




Chapter 23

African Union at 20: Gender Relations in Africa and Agenda 2063

Dorcas Ettang 

Durban University of Technology, South Africa 
dorcasett@dut.ac.za

Introduction

Celebrating its 20th year, the African Union (AU) has made significant strides in improving gender relations and addressing gender gaps in its various policies and structures. These efforts are evident in its Gender Parity Project, Gender Policy, Agenda 2063, and Ten-Year Implementation Plan, and continental reports on the implementation of Agenda 2063. Agenda 2063 comprehensively presents the various dimensions of Africa's political, socio-economic, and security landscapes and situates gender within it through its various provisions and implementation plans. Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 clarifies the position of the AU and its member states on gender equality, with its primary goal of achieving “full gender equality in all spheres of life” by prioritising women's and girls' empowerment and preventing discrimination and violence against them (AU 2015a). Its Ten-Year Implementation Plan, published in 2015, notes the transformational goal of reducing violence against women by a third and normalising gender parity by 2023 in all its organs and regional economic communities (RECs). The union's review of national and RECs' strategic plans identified gender and women's development as a priority area (AU 2015b).

There is a general acknowledgement by the AU, RECs, and member states that gender is a fundamental human right central to economic growth, regional integration, and social development. This is essential in understanding how rights favour



men and not women. The African Union Gender Parity Project 2025 holds that gender is a “socially and culturally constructed difference between men and women, boys and girls, which gives them unequal value, opportunities, and life chances (AU 2020)”. The reflections of the meaning of equality or inequality between men and women then come into question. Some argue that gender equality connotes that women must be treated like men, while others argue that a recognition of the different situations men and women face must be considered; for example, giving equal job access to men and women is impossible, since women are often responsible for childcare as well (Oluwole 1997). The discourse on gender inequality is evident in the disparities that shape how men and women are perceived and included in various spaces. For example, entrenched “inequalities in childcare and household work still restrict opportunities for women and impact career possibilities and working patterns” (Hicks 2010). Drawing from the case of South Africa, while income earning has increased between men and women, there are still considerable gaps in types of employment between them; thus, women find themselves working in part-time positions or the informal sector (Hicks 2010).

The importance of gender cannot be understated, as it examines men’s and women’s roles in society and how these are understood and applied in communities, institutions, and governments. This is important because of the female demographics on the continent and their contributions to the continent. According to World Bank (WB) 2021 data, Sub-Saharan Africa is home to an estimated 1.18 billion people, with the female population constituting about half of that, sitting at 50.2%. Some countries with over 50% female population include Rwanda (51.1%), Botswana (50.6%), Malawi (51.4%), Namibia (51.7%), and Zimbabwe (52.8%), with countries like Equatorial Guinea sitting at the lower end, with 47.2% (WB 2021). With these estimated statistics, women significantly contribute to the continent’s human population and capacity.

They are not a homogenous group, as they represent various social, economic, and educational backgrounds. Beyond their demographics and diversities, women have played critical

roles in the continent's liberation movements and contributed to the emancipation of the continent. For example, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti used her status to spearhead and drive resistance efforts against colonialism in Nigeria. Bibi Titi Mohammed was also considered a freedom fighter leading the women's wing of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) in their struggle for Tanzania's independence and sovereignty (Asiedu 2019). Women have contributed as political theorists shaping political security, economic, health, and governance discourses, and others have become activists in driving political change and transformation in Africa's communities and societies.

Women in Africa have been involved in protests and movements that promote their rights and those of everyone in society, including men. For example, in Nigeria's political history, many pressure groups organised by women in Yoruba society (the western part of the country) became human rights organisations promoting democratic principles for both men and women (Oluwole 1997). Ekeh (1992) identifies traditional women's movements as one of the four core civil society organisations (CSOs) that emerged in postcolonial Africa. Women's movements rose significantly in the 1990s as with other civil society movements, including churches, trade unions, ethnic-based groups, and youth movements, contributing to African society's development and the political landscape's expansion (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Chambati 2013).

Against this backdrop, this chapter is constructed on the main argument that the need for women's inclusion in all facets of the African polity is integral to the success and the securing of the future of the AU, RECs, its member states, and the many communities across the continent. Within the context of the last 20 years, this chapter examines some of the conceptual debates regarding gender relations and gender equality on the continent, and the implications of this in achieving Agenda 2063. It also explores some of the more practical implications and policy challenges in achieving gender equality within Africa's political, socio-economic, and security contexts required to achieve the goals outlined in Agenda 2063.

