

II ECOWAS WOMEN ENTREPREUNERS MEETING

I. THE ROLE OF DIGITALIZATION IN BRIDGING THE GENDER
GAP IN AFRICA

II. THE ROLE OF THE BLUE ECONOMY FOR WOMEN'S SOCIO-
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

8 March 2023

Casa África · Gran Canaria · España



Consejería de Economía,
Conocimiento y Empleo
Dirección General de Asuntos
Económicos con África



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II ECOWAS Women
Entrepreneurs Meeting

In collaboration with:



Consejería de Economía,
Conocimiento y Empleo
Dirección General de Asuntos
Económicos con África



Projects co-financed by the European Union:



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Aknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude and acknowledge the following individuals and institutions for their valuable contributions to these papers.

Ana María Hernández Díaz, Yurena Ojeda Rodríguez, Naziha Hage, Casa África; Nasara Cabrera Abu, General Director for Economic Affairs with Africa of the Government of the Canary Islands; Carlos Gutierrez, Cabildo de Fuerteventura; Ana Pérez Peñalvo, Manager, Fundación Puertos de Las Palmas; Navin Khemlani, CEO, IBC Spain, Teresa Langle de Paz, Director of the Women for Africa Foundation; Ainhoa Marín Egoscozábal, Senior Researcher for Sub-Saharan Africa at the Real Instituto Elcano; Charles Mensa, Chairman of the Institute of Economic Affairs of Ghana; Rokhaya Fall, Vice President of CODESRIA; Ibrahim Diarra, Director General of the Ivorian Centre for Economic and Social Research (CIRES); Odile Ndoumbé Faye, Programme Manager on Gender and Civil Society, ECOWAS Gender Development Centre; Keiso Matashane-Marite, Head of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section of UNECA's Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division; Esther Pérez Verdú, CEO of Nemesys 2.0; Aziza Cheikhna, co-founder and president, Hadina Rimtic; Thiaba Camara SY, President of WIC Capital; Awamary Lowe-Khan, CEO The Woman Boss; Florentine Guihard-Koidio, president of the Network of Maritime and Port Professional Women in West Africa; Eunice Mascarenhas, President of the Cape Verde Businesswomen's Association; Fatou CISSE, President of BPW Senegal; Margarita Pena, special delegate of the Santa Cruz de Tenerife Free Trade Zone and member of BPW Canarias; Mónica Quesada, Project Manager, Maritime Cluster of the Canary Islands.

We extend our sincerest appreciation to all the participants for their insightful contributions and commitment to advancing gender equality in Africa.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global gender gap continues to persist, representing a significant challenge in achieving gender equality and inclusive economic growth. The Global Gender Gap Index, developed by the World Economic Forum, provides valuable insights into the relationship between gender parity and per capita income. While the index does not establish causality, it underscores the importance of investing in closing gender gaps in access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power.

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, it will take an average of 132 years to close the gender gap worldwide. However, the situation is even more concerning in certain regions, particularly in Africa. In North Africa, for example, the projected time to bridge the gender gap is a staggering 267.6 years, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to accelerate progress.

Despite these alarming figures, there are African countries that have demonstrated remarkable progress in reducing the gender gap. Notably, Namibia and Rwanda are among the top ten countries in the world that have rapidly reduced the gender gap, achieving up to 80 percent progress. These countries serve as shining examples of the transformative power of inclusive policies and concerted efforts to empower women and promote gender equality.

Closing the gender gap is not only a matter of social justice but also an economic imperative. Countries that invest in their human capital and create an enabling environment for gender equality tend to experience higher levels of prosperity and competitiveness.

In this context, **digitalization and the blue economy have emerged as powerful drivers of change**, offering unique opportunities to address gender inequalities and promote women's empowerment in Africa.

In Africa, digital technologies hold immense potential for bridging the gender gap and advancing women's empowerment. By leveraging the power of digital tools, platforms, and services, countries in Africa can overcome traditional barriers and enable women to access new opportunities, participate in economic activities, and lead in various sectors.

Digitalization offers a range of opportunities to address gender inequalities and unlock the untapped potential of women in Africa. Access to digital technologies, such as mobile phones and the internet, can bridge the digital divide and provide women with the tools and information they need to succeed in a rapidly changing digital landscape. By enhancing digital literacy and skills training programs tailored to women's needs, countries can equip them with the knowledge and capabilities to participate actively in the digital economy.

Furthermore, digital platforms and e-commerce have the potential to create new avenues for women's economic empowerment. Online marketplaces enable women entrepreneurs to reach broader markets, access finance and resources, and overcome geographical limitations. Through e-commerce, women can start and scale businesses, creating employment opportunities not only for themselves but also for others in their communities.

The role of digitalization extends beyond economic empowerment. It also encompasses improving access to quality healthcare, education, and essential services for women and girls. Telemedicine, online education platforms, and mobile banking services can revolutionize the delivery of vital services, particularly in remote and underserved areas.

In this paper, we will explore **the role of digitalization in bridging the gender gap in Africa**, examining the opportunities it presents and the challenges that need to be addressed. By analysing successful digital initiatives and good practices from across the continent, we aim to provide insights and recommendations for policymakers, stakeholders, and organizations to leverage digital technologies effectively in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa.

Regarding women's participation in the blue economy, it has emerged as a crucial driver of sustainable development and economic growth. Women play a pivotal role in this sector, constituting a significant portion of the workforce and contributing substantially to the overall economic output. However, despite the notable progress made in certain countries, women in the blue economy still face various barriers and challenges that hinder their full participation and advancement. Discriminatory laws and social norms, limited access to education and training opportunities, as well as a lack of representation in decision-making processes, pose significant obstacles for women in the blue economy. Addressing these barriers is crucial for unleashing the full potential of women and maximizing the benefits of their participation in the blue economy.

In this article, we will delve into **the role of women in the development of the blue economy in Africa**, exploring their contributions, the challenges they encounter, and the potential solutions that can promote gender equality and inclusive growth. By examining experiences and success stories, we aim to shed light on the importance of women's empowerment and highlight the transformative impact they can have on sustainable development in Africa.





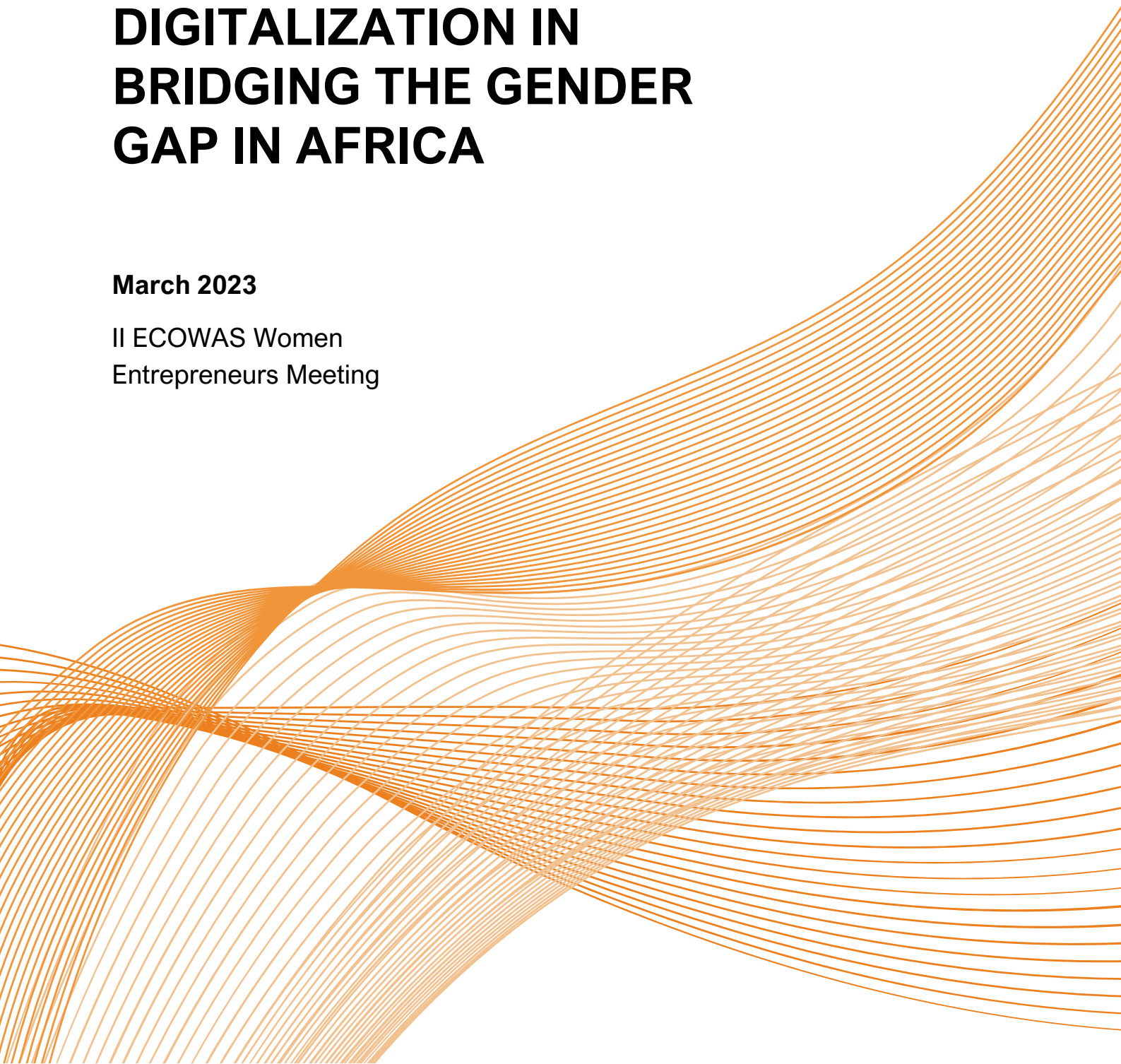
CASA ÁFRICA



THE ROLE OF DIGITALIZATION IN BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP IN AFRICA

March 2023

II ECOWAS Women
Entrepreneurs Meeting



INDEX

- 01** IMPORTANCE OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR AFRICA
- 02** DIGITAL ECONOMY CHALLENGES AND HOW WOMEN CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FACE THEM
- 03** GOOD PRACTICES
- 04** AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
 - 4.1 GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE
 - 4.2 ACCESS TO THE INTERNET
 - 4.3 INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION OF GIRLS AND WOMEN IN STEM
 - 4.4 ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LEADERSHIP IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY
 - 4.5 IMPROVING POLICIES FOR A MORE EGALITARIAN DIGITAL ECONOMY
- 05** CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
- 06** BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES



01

IMPORTANCE OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR AFRICA

Rapid digital transformation is reshaping the global economy, driving financing inclusion, closing information gaps between buyers and sellers, and changing the way economies of scale are achieved. Africa's internet economy is poised to reach US\$180 billion by 2025 (up from US\$115 billion in 2020), accounting for 5.2 percent of the continent's GDP, according to Google and IFC, 2020 (1). There is increasing evidence of the positive impact of access to the internet and mobile technologies on growth, jobs, innovation, firm productivity, agricultural productivity, and, critically, household consumption levels. The so-called "digital dividends" encompass a plethora of benefits, including enhanced inclusivity stemming from the expansion of information access, heightened efficiency due to decreased information costs, and amplified innovation fostered by the facilitation of information goods in driving transaction costs down to virtually nil (2).

Digital development is the way of the future, and it has the potential to benefit the African economy and society significantly.

Indeed, digital technologies, which have become essential nowadays—including to help meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis—are placed at the heart of the world's priorities.

In addition, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital technologies in ensuring business continuity, remote work, and distance learning. It is necessary to explore possible solutions for more intensive use of digital technology, especially by small and medium enterprises, to increase their productivity and create more quality jobs.

