




## Chapter Seven

# Achieving SDG5 in the Fourth Industrial Revolution through Women's Participation in Politics and Economic Governance in Africa

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### Introduction

The political and economic participation of women is one of the greatest challenges in most African countries (Grosso & Sato, 2017). A wide gap still exists when it comes to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) (UN, 2015), which promotes gender equality (Ojo, 2022). The realisation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is through gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. According to Statistics Times (2025), despite the fact that women make up half of the world's population, the current demographic data shows men exceed women globally in 2025 by a margin of 50.3% to 49.7%. Even though their numbers are almost equal, the participation of women in formal political structures and processes where decisions regarding



the use of societal resources generated by men and women remains insignificant (Bari, 2005). The absence of women in the decision-making processes means that all the decisions on how society uses resources are made largely by men and is a great disadvantage to women (Bari, 2005). The political participation of women is a key concern for democracy (Grosso & Sato, 2017). For a society to be sustainable and thrive in democracy, all citizens must be involved in public debate and decision-making at all levels.

Since the beginning of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in 2011, gender studies have increased discussions centred around the role of women in politics (Kodila-Tedika et al., 2015). The 4IR gives a chance for women to take full charge of political and economic governance to achieve SDG 5. Although there is no universally accepted definition of political participation, broadly speaking, political participation may be regarded as participating in the political process, such as voting and occupying a political post (Kinge & Adepoju, 2014). In most African countries, women are not politically and economically involved, and this has affected their welfare. The participation of women in political and economic activities is critical to fighting gender inequalities and discrimination against women on the African continent. The presence of women at all levels of decision-making is very crucial. Women should be part of the government and help in developing policies that shape the future of women and the girl child. They should also take part in shaping scientific policies on climate issues, as they equally affect women and their health (Grosso & Sato, 2017).

The research objectives look into assessing Africa's readiness to achieve SDG 5 by 2030. It also determines the challenges that hinder women in Africa from being active in the political and economic spheres. And lastly, it proposes effective ways that can be used to push gender equality and non-discrimination agenda in the 4IR era.

## Research Gaps and Questions

African countries have achieved much to fight gender inequality and discrimination against women in the political and economic spheres. However, there have been several structural problems and challenges like poverty, gender-based violence, climate change, and pandemics such as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and malaria that have slowed progress. Slow progress has been noticed in trying to achieve SDG 5 by 2030 (Muswere, 2020). The slow progress in achieving SDG 5 has also affected the achievement of the other SDGs by 2030. This raises the question of whether Africa can achieve the SDGs in the remaining few years. One of the main factors that hinder African women from participating in political, economic, and social spheres is an entrenched patriarchal system dominant on the African continent. The patriarchal system dominates in the socio-cultural African setting. It leads to an imbalance in the social power dynamics where men will always dominate women (Sikweyiya et al., 2020). This hinders the political and economic future of women. The patriarchal system discourages female education and encourages early female marriages, and this destroys the financial inclusion of women in the future (Ojo, 2022). In most African countries, the urge to implement gender-responsive strategies and policies is not there. The Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015) and Agenda 2063 (AU, 2013) are based on inclusive growth and sustainable development but will remain a mere aspiration if the levels of gender inequality remain unchecked.

## Literature Review

### Liberal Feminist Theory

This chapter has adopted a liberal feminist theory. “Liberal Feminism rests on the conception that human nature is individualistic and ensuring equal space for both sexes is the main concern of this framework” (Kumar & Gautam, 2019). Liberal theory is a “feminist theory that believes gender inequality is created by lowering access for women and girls to

civil rights and allocation of social resources such as education, and employment” (Giddens, 2006; Enyew & Mihrete, 2018). The historical development of liberal feminism can be traced back to the Enlightenment period. Liberal feminism is rooted in political thought and philosophy that drives the agenda of women’s emancipation through the notion of equal treatment of men and women. The key tenants of the Liberal feminist theory include equal citizenship, democracy, universal rights, and autonomy (Tong & Botts, 2009). Liberal feminists dismiss and cast aspersions on the inferior treatment of women because of their biological differences to men. They advance the assertion that the key differences based on biology must never be used as a weapon to subjugate women as it is merely a difference in genetic and reproductive makeup. There is no justifiable reason that can be advanced for preventing women from having the same rights as men. Women must enjoy in equal measure the same rights and privileges enjoyed by men in areas such as employment opportunities and education amongst others (Enyew & Mihrete, 2018). “Liberal Feminism is characterised by an individualistic emphasis on equality” (Khattak, 2011). One of the key strengths of liberal feminism is that it does not deny the inherent physical and biological differences between men and women. Its assertion, however, is that women must not be treated as inferior to men. There must be equality in the treatment of men and women (Nienaber & Moraka, 2016).