This chapter is divided into five parts. After the introduction, the second section explores gender, Pan-Africanism, and decoloniality as critical lenses for understanding gender relations in Africa. It does this to provide the history and context of how gender equality and gender relations have played out in Africa. The third section presents an argument for gender equality, considering recent developments around the COVID-19 pandemic. Section four interrogates gender relations and gender equality with 2063 in view, and proffers some ideas on achieving that as the continent advances toward its goals. Finally, it reflects on women as a central component of the African agency and what this means in a gender-inclusive, decolonial, Pan-African continent. In conclusion, some critical arguments are summarised.

Gender, Pan-Africanism, and Decoloniality

The intersections between gender, Pan-Africanism, and decoloniality provide an understanding of the gender dynamics and relations on the continent and how these have been foregrounded in Africa's colonial and postcolonial experiences. The current state of gender relations on the continent is, therefore, a consequence of the colonial experience and is reflective of the current global system, which has filtered into the postcolonial state in Africa (Nkenkana 2015; Ekeh, 1975; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Chambati 2013). While African countries have gained their independence, the colonial-designed power structures remain. Building on the work of Maldonado-Torres (2007), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012) captures the term coloniality as "an invisible power structure that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of direct colonialism". In other works, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati (2013) describe the coloniality of power as how the West has dominated and exploited the non-Western world in four broad areas: resources and economies, political and traditional authority, gender and sexuality, and African epistemologies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Chambati 2013). Citing GC Spivak's work, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati (2013) present the idea of a "global gender hierarchy

that privileges males over females and Western patriarchy over other forms of gender relations”.

Coloniality has, therefore, shaped and constructed how gender roles are perceived, idealised, and normalised in Africa. Nkenkana (2015) aptly points out that the coloniality of gender digs deeply into women’s liberation from various forms of oppression. These forms of oppression were reflected in Africa’s colonial experience, where women were subjugated and discriminated against. These ranged from the kidnapping and raping of women to horrific experiences that marred their human dignity and constrained their freedoms. Korieh (2001) outlines the conditions in Nigeria and other parts of Africa where the colonialists “discriminated between men and women and made the former the primary target of local development policy”. The colonial systems emerged by establishing institutions based on European ideas of gender, which constrained and went against Africa’s pre-colonial agricultural systems and women’s vital roles (Korieh 2001). The critical role of women in Africa’s pre-colonial societies supports the perspective of Sudarkasa (1986) that a “neutral complementarity, rather than a superordination/subordination, more accurately describes the relationship between certain female and male roles in various precolonial African societies.”

Gender-inclusive forms of Pan-Africanism emerged historically in the United States within Pan-African and Black nationalist movements and with the remarkable role of key political actors like Thomas Garvey, Audley Moore, and Dara Abubakari (Farmer 2016). These individuals solidified the idea of Pan-Africanism through a gendered lens. For example, both Moore and Abubakari persistently recommended “gender-conscious interpretations of Pan-African organising” and were “progenitors of late twentieth-century Black Power and Pan-African thought” (Farmer 2016:286). This idea of gendered Pan-Africanism opposes Western ideas, traditions, and values like patriarchy and establishes and argues for the role of women while disproving racism. (Farmer 2016).

Furthermore, it involves questioning frameworks that promote masculinity and the idea of a “male, global, political

black subject” (Farmer 2016:290). Citing UY Taylor,¹ Farmer (2016:287) points out that the “gender-inclusive model of community Pan-Africanism” was developed to call for “reparations, black nation building, and African liberation while expanding women’s political roles and options”. This requires a shift from defining Pan-Africanism through a masculinist frame, as in early 20th-century society and organisations (Leeds 2013). This involves being conscious of gender dimensions and dynamics when interpreting various policies, programmes, and institutions, and ensuring that the women and men leading these processes are gender-conscious. This is important because men are equally essential players in building a gender-inclusive Pan-African society.

A gender-inclusive Pan-African decolonial lens requires a total shift and independence from colonial Africa, characterised by the subjugation of the African² but also of African women through slavery and other cruel forms. Furthermore, it requires a systemic transformation from the postcolonial state, which continues to subjugate and discriminate against women in many ways, to one that fully emancipates women from the systems which historically and currently sideline, inferiorise, and oppress them. In doing so, Nkenkana (2015) argues for the decolonial feminist ideas of Thomas Sankara that “women’s liberation struggle should not be reduced to efforts of incorporation of women within the patriarchal, colonial, and imperial modern systems women seek to reject”. Decoloniality becomes more relevant in understanding the shift away from colonial structures described as “racial, patriarchal and hegemonic” (Grosfoguel 2007).