Africa has a singular opportunity to harness the potential of the digital economy to foster innovation and prosperity. Nevertheless, if the digital divide remains unbridged, its economies may falter and stagnate. Despite its potential, the digital economy also poses novel challenges to women and girls in terms of full participation. In Africa and around the world, women and girls lag behind in connectivity, digital skills, engagement in digital careers, leadership positions, and access to information and communication technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic has only served to further aggravate this gender digital divide. To prevent women and girls from being left behind by digital transformation, it is vital to adopt a feminist approach that prioritizes their needs.

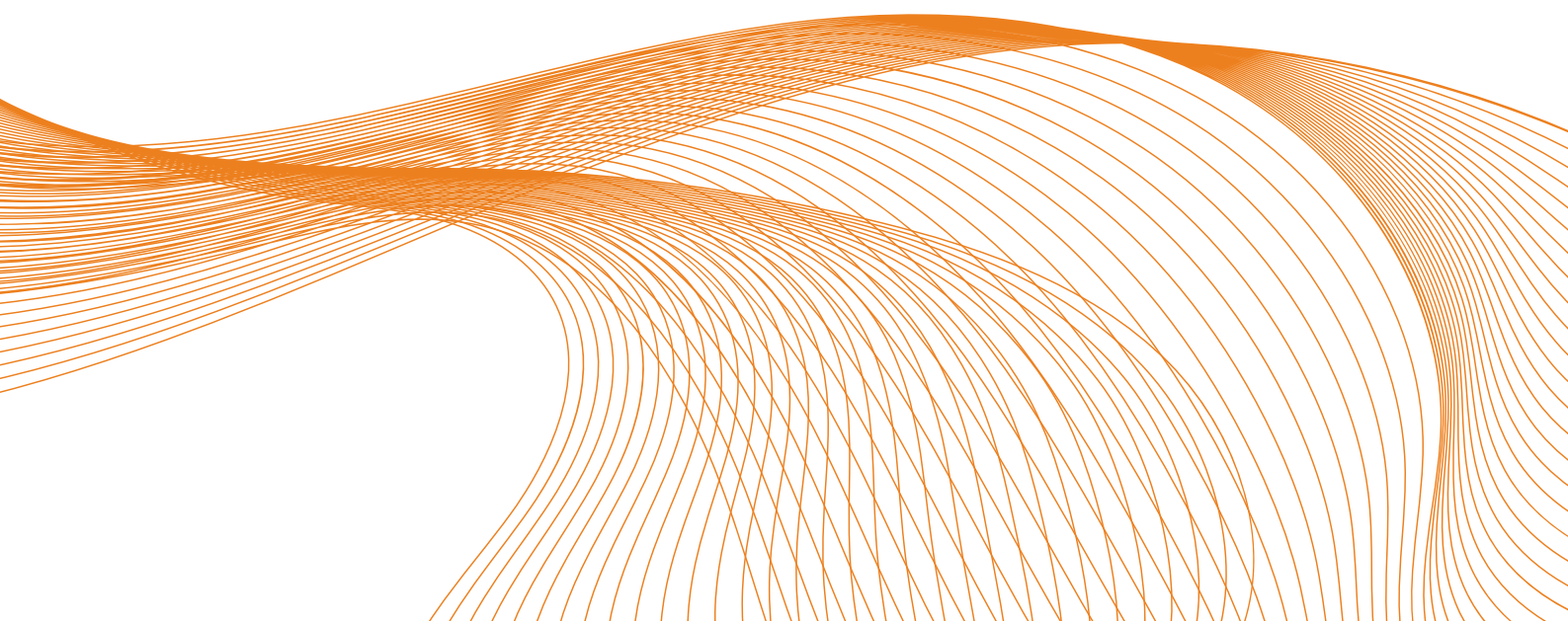
Indeed, the digital economy offers ample potential to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth by the United Nations, enabling opportunities for economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development. The digital economy can make significant contributions towards achieving a multitude of SDGs, such as No Poverty, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Sustainable Cities and Communities, and Climate Action. By leveraging digital technologies and creating an inclusive digital ecosystem, the digital economy can facilitate progress towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

Agenda 2030 highlights the urgent need to move towards new sustainable and inclusive patterns of consumption and production while recognizing technology as a means to achieve this goal (3). It emphasizes the importance of "enhancing the use of instrumental technology, particularly information and communications technology, to promote women's empowerment" (Goal 5b).

At the II ECOWAS Women Entrepreneurs Meeting, the concern for gender-inclusive access, use, and development of technology is seen as part of the need to advance towards a new productive and technological paradigm with equality and sustainability. However, without appropriate policies, there is a risk of exacerbating the structural knots of gender inequality.



Figure 1: SDGs related to the digital economy.



02

DIGITAL ECONOMY CHALLENGES AND HOW WOMEN CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FACE THEM

The digital economy presents a multitude of opportunities for Africa, but it also poses several challenges. One of the primary challenges is the digital divide, referring to the gap between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not. This divide manifests in areas such as internet access, digital skills, and access to digital financial services.

There is a significant lack of infrastructure, including reliable electricity and broadband connectivity, that impairs the ability of businesses and individuals to fully participate in the digital economy. Nearly 300 million Africans live more than 50 kilometres from a fibre or cable broadband connection and only 28 percent use the internet, hence the lack of widespread availability of high-speed internet remains a significant hurdle for Africa to fully harness the potential of digital transformation (4) . That slow spread of internet technology also makes it difficult for the continent to leapfrog obstacles to sustainable development (5) .

Furthermore, the shortage of skilled workers in the digital economy poses a significant obstacle to innovation and the development of new digital technologies.

Another challenge, according to the World Bank Group, is that too few citizens have digital IDs or transaction accounts – locking them out of access to critical services and e-commerce. Digital startups struggle to attract funding and ‘traditional’ businesses are only slowly adopting digital technologies and platforms to boost productivity and sales. Many opportunities and challenges exist in embracing Fintech in Africa. Over the past decade, Africa’s financial technology, or fintech, has experienced phenomenal growth. This growth has led to the advancement of e-commerce and other innovative approaches within the continent and is a bright spot for the future of the digital economy (6) .

However, the digital economy has the potential to worsen existing inequalities, particularly, gender-based inequalities, if access and usage are not distributed equitably. Figure 2 shows the challenges facing Africa related to the digital economy.

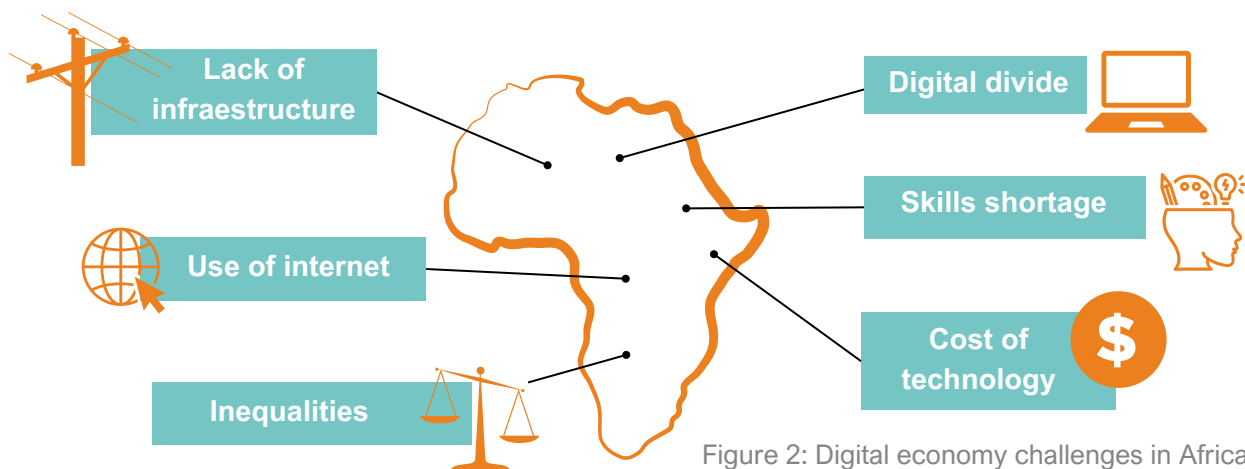


Figure 2: Digital economy challenges in Africa.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

The role of women in the digital economy can help address several challenges, including reducing the gender gap in employment and pay, promoting innovation and driving economic growth. However, women are currently underrepresented in the digital workforce, with only 26% of the digital workforce globally being women (7), particularly in leadership positions and technical roles. According to a report by McKinsey Global Institute, persistent gender inequality is limiting Africa's potential (8). However, if Africa steps up its efforts now to close gender gaps, it can secure a substantial growth dividend in the process. Accelerating progress toward parity could boost African economies by the equivalent of 10 percent of their collective GDP by 2025.

Research has shown that companies with gender-diverse teams are more innovative and financially successful.

Furthermore, agreeing to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, women's digital entrepreneurship is a key driver of socio-economic development in Africa, and indeed the world, as they are more likely than men to start businesses in the digital sector (9, 10).

To reduce this gap and promote economic growth, it is crucial to identify the specific needs and constraints of women entrepreneurs and enabling factors that can support the growth of women-led digital businesses. Increasing women's participation in the digital economy is essential for achieving gender equality and driving economic growth. However, this will require focused efforts to overcome the barriers that women face in accessing digital skills and job opportunities, as well as promoting gender diversity in leadership positions.



03

GOOD PRACTICES

There are several policies, efforts, and initiatives that can be carried out to increase the role of women in the digital economy. Building women-centric mentoring and training programs, empowering women economically by facilitating access to financing, supporting entrepreneurship, and fostering business skills development, as well as implementing policy and regulatory measures to promote gender equality are key steps.

Countries and organizations around the world are taking action to empower women in the digital economy. In Canada, the government has introduced the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES) (11) to support women entrepreneurs and increase the number of women-owned businesses.

The African Development Bank has initiated the "Coding for Employment (12)" project, offering digital skills training to young women in Rwanda. The project aims to boost the number of women working in the tech sector and provide them with employment opportunities. Similarly, Girls Who Code (13), an organization from the United States, aims to inspire and equip girls with coding skills through after-school clubs and summer programs. By providing a supportive environment, access to role models, and encouraging young women to pursue careers in technology, they contribute to narrowing the gender gap in the industry.

UNCTAD's E-Trade for Women initiative (14) promotes the engagement of women entrepreneurs in developing countries and works towards designing relevant policies to address the obstacles they face. It inspires more women to venture into digital entrepreneurship and has made significant progress, reaching founders of almost 200 women-owned digital businesses in over 40 developing countries.

The Women for Africa Foundation (MxA) (15) aims to expand access to knowledge and strengthen digital skills while empowering women's leadership in all fields of knowledge and professional sectors. A prime example of their work is an entrepreneurship program that has been running for over 8 years, the Babson College, Launch & Grow, which has successfully fostered a network of over a hundred small and medium-sized businesswomen in Kenya. Another noteworthy success story is the Learn Africa Program, dedicated to providing higher education opportunities for young African women. In collaboration with over 50 Spanish universities, this program has enabled hundreds of young women from across the continent to pursue master's or doctoral degrees, with the most sought-after field of study being "Business Administration".

While there are numerous initiatives and programs promoting gender equality in the digital economy, it is essential to tailor them to the unique realities of each country and region. By designing context-specific programs, we can empower women more effectively. With ongoing support, we can foster a diverse and inclusive digital economy that maximizes women's potential worldwide.

04

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

We'll address key areas for improvement, promoting inclusivity and equity in the digital landscape. These include the gender digital divide, internet access, girls' and women's participation in STEM, entrepreneurship, and digital leadership. Additionally, we'll focus on policy enhancements for a more egalitarian digital economy.

4.1.



**GENDER DIGITAL
DIVIDE**

4.4.



**ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AND LEADERSHIP IN
THE DIGITAL
ECONOMY**

4.2.



**ACCESS TO THE
INTERNET**

4.5.



