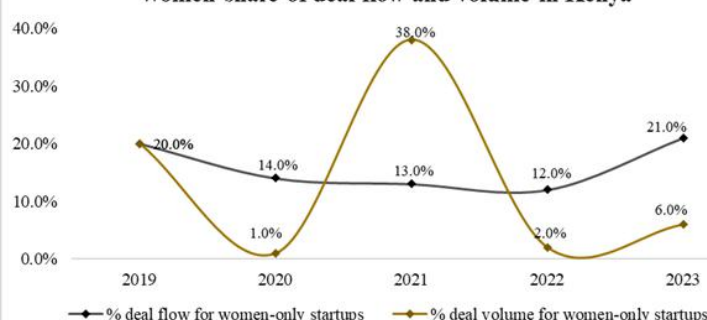
Despite their significant contributions, women entrepreneurs in Africa face a \$42 billion financing gap compared to their male counterparts, with only 20% of women entrepreneurs receiving formal financial support. According to Africa: The Big Deal, all-male founding teams received \$1 for every \$1 raised, compared to 2.7 cents secured by all-female founding teams. Since 2014, startups with women

founders have received less than 5% of venture capital funding across the continent.

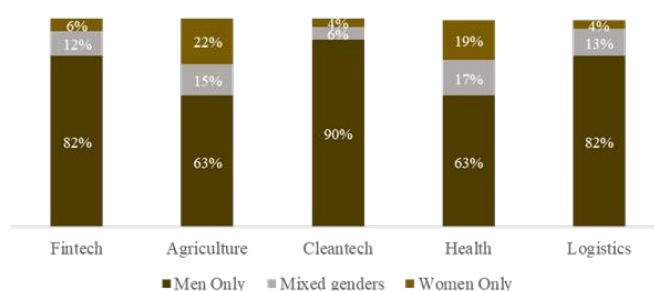
Over the past decade, Kenya has secured over \$4.5 billion in total startup funding, with women-only startups receiving 12% of the financing and accounting for 15% of the over 675 deals. In Nigeria, which has raised over \$5.3 billion, women-only startups received just 1% of the funding despite making up 9% of the over 930 deals. Similarly, in South Africa, which raised over \$2.7 billion, women-only startups secured just 0.5% of the funding while accounting for 10% of the over 530 deals, underscoring the gender funding gap across Africa's top startup ecosystems.

In 2023, 21% of Kenya's deal flow went to women-only startups, yet they accounted for just 6% of the deal volume (Fig. 3). In Nigeria, women-only startups received 12% of the deal flow, but only 1.8% of the deal volume (Fig. 4). In South Africa, 19% of deal flow went to women-only startups (Fig. 5), further highlighting the persistent disparities in funding allocation for female-led businesses.

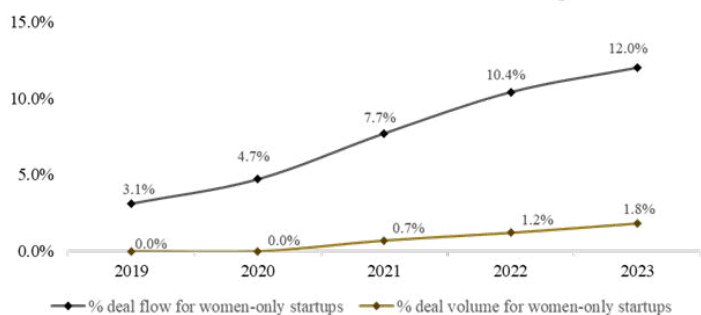
Women share of deal flow and volume in Kenya