1 For more information, see Taylor, U.Y. (2002). *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

2 While colonialism had its effects on women mainly, it had an impact on men as well. Korieh (2001:117) points out that “as a systematic exploitation of colonised peoples, colonialism affected both men and women. But as a gendered process, it affected men and women in both similar and dissimilar ways”. She also notes that colonialism created inequality for both men and women, as only a few local and political elite benefited in positions created by the colonial entities (Korieh 2001).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni presents decoloniality as “the deepening and widening of decolonization movements in those spaces that experienced the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neocolonialism, and underdevelopment” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). Nkenkana (2015) relates to decolonising gender as a necessity, citing Maldonado-Torres who writes that decoloniality is a “family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as the fundamental problem in the current modern age” (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Decoloniality means freedom from the structures that promote and strengthen patriarchy, as well as dominate, exploit, and exclude women. Decoloniality then usurps these structures and endorses a gender-conscious Pan-Africanism when trying to ground and situate women to men.

Essentially, gender, decoloniality, and Pan-Africanism are a fight against patriarchy, capitalism, and hegemonism. Ensuring a gender-inclusive, decolonial, Pan-African society is also about capitalising on the capacities of local communities. Africa’s pre-colonial societies showcase the hierarchy and involvement of women and the value they bring. Africa’s story, then, is one where men and women contribute to society, power structures are not patriarchal, and structures that subjugate women are transformed. It is crucial that the continent is not restricted or constrained by coloniality, but that new ways of being and thinking continue to be adopted where women are included. This aptly captures the African context.

The Argument for Gender Equality

As discussed in the previous section, history has shaped the views and ideas of women and their role and place in society. Oluwole notes that men, theologians, and philosophers have justified why females are physically and intellectually inferior to the male species from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance (Oluwole 1997). These views birthed sexism as the lens through which social organisation was seen in Western culture and society. In reflecting on gender equality in the context of Agenda 2063, the following hard facts need to be re-emphasised:

Firstly, the examples and gains of gender equality have been embedded in Africa's history. A historical examination of African society and cultures depicts women's inclusion and importance. In her review of proverbs and language from the Yoruba³ culture, Oluwole (1997) notes that motherhood is more highly regarded than fatherhood, matrilineal relationships are more substantial and more profound than patrilineal ones, and males and females are regarded as partners and that society must recognise both of them. Furthermore, historians, ethnologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and other students of Yoruba culture attest that Yoruba women play critical roles in the political and economic life of traditional society, with accounts of women holding very prominent roles as chiefs and rulers (Oluwole 1997). For example, in the old Ibadan Kingdom, the position *iyalode* was created in the 1950s, giving holders of this title significant involvement in traditional governance, and they possessed similar qualities to their male counterparts, called *baale* (Famulusi 2012). The "*iyalode*" was described as "a chief to whom all the women's palavers are brought before they are taken to the king. She is, in fact, a sort of queen, a person of much influence and looked up to with much respect" (Falola 1984:108-109).

Women in Yoruba culture contribute significantly to trade and economic life, which include owning property, engaging in multiple businesses and trades, and practising multiple occupations (Oluwole 1997). Sudarkasa (1986) maintains that, in pre-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa, "women were conspicuous in high places", sitting as members of the royal family, holding key official positions, performing roles as occasional warriors, and, in one case, as a supreme monarch wielding significant influence. This also was the case in farming, trade, and craft production (Sudarkasa 1986). Korieh (2001) asserts that in the culture, women were complementary and not inferior to men. From the above, it can be inferred that the achievement of Agenda 2063 cannot be a reality if gender exclusion continues to persist.

Women are central to achieving its critical goals at every stage. This will require their representation and full participation

3 The Yoruba language is spoken in countries like Nigeria, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Sierra Leone.

in designing and implementing relevant policies, developing appropriate programmes, building relevant institutions, and monitoring, evaluating, and assessing these. Their track records on the continent speak for themselves. As an example, former president Joyce Banda of Malawi's successes are noteworthy: from introducing various austerity measures to organising a national dialogue to develop a national economic recovery plan for Malawi, which identified key sectors like agriculture, mining, and energy and three key priority projects in each sector (Njoku 2013).