**IMPROVING
POLICIES FOR A
MORE EGALITARIAN
DIGITAL ECONOMY**

4.3.



**INCREASING THE
PARTICIPATION OF
GIRLS AND WOMEN
IN STEM**



4.1. GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE

The digital divide consists of two closely linked gaps: limited access to information technology and a lack of technical skills. These gaps exacerbate each other in a circular pattern, where technical skills are challenging to develop without access to technology, and having access to technology is useless without the necessary skills to use it. The gender digital divide, which is particularly significant in Africa, is a severe inequality exacerbated by the digital revolution. Inequalities in information and communication technology (ICT) usage persist due to various factors, such as literacy, income, and employment status.

In the Global Gender Gap Report 2022, Sub-Saharan Africa was ranked third last in terms of gender equality achievements (7). The economic benefit of acting would be significant: if 600 million more women in poor nations had access to the internet, this could boost global GDP by up to USD 18 billion. Considering this, we inquire as to what must change in order for global agendas for digital transformation to adequately incorporate the gender component.

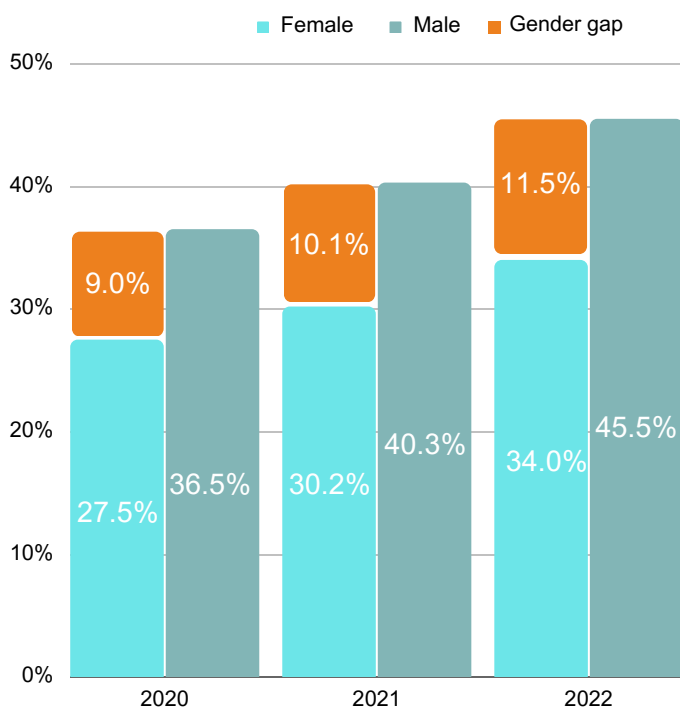
Despite recent improvements, women and girls are underrepresented in industries, academia, and the broader technology sector. According to The Gender Snapshot 2022 (16), women hold only 2 in every 10 science, engineering, and information and communication technology jobs globally. At the 20 largest global technology companies, women are 33 percent of the workforce in 2022, but they hold only one in four leadership positions. Women inventors make up only 16.5 percent of inventors listed on international patent applications worldwide.

Bringing women and other marginalized groups into technology results in more creative solutions and has greater potential for innovations that meet women's needs and promote gender equality. Excluding women from the digital world has already cost low- and middle-income countries \$1 trillion from their gross domestic product in the last decade. Without action, this loss will grow to \$1.5 trillion by 2025.

4.2. ACCESS TO THE INTERNET

The Internet holds great potential to empower African women and address the barriers that have hindered their full engagement in the digital society. However, limited studies on internet usage reveal significant disparities between men and women in developing countries. In Africa, for example, women are estimated to make up 25% or less of internet users. In the graph 1, it can be observed the noticeable disparities in internet usage among the population in Sub-Saharan Africa when segmented by gender. It clearly emphasizes the significant gaps that exist in terms of internet access and utilization.

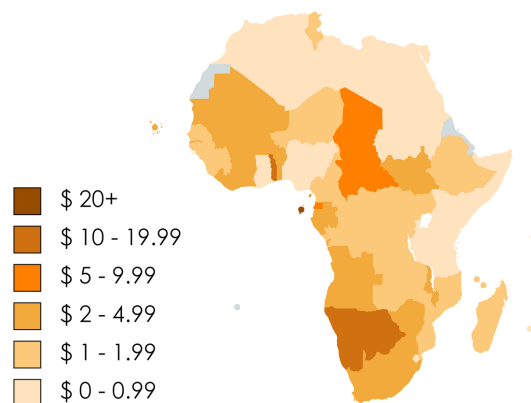
Studies have established a clear and positive correlation between broadband penetration and its impact on GDP growth. An increase in broadband internet penetration can lead to a significant increase in GDP, most significantly in Africa. According to the ITU, a 10 percent increase in broadband penetration could lead to a GDP growth of 2.5 percent in Africa, or 5.2 percent according to Google and IFC, 2020 (1). However, in the graph 2 it is shown the average prices for 1 GB of mobile data in Africa in 2022, by country (in U.S. dollars).



Graph 1. Share of population using the Internet in Sub-Saharan Africa from 2020 - 2022, by gender. Source: ITU, Statista 2023.

The graph 1 illustrates the trends in the internet usage among different genders in Sub-Saharan Africa. From 2020 to 2022, there has been a noticeable increase in the percentage of both females and males accessing the internet. In 2020, 27.50% of females and 36.50% of males, by 2022, these figures had risen to 34% for females and 45.50% for males. However, it is important to note that despite the overall increase in internet usage, the gender gap has also widened. In 2020, the gender gap was 9.00% and by 2020 it had increased to 11.50%, reflecting a larger disparity in internet access.

The graph 2 shows the average price for 1 GB of mobile data in various African countries in 2022. Among the countries mentioned, Algeria, Libya, Ghana and Somalia boast the most affordable mobile data, with an average cost of \$0-0.99 for 1 GB. However, Togo, Botswana, São Tomé and Príncipe and Saint Helena exhibit the highest average price among the African countries, between \$12.94 to \$41.06.



Graph 2: Based on a global analysis of over 5.292 mobile data plans in 233 countries. Source: Cable.co.uk

According to The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022 (7) there are several barriers that contribute to these disparities in mobile internet use:

Affordability is a key obstacle, with the cost of handsets being a major concern for women in some countries of West-Africa.

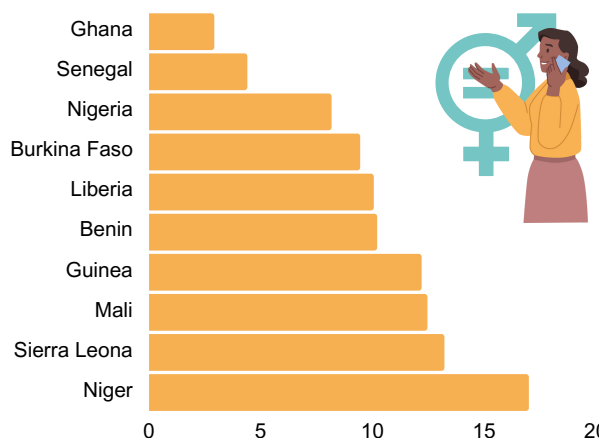
Literacy and digital skills also play a significant role. Difficulties with reading and writing and a lack of knowledge on how to access the internet on mobile devices pose challenges for women. In Nigeria, for instance, a higher percentage of female mobile users (41%) cite difficulties with reading and writing as a barrier to mobile internet adoption compared to men (32%).

Relevance is another factor inhibiting the adoption of mobile internet. Some women may perceive the internet as not relevant to their daily lives or may struggle to find content that is meaningful and useful to them.

The **lack of access to internet-enabled** phones presents a significant barrier.

In the digital landscape, the concept of "haves" and "have-nots" has evolved, encompassing both local/community-level disparities and broader socioeconomic factors that influence individuals' access and use of ICT.

The knowledge gap hypothesis suggests that individuals with higher socioeconomic status have an advantage in accessing and affording new sources of information (17).



Graph 3 Gender gap in mobile phone access in Africa in 2021, by country. No data available for Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Togo, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Chad.

In 2021, as the graph 3 illustrates, the country with the lowest gender gap in mobile phone access within the studied population was Ghana (2.9%), Senegal followed with a slightly higher gender gap (4.39%). As we move to countries with larger gender gaps, Mali and Sierra Leone show higher gender gaps, with 12.45% and 13.21% respectively. Finally, Niger has the highest gender gap among the listed countries, with a 16.99%.

These findings highlight the significant gender disparities in mobile phone access across the African countries. However, the availability of digital access alone does not guarantee equal opportunities for women and girls. There may be instances where access is controlled or monitored by men or limited to restricted online spaces that primarily focus on certain aspects such as women's appearances or traditional gender roles. Moreover, concerns about safety and harassment, both online and offline, act as barriers preventing many women and girls from utilizing and embracing information and communication technologies (ICTs) (18).

THE BENEFITS OF DIGITALIZATION

Digitalization offers numerous benefits for reducing the gender gap, as highlighted by Awamary Lowe-khan, CEO of The Woman Boss:

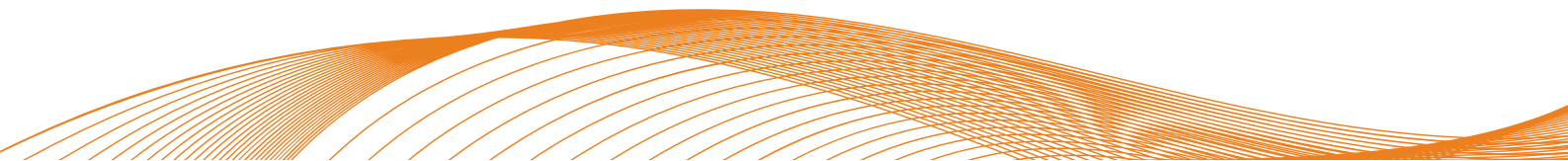
1. Digitalization allows for **easy access to information** through the internet.
2. Digitalization has expanded job opportunities, **allowing individuals to work remotely** and have clients or employers from different parts of the world, which benefits women who may face traditional barriers to employment.
3. **Online education platforms** have emerged as a result of digitalization, providing women with access to educational resources and opportunities for personal and professional growth.
4. **Digital platforms** such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram provide **tools for advocacy and empowerment**, enabling women to voice their concerns and connect with a wider audience.
5. **Technology and algorithms** can be utilized to **address gender biases and promote equal opportunities** for women.
6. Digitalization enables women to have **access to financial services** such as opening bank accounts, contributing to their economic empowerment and independence.

7. Digital platforms **facilitate market linkages**, allowing women entrepreneurs to sell their products or services to consumers worldwide, including in other parts of Africa and beyond.

8. Digitalization enables women to **connect with mentors and mentees from different locations**, providing opportunities for networking, learning, and support.

9. Digital skills **facilitate women's participation in the community and in political life** by providing women with resources to express themselves and take an active part in the public sphere. Likewise, some studies show that the development of digital skills increases girls' and women's self-confidence, independence, social prestige, and power.

In addition, the Internet opens a huge window to the world and allows women of all backgrounds to be exposed to representations of women in other cultures and contexts, facilitating reflection on traditional roles and how to challenge them, even changing their personal aspirations (19).



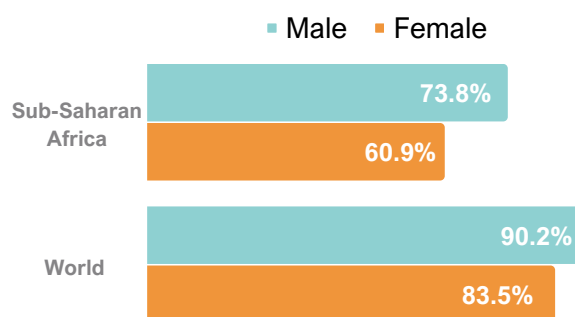
4.3. INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION OF GIRLS AND WOMEN IN STEM

Investing in STEM education and fostering the participation of girls and women in STEM fields is not only crucial for achieving the African Union's 2063 agenda but also for positioning Africa as a future technology hub (20). By bridging the gender gap and empowering girls and women in STEM, African countries can unlock their potential and contribute to the digital transformation of the continent.