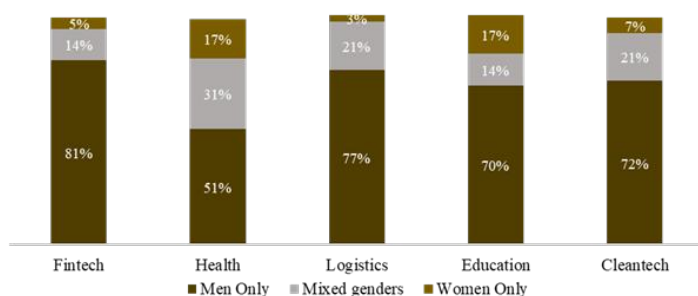
Gender gap by top sectors in Kenya



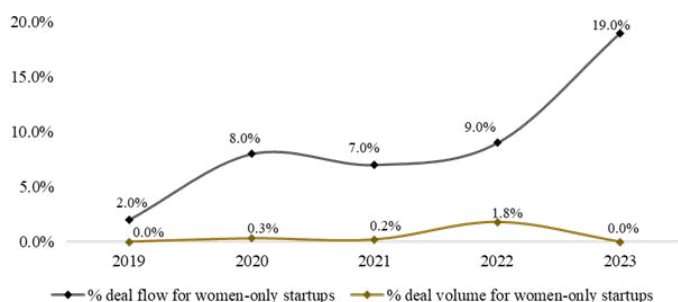
Women share of deal flow and volume in Nigeria



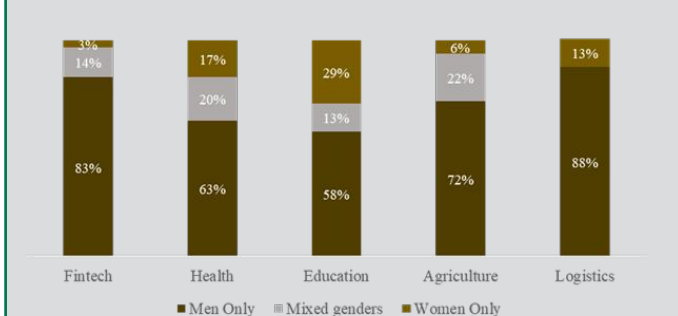
Gender gap by top sectors in Nigeria



Women share of deal flow and volume in South Africa



Gender gap by top sectors in South Africa



In 2024, startups led by female CEOs raised only \$48 million, a fourfold decline from \$201 million in 2023 and the lowest total since 2020. This accounted for just 2% of the \$2.2 billion invested in African startups that year, the smallest share since tracking began in 2019 (Fig. 6). By contrast, startups with male-only founding teams secured \$1.6 billion, while solo male founders raised \$430 million. Even gender-diverse teams raised \$123 million, significantly outpacing female-only teams, which raised only \$21 million, or 1% of the total funding. These figures highlight the ongoing challenges women entrepreneurs face in securing the funding needed to scale their ventures.

Challenges and Opportunities

Beyond financing, women entrepreneurs face challenges with infrastructure, education, and policy constraints. Cultural norms and limited access to education hinder business growth. Female secondary school enrollment remains below 50% in most African regions, limiting opportunities for formal employment and high-growth entrepreneurship.

However, targeted interventions are making a difference—such as the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi). We-Fi has allocated over \$364 million in three funding rounds to programs supporting women's entrepreneurship. The Tony Elumelu Foundation has empowered 20,000 entrepreneurs, creating 400,000 jobs and generating \$2.3 billion in revenue across 54 African countries.

The Future of Women Entrepreneurs in Africa

Women in Africa are important contributors to the continent's economy, adding \$287 billion (a 5% GDP increase) and 23 million jobs. According to UBS, a leading global financial services firm, allowing men and women to contribute equally as entrepreneurs could increase global GDP by 3-6%, adding \$2.5–5 trillion to the world economy.

To fully unlock this potential, stakeholders must:

1

Implement gender-responsive policies to support women-led enterprises.

2

Improve access to financing through targeted funding initiatives.

3

Invest in education and training for women entrepreneurs.

4

Strengthen infrastructure to facilitate business growth.

Women entrepreneurs are a beacon of hope and progress for Africa. Through resilience, innovation, and determination, they are transforming economies, creating jobs, and driving sustainable development. By addressing existing challenges and providing adequate support, Africa can harness the full power of its women entrepreneurs, ensuring a more inclusive and prosperous future.



**Empowering African
businesses with
sustainability intelligence
to build resilient and
impactful businesses.**

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