Furthermore, former president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia successfully maintained peace and embraced inclusivity, appointing women in leadership positions like the finance and justice ministers and the chief of police (Hunt 2007). She ensured that the youth held key roles in various ministries, including foreign affairs, finance, transport, and commerce (Ettang 2014). Both women, before stepping into power, had impressive accomplishments and roles at national and international levels, thus bringing significant expertise and knowledge.⁴ Asuako (2020) notes that evidence shows that, the more women are involved in decisionmaking at the private and public levels, the higher the effectiveness and accountability in a country's public sector.

Secondly, gender inequality is most visible and felt during emergencies and economic problems on the continent. This is the case with climate-related threats like floods, food insecurity, and high food prices due to global warming and economic instability. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights glaring gender inequality during challenging times on the continent. For example, there were reports of disruptions in health services in reproductive, sexual, maternal, child, newborn, and adolescent health in 40% of African countries due to COVID-19 (WHO 2022). These disruptions remained for two years after the pandemic (WHO 2022). The pandemic hit women harder on the continent as 74% of them were engaged in the informal sector as domestic workers and street vendors, in the hospitality, service, and tourism industries,

4 See Ettang, D. (2014) "Female Presidents in Africa: New Norms in Leadership or Reflection of Current Practice". In Jallow, B. (ed.) *Leadership in Postcolonial Africa: Trends Transformed by Independence*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

and subsistence farming and informal cross-border trade – all of which were restricted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Violence against women increased at the onset of the pandemic in Africa, with an estimated 15 million additional cases for every three months of lockdown (UNFPA 2020). While the COVID-19 pandemic was devastating for the continent due to the loss of lives and the impacts on communities, women were disproportionately affected, as it threatened to reverse the progress made in achieving gender quality and upholding women’s rights.⁵

From the above, post-pandemic recovery efforts that target women are essential. Gender-sensitive approaches that can build the resilience of women and better prepare them before and during pandemics are still required. The continental, sub-regional, national, and local efforts to combat the pandemic and other large-scale emergencies cannot be successful if gender inequality persists. In line with this, the threats on the continent, like food insecurity, climate change, the effects of COVID-19, sexual and gender-based violence, displacement, and inter-communal violence, cannot be resolved if there are limited efforts in place to assist women who have been disadvantaged and excluded for lengthy periods. The understanding is that the gains made on the continent could have been more advanced if the embedded institutions, systems, and mindsets that exclude women were transformed to the point where the issues that predominantly affect women and girls are not considered *ad hoc* or an add-on in some instances. Thus, ensuring gender equality should be the starting point in policymaking and implementation, community-based action, budgeting, resource allocation, governance structures, infrastructural development, and

5 See “African Union Commission – Women, Gender and Development Directorate” (AUC-WGDD); United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (2020). “Gender-Based Violence in Africa During the COVID-19 Pandemic”. https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Africa/Attachments/Publications/2021/Policy%20Paper-%20GBV%20in%20Africa%20during%20COVID-19%20pandemic_EN%2018%20Feb_compressed.pdf.

capacity development. All these are very important for improved preparedness during emergencies.

Thirdly, the advances made by the AU present a strong argument for gender equality as the regional institution continues to prioritise this. Some of the efforts in achieving the inclusion of women within the AU are noteworthy. Its staff regulations and rules give priority to less-represented genders who hold equal qualifications. The AU insists on the inclusion of the Women's Gender and Development Directorate in the Joint Advisory Committee on Administrative Policies and of the Appointment, Promotion and Recruitment Board (APROB). Its ethics office, inclusive of its female employees, expedites investigation into cases involving sexual harassment, abuse of power, nepotism and insubordination, and it has "[neutralised] gender-based language in job advertisements including a statement on gender equality and a pledge to gender equality in all job descriptions" (AU 2020).

The argument for gender equality remains very important, as evidenced by the discussions above. Essentially, gender equality calls for more than just blending women's issues into the mainstream, but a complete change of structures that contribute to gender inequality. Nkenkana (2015) thus asserts that "a fundamental problem resulting in the misinterpretation of systematic and structural conditions perpetuating gender inequalities is a focus on women as the subject of change in gender transformation and/or mainstreaming and a focus on fitting women into the status quo rather than transforming the status quo". This will require not only reporting on the progress of gender but also a critical examination of the "fundamental systematic and structural transformation of patriarchy" (Nkenkana 2015). This form of transformation that addresses the roots and foundations of gender inequality should be the focus for all Africans.