### **Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5)**

Women’s equality and empowerment is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015). SDG 5 focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (UN, 2015). Women and girls everywhere, must have equal rights and opportunities to live a life free of violence and discrimination. A huge gender gap still exists in Africa and SDG 5 moves towards trying to bridge that gap. While more women have occupied political positions in recent years, including through the use of special quotas, they still hold a mere 23.7% of parliamentary seats, far short of parity (Martinez & Mellado, 2020). In the private sector, the situation is not

much better. Globally women occupy less than a third of senior and middle management positions. In achieving SDG 5, Agenda 2030 promises to remove all barriers that hinder women and children to achieve their full potential. The achievement of all the SDGs depends on the achievement of Goal 5. It is crucial to achieve gender equality in Africa, as it helps in the fight against poverty (Kodila-Tedika et al., 2015). Not only does it help to fight poverty, but it is also fundamental to the development of Africa (Jallah et al., 2021). A gap in gender equality leaves females at a disadvantage and this can be related to the level of illiteracy amongst women in Africa (Ojo, 2022).

### **The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) brought many technological changes that have shifted the workplace and society. It represents a new and powerful industrial wave with an orientation towards digital and virtual technologies and customer service. The 4IR is supported by disruptive technologies which have a profound rapid and radical global economic, political, and social transformation driven, amongst others, by the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), genetic engineering, quantum computing, automation, and 3D printing (Chiweshe, 2019). The 4IR introduced many digital technologies such as robotics, AI, machine learning, and IoT (Schwab, 2017). The 4IR is a revolution that has fundamentally changed the way that people live, work, and relate to one another (Schwab, 2017). Africa has entered into a new unprecedented economic trajectory driven by the 4IR, whose impact and effect are uncertain for everyone but is anticipated to have a significant impact and consequences for women and children (Ndung'u & Signé, 2020). Africa has not yet fully adopted the 21<sup>st</sup> century digital transition. Studies show that it still lags in several indicators essential for a successful digital revolution (Ndung'u & Signé, 2020). Most African countries have enormously adopted digital technologies to boost the political and economic participation of women. The digital financial inclusion of women results in their economic

empowerment and contributes to financial decision-making (Ojo, 2022).

### **African Women in the 4IR**

Technological advances in the 4IR create specific opportunities and improvements in the quality of life of women across Africa (Chiweshe, 2019). It also provides women with opportunities to take part in the political and economic spheres thereby reducing the gender gap that exists. Women can be a powerful instrument of political and economic change in the 4IR. African women have a golden opportunity to relaunch the women's agenda of gender equality in a way that will fast-track social, political, and economic change by making use of the transition into the 4IR. The political and economic transition can secure the kind of social change that would give women a more meaningful life.

The 4IR advances will give women more opportunities such as access to finances through digital financial inclusion, and flexible working conditions that allow them to work from home and contribute positively to economic growth. At the same time, 4IR technologies help to improve the quality of life of women (Chiweshe, 2019). Promoting girls at a younger age to take up science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) will help to create better societies and at the same time prepare women to enter the workforce and increase the overall economic growth. Thus, there is a need to foster a culture of STEM, gender, and sex education at all levels and at the same time encourage an entrepreneurial skills mindset amongst women and young girls (Damilola, 2020).

Women's employment is being placed at risk in the productive sectors. This has been attributed to automation (Damilola, 2020). More women are facing job losses. Most women are employed in low-skill sectors; hence, they are at a higher risk of losing their jobs. This was proved during the COVID-19 pandemic when a higher percentage of women lost their jobs as they did not fall under the critical jobs segment. This provides a chance for women to take an active part in the political and economic structures of society. This ensures

that women are part of decision-makers and make decisions that best favour them and their families. By doing so, issues of gender inequalities will be solved, thereby achieving the 2030 Agenda.

## **Women's Participation in Politics in Africa**

Women are nearly half of the global population, however, their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is more than half as compared to that of men because of their dual roles in the productive sphere (StatisticsTimes/UN, 2024). Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by men and women are made, remains insignificant. Presently, women's representation in legislatures around the world is 15%. SDG 5 on gender equality provides for women's increased and meaningful participation in political decision-making. This global agenda to be achieved by 2030 will remain a dream if Africa does not change its systems, practices, and policies to ensure that more women sit at the political table. In normative theories of democracy, the premise is that women are equal citizens and should, therefore, participate in politics on equal terms with men (Kayuni & Chikadza, 2016). However, in almost every country and locality, there are fewer women in elected positions who are active in the political and economic spheres of governance in Africa.