Several barriers have been identified, even when access to a computer and technology exists, women are not necessarily using it. Some of these barriers implicated are:

- **Gender-Inclusive Education:** This includes addressing barriers such as limited resources, social norms, and cultural biases.
- **Early Interest and Awareness:** Providing exposure to STEM fields through interactive and engaging activities can help spark curiosity and foster a passion for science and technology among girls.
- **Literacy and Numeracy Skills:** Recognizing the importance of basic literacy and numeracy skills is vital for girls and women to excel in this field. See the graph 4.
- **Soft Skills Development:** Alongside technical skills, cultivating soft skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork is crucial.
- **Role Models and Mentorship:** Having access to female role models, mentors, and leaders in STEM fields can inspire and motivate girls and women to pursue these careers.
- **Addressing Socio-Cultural Barriers:** This includes combating gender stereotypes, promoting inclusive learning environments, and advocating for equal opportunities and representation.
- **Digital Literacy and Technology Access:** Programs should focus on equipping women and girls with digital skills, ensuring they are comfortable and confident in utilizing technology for learning and career advancement.
- **Entrepreneurial Skills:** Programs should emphasize the development of entrepreneurial mindsets, business management skills, and access to financial resources and networks.

Adult literacy rate, by sex.



Graph 4: Adult literacy rate, by sex (% of people ages 15 and above) 2020. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UIS.Stat Bulk Data Download Service.

Adult illiteracy disparity between men and women 13 in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is greater than the global average deficit of 6.7.

4.4. ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LEADERSHIP IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Africa boasts the highest number of women entrepreneurs per capita globally, specifically Uganda and Botswana. However, it is important to recognize that the high rates of women entrepreneurship in these countries are primarily driven by necessity rather than opportunity. In Uganda, limited formal employment options and the desire for financial independence have compelled women to venture into business out of necessity. Conversely, Botswana showcases a different scenario, with women's substantial participation in the labour market and their increasing presence in senior professional positions reflecting their determination to overcome economic challenges. Although government programs designed to support women entrepreneurs have provided small loans to kick-start business ideas, limited access to financial resources and asset ownership continues to impede their progress.

The World Bank's data from ten African countries exposes a significant gender disparity, revealing that male-owned businesses possess an average of six times more capital than their female-owned counterparts. Consequently, female entrepreneurs experience a 38% lower monthly profit compared to their male counterparts.

Studies show that companies with a higher representation of women in executive positions tend to achieve better results (8). Furthermore, women often possess unique leadership qualities such as empathy, inclusivity, and strong communication skills.

These attributes can contribute to effective team management, employee development, and customer relationship building. Additionally, this can inspire and encourage more women to pursue leadership roles.

Legal and regulatory frameworks, further hinder women entrepreneurs, limiting their ability to leverage the benefits of the digital economy. The Women Business and the Law project, identifies eight indicators that explore women's interactions with the law throughout their lives and careers (21). Regrettably, nearly 2.4 billion women worldwide still lack the same legal rights as men, with notable disparities observed in regions such as East Asia and Pacific, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Nonetheless, Sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed positive examples of reforms. Efforts to promote women's financial inclusion have been initiated in Benin and Côte d'Ivoire by prohibiting gender-based discrimination in financial services and access to credit. Senegal has also eradicated barriers for women working in industrial jobs and has made progress by prohibiting the dismissal of pregnant women. Furthermore, the Republic of Congo and Côte d'Ivoire have taken significant steps to address gender-based violence against women, adopting laws that combat various forms of domestic violence. Despite of this, challenges persist in certain areas, such as paid family leave and societal norms.

On the other hand, digital exclusion poses risks for women as they may be left behind in the ongoing digital revolution (22). The demand for digital skills is projected to rise, with estimates suggesting that 90% of future jobs will require such expertise. Indeed, to accelerate the post-pandemic economic growth, it is essential to equip more women entrepreneurs with digital tools and digitalization skills. By leveraging e-commerce, specifically, they can reap numerous benefits such as lower barriers to entry, wider market reach, and the flexibility of working hours and location.

According to the International Finance Corporation, there is a significant opportunity to inject over \$300 billion into e-commerce markets in Africa and Southeast Asia between 2025 and 2030 (23).

However, to truly empower women in the digital economy, it is important to address the deep barriers and disparities faced by women in patriarchal societies, lightening women's domestic workload and caregiving responsibilities. Creating an inclusive digital economy that empowers women is not only a matter of justice but also a strategic imperative for sustainable development.

4.5. IMPROVING POLICIES FOR A MORE EGALITARIAN DIGITAL ECONOMY

In the pursuit of a more egalitarian digital economy in Africa, it is essential to address the existing data gaps, promote gender equality in institutions, and develop strategic public policies. Experts in the field emphasize the need for comprehensive data disaggregation, a whole-society approach to multilateralism, and the empowerment of women in various dimensions.

While raising awareness is important, the power of legislation is essential in promoting gender equality. Implementing obligations on companies or the public sector to ensure gender balance in the workforce sparks frequent debates, with arguments for and against affirmative action, as emphasised Professor Charles Mensa, President of the Institute of Economic Affairs of Ghana (IEA).

In that sense, Think Tanks and Data Analysis could have a relevant role. Ainhoa Marín Egoscozábal, Principal Researcher on Sub-Saharan Africa at the Real Instituto Elcano, stresses the importance of think tanks in advancing gender equality. She underscores the critical role of data as the foundation for identifying and addressing gender disparities. Without comprehensive data and statistics, it becomes challenging to accurately assess the extent of the problem.

"Women have the right to be average, normal workers. Not only the most capable women leaders but normal people who can reach positions of relevance."

Ainhoa Marín Egoscozábal, Principal Researcher on Sub-Saharan Africa at the Real Instituto Elcano

Think tanks can have a role in exerting political influence and driving policy changes. While ideas and perceptions hold importance, data provides a more robust and convincing argument for the changes that need to be implemented. The ability to collect and analyze data is fundamental to the process of informing policy makers about the necessary steps towards achieving gender equality in the digital economy.

Nasara Cabrera Abu, Director General of Economic Affairs with Africa at the Government of the Canary Islands, emphasizes the continued lack of disaggregated data by sex, hindering the ability to measure the effectiveness of actions aimed at addressing inequality. She argues that institutions should commit to promoting effective gender equality and strategically plan public policies with a gender perspective that permeates all actions. Merely achieving gender parity in participation is not enough; it is essential to undertake actions with a gender focus. The comprehensive definition of inequality provided by Swedish sociologist Oran Tebor in his book "Inequality Kills," encompasses vital inequality (refers to the disparity in the ability to lead a fulfilling life), existential inequality (capacity for personal development and autonomy), and material inequality (revolves around the possession or lack of resources).

Drawing on the work of sociologist Nancy Fraser, Nasara Cabrera advocates for contributions to the concept of "Social Justice." She asserts that women face inequality across three dimensions: recognition, redistribution, and representation or participation.

Recognition pertains to how women are perceived and acknowledged as equals, while redistribution focuses on their material living conditions. Representation or participation highlights women's capacity to access positions of power and advocate for their rights. These dimensions of inequality and the two concepts of equality are interconnected.

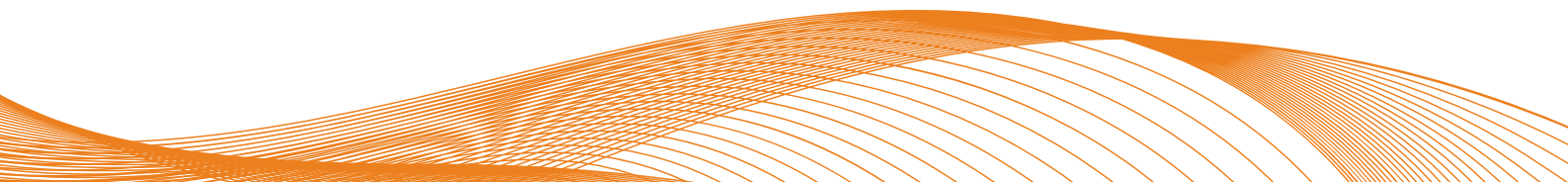
"Institutions must set an example, the gender perspective must cross all actions, not only equal participation but also actions with a gender focus, which is not the same thing".

Nasara Cabrera Abu, General Director of Economic Affairs with Africa at the Government of the Canary Islands

Keiso Mathashanna, the head of the Gender Equality and Empowerment section at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), discusses the potential for improving equality in the digital realm through multilateralism. She emphasizes the importance of unpacking the concept of multilateralism and understanding its implications for social and economic development in Africa.

Multilateral cooperation is crucial for promoting equality in the digital sphere. This approach involves collaboration among stakeholders at all levels to achieve four key outcomes:

- 1. Enhanced access to education and employment,** by challenging traditional gender stereotypes.



2. Leverage digitalization and technology to **enhance access to healthcare services** and promote overall well-being.
3. Empower women and **amplify their collective voice in governance**.
4. **Combat gender-based violence** in all its forms, such as physical, emotional, and technological abuse.

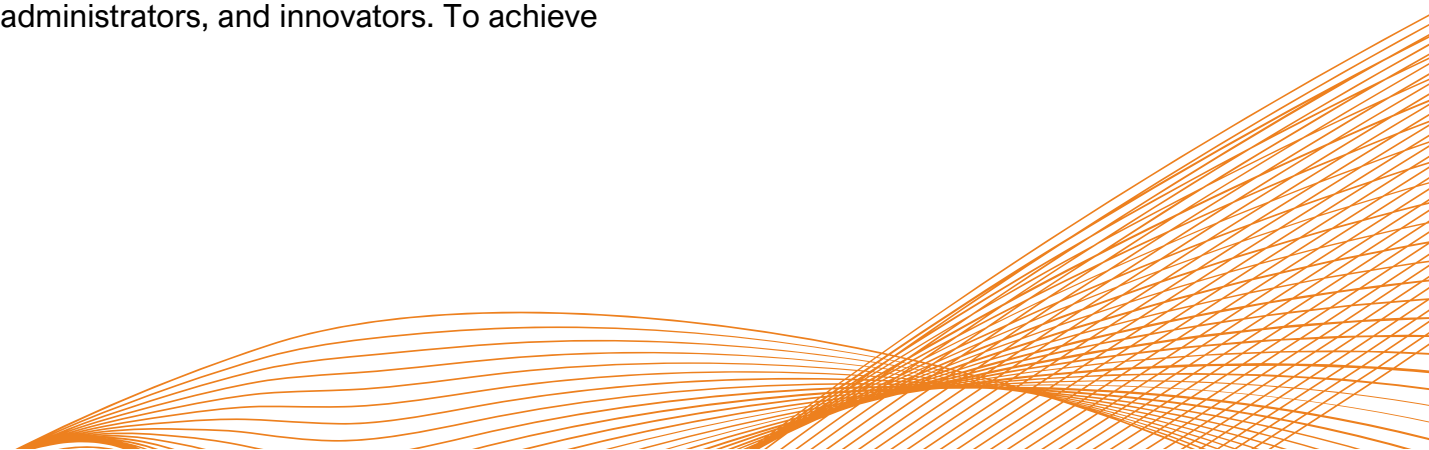
In addition to these outcomes, there is a need to support entrepreneurship and utilize frameworks like the **African free trade area and protocols for women and youth** (24). Efforts to break the glass ceiling and advance gender equality require a comprehensive approach, including mentorship programs, monitoring and evaluation systems, and the use of data for evidence-based decision-making. By adopting a collective responsibility and fostering an inclusive environment, societies can tap into the expertise and potential of women, thereby creating a more equitable and prosperous future.