Gender Equality and Africa in 2063

Agenda 2063 presents the clear realisation that Africa's full potential will be determined by how much it can include and empower women and how it can rapidly remove the obstacles

to their full participation. A review of the human capacity on the continent reflects one that remains largely untapped, with women making up a significant proportion of it. Thus, as the continent advances, the contribution of women needs to be acknowledged and their liberation is sought after. ‘The Africa We Want’ cannot be a reality without women’s liberation and a rigorous system change. This must occur across the board, including governance structures, the private sector, community-based organisations (CSOs), and law enforcement. In achieving gender equality before 2063, the following issues need to be reviewed.

Representation versus Participation

In its Gender Parity Project 2025, the AU presents gender parity as “the statistical measure that provides a numerical value of the men-to-women ratio” (AU 2020). The project’s goal “seeks to have a 50/50 representation of women and men’s representation and to have 35% of youth (between 15 and 35 years) in the staff component of the AU by 2025”⁶ (AU 2020). As of March 2020, there were equal numbers of men and women commissioners in the AU Commission and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), while 53% of the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) staff population are female (AU 2020). While these are noteworthy, there is an acknowledgement that gender gaps remain in most of its organs (AU 2020). These gaps are equally present within the governing structures of AU member states.

While there have been many efforts to increase the number of women and meet representation quotas of 50%,⁷ more is needed to translate this into genuine participation. Women’s participation is “the process and an outcome related

6 The Gender Parity Principle is also reflected in key legal and policy frameworks of the African Union like the Modalities of Elections of Officials; The Staff Regulations and Rules; The 2009 Gender Policy; The Charter on Democracy, Governance and Elections; and The Maputo Protocol and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.

7 Increasing women’s active participation does not negate the goal of achieving 50% inclusion of women; this should continue to remain a priority.

to women's engagement in political and economic institutions by participating in bureaucracies, policymaking bodies, and representative organisations" (Msoka & Muya 2018). These under-listed practical steps can enhance women's participation:

1. Women should preside over and lead decisionmaking and policymaking processes in different institutions and structures where they can drive and develop responses to Africa's persistent challenges at the continental, sub-national and national levels.
2. More women should be appointed as special envoys, chairpersons, chief mediators, heads of AU peacekeeping missions and their various components, and heads of security and defence. These are positions where they can actively input into designing strategies and policies and allocating resources, not only fulfilling administration-related roles.
3. Work culture and environments should be aware of women's complex societal roles beyond their work and career.⁸ This also involves providing support⁹ structures that enable their active participation.
4. Training and capacity development initiatives for women should be provided to help them to participate in the workforce actively and advance in their fields. These include mentoring programmes, capacity development skills in leadership, facilitation, and presentation, and skills that can allow their total immersion and participation in various decisionmaking and strategic positions.
5. Women's groups should be included as a critical requirement in all African Union and state governments' engagements with civil society organisations.
6. Peer support should take the form of female candidates being nominated and supported by men and their fellow women

8 Women's roles as mothers are integral to their identities, which is evident in their role in providing childcare. Because of this, many women cannot work or gain an income actively.

9 The ideas of childcare facilities in the workplace and providing flexible work hours are essential in creating a space for women to balance both their work and domestic responsibilities (Hicks 2010).

- when vying for leadership positions from the local to the national, regional, and continental levels.
7. Women should be appointed as heads of key departments in all sectors, including the security and private sectors.
 8. Women should be a first point of reference in developing responses in national security, defence, policing, and criminal investigation.
 9. Resources and incentives should be provided for women to be involved in knowledge production, from data collection to analysis and outcomes.
 10. All data should be gender-specific and inclusive, and data analysis should be grounded in gender awareness.

Some of the measures by the AU to achieve the full implementation of its gender parity project include: ensuring gender-supportive administrative systems that allow for women's capacity development, developing a mentoring system for young women, establishing a platform/roster of women to assist new women employees in Addis Ababa, and developing an expatriate guide (AU 2015). Representation also does not mean women's liberation as the efforts by state organs to increase the number of women in parliaments and high-level positions in its governance structures have failed to ensure or guarantee their liberation. This is because women are incorporated within a patriarchal system. A process of the "menisation" of women, "whereby men and their roles in societies are used as a benchmark to measure the transformation of women" (Nkenkana 2015:44). Hicks (2010) argues that gender transformation is beyond a numbers game and requires further addressing the institutional cultures that limit women's representation and promotion. The following section reflects on the mindsets that drive gender relations.