The historical exclusion of women from the political structures and processes is caused by multiple structural, functional, and personal factors that vary in different social contexts across different countries (Bari, 2005). The nature of politics in a country and liberal democracy determines the participation of women in politics. In some countries, the political sphere is too harsh such that women prefer to stay away and fend for their families. Democracy has for the longest time served men better than women. More women in politics tend to motivate other women thereby increasing the number of women who run for an elective office. In recent times, the perception of women holding public office has improved. The increase in women participating in politics is crucial as they

can use their influence to recruit more women into politics (Sawer, 2000).

## **Women's Participation in Economic Change in Africa**

The participation of women in economic activities is important for their personal development and status in society (Singh, 1987). Women must participate in the labour force of their countries, participate in economic issues on an equal footing with men, and be fully integrated into the system (Staudt, 1986). Engels was one of the first theorists to stress women's integration in the economy. He emphasised that getting resources into women's hands, integrating women in the wage labour force, and securing female rights to enable and empower women for other actions were deemed worthy in themselves (Staudt, 1986). Legal reforms that promote women's economic inclusion are slowly being implemented globally (Loayza & Trumbic, 2020). This also implies the slow progress of societies and the entire world. The unequal economic inclusion of women exposes them during challenging times such as pandemics, shocks, and crises that the world is facing. The COVID-19 pandemic left many women and girls impacted by the economic crisis (Loayza & Trumbic, 2020).

Recently, studies have shown that gender equality is "smart economics" (Revenge & Shetty, 2012). Women have full potential which remains untouched. This is detrimental to society and the world as this leads to lost opportunities for economic growth (Revenge & Shetty, 2012). The economic inclusion of women promotes agricultural productivity, and enterprise development at the micro, small, and medium enterprise levels, as well as enhances business management and returns on investment. A multiplier effect is created when women fully participate in economic activities, as they will reinvest their income into the communities and their families. Women are key to creating peaceful and stable societies and enhancing economic growth. In Africa, these benefits have not been fully recognised and accepted, hence not fully translated

into women's full economic participation. Women have faced many challenges that hinder them from full economic participation. These challenges include a lack of access to property rights, proper networks, mentors, training, finance, technology, and markets (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020).

The projection of an in-depth synopsis of women's political participation and economic governance in Africa is cemented through case analysis of Morocco, Liberia, Malawi and Cameroon. Their geographic segmentation as a representation of different African regions provides a critical lens to understand the various country and regional differentials that depict, influence and shape the participation or marginalisation of women in Africa in politics and economic governance. To understand the different political and economic landscapes in which women in Africa experience, the chapter begins by discussing the political and economic dynamics in Morocco.

### **Women in Morocco's political participation**

There has been a marked increase in women's representation and political participation in Morocco. The growth can be traced back to 2002 through the launch of the first gender quota (Grosso & Sato, 2017). The institutional changes, women's mobilisation, and policy reforms have led to a more politically inclusive environment. In all the efforts to promote the political inclusion of women, challenges remain (Martinez & Mellado, 2020). The Moroccan general elections of 2021 resulted in a significant increase in the participation and representation of women in politics. Women, however, still lag and remain under-represented across various levels of decision-making (Tadlaoui, 2021).

The political participation of women in Morocco is hindered by many challenges. The challenges include patriarchal societal stereotypes, the marriage of underage girls, constraints in accessing education, and limited access to economic resources (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020). All these challenges restrict women's participation and hamper gender equality. Men head the majority of political parties, and this makes it difficult

for women to establish themselves. The political landscape is dominated by men who have a significant influence on electoral laws, and this creates a limiting environment for women's political participation (Grosso & Sato, 2017).

### **Legislative Reforms to Enhance Political and Economic Participation**

Promoting gender equality in Morocco has been strengthened through legislative reforms (Mouline et al., 2022). The reforms undertaken in 2021 focused on increasing women's economic participation by ensuring improved representation at the board level within public companies. Establishing a mandatory quota for women is meant to ensure that by 2024 Morocco has at least 30% female representation at the board level of public enterprises. This threshold is set to increase to 40% by 2027 (Grosso & Sato, 2017). Despite the enactment of legislative reforms, women in Morocco continue to experience discrimination, stigma, and inequalities perpetuated by men. The political, economic, social, and cultural domains are dominated by men and hamper women's participation (Mouline et al., 2022). The systematic exclusion of women reinforces patriarchy and drives women to poverty (Grosso & Sato, 2017). Women's increased participation in politics in Morocco has helped to strengthen the women's emancipation movement. Moroccan women have succeeded in building broad coalitions and networks and forging links with other political and rights-based actors (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015). Secondly, close links have been established with ordinary women, who have familiarised themselves with their concerns. Thirdly, the women's movement has shown great flexibility and agility in responding to changing circumstances and opportunities.