Policies promoting gender equality in STEM fields should prioritize creating an inclusive and supportive environment for scientific careers, guaranteeing gender balance in decision-making processes and bodies, and incorporating the gender dimension in research and innovation content. By nurturing equality and diversity in STEM, we can unlock the full potential of talented female researchers, teachers, administrators, and innovators. To achieve

this, it is crucial to establish a legal and policy framework that incentivizes the elimination of barriers hindering the recruitment, retention, and career progression of women in STEM, while also addressing discriminatory practices and redressing gender imbalances in decision-making processes.

"Policy analysis is very important, to look at policies and to look at the environment that is changing, because the issues that were topical 20 years back are still topical, but we have emerging issues that need attention".

Keiso Mathashanna, Head of the Gender Equality and Empowerment section at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Limited access to digital technologies poses significant challenges for Africa's full participation in the digital economy. It is crucial to improve connectivity infrastructure, promote digital training programs, and facilitate access to digital financial services.
2. Factors such as affordability, literacy, relevance, and social norms contribute to this divide, hindering women's full engagement in digital society.
3. Empowering women in the digital economy leads to more creative solutions and innovations that meet women's needs. Excluding women from the digital world comes at a high cost to countries' gross domestic product.
4. Digitalization offers various benefits, including improved access to information, job opportunities, education, advocacy platforms, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, networking, mentorship, and participation in community and political life. Developing digital skills among women and providing them with resources and opportunities can empower them, challenge traditional gender roles, and increase their self-confidence and independence.
5. Increasing the participation of girls and women in STEM fields in Africa is crucial for positioning Africa as a future technology hub. Context-specific programs to the specific realities of each country and region should be designed, focus on gender-inclusive education, early interest and awareness in STEM, literacy and numeracy skills development, soft skills development, role models and mentorship and addressing socio-cultural barriers.
6. Women entrepreneurs face limited access to financial resources and assets, resulting in lower profits compared to male entrepreneurs. However, companies with a higher representation of women in executive positions tend to achieve better results, highlighting the importance and unique leadership qualities possessed by women.
7. To achieve a more egalitarian digital economy, data gaps need to be addressed, gender equality in institutions should be promoted, and strategic public policies should be developed. Think tanks and data analysis can play a significant role in advancing gender equality by providing compelling evidence supported by data.
8. Multilateral cooperation is essential for enhancing access to education and employment, improving health outcomes, empowering women in governance, combating gender-based violence, and supporting entrepreneurship. Policies promoting gender equality in STEM fields should prioritize creating an inclusive and supportive environment for scientific careers.

06

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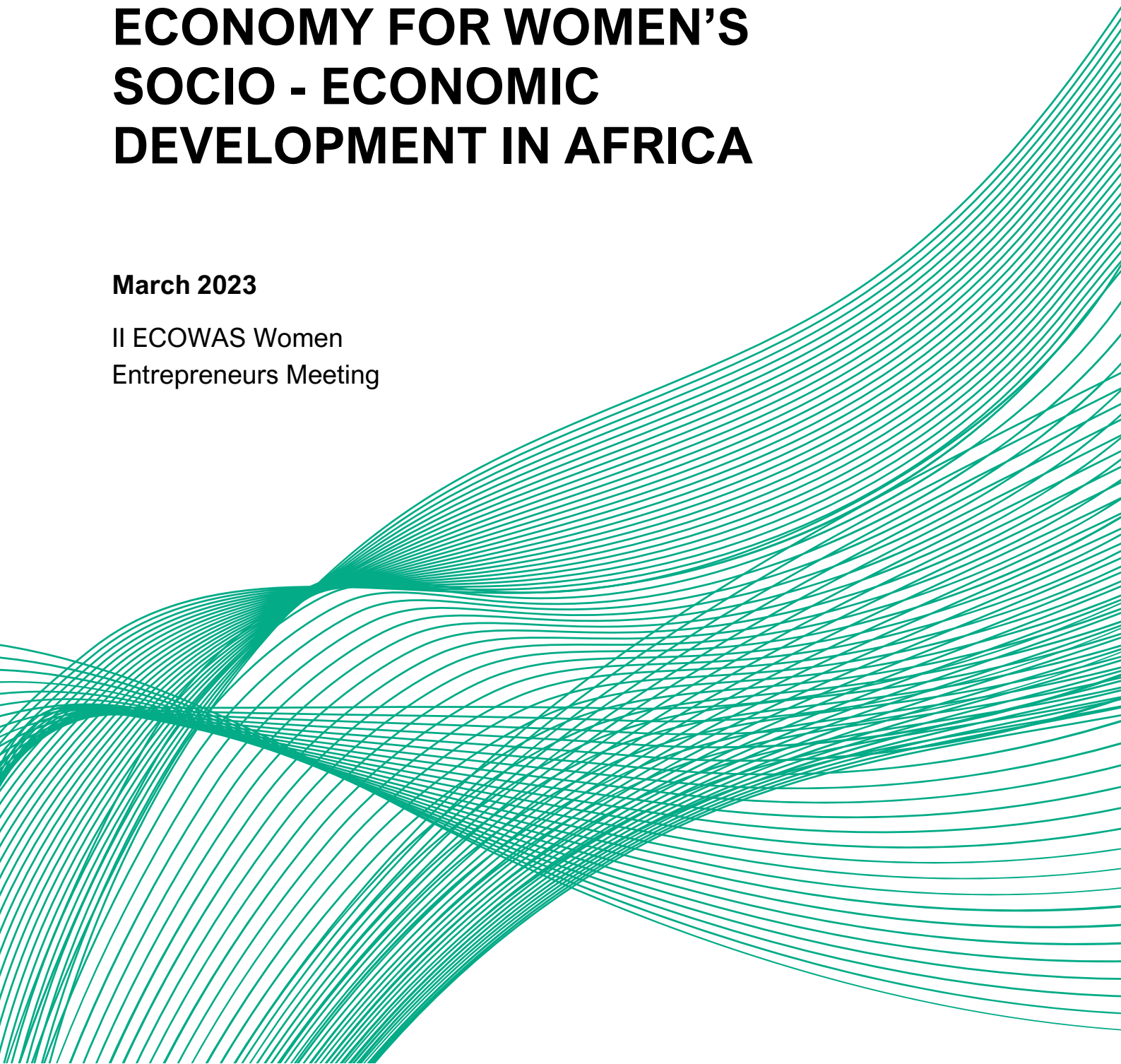
CASA ÁFRICA



THE ROLE OF THE BLUE ECONOMY FOR WOMEN'S SOCIO - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

March 2023

II ECOWAS Women
Entrepreneurs Meeting



INDEX

- 01** IMPORTANCE OF THE BLUE ECONOMY FOR AFRICA
- 02** BLUE ECONOMY CHALLENGES AND HOW WOMEN CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FACE THEM
- 03** GOOD PRACTICES
- 04** AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
 - 4.1 TRAINING / CAPACITY BUILDING
 - 4.2 INCORPORATION OF WOMEN IN COMPANIES OF THE SECTOR
 - 4.3 WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE BLUE ECONOMY
 - 4.4 IMPROVING POLICIES FOR A MORE EGALITARIAN BLUE ECONOMY
 - Policies to narrow the gender gap
 - The role of public-private partnerships
 - Fighting against gender-based violence
 - Addressing cultural and social barriers – Role models and success stories
- 05** CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
- 06** BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

01

IMPORTANCE OF THE BLUE ECONOMY FOR AFRICA

World Bank defines the Blue Economy as “including a variety of activities ranging from fisheries and aquaculture; and ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, coastal protection and biodiversity” (1). As the world increasingly turns to sustainable development and environmental conservation, the concept of the blue economy has gained momentum as a means of harnessing the potential of our oceans and water resources.

The Blue Economy has emerged as a critical concept in Africa, as a means of achieving sustainable development. In the continent, the blue economy holds tremendous opportunities for economic growth and job creation. The African Development Bank estimates that Africa's blue economy is worth \$1 trillion per year and has the potential to create millions of jobs for African youth, particularly in the fisheries, aquaculture, and maritime sectors. These industries have the potential to not only reduce poverty and improve exports, but also to empower women through employment and leadership opportunities, as stated Fatou Cissé, President of BPW Senegal, a network of business and professional women with affiliates in over 100 countries.

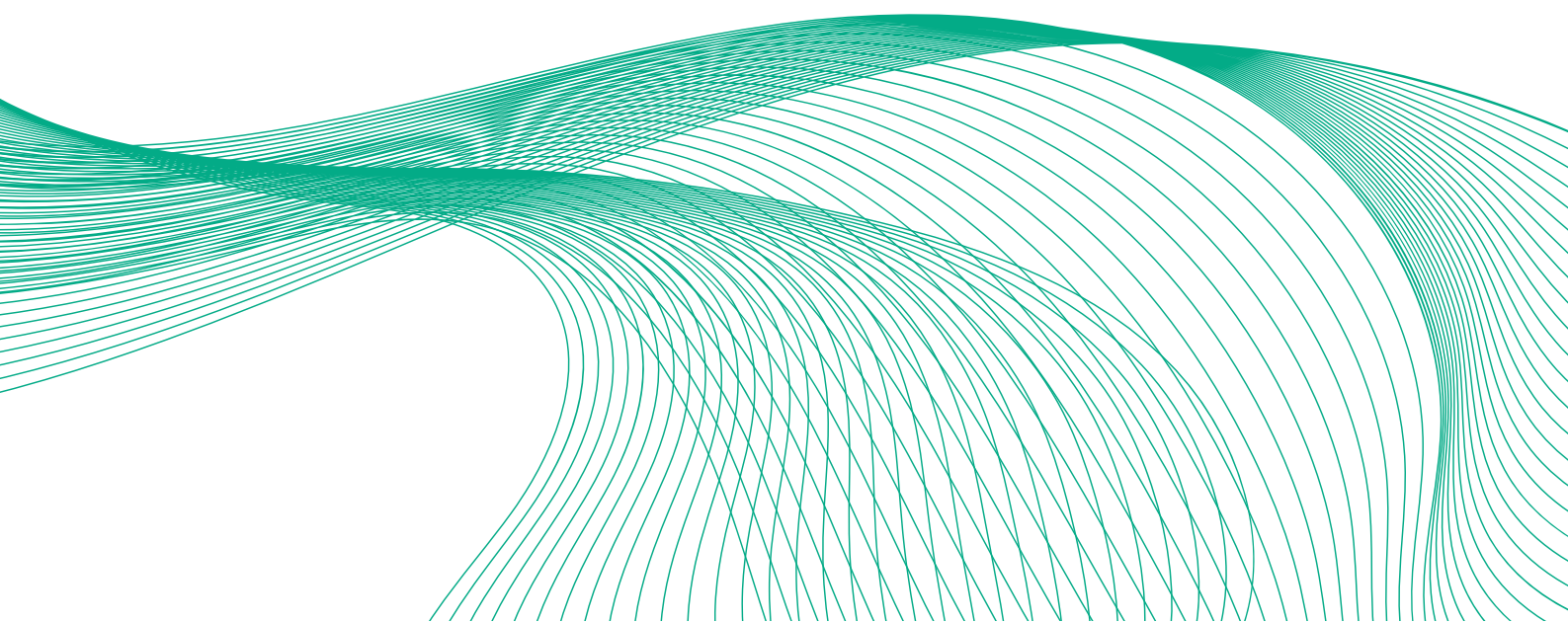
Additionally, the Sustainable Development Goals provide a framework for achieving these objectives and building a more equitable and sustainable Blue Economy (2). The blue economy is aligned and directly linked to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 14, which promotes the “sustainable use [of] oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” (3). These goals are also in line with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which aims to promote sustainable development across the continent.



