

# RECLAIMING AFRICA'S FUTURE: A CALL FOR FEMINIST FINANCING, INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE, AND PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN SOCIAL SERVICES

*A Call To Action by The African Women's Major Group*

## PRESS STATEMENT

With five years left to implement the sustainable development goals and contribute to the 2063 agenda, the African Regional Forum on the SDGs is being convened in Kampala, Uganda, to review progress and challenges in implementing the SDGs in Africa. This year, the goals under review are SDG 3 on good health and well-being, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 8 on decent work, SDG 14 on life underwater, and SDG 17 on global partnerships.

**Women's  
Major Group**

As African citizens, feminists, and members of the African Women Major Group, the African Women's Major Group is a member of the Africa Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (ARMMGOS). We have a mandate to represent the voices of women & girls in all their diversity in regional and global United Nations sustainable development processes. During the 11th session of the African Regional Forum on SDGs, we recognize the achievements of African member states and call on them to adopt our recommendations to ensure Africa can accelerate the implementation of the SDGs for all women and girls. These recommendations were presented to the ARFSD during the Major Groups and Stakeholders Workshop for consideration and inclusion in the outcome statement of the Forum and the African Common Position for the World Social Summit.

To begin with, we acknowledge that significant progress has been made towards achieving the SDGs under review; however, the current global socio-political and economic landscape, in particular, natural disasters, climate crises, conflicts, debt crises and political uncertainties, have affected and delayed progress. An evident delay in progress, and even regression for some countries, is in the achievement of indicators on SDG 3.7- on sexual reproductive health and rights and SDG 5 on gender equality primarily due to pervasive socio-cultural norms, laws and policies that limit access to information and services like Comprehensive Sexuality Education and contraceptive services. Furthermore, African governments remain lax in addressing challenges caused by climate crises, further exacerbating this regression.

The continent continues to experience a narrowed and shrinking civic space and a growing pushback against the rights of women, girls and gender-expansive persons. We have witnessed an uproar and uprising of voices of young persons rising every day from various corners of the continent, demanding their rights to participate in shaping their worlds. Free, unencumbered civic engagement is crucial in raising awareness on key issues aligned with the SDGs and holding governments accountable to the targets set.

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The increasing threats to democracy, the rule of law and gender equality, especially from the well-organized and coordinated anti-rights movements, continue to be a threat to good and inclusive governance and, therefore, a threat to the progress achieved. It is important to note that the anti-rights movement continues to be a threat to the achievement of progress in SDGs, and even while they often claim to support African values, their actions are against our fundamental African spirit of 'Ubuntu' because they push for increased discrimination and entrenchment of patriarchal and colonial legacies.

Today, we re-echo the message propelled by African women and feminists in 1985 during the third meeting of the United Nations Decade for Women: the "World is in Crisis"! Today, as it was 40 years ago, the world is in crisis, leaving women and girls facing the biggest brunt of its problems. In the Nairobi manifesto, African women and feminists stated that "the major problems faced by Africa are external domination and the misplaced priorities of existing development strategies resulting in internal mismanagement." 10 years later, in 1995, a bold and consistent push for gender equality led to the ground-breaking Beijing Platform of Action which we are commemorating 30 years later. In this tradition, we are here with reminders that "Today we face global poly-crisis", with women and girls still facing the largest brunt of this. As we gather for the 11th African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development with member states, civil society and other stakeholders, we call for a renewed commitment to intersectional solutions that transform the lives of African peoples, especially African women and girls in their diversities.