### **Bridging Fundamental Differences for a Bigger Cause**

Women in Morocco are not a homogeneous group. There are many fundamental differences, such as age, religion, marital status, race, culture, and political affiliation, which have

to be bridged for the more significant cause of enhancing participation. The strides made by the Moroccan women's movement include breaking the divide between religious and secular women. This was a significant step in strengthening women's voice within the broader feminist agenda and the strengthening of women's cause within the international community. The ability of Moroccan women to set aside their differences and foster unity for their emancipation is critical in their fight for equality and autonomy.

### **Government Political Support for Reforms to Advance Women's Political and Economic Participation**

The political support and political will demonstrated by King Mohammed VI were instrumental in increasing women's political participation. The adoption of women's quotas was supported and encouraged by the king in the national and local elections of 2002 and 2009 respectively. This assisted in increasing women's participation and representation in politics (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015).

### **Positive Milestones, but Still a Long Way to Go**

The positive milestones that have been achieved in the political and economic domain of women's participation include increased access of girls to education, increased levels of employment for women, improvement in women's health, and a family structure hinged on the nuclear family (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015). The achievement of policy reforms has however been limited in its impact by poor implementation. The resistance to implementing further reforms has the potential effect of reversing the gains that have already been achieved (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015).

Whilst Morocco has made significant gains in ensuring the increased participation of women in politics and economics, it is important to illustrate that Africa is not a homogenous continent. Whilst Morocco is situated in North Africa, Malawi, on the other hand, is situated in Southern Africa. The country

and regional differences may result in different experiences for women. The political and economic participation of women in Malawi can provide new imperatives for the Southern part of Africa.

### **Political participation of women in Malawi**

Malawi is one of the poorest societies not only in the world but also within sub-Saharan Africa (Hyder & Behrman, 2014). Much has to be undertaken to achieve SDG 5 using the 4IR technologies in Malawi. Many women are involved in informal work such as agriculture-related activities, buying, and selling, and the cotton industry. The formal politics in Malawi is dominated by a patriarchal structure (Kayuni & Chikadza, 2016). Critical decisions that impact women's lives are therefore made by men.

Feminist theorists have noted that men cannot fully represent women's issues, as there are areas in women's lives that can only be best articulated by women (Kamlongera, 2008). The involvement of women in state politics is very critical as it enables the attainment of gender balance, which is vital for a healthy democracy and equal access to power and resources for all. Malawi attained its independence in 1964. Since attaining independence, women in Malawi have been significantly excluded from participating in politics. The democratic framework of Malawi has not afforded women equal representation in various spheres of government (Kamlongera, 2008). Women in Malawi have been socialised into the idea of voting for mainly male political candidates (Ott & Kanyongolo, 2009). The political participation of women in Malawi in key areas of wielding political power is very limited. The majority of Malawian women are always present at political rallies, thus showing their interest in politics. Despite being the majority and showing political interest, their participation still lags compared to that of men (Kamlongera, 2008). The traditional gender roles ascribed to women in Malawian society reflect their low political participation.

Women are regarded as followers and not leaders. Furthermore, women in politics are not seen as politicians, but as someone who has moved away from the societal norm of womanhood (Barnes & Burchard, 2013). Patriarchy negatively affects the progress of gender equality in Malawi. This has resulted in few women contesting to become president of the nation. There has also been a societal view that Malawi as a nation must not be ruled by a woman president and the nation itself is not ready for women leaders (Gabay, 2014).

### **Legislative Reforms**

The Malawi government has taken strides to fight gender discrimination through different legislative reforms. The 1994 Constitution of Malawi prohibits discrimination in any form. Section 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi provides for equal and effective protection of all persons against discrimination on different grounds, including gender. Section 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi also establishes the principle that the state should promote the welfare and development of all people of Malawi by progressively adopting and implementing policies and legislation aimed at achieving gender equality and the full participation of women in all spheres of Malawian society (Constituteproject.org, 1994).