Changing Mindsets and Unlearning Gender Relations

While there have been efforts to improve gender equality, there are persistent mindsets and ideas that negatively impede further progress on the continent. These mindsets are constructed by patriarchy, male centrism, and masculinity. These are not just

experienced in private spaces but have filtered into African systems of governance and state structures, becoming widely shared and dominant. These ideas relate to narratives and actions on who holds power and has access to resources and how and where they should be allocated. I employ the term used by Hicks (2010), “invisible elements”, to represent those that marginalise working women continuously and to depict the institutional cultures that are male-centric and dominated by men. In South Africa as an example, this institutional culture is characterised by “internal policies and practice, access to skills training, harassment, and a sense that men are taken more seriously, and women have to ‘earn their stripes’ – a situation that is even harder for black women” (Hicks 2010). As is seen from the case of Ghana, customs, laws, and religions have been used to validate and justify these actions, such that even women have accepted these as the norm (Asuako 2020).

Thus, Nkenkana (2015) posits that achieving gender transformation involves understanding the order that designs and prescribes the oppression of women and, in doing that, it offers the opportunity to create better alternatives for the future. The idea is to refrain from forcing women into systems that fail to recognise or include them, but to engage in the process of self and group awareness, where the sources and knowledge systems that deem them inferior and restrict them from active participation are interrogated, and new ways of engaging are learnt. Unlearning in an organisational context is not about “forgetting but the ability to choose an alternative mental model or paradigm”, and “stepping outside the mental model to choose a different one” (Bonchek 2016). A different model will shift from the patriarchal model and way of thinking to newer ways of action. Therefore “the challenge of gender transformation is enmeshed in power, knowledge and notions of being shaped by colonial and patriarchal orders” (Nkenkana 2015:45). These old, colonial-style knowledge systems must be removed to make way for more innovative ways of women’s inclusion and political participation.

If African systems have been shaped in such a way that restricts gender inclusion, and the idea that men and women can contribute equally to the continent, then these structures have to

be transformed to ensure a future that includes women. The role and influence of patriarchy need to be removed, as they inhibit a change of mindsets and ideas that limit their roles and involvement. Nkenkana (2015), in noting the patriarchy that exists, presents Thomas Sankara's argument¹⁰ that the first step is to understand how it functions, have a clear meaning of its real nature, and develop clear actions that can produce true and full liberation of women in all its entirety. While policies are well drafted and comprehensive, they cannot achieve maximum results if the structures perpetuating women's subjugation remain. The AU Gender Policy is one of many efforts to transform these structures of patriarchy as it goes beyond increasing quotas, but it acknowledges the diverse ways women are excluded and how to transform these (AU 2009). The policy acknowledges that "a paradigm shift is inevitable" in bringing the policy to life (AU 2009). In changing these mindsets, social roles and power dynamics must embrace women as co-creators, leading the creative process in every aspect of society and community.

This process of unlearning also applies to value systems that entrench the inequalities between men and women and the inferiority of and subjugation of women to newer values that uphold the protection and support of women. For example, the increase in child marriage and sexual and gender-based violence, more recently on elderly women as seen in cases like South Africa, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, requires more emphasis on existing values like *Ubuntu*,¹¹ respect for human life, respect for others, selflessness, and compassion.

Transforming a Patriarchal System

Scholars have written extensively on the nature of the colonial and global system as patriarchal (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Chambati

10 For more information, see Sankara, T. (2007). *Women's Liberation and the African Freedom Struggle*. New York: Panaf.

11 Found in most of South Africa's African languages, *Ubuntu* is defined as a "spiritual foundation, an inner state, an orientation, and a good disposition that motivates, challenges, and makes one perceive, feel, and act in a humane way towards others". (Mnyaka & Motlhabi 2005:218). Its nature and characteristics include "respect for persons and the importance of community, personhood, and morality" (Mnyaka & Motlhabi 2005:218).