Currently, access to healthcare is still hindered in many African countries by legal barriers, especially laws that criminalize diverse population groups. These legal barriers prevent young people, people living with HIV, women, and sexual and gender minorities from accessing critical healthcare. And despite the progress made on maternal mortality, the rates across Sub-Saharan African countries are higher (at 454 deaths per 100,000 births) than the global averages and the targets set in the SDGs of less than 70 deaths per 100,000 births. Some of these deaths result from unsafe abortions, especially among adolescent girls and young women. Furthermore, the continent continues to register high rates of teenage pregnancies with a 2022 World Health Organization-Health in SDGs report stating that Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest adolescent birth rates (10-14) at 102 births per 1,000 women aged 10-14. Across the continent, health systems face many challenges in delivering health for all, mainly due to financial, infrastructural and human resource constraints. For equitable access to the right to health, it is pertinent to address existing barriers, for example, through adequate sector contributions to health. Many African countries continue to deliver below the Abuja declaration target that mandates countries to allocate at least 15% of their national budgets to health. Even with the less-than-optimal money that is assigned to health, money that is intended for women, girls, and marginalized communities is misappropriated. Furthermore, women and girls, while making up the more significant percentage of poor people on the continent, have to pay high out-of-pocket costs to access life-saving services.

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Despite women making up half of Africa's population, they hold only 26% of political positions and only 13% of corporate leadership positions. While we lauded the existing legal and policy frameworks at the regional, national and local levels, many African countries have failed to domesticate regional instruments such as the Maputo protocol or implement laws and policies that address gender-based discrimination and violence. Women and girls are still being subject to gross human rights violations and economic disparities despite their political, social and economic participation. Currently, African women comprise 62% of the workforce compared to the global average of 47% and contribute 44% of household needs. Even with this contribution, 1 out of every 10 women globally lives in extreme poverty, the majority of whom live in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Additionally, girls and women are the most vulnerable when it comes to informal work because they find it harder to access education, training, and employment opportunities. Girls have high rates of unemployment and slow rates of transitioning from school to work, with the World Bank reporting that by 2021, over 30% of girls in Africa between 15 and 24 years of age were neither in school nor in employment. Their opportunities to work in the formal sector are affected mainly by a lack of skills, limited access to finance, lack of networks, discrimination, and restricted mobility, thus forcing them into informal work.

Worthy of note is that African women also play a critical and undervalued role in managing and conserving marine resources, encompassing activities from fishing and processing to conservation efforts and policy advocacy. They possess deep local knowledge of aquatic ecosystems and resources, which is crucial for developing sustainable conservation strategies. Many African women rely on fishing, making up 60% of those handling fish once landed, water collection, and conservation of aquatic resources for their livelihoods and food security. Despite this crucial contribution, women who rely on and contribute to marine resources are not only directly impacted by the effects of climate change, with marine resources forming part of the tradeable commodities, but are also rarely included in the design of climate adaptation strategies and do not make up the majority of the benefactors from them. They are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and climate change, and their contributions to marine conservation are often overlooked, necessitating increased participation and funding.

# PRESS STATEMENT

To address the polycrises:

We call for **increased domestic resource mobilization for public provision of basic social services, particularly health education. This requires reform of the global financial architecture and a commitment by African states to adopt a public-first approach to financing social services.** African countries should strengthen their efforts towards domestic resource mobilisation by implementing measures to curb illicit financial flows, eliminating harmful and regressive tax incentives and exemptions and further introducing or increasing progressive taxes on wealth. These strategies will increase revenue collection to fund development and gender equality efforts.

**African governments should adopt and implement gender-responsive budgeting:**

African states should make provisions for gender-responsive programs and institutions to enable them to fulfil their mandates effectively. Additionally, building capacity for gender budgeting and empowering subnational and local actors to adopt and integrate gender-responsive budgeting into budget development, implementation monitoring, and expenditure analysis is crucial for meaningful progress. African countries should focus on developing and implementing finance for development strategies to ensure that resources are prioritized to address development challenges like strengthening social services (health and education, among others), addressing poverty, and combating the impacts of climate change instead of these resources being used for individual gain.