The low participation of women in Malawian in politics has been attributed to a wide range of factors that include social, economic, and legal factors that range from the social, economic, and legal (Ott & Kanyongolo, 2009). The failure to institute legal reforms also contributes to the low numbers of women participating in politics. It has been noted that the current electoral laws in Malawi have not contributed much to empowering women in the political landscape. The principles of equality and non-discrimination have not been consistently applied to the electoral laws of Malawi. To achieve meaningful participation of women in politics, there is a need to legally empower women by putting in place laws that promote gender equality and, in some instances, affirmative action. Legal empowerment refers to the “*use of the law as a tool to empower the poor and marginalised*” (UN, 2009). It is a process

of systematic change through which the poor and excluded are enabled to use the law, the legal system, and legal services to protect and advance their rights and interests (Naresh, 2008). The enhancement of electoral laws in areas such as candidate nomination, vote counting, polling station management, determination, and announcement of results has the positive effect of improving women's political participation if properly implemented (UN, 2009). It is therefore essential to evaluate the law as it creates the foundation for citizens' participation (including women's participation) in politics (Hyder & Behrman, 2014).

### **Affirmative Action in Malawi**

Affirmative action is crucial for the meaningful political participation of women. It provides space for increasing the representation of women in politics. In countries such as South Africa and Uganda, a variety of affirmative action measures, such as reserving seats for women in parliament, have been put in place (Goetz, 1998). In these two countries, the participation and representation of women in politics have increased (Goetz, 1998). Section 20 (2) and Section 24 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, 1994, states that legislation may be passed that addresses inequalities in society, including gender inequalities.

### **Malawi's Women's Economic Participation**

The main agenda in Malawi is the promotion of gender equality. Throughout all the economic structures, gender gaps persist, and this is slowing down the progress of SDG 5. Malawi is lagging across several indicators related to women's economic opportunities. The country, however, has one of the highest labour force participation rates. The largest employment sector in Malawi is the agricultural sector (Spring, 2019). 59% of women are employed in that sector, but there are still large gender productivity gaps (World Bank, 2021a). The gender productivity gaps are caused by women having challenges in terms of accessing resources which include labour, technology,

and inputs such as seeds and fertilisers (Rodgers & Akram-Lodhi, 2019; Fisher & Kandiwa, 2014). Men in the agricultural sector attain higher yields than women.

Morocco and Malawi provide similar and different experiences in relation to women's political participation and economic governance. The critical insight provided by the data depicts that despite key differentials, Africa has made significant strides in widening the political and economic spectrum for women's participation. Liberia provides an important lens because of the economic and political challenges that it has faced, driven by protracted civil wars which resulted in political unrest and instability.

### **Political Participation of Women in Liberia**

Liberian women are regarded as the weaker gender (Jallah et al., 2021). Most women born between the 1900s and 2001 have a mindset that women are of lesser need in collective societal activities. This idea has fledged fully into a stereotypical concept in the minds of females, thus leaving a huge gap in the confidence for an equal sense of participation in the political processes of their constituencies. The Liberian legislature is made up of less than 10% of women (UNDP, 2021). This shows the under-representation of women in government structures and processes. This has been a growing concern for electoral stakeholders and international partners in the country. Equal political participation by women is key to sustaining peace and national development. Victimisation and violence against women are still persistent in Liberia. This poses a challenge for women to participate fully in politics (Liu, 2022).

The exclusion of women in politics and governance is a result of a lack of adequate finances, cultural backgrounds, the type of political class systems, access to education, job opportunities, and the level of socio-economic development (UNDP, 2021). This exclusion of women makes it difficult to establish the core values of a democratic society. Women are excluded from occupying key positions in important decision-making bodies. This obstructs economic development and

discourages the attainment of gender equality in societies (Mvukiyehe, 2018). A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed in 2017 between the National Elections Commission (NEC) and nineteen political parties. The MOU supports a 30% gender quota and contains five pillars with specific actions to be implemented by political parties towards achieving the 30% benchmark set by the National Elections Commission (Gharib, 2022).

### **Women in Liberia's Economic Participation**

Liberia is amongst the poorest African states despite its abundant wealth and favourable geographic location (World Bank, 2021b). Low literacy rates in local constituencies and having more remote places than urban areas for men and women can be linked to the current state of the country's economy. Women are under-represented compared to men (Jallah et al., 2021). In Liberia, 74% of all the female workers are informal labourers. These women face a myriad of challenges ranging from difficulties in accessing credit and banking facilities, lack of proper social protection mechanisms, limited financial literacy, and business training.

The Ebola pandemic resulted in a health and economic crisis for Liberia (World Bank, 2021b). The economic and health situation in Liberia was further worsened by the outbreak of COVID-19. On 16 March 2020, Liberia announced its first COVID-19 case (Nyiauwung et al., 2022). This resulted in the introduction of specific measures to mitigate the spread of the virus. These measures included social distancing and the closure of schools, churches and businesses (International Monetary Fund, 2021). The gender disparities that exist in Liberia resulted in women suffering major economic losses that were caused by job losses. The majority of women were employed in the hardest-hit sectors such as trading, small-scale fisheries sector, and services (Geist et al., 2020). Women traders and those in fisheries experienced severe economic effects caused by the COVID-19 restrictions on the movement of customers (Campbell et al., 2021). Their fish trading suffered because of a lack of customers, resulting in rotten stock (Nyiauwung et al.,

2022). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic severely hampered the operations of women's businesses, which curtailed their livelihoods and decreased their income (DFID, 2001).