2013; Korieh 2001). Patriarchy in Africa has emerged in multiple ways: men being of a higher status than women and women being relegated to the home and domestic matters; thus, it is reflected in many aspects of society. The AU Gender Policy also presents the need to consider Africa's societal context regarding gender equality, mainly because gender roles are linked to status, relationships between genders, and power relations in public and private spaces (AU 2009). Patriarchy, as conceptualised in this policy, defines gender roles and relationships, noting that the different contexts, value systems, and structures within the continent must be considered in achieving gender equality (AU 2009). At the nation-state level, Ghana provides an example of how patriarchy and male dominance have limited how much women can participate in political decisionmaking and other spaces (Asuako 2020). Transformation then will involve establishing the complementarity of men and women in decisionmaking and not seeing women as inferior or less able to take on any position, especially if they are qualified.

While changing mindsets is vital in breaking down the dominance of patriarchy, more practical actions are critical to achieving it. The AU, in its gender policy, speaks to this transformation through initiatives like creating the African Women's Trust Fund, reorientating existing institutions, and paying better attention to gender equality (AU 2009). For example, in tackling inequalities in agriculture and food systems, gender transformative approaches involve a methodology that engages both men and women as agents of change and taking responsibility for equality, "removing barriers in various structures, preventing gender norms that constrain women, and revisiting the unwritten rules about who can do what kind of work, control what types of assets and make what level of decisions" (Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers n.d.) In the workplace, gender transformation is indicated by girls, boys, men, and women sharing the same opportunities, benefits, contributions, and rights (AU 2009). The transformation of a patriarchal, women-exclusionary system requires the following:

1. At the grassroots level, women's agency and ability to contribute successfully to the continent's future must

- be promoted. This involves tackling patriarchal ideas, raising awareness, and educating communities on the complementarity of men and women and the historical contributions of women in African pre-colonial societies.
2. Community conversations and engagements about patriarchy, its effects on development, and how to shift away from it must increase. Community-level engagement creates the space for context-specific change at the local level.
 3. Engaging in discourses around transforming patriarchal systems and how to do it is essential. Academic institutions of learning can become the spaces for doing this by engaging both men and women in the process.
 4. Grassroots engagement with institutions that support and teach patriarchal ideas can help to inform, enlighten and raise awareness about its ills and knowledge sources.
 5. Programmes that continue to empower women in entrepreneurship, education, digital technology, and other relevant fields must be created so they can successfully compete for work in those areas.
 6. Girls must have the same access to opportunities as boys. Family choices of who should gain an education should not exclude girls. This is an important message that should be filtered to family and community structures.
 7. We need to criminalise and prohibit practices that limit women from thriving as members of their community and society, ranging from sexual and gender-based violence to forced exclusion from capacity development opportunities, and low pay for work.
 8. Gender considerations should be the starting point for job opportunities, promotions, and capacity development initiatives.
 9. There should be regular reviews of economic, political, social, health, and security policies and implementation processes at grassroots level and in community structures, to determine how women are excluded or included.
 10. Aspects of laws, cultures, and customs that prohibit women from owning property and land must be eradicated.

11. Legislation is needed that prohibits and criminalises child marriage, child labour, and female genital mutilation, and that improves in the reporting and tracking of these activities.
12. Measures must be instituted to prevent the trafficking of women and children.

Policy Development and Implementation

Africa is not devoid of policies that address gender disparities in various sectors. There are comprehensive policies on sexual harassment, promotion, parity, and equity, but these are not implemented extensively. Implementation is a persistent challenge that requires attention for complete transformation and change to occur toward 2063. Regular policy reviews should be part of every institution's standard operating procedure, and these must focus on interrogating the utility of these policies. Furthermore, there should be critical review processes on implementation, focusing on how they can redress inequities and the exclusion of women. Existing policies that promote patriarchy, subjugation, and discrimination of women need to be discarded in favour of developing newer policies. Continental, national, and local monitoring and evaluation processes must involve academic institutions, civil society organisations, research institutes, and advocacy groups to ensure that change occurs regularly and produces results.

In developing new policies, it is essential to reflect and ensure that gender equity is considered, integrated, and included in the initiation and formation stages of policies, programmes, and institutions. Gender planning is a “process of planning and designing the implementation phase of policies, programmes, or projects from a gender perspective, and it takes place in the second stage of the policy cycle” (European Institute for Gender Equality 2019). This process is essential in shaping and ensuring gender-inclusive policies, programmes, and institutions. Progress reports are essential, particularly in tracking developments in policy and action, and member states must provide these. According to the Second Continental Report on The Implementation of Agenda 2063 (2022), only 38 African countries submitted their progress reports (AUDA-NEPAD 2022). When states fail to provide progress

reports, the AU can also employ other stakeholders to obtain progress reports and verify the reports submitted by states.