However, as Dr Charles Mensa, Chairman of the Institute of Economic Affairs of Ghana mentioned, gender diversity is a crucial aspect of blue economy development in Africa. Women's participation in the blue economy is necessary for achieving sustainable development and reducing poverty. Unfortunately, women are often excluded from decision-making processes and face cultural and institutional barriers. According to the United Nations, women comprise only 2% of the total workforce in the maritime sector worldwide.



As we work towards a more sustainable world, it is important to recognize and support the role of women in achieving these goals. The blue economy in West Africa provides a unique opportunity to promote women's leadership and empowerment while also driving economic growth and environmental conservation. However, gender inequality and exclusion remain a significant challenge, particularly in male-dominated sectors such as fisheries and aquaculture (4). Addressing these issues requires a range of interventions, including capacity building and training, policies that promote women's entrepreneurship and participation in companies in the Blue Economy, and policies that promote gender equality more broadly. By reducing the gender gap in the Blue Economy, we can build a more inclusive and sustainable economic future for Africa. Closing the gender gap is therefore not only a "women's issue" but a question of greater prosperity and stability in all socio-economic areas, including the maritime space (5).



02

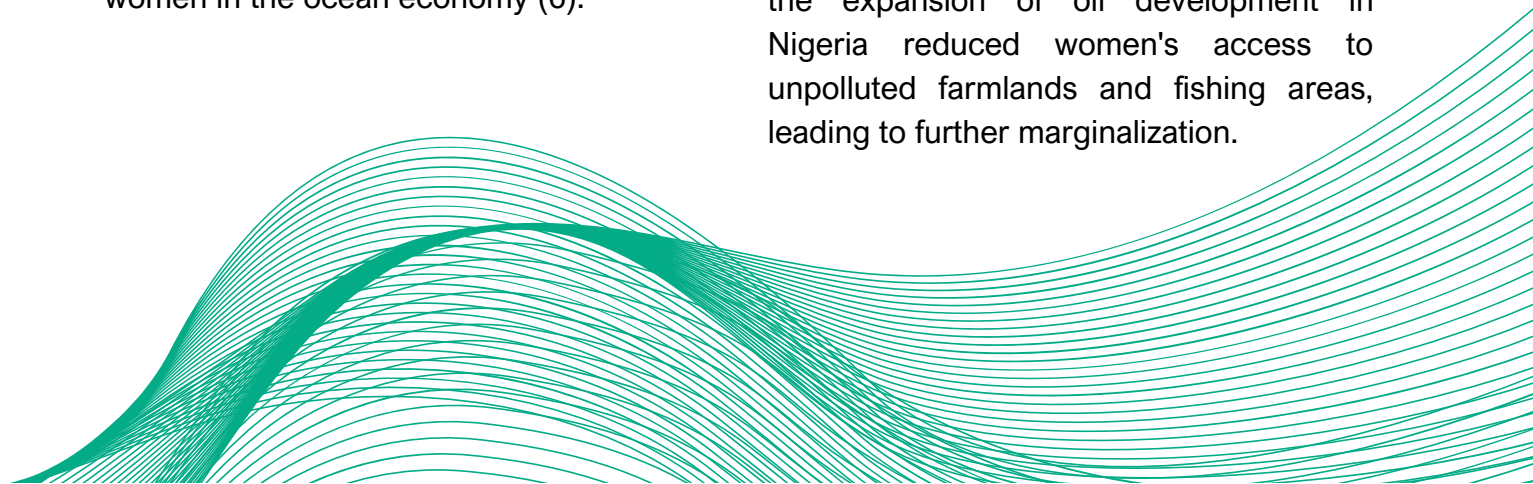
BLUE ECONOMY CHALLENGES AND HOW WOMEN CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FACE THEM

Women's contributions to the blue economy are significant, but often invisible and unrecognized. Women play a critical role in fisheries, where almost half of the workforce is estimated to be female, as well as in other sectors such as tourism, aquaculture, oil and gas, and blue carbon. Discrimination, legal barriers, and harassment in the workplace limit their ability to participate meaningfully in maritime industries and leads to their marginalization or exclusion. Women's contributions are often not recognized, which is reflected in the low priority given to policies that address gender inequalities. However, existing gender inequalities continue to produce and reproduce inequalities that lead to women's marginalization and lack of inclusion in these sectors. Women's contributions are often unpaid or underpaid, and they are often responsible for labour-intensive yet lower-paid supporting activities such as fish processing.

Gender inequalities are exacerbated by blue growth when they are ignored, leading to the further marginalization of women in the ocean economy (6).

Women face limited opportunities to improve gender equality, as many programs are targeted at an assumed male breadwinner, and new and higher-earning jobs are often reserved for men. Women have limited access to capital, education, and skills, making it difficult for them to take up new opportunities. Gendered pay discrimination is pervasive, with women receiving lower wages and fewer benefits than men.

Lack of inclusion during the planning stages can further entrench gender differences in employment and economic benefits. Women's exclusion from decision-making and mapping processes puts them at risk of losing access to resources they depend on, which are highly gendered and shaped by access to capital, assets, knowledge, and relationships across the life course. Women rely on inshore areas to harvest shellfish for income and subsistence or depend on fishers to supply them with fish for processing. However, they have been marginalized in West Africa following blue carbon policies that ignored the role of mangroves in their livelihoods. Similarly, the expansion of oil development in Nigeria reduced women's access to unpolluted farmlands and fishing areas, leading to further marginalization.



In addition to these challenges, specific challenges faced in the African Union (AU) Member States include (7):

- Inadequate information and data on blue economy development.
- Lack of best practices and success stories.
- Unsustainable activities.
- Lack of policies and regulatory frameworks.
- Failure to recognize neglected economic opportunities.
- Limited guidance and direction resulting in conflicts of interest.
- Limited accessibility of the blue economy.
- Lack of a strategic framework.
- Security and crime leading to cost escalation.
- Marginalization and displacement of coastline communities.
- Lack of public education interventions.

Women can play a crucial role in overcoming the challenges of the blue economy as we will explore in this paper.

03

GOOD PRACTICES

Closing the gender gap would require increased political efforts and ensuring greater gender diversity in traditionally male-dominated industries, such as the maritime sector, can be an effective way to accelerate progress and efficiency (8). International efforts have shown that more systematic and effective integration of women in coastal economies, while addressing inequalities, has reduced gender gaps (9). These efforts have also delivered an increase in women's income, improvements in local livelihood activities, and brought positive impacts to marine life conservation. Thus, addressing gaps gender is key for women's development, and that of their families, communities, and the economy, as well as the progress and sustainability of the Blue Economy.

Initiatives in other countries have shown that promoting the inclusion of women in the blue economy can bring about positive change. Norway, for example, has launched a program called "Equal Opportunities in the Blue Economy", which aims to promote the inclusion of women in the blue economy and reduce the gender gap in the sector (10). The Australian government has launched a program called "Women in Seafood Australasia" to promote the inclusion of women in the fishing and aquaculture industry. The program aims to create, build, and maintain engagement opportunities for women in the seafood industry. The program also provides funding to support women's participation in leadership and professional development programs (11).

Spain has also been active in promoting gender equality in the blue economy through programs such as the NEPAD Spanish Fund for Empowerment of African Women. This fund, created in 2010, supports projects that promote gender equality and empower women in Africa, including in the fisheries sector. However, there is a lack of specific data on Spain's effectiveness in supporting gender equality in the blue economy. While Spain has emphasized feminist foreign policy, it is a relatively recent development, and it is too early to evaluate its impact on promoting gender equality in the blue economy (12).

In Africa, customized cascade training for women has been a pathway to stimulate long-term effects. In Ghana, a customized technical training program for women in the fisheries sector was developed to address gaps identified during a gender integration portfolio diagnosis. The "women leadership initiative program" adopted a cascade training approach starting with a "training for trainers" and then rolling out the training for women. The pilot training exercise sought to integrate lessons, while the second round of activities provided training for trainers to stimulate long-term results (13).

One effective approach to achieving these goals has been the establishment of networks and associations specifically for women in the industry. These networks provide a platform for women to connect, share knowledge and experiences, and advocate for change. For example, the Port of Las Palmas Foundation and the Network of Women Professionals in Maritime and Port Affairs of West and Central Africa (REFMAP) have established a successful partnership to promote gender equality in the maritime and port sectors of West Africa. The partnership includes a number of initiatives such as training programs, mentoring, and networking events for women professionals in the sector. One of the main initiatives of the partnership is the "Women's Leadership Program", which is aimed at promoting the leadership skills of women in the maritime and port sectors. The program provides training and mentoring to women professionals in West Africa, helping them to develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed in leadership roles.



04

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In this article, the position of African women in the blue economy is approached from several angles, although 4 aspects have proved to be key: capacity building and training, women's entrepreneurship and participation in companies in the Blue Economy, and policies that promote gender equality.

4.1.



**TRAINING AND
CAPACITY BUILDING**

4.2.



**INCORPORATION OF
WOMEN IN
COMPANIES OF THE
SECTOR**

4.3.



**WOMEN'S
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
IN THE BLUE
ECONOMY**

4.4.



**IMPROVING
POLICIES FOR A
MORE EGALITARIAN
BLUE ECONOMY**

4.1. TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Gender stereotypes and unconscious bias impact women's opportunities for training and advancement in the blue economy. Women often face barriers to career advancement in the blue economy, including limited opportunities for leadership and management roles. Training and capacity building can help women develop the skills and confidence they need to advance in their careers and take on leadership roles. In the Canary Islands, the Maritime Cluster has observed that blue vocations are generated from an early age. Ministries of Education should develop maritime sector programmes for use in early childhood education and in education institutions to highlight career opportunities and overcome "sea blindness".

Vocational training has demonstrated high employability rates and benefits for women. Through skills-based training, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation on leadership roles and responsibilities, decision-making, effective women leaders can be produced. In the informal sector, functional literacy programs on hygiene, quality, labeling, and traceability, as well as methods and techniques for training women in illiterate environments would be of great value.

Women also need to access higher education and be trained in universities and vocational institutes to develop the necessary technical competencies. It is also important for women to have international experience and the opportunity to study outside their environment, which prepares them for such an internationalized sector as the marine-maritime sectors. Additionally, networking and mentorship opportunities are crucial for career advancement and business success.