Liberia provides a context in which the country has abundant resources but the marginalisation of women in political and economic participation persists. There is an opportunity for Liberia to learn and adopt some mechanisms from Morocco and Malawi that have led to increased women's participation. Cameroon is situated in central Africa and provides further insight into the challenges and opportunities being experienced by African women in the quest for political and economic emancipation.

### **Women in Cameroon's Political and Economic Participation**

Women constitute 52% of the population in Cameroon (Fonjong, 2001). They have a significant role to fulfil in the development of society. The major problem that women face in Cameroon is that they function as subordinates, not managers or leaders. This is the state of affairs in traditional and state institutions. The empowerment of women in Cameroon is a national issue of concern. State and international efforts at mainstreaming women in development have produced mixed results. There is a low representation of women in politics, and discrimination against women is still persistent in custom. Politics continues to be considered a man's domain. Women face various barriers limiting their participation as voters and candidates, even though they represent 52% of the population. Many women do not have a voter's card, and if they do, sometimes they are instructed by their husbands on how to vote and can face reprisals and violence from their spouses for voting according to their conscience. In social and economic matters, wages remain unequal between men and women, especially in the private sector. The recruitment process is discriminatory against women. The majority of women work in agriculture and informal sectors. Employment opportunities for women are limited, and this affects their economic and negotiation

power. This hinders the exercising of other rights, including participation in political life (Kinge, 2016).

## Comparative Insights of Political and Economic Participation of Women in Africa:

**Table 1:** Female Political Leaders as of 2024

Country	Total Number of Male and Women Political Leaders	No of Women Political Leaders	% of Women Political Leaders
Morocco	19	5	26.3
Cameroon	34	5	14.7
Malawi	21	8	38.1
Liberia	17	5	29.4

Source: *United Nations Women: Women Political Leaders (2024)*

The table shows the total number of political leaders in the four countries and the number and percentage of women in those political leadership positions. As illustrated in the table, the number of women in positions of political power as of 2024 remains low across all countries discussed in this chapter despite commitments to increase the number of women in political positions. According to the 2024 Afro barometer (International IDEA, 2024) women’s political participation in Africa increased by 1% from 2021 to 2024. The Afro barometer further notes that it will take African countries up to 2100 to reach equal political participation for women. At the national and local levels, most African countries, such as Morocco, have come up with a quota system to promote more women to take up political leadership positions.

These quotas, however, have not been effective as there is a lack of political will to implement them. Furthermore, patriarchy is still the dominant barrier to the political participation of women in Africa and the countries discussed in this chapter. Women fail to break through into political spaces because society expects them to be confined to be the wife

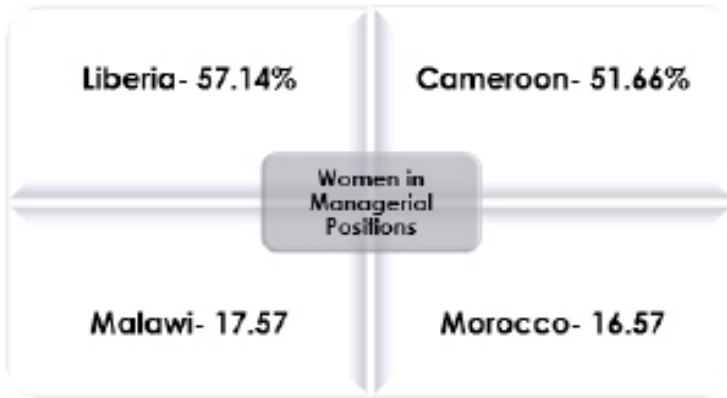
and perform motherly duties. This therefore poses challenges for the majority of women when they are trying to juggle between household responsibilities and work, which becomes an obstacle for them to break through to political leadership positions. The majority of African beliefs and attitudes on the political participation of women in politics often discourages women. Women are not allowed to take up leadership positions, as the positions are regarded as male positions. When women want to take part in politics they are often abused and fail to break through the male dominated landscape. Women also lack resources to support their political desires. They do not have the financial resources that allow them to campaign and they do not have support from government institutions, which hampers their progress. The media is also not fair to female political candidates. Social media specifically causes more problems than solutions for female political leaders. Female political leaders often encounter online gender-based violence which is now a new problem that is being experienced by women in politics and no help seems to be available for them.