Reflections on Women as African Agency

The Africa of the future must include and involve African agencies. In this chapter, African agency refers to governance driven by grassroots initiatives, decentralised structures, citizen-focused approaches, and inclusive and participatory engagement led by citizens. This notion of African agency is resolute and firm in including women in these processes. The AU Gender Policy establishes the importance and contribution of women in all sectors and at the national, regional, and international levels (AU 2009). Africa's history is filled with narratives and experiences of how women have transformed their families, communities, and societies for the better.

Women are a critical component of African agency because they are the most informed about issues of war, armed violence, intimate partner violence, and criminality because, in many instances, they experience it the most. Furthermore, they have been the recipients of longstanding cultural, social, and religious thought practices and ideas that have subjugated, oppressed, and excluded them. They have found ways to remain resilient amid remarkable resistance and diverse limitations. They contribute to health, economic, security, and political discourses and research. They have expertise in conflict resolution, trauma support, and community development. They also understand the continent's political landscape and bring various perspectives and innovative ideas. They are heads of households, community providers, and first responders. They are specialists on local, societal, national, regional, and global issues and dynamics and how these are linked. They are the bridge and link between men, children, youth, refugees, communities, and minority groups. Indeed, they are sources of information and huge resources to society.

There are well-documented sources on the contribution of women in the African agency. These include their roles in leadership as envoys and representatives of the AU, RECs, and member states. For example, the chairperson of the AU appointed

three women as special envoys for youth, COVID-19, and women, peace and security (AU n.d.). These women have brought significant attention to these portfolios across the continent by raising awareness of these issues at multiple levels and engaging various stakeholders at the national and regional levels, while working to reform relevant policies and develop appropriate responses and programmes. Women have contributed to post-conflict environments in resolving conflicts, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and helping with post-conflict reconstruction, transitional justice, and reconciliation efforts.

While highlighting the important roles of women, it must be noted that men are also essential contributors to the African agency and are important in achieving the gender-inclusive Pan-African agenda. The AU acknowledges that men and women are not in an “unhealthy competition”, and that men have the same rights to equal job opportunities within the AU and should be equally free from discrimination and harassment (AU 2020). Oluwole (1997) also recognises that “male-female complementarity cannot be ignored in creating a healthy civil society”. This complementarity must be harnessed, as both men and women are agents of change in transforming the continent. One clear point is that their abilities and capacities have not been maximised, thus limiting the continent from benefitting from their expertise.

Conclusion

Gender equality is vital in rebuilding Africa and important for the attainment of sustainable development and economic integration in Africa. Thus, there needs to be an unlearning of norms and thought processes that give men advantages over women with no basis, present women as lesser and inferior humans, and normalise patriarchy. Systematic and individual transformations are required in creating new knowledge systems that constitute a shift from coloniality, patriarchy, capitalisation, and Western-centric models. This requires self and group awareness and reflections on how gender inequality is created consciously and unconsciously. This is important in genuinely benefitting from the representation and participation of women on the continent.

The contribution of women in Africa and their successes have been well documented and should not be questioned or interrogated. Their track record is extensive in how they have helped to improve relationships, build social cohesion, achieve social change, represent vulnerable groups, contribute to food security, develop restorative justice processes, promote the need for reparations, assist minorities, implement anti-poverty programmes, develop social assistance programmes, improve healthcare, and contribute to Pan-Africanism and decoloniality discourses. The AU's stance on gender issues has been used to inform action in achieving gender equality within the AU Commission, its organs, and member states, and in clarifying the continental stance on gender equality. Grounded in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, its gender policy highlights the role of the AU and how it commits to gender mainstreaming in addressing gender-related issues and concerns.

This chapter advanced the idea of a gender-inclusive, Pan-African, decolonial lens which shifts attention away from men as the primary political subject and foregrounds the role of women as key political players. While the AU has made strides to do this, there must be continuous reviews of Agenda 2063, its implementation plans, and continental progress reports through a gender-inclusive, Pan-African lens. These rigorous reviews should include member states' representatives, AU personnel from the field and commission, academic institutions, research institutes, CSOs, and local communities. Furthermore, the goals of its Gender Parity Project to become a preferred employer for African women, including their families, and achieve gender parity in all available positions and organs, should continue to be pursued with the deadline of 2025 fast approaching.

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