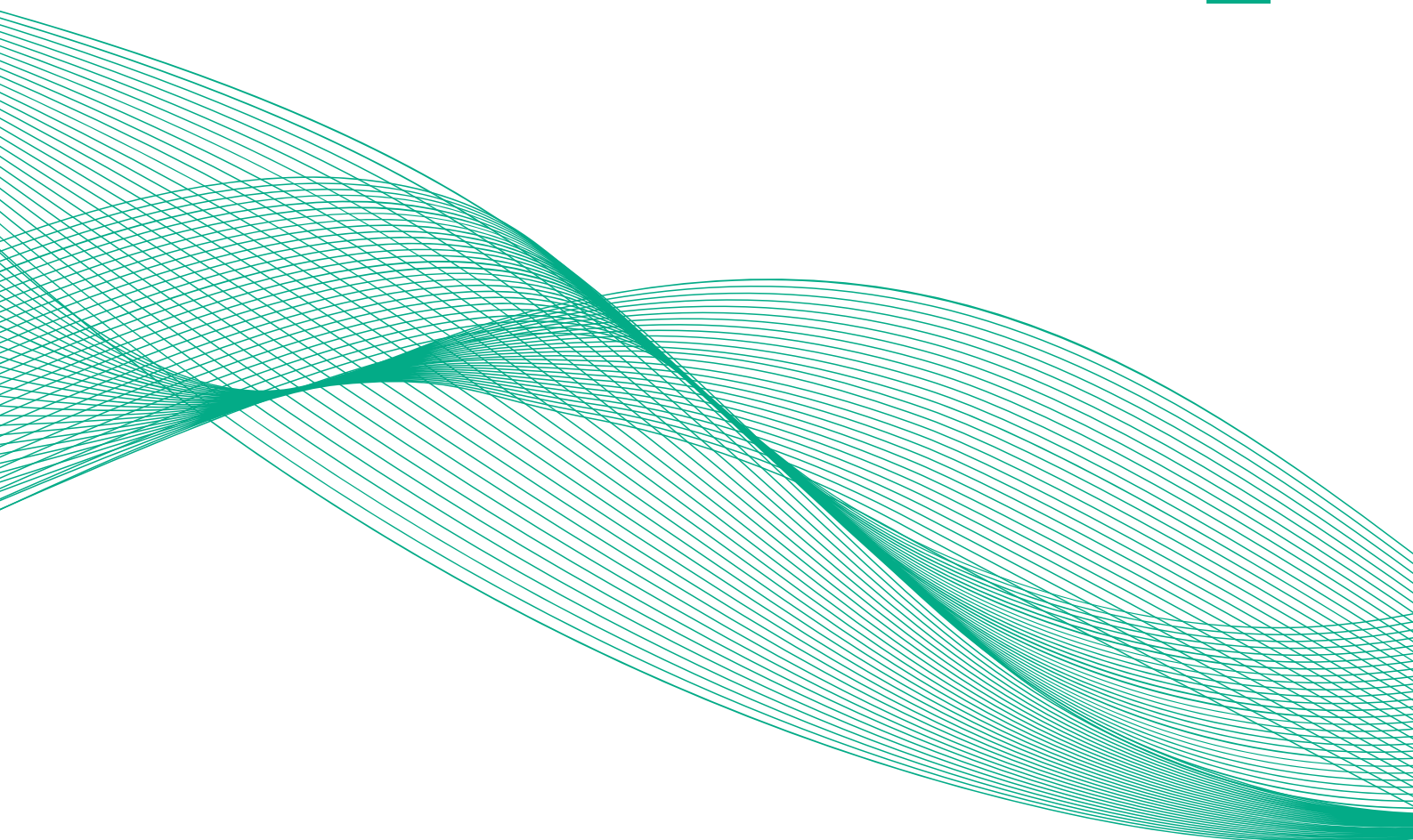


To design effective training programs, it is essential to involve women in the process and to use the andragogy approach. Additionally, the development of financing tools that facilitate economic development and offer services such as credit and insurance can encourage women to move beyond subsistence activities. For example, in Senegal, the Strategy for Strengthening the Capacity and Social and Economic Power of Women Active in the Fisheries Sector was successful in addressing the marginalization of women in the sector. Other successful programs include USAID/COMFISH, which provided sustainable approaches adapted to the needs of women involved in fish processing. These programs aimed to empower women economically and politically, enabling them to defend their interests in decision-making processes and increase their economic independence for their empowerment.

Thus, capacity-building programs can bridge this gap by providing women with the necessary skills:

- **PROFESSIONAL TRAINING**
- **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**
- **ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT**
- **PROJECT MANAGEMENT**
- **LEADERSHIP**

Another approach is to give visibility and relevance to female leaders in the blue economy who can showcase their achievements and serve as examples of success in male-dominated sectors. This can be achieved by organizing events such as "This is our Port" (14), which has already had two editions. Such events provide an opportunity for women to learn from other women and be inspired to pursue careers in the blue economy.



4.2. INCORPORATION OF WOMEN IN COMPANIES OF THE SECTOR

Women in Africa face various challenges in accessing employment opportunities in the blue economy (15). This has led to proposals to improve female participation in the blue economy, both in terms of numbers and in decision-making roles, which, as in so many other sectors, has proven to have a tremendously positive impact. Career opportunities in the maritime sector must be highlighted and brought to the attention of girls and women. There is also a need to raise the profile of women in maritime research and to raise awareness of women working in the environment.

One of the biggest challenges is the scarcity of resources exacerbated by climate change, which has accelerated the degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems. This degradation reduces the ability of ecosystems to provide goods and services on which the livelihoods of communities, especially women, depend, making them more vulnerable to socio-economic precarity. Other challenges in the fishing industry include:

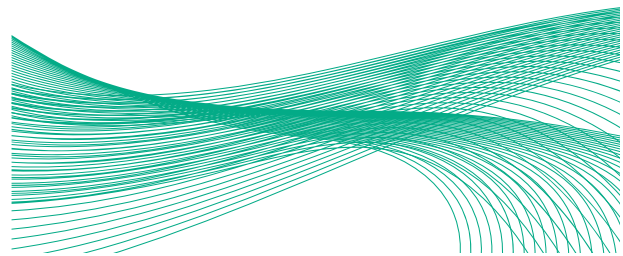
- Difficulty in accessing raw materials due to competition from traders from other areas,
- Competition from fishmeal and fish oil factories and the lack of modernization in the sub-sector
- Lack of training,
- Poor quality of statistical data,
- Weak financing and support systems, and
- Lack of certification and labeling processes, which affect the commercialization of finished products.

All these issues make their work difficult, arduous, and risky. Another challenge is the lack of women in leadership positions, and promoting women to these positions is essential for improving gender representation and ensuring a solid technical education. To effectively promote women in the blue economy in Africa, it is necessary to encourage and stimulate companies through various actions:

1. **Capacity building programs that are specifically designed for women**, both in formal and informal sectors.
2. **Advocacy policies to raise awareness of maritime issues**, particularly those related to pollution, maritime piracy, and the protection of coastal and marine environments.
3. **Setting up an observatory to monitor the career progression of women** in the sector.
4. **Forums, seminars, and webinars initiated by women's organizations and regional and international organizations** to promote gender diversity and equity in their workforce.
5. **A registry system** can be established to identify women working in both formal and informal sectors.
6. **Governments can provide tax incentives or subsidies** to companies that demonstrate gender parity.

In addition, industry associations can encourage their members to adopt gender diversity policies and recognize and reward companies that demonstrate commitment to promoting gender equality. For instance, women can play a crucial role in accelerating the growth of the maritime sector in their country by serving as a task force and providing a platform for the sector to seamlessly integrate and form a social pact as part of efforts to rapidly develop the maritime industry. As Fatou Cissé, President of BPW Senegal stated, women are able to support each other and show audacity. “There is no limit to what they can accomplish. They are capable and they are worthy”.

There are already studies from European countries that demonstrate the benefits of having women in leadership positions in their institutions at all levels. For instance, McKinsey's Women Matter report (16) found that companies with a higher percentage of women in executive positions tend to perform better financially. To adapt these lessons to the blue economy in Africa, a public awareness campaign highlighting the maritime sector and the role of women is essential.



4.3. WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE BLUE ECONOMY

Promoting women's entrepreneurship and women-owned/led micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is a primary strategy for generating more and better jobs for women in various economic sectors. However, it is important to note that such activities need to be accompanied by a proper gender assessment to ensure their feasibility and effectiveness. In general, women face significant challenges when starting and running businesses in the blue economy in Africa. These challenges include:

- Limited access to finance and credit.
- Lack of access to education and training.
- Cultural and social barriers.
- Discriminatory laws and policies.

Women often have difficulty accessing funding (15) and credit due to discriminatory lending practices and the lack of collateral. In addition, women may face cultural and social barriers that prevent them from participating in certain sectors such as fishing and maritime security.

There are similar challenges and efforts to promote women's entrepreneurship in the blue economy in all African countries. Capacity-building programs in Côte d'Ivoire, sponsored by the FAO, have focused on providing women in the fishing industry with training in management, accounting, and entrepreneurship, as well as promoting women's associations to create networks of support and opportunities for collaboration.

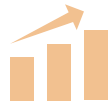
Successful programs have included not only business training but also literacy training and awareness-raising campaigns to promote sustainable practices and prevent harmful activities such as illegal logging. The Ghanaian government has implemented policies to promote women's participation, including providing training and support for women entrepreneurs and investing in infrastructure to support women-led businesses. In Kenya, the government has implemented policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the blue economy, such as providing access to finance and credit for women entrepreneurs and promoting gender-sensitive laws and policies.

Training programs like the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Women initiative have proven effective in providing women entrepreneurs with business education, mentoring, and networking opportunities. These programs have helped women entrepreneurs to access financing, improve their business management skills, and grow their businesses, which has in turn helped reduce the gender gap in entrepreneurship. Another example is the story of a group of women from the coastal town of Saly in Senegal who established a fish-processing plant with the support of a local NGO. The project, which was initially launched as a micro-credit scheme, has since grown into a successful business that employs over 100 women and supplies fish to local markets and restaurants.

To overcome cultural barriers such as gender discrimination, governments can also work to promote more inclusive and diverse business environments through

policies and initiatives that support women-led businesses and encourage the participation of women in leadership roles.

Here are some potential strategies to promote women entrepreneurship in the blue economy:



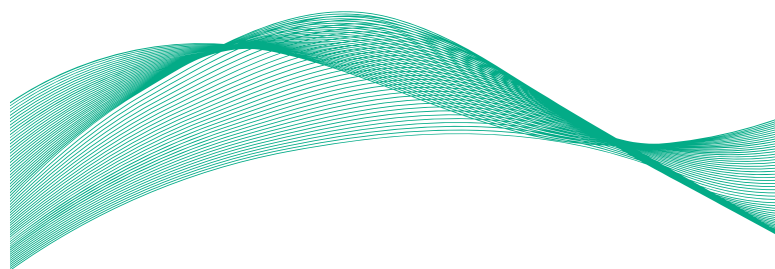
Financing and resources, such as training programs and technical assistance, to women entrepreneurs.



Training and capacity-building programs can help women entrepreneurs acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to start and grow their businesses. These programs should focus on developing leadership skills, business management, and technical skills in areas such as fisheries management, aquaculture, and marine conservation.



Women entrepreneurs in the blue economy would benefit from networking and mentorship opportunities that provide access to resources, knowledge, and expertise. This could involve creating business incubators and accelerators, hosting networking events and conferences, and partnering with established businesses to provide mentorship opportunities.



4.4. IMPROVING POLICIES FOR A MORE EGALITARIAN BLUE ECONOMY

The blue economy has the potential to contribute significantly to sustainable development and the creation of decent work opportunities, particularly for women. However, women in the blue economy often face barriers to accessing safe and decent working conditions, such as discriminatory laws, lack of access to education and training, and limited representation in decision-making processes.



POLICIES TO NARROW THE GENDER GAP

Various policies aimed at reducing the gender gap have been implemented worldwide, including gender quotas and paid parental leave. Norway's quota requiring 40% of board members in publicly listed companies to be women has resulted in a significant increase in women's leadership positions. Other countries such as Rwanda, Senegal, and Cape Verde (17) have implemented similar policies, resulting in increased women's representation in decision-making roles. However, some women, like Florentine Guilhard-Koidio, President of the Network of Maritime and Port Professional Women in West Africa believe in promoting competence over quotas and positive discrimination. It is essential to avoid thinking of women as tokens or diversity checkboxes and to identify and promote competent women.

The efficacy of gender quotas in leadership positions and politics is an ongoing debate. A recent study conducted in Norway (18) found that quotas had increased women's representation on boards, but the long-term impact was uncertain. Meanwhile, a Forbes article (19) argues that quotas are necessary because voluntary measures and business initiatives have failed to close the gender gap in leadership positions. The Harvard Business Review (20) suggests that quotas are only a starting point, and more comprehensive policies are needed to support women's advancement in the workplace.

To successfully implement policies aimed at reducing the gender gap, budgetary allocations are crucial. The World Bank Group emphasizes that gender-sensitive activities are better implemented when accounted for in their financing. Adequate budgetary allocations (15) can help to achieve better outcomes and ensure that policies aimed at reducing the gender gap are successfully implemented. In addition, gender-specific data on women in the maritime space should be produced. This information can be obtained by including the maritime sector in labour force surveys as a key component of data collection exercises.