The table shows that the total number of political leaders in Morocco is 19; female political leaders is 5 and the percentage of women in political leadership is 26.3%. These figures show that in Morocco, women occupy over a quarter of the political leadership positions. Strides have been made in Morocco to have more women's inclusion in politics though they are still the minority compared to men. Morocco is a North African country that has a blend of Islamic traditions and the reforms are progressive. The country has cultural and institutional challenges that hinder women's political participation. In Cameroon, female political leaders comprise 14.7% of the population. This shows that gender equality in politics in the country is not prioritised compared to other African countries. The major barriers to women's political participation in Cameroon are cultural barriers exacerbated by political instability. The figures in Table 1 show that Malawi has 38.1% of women's political participation. This high percentage (as compared to the other countries in this chapter) of women's political participation can be attributed to the fact that in the

history of politics in Malawi, a female president was appointed from 2012 to 2014.

The appointment of Joyce Banda was necessitated by the country's political stability making Malawi a pioneer in promoting the participation of women in the political sphere. Liberia has the highest percentage of female political leaders. After the conflicts that occurred in Liberia in the period of 2002 to 2009, as part of the peace-building efforts, more women were given leadership opportunities. The post-conflict rebuilding efforts supported the inclusion of women in politics and their appointment to political decision-making positions. Furthermore, the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the first elected female head of state gave room for more women to be included in politics and be accepted as political leaders.

Figure 1 shows the figures of women in managerial positions in the countries discussed in this chapter. These managerial positions depict the number of women who participate economically in these countries. The figures in Figure 1 show that when it comes to the economic participation of women, Liberia has the highest number of women in managerial positions. The high percentage of women in managerial positions in Liberia can be attributed to various factors such as the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President. This gave women increased opportunities for their participation in the economy. Liberia also has gender equality policies that focus on empowering women in economic spaces through their participation in business and leadership. In Cameroon, the percentage of women in managerial positions is 51.66%. This high percentage is attributed to the fact that the country has instituted reforms that promote gender equality. This has seen the rise of more women in managerial positions. Malawi has 17.57% of women in managerial positions. This low percentage is attributed to the fact that the country remains a patriarchal society. Women in Malawi are limited by traditional gender roles that prohibit them from taking up decision-making positions. The majority of women in Malawi are not educated, and therefore, they cannot take up managerial positions.



**Figure 1:** Women in Managerial Positions 2024. Source: Author's conceptualisation

## Methodology

This chapter uses a systematic literature review. The reviewed literature was from reports, scholarly journals, and conference proceedings on women's political and economic participation in Africa. These were derived from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, EBSCOhost, and Elsevier.

## Findings and Discussions

The continent of Africa is saddled with a small number of women holding key positions in political party structures. Only 12% of women hold top-party leadership positions. Women are still largely excluded from political and economic participation (IDEA, 2021). There is still much work that needs to be done to bridge existing gender inequalities to achieve SDG 5 by 2030.

## Access to Resources

The political participation of women in all the countries under chapter is hindered by a lack of finances. There is a great disparity in access to resources between male and female politicians. Male politicians have better access to resources

which bolsters their campaigns and makes it easier to participate in the political space as compared to women. The political participation of women and the hampering of their aspirations in Africa is dampened by limited access to resources. The difficulties that women experience in accessing resources discourage them from taking active participation in politics (IDEA: 2021). Women need to take advantage of the 4IR digital technologies such as social media platforms, to engage with the masses, campaign and discuss women's issues. Digital financial inclusion is also a way for women to participate in the economic change in their countries. The 4IR technologies can be used by women to make decisions about economic activities in society.

The digital challenges faced by women in Cameroon are illustrated in the National Gender Policy Document of 2011-2020 and the Digital Vision of 2020. Barriers faced by women encompass limited financial access, digital illiteracy, language, and family commitments (IMF, 2020). The increased participation of women in the political and economic space is enhanced by their digital empowerment. The major impediment that has slowed the digital empowerment of women is the lack of political will to avail sufficient resources for this venture. In Cameroon, the problem of misappropriation of funds meant to digitally empower women through digital literacy programmes and championing women's and girls' STEM programmes has been of considerable concern (Nsaidzedze: 2020). There is considerable evidence that women's participation in politics increases through their digital empowerment. South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana have witnessed increased women's participation in politics through digital empowerment (Nsaidzedze, 2020).