**We call for the prioritization of Universal Health Coverage and the integration of sexual and reproductive health and rights as essential to achieving UHC.**

**Governments should eliminate legal barriers affecting access to social services and urgently repeal discriminatory laws and policies against women and girls in all their diversity.** These legal barriers should be eliminated through law reform to guarantee unfettered access to social services for all Africans, regardless of who they are.

**It is past time to recognize women's leadership:** African states need to strengthen women's leadership by improving protections for women, implementing affirmative action, and providing incentives to encourage women's leadership. This includes increasing women's involvement in climate policy-making and also within the implementation of such policies at local, national, and regional levels.

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To address the polycrises:

**It is pertinent that governments recognise unpaid care work:** Women bear the burden of providing care work for their families, such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, the elderly, and the sick, collecting firewood, emotional labour, and so many other tasks that are often viewed as part of their natural role within society and receive no monetary compensation. This labour is usually neglected and yet dramatically impacts women's participation in the public sphere of life. African countries need to recognise this labour and attach value to it instead of minimising and diminishing this contribution. A socialized, public-sector response is therefore essential to reverse the deeply entrenched, unequal distribution of care work in Africa.

**Governments should improve legal protections for women in the informal sector:** Many women in Africa work within the informal sector, which has little to no legal protections for people who work there. African governments need to urgently establish laws that protect women within the informal sector by guaranteeing a minimum wage, granting maternity leave, prohibiting sexual harassment, and ensuring compulsory contributions to retirement funds by employers.

**African countries need to expedite universal ratification and full domestication of the Maputo Protocol:** African states need to lift all reservations on this protocol and fast-track the universal ratification and domestication of the Maputo Protocol to ensure African women and girls in their diversity can enjoy the full breadth of their human rights. With rising rates of femicides and violence against women and girls, it is time to enforce laws against harmful practices to ensure justice for the survivors and also to repeal rules and policies that allow the continuation of these destructive practices.

**African countries should enhance regional and continental cooperation to achieve Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063:** With the rest of the world moving towards prioritising national interests, African countries need to strengthen not just the African Union but all other regional economic mechanisms to support the localization of SDGs. This includes the continued push for reforming the global financial architecture and fast tracking the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement. African States must genuinely commit to implementing this agreement through a gendered lens and foster true collaboration amongst African countries to thrive.

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To address the polycrises:

**We call for strengthened climate adaptation strategies:** African countries need to support the upscaling of promising initiatives that address cultural and systemic change to ensure equal and inclusive access to property rights for women and girls to traditional natural resources and to inheritance and support gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation programs in communities especially those vulnerable to climate change. Strengthened climate adaptation strategies also include the prioritization of climate financing.

**We therefore call upon governments to improve access to climate financing:** African countries need to develop mechanisms to ensure access to appropriate funding for women and girl's organizations to improve their resilience to climate change and upscale their efforts in biodiversity conservation, sustainable management of forests and in ecosystems restoration increase and also improve access to green financing for women-led initiatives in climate-smart agriculture, fisheries and renewable energy.

**Improve gender-disaggregated data collection:** There are a lot of gaps in the existing SDG data within the continent. African countries should ensure that regional and international partnerships prioritise data collection on gender disparities to inform evidence-based policymaking instead of relying on assumptions and stereotypes of what is happening on the continent. They should accept and rely on citizen-generated data that speaks to the lived realities of people instead of disregarding it as inauthentic.

**It is also crucial for governments to promote digital inclusion:** We are operating in the digital age, and yet the gap between women and men's access to the internet remains wide, leaving women behind in terms of technological advancements. This digital divide needs to be closed by reducing the cost of internet access and curbing online gender-based violence to ensure women have access and can freely participate in the digital space.

**Lastly, we call on African states to be the first region to review SDG 5 annually.** The 2022 Africa Sustainable Development Report noted that SDG 5 is a cross-cutting issue among all other SDGs, yet it is still reviewed as a stand-alone SDG. Going forward, the ARFSD should review SDG 5 annually, similar to SDG 17, given that both are deeply embedded within all the other SDGs.