THE ROLE OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Public-private partnerships can play a significant role in promoting gender equality. These partnerships can leverage the resources, expertise, and networks of both the public and private sectors to create more inclusive policies and practices. For example, in the European Union, the BlueInvest platform was created to bring together public and private investors to support sustainable blue economy projects, including those led by women entrepreneurs.

However, policies are needed to facilitate these partnerships and ensure that they prioritize gender equality. One such policy is the inclusion of gender considerations in procurement processes. This means that public-private partnerships should require gender equality criteria to be included in the selection of contractors and suppliers.

The example provided by the Maritime Cluster of the Canary Islands, which promotes the visibility of women in the blue economy through events like "This is our Port" (21), is an excellent illustration of how public-private partnerships can promote gender equality. By bringing together stakeholders from the public and private sectors, these partnerships can increase the visibility and opportunities for women in the blue economy and help to create a more diverse and inclusive industry.



FIGHTING AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Another problem in the blue economy is gender-based violence and harassment, as it can have significant negative impacts on the well-being and productivity of women. To address these issues, it is essential to increase awareness and social mobilization and provide women with access to justice and appropriate support. Policies and measures must be put in place to prevent and respond to these behaviours, including ending impunity for violence and pursuing perpetrators. Universal access to basic services is also crucial, including rapid intervention for safety and protection, psychological and social support, and assistance to help women understand their rights. In addition to these measures, gender-sensitive policies in companies and institutions, training for personnel, and monitoring and management of human resources are essential to prevent gender-based violence and harassment.

One successful case in this area is the "Safe at Sea" project, which was implemented by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in collaboration with the maritime industry to address the issue of sexual harassment and assault at sea. The project aimed to raise awareness of the issue, improve reporting mechanisms, and develop policies and procedures to prevent and respond to these behaviours. However, policies alone are not sufficient to ensure that women have access to safe and decent working conditions. There is also a need for measures to monitor and enforce these policies.



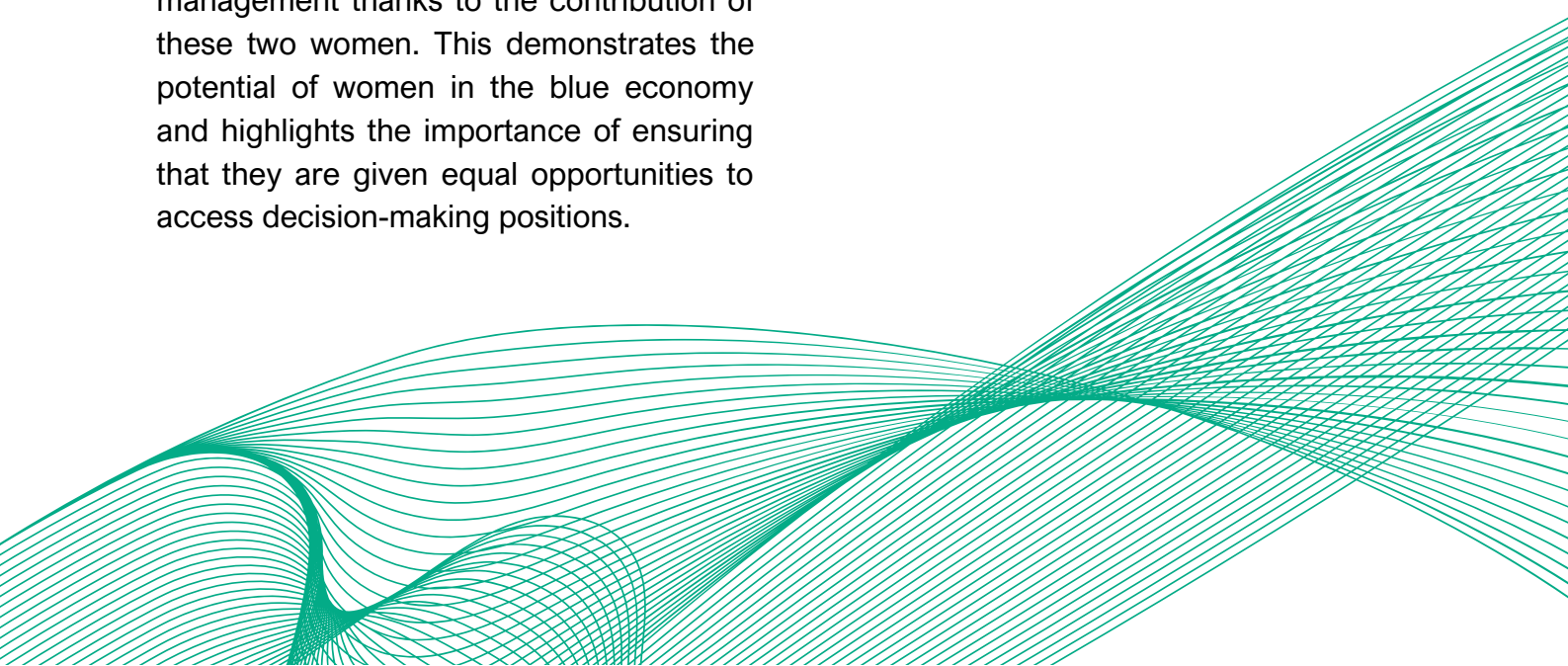
ADDRESSING CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BARRIERS – ROLE MODELS AND SUCCESS STORIES

Policies must be designed to address the cultural and social barriers that prevent women from fully participating in the blue economy. Reforms that include economic, legal, and political measures are needed to support women's advancement in the workforce. These policies need to be developed by women who understand the issues and can prioritize solutions. Training is also crucial, as Monica Quesada, Project Manager at the Maritime Cluster of the Canary Islands, emphasizes, to ensure that women have the necessary skills to succeed. For example, implementing policies that encourage women's interest in the maritime sector and institutionalizing gender equality can help integrate women into the blue economy. Furthermore, innovative financing mechanisms can be put in place to support these policies.

For instance, in Guinea Conakry, two women from the Network of Women Professionals in Maritime and Port Affairs of West and Central Africa were appointed as the head of the port, which led to the port receiving a prize for better management thanks to the contribution of these two women. This demonstrates the potential of women in the blue economy and highlights the importance of ensuring that they are given equal opportunities to access decision-making positions.

Here are some of the recommendations to share success stories:

- Sharing knowledge and successes is crucial for creating networks and visibility for competent women in the blue economy.
- Promoting professions in the blue economy by coordinating with educational institutions and port authorities.
- Involving value chains, landowners, and sustainable project design in communities to support decision-making.
- Organisation of a campaign to sensitize people to the blue economy and create incentives for investment in the sector.
- Mentorship by successful women in leadership positions is crucial for overcoming barriers to women's participation in the blue economy.



05

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we have highlighted in this article, the blue economy has the potential to be a significant contributor to women's socio-economic development in Africa. However, the current exclusion of women from the maritime sector has hindered their access to economic opportunities, as well as their ability to benefit from the sector's development. Here are the main conclusions:

1. Gender stereotypes and biases must be addressed to ensure that women have equal opportunities for training and advancement. Providing gender-sensitive training and capacity building can help reduce these biases and create a more inclusive workplace. It is crucial to incorporate blue vocations into the curriculum and extracurricular activities from the beginning of primary education. Vocational training and apprenticeships can help women develop the skills and confidence they need to advance in their careers and take on leadership roles. Women also need to access higher education and be trained in universities and vocational institutes to develop the necessary technical competencies. Policies can facilitate the development and implementation of these programs, and funding and support from governments and NGOs can help ensure that training programs are accessible and relevant to women in the blue economy.

2. Empowering women entrepreneurs is a critical aspect of promoting women's participation in the blue economy. Several African countries have made progress in promoting gender equality and empowering women entrepreneurs, resulting in a growing number of successful women-led businesses in the blue economy. Nevertheless, to further support women entrepreneurs in the blue economy, governments and development partners should establish and expand credit schemes and other financial incentives. In addition, they should provide training and capacity-building programs for women entrepreneurs to develop business skills and improve access to markets, networks, and resources.

3. Women's networks, as exemplified by the Women in Port Management Network of Africa (REFMAP) with the support of Las Palmas Port Foundation, can play an essential role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the blue economy. These networks can provide a platform for women to share knowledge, experiences, and best practices, as well as advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment. Governments, civil society organizations, and development partners should support the establishment and strengthening of women's networks and facilitate their participation in policy dialogue and decision-making processes.

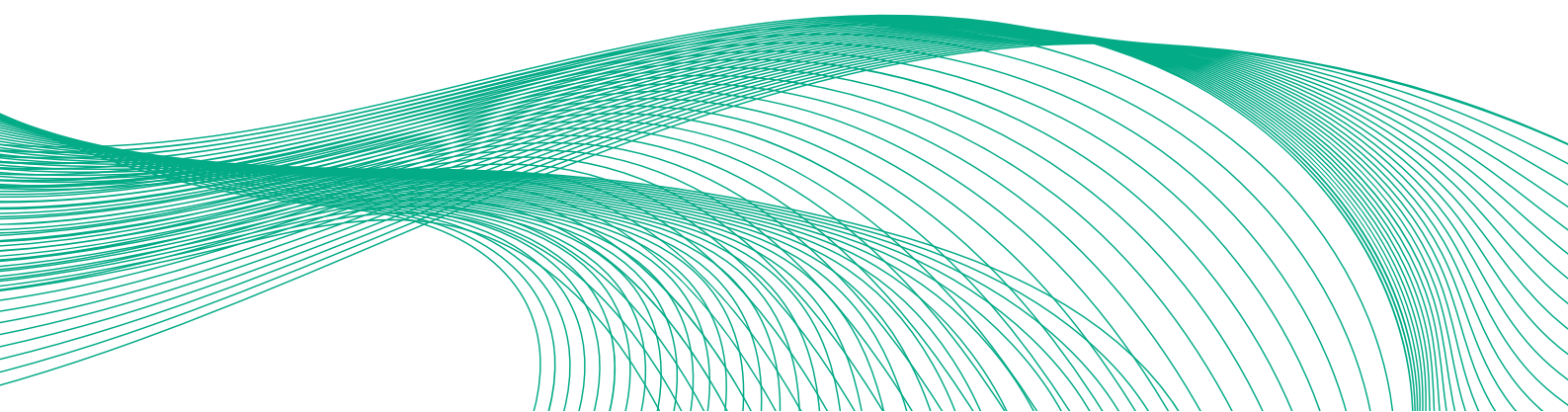
4. Gender-sensitive measures can play a critical role in promoting women's participation and empowerment in the blue economy. To promote women's participation in the sector, companies can implement capacity building programs, organize advocacy policies, set up observatories to monitor women's career progression, and participate in forums and seminars promoting gender diversity. Increasing women's participation can have several benefits, including accelerating the growth of the maritime sector, contributing to the protection of the marine and coastal environment, and sustainable management of biodiversity resources. To achieve these benefits, a public awareness campaign highlighting the role of women in the blue economy and the benefits of gender diversity is necessary. In the same way, highlighting success stories is essential.

5. The blue economy is a potential avenue for sustainable development and decent work opportunities for women. However, women often face challenges in accessing safe and decent working conditions. To reduce the gender gap, policies such as gender quotas and paid parental leave have been implemented globally. Public-private partnerships can also play a vital role in promoting gender equality. However, policies are required to facilitate these partnerships and ensure that they prioritize gender equality.

Unfortunately, gender-based violence and harassment is a significant issue, and policies and measures must be put in place to prevent and respond to these behaviors. Moreover, policies must be designed to address cultural and social barriers that prevent women from fully participating in the blue economy. To support these policies, training and innovative financing mechanisms can be put in place.

"Equality is a right, once conquered and recognized, we must continue to fight day by day so that there is no step backwards in that equality in rights. Without this equality in rights, society cannot prosper"

Margarita Pena (Spain - Canary Islands), Special delegate of the Santa Cruz de Tenerife Free Trade Zone and member of BPW Canarias.



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