### **Adoption of Quotas and Political Will**

The participation of African women in politics and economic governance is enhanced through the adoption of quotas and political will. The legislation of quotas is important, as it creates a binding system that is important for implementation (IDEA, 2021). The promotion of legislation without a political will is problematic and will not guarantee success. Countries that have

voluntarily embraced a quota system for women's political and economic participation have been seen to be more successful in embracing and implementing quotas when compared to those that have been forced to do so because of a legislated position. This phenomenon illustrates the importance of political will as a key imperative to realise enhanced women's participation (IDEA, 2021).

### **Women's Participation Crucial for Women's Empowerment and Development**

The increased participation of women in politics and economic spheres is important, as it improves their well-being. As women participate and occupy key positions, they can influence decisions. There is evidence that when women occupy key positions in politics and economics, they can work for the development of all, thus overcoming the blurred lines of political affiliation. The societal problems that have been faced by women over a prolonged period, such as gender-based violence, electoral reform constraints, gender equality, and childcare can be rigorously confronted through enhanced women's participation (Sahu & Yadav, 2018).

### **Recommendations**

#### **Enhanced Political will from male elite political leaders**

Men dominate the African political domain structure. The men in political leadership positions become political elites. Their stance towards the support and promotion of women's leadership ascent is vital. The development of winning their support may not be easy as they seek to maintain the status quo. There is a general belief amongst the male political elite that it is very difficult for women to win elections. There is, therefore, a need to develop innovative ways to win their political support for championing gender equality (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

### **Promotion and redesign of quota systems**

The adoption of the quota system by some African countries has led to an improvement in women's political and economic participation in the 4IR dispensation. The importance of quotas is that they create a system that gives impetus to political leaders to fill the relevant quotas with women candidates. The proper design and implementation of the quota system are important. The effect of poorly designed quotas provides an avenue for the circumvention and undermining of the participation of women (Krook & Zetterberg, 2014; O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

### **Investment in digital resources for women**

There is a need for increased access to digital technologies for women and the girl children. The employment and safeguarding of jobs for women in the 4IR environment are enhanced through digital literacy and empowerment. Women's activism and advocacy, which help to cement their collective power and fight gender-based violence, marginalisation, oppression, and stereotypes are enhanced and strengthened through digital mobilisation. The impediment to the large-scale promotion of the digital empowerment of women is constrained by structural, political, social, and economic hurdles that are discriminatory and stifle the mass release of resources for women's digitalisation programmes. The failure to address the gender digital imbalance has the propensity to increase gender inequality (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

### **Collaboration, unity, and exemplary leadership.**

SDG 5 can be achieved through a collaborative and unified effort from women. Women need to overcome differences that range from religion, educational level, culture, age, and marital status amongst others, and unite to confront challenges hindering participation. This can be achieved by women developing systems and approaches that enhance collaboration (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

More research should focus on women's political and economic participation in rural areas. This is a group that does

not have enough representation and advocacy. We would like to further our research on the political and economic participation of disabled women in Africa. Nothing much has been said about the digital financial inclusion of disabled women and women living with albinism. An exploration of the digital literacy of women in Africa and its impact on women's empowerment is an area for further research.

## **Conclusion**

The attainment of SDG 5 on gender equality within the domain of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) presents opportunities and challenges for Africa. There is a need for the continent to take advantage of the 4IR by cementing opportunities and addressing challenges to ensure maximum benefit. The success of the 4IR in Africa is enhanced by the active participation of women in the political and economic spheres. The changing dynamics in the political and economic trajectory of Africa, driven by transformation, innovation and empowered decision-making places women at the centre of effective governance. The involvement of women is critical in promoting gender equality and enhancing political and economic inclusivity. It is also crucial to note that the reshaping of industries and the labour market by the 4IR requires women to participate in order to drive equitable growth and social progress. Governments, civil society and the private sector have a role to play in creating an enabling environment for women to have access to education, resources and leadership opportunities.

The development and promotion of policies that are gender-responsive will ensure that women across Africa contribute meaningfully to economic governance and benefit from the opportunities that are presented by technological advancements. Finally, the achievement of SDG 5 in the context of the 4IR demands the collective action of all. It stands as a collective responsibility of governments, civil society organisations and the private sector to push towards the achievement of SDG 5 in the 4IR era and the implementation systemic change. The 4IR has provided a new trajectory and impetus to redefine the critical political and economic role

of African women as key role players. The dismantling of patriarchy and cultural hinderances that hamper women's participation in politics and economics need to be dismantled. The potential for Africa's political strengthening and economic development is immense with the full participation and embracement of women. The active participation of women in politics and economic governance is important as Africa seeks to successfully navigate the complexities of the 4IR. The amplification of the voice of the African woman is paramount in a changing continental political and economic discourse.

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