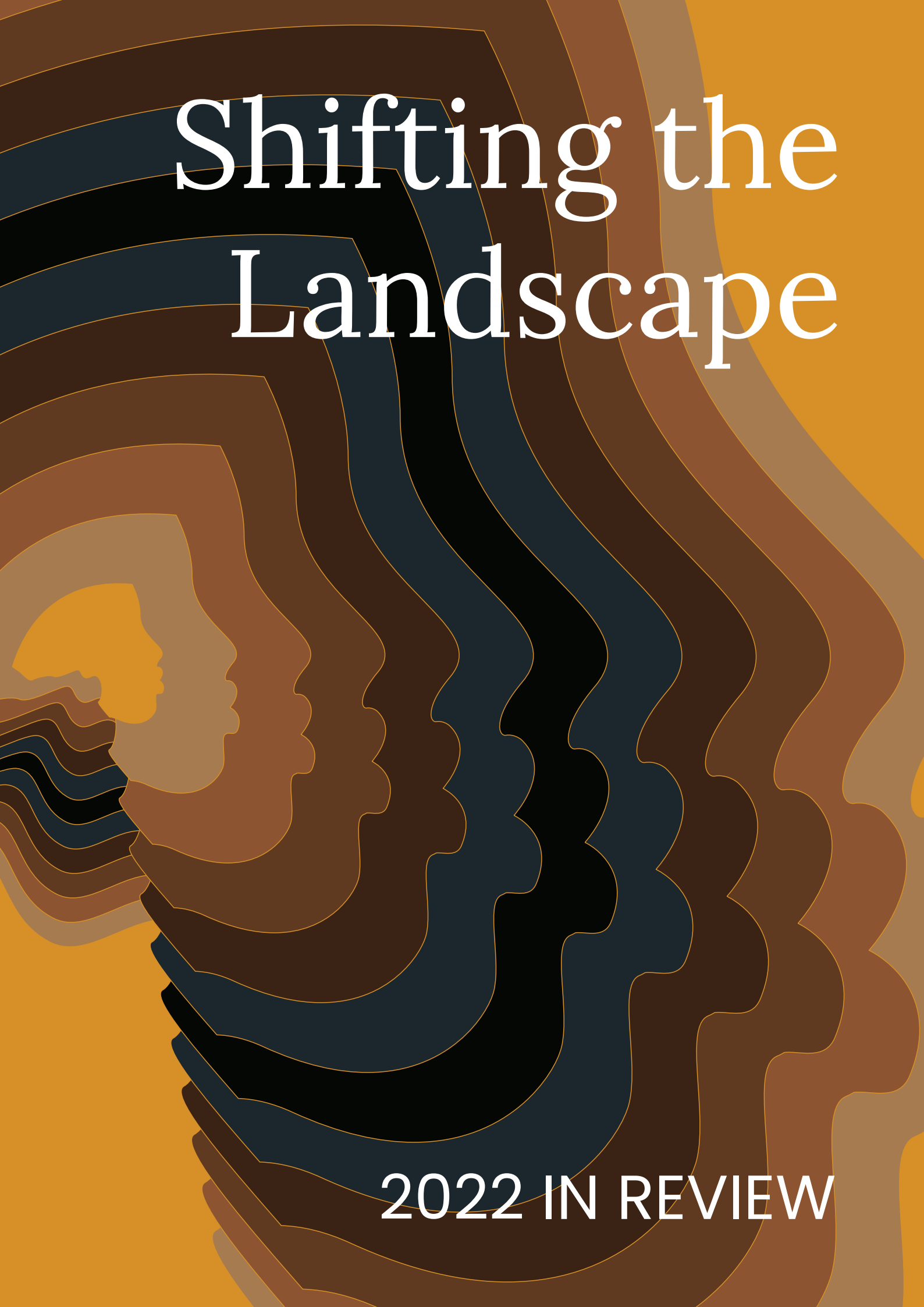
Shifting the Landscape



2022 IN REVIEW

Foreword

A lot has changed for female leaders in the almost two decades since I became Africa's first elected female president. At that time in 2006, the proportion of female parliamentarians was only at 16.8%[1] and has today risen to 26.3%. Since then, it's been a series of many 'firsts' for African women such as Ethiopia's first female Chief Justice, Somalia's first female presidential candidate or Kenya's first female Governor. This has been due to the relentless push by female leaders and their allies to see a society where governance reflects the people being governed.

For every milestone reached, there have also been lots of setbacks, but I remain positive in an Africa where citizens can see themselves reflected in their leaders and where Africans from any gender, creed, religion, community, economic background, those living with disabilities—anyone can dream of becoming a decision maker in their country.

Africa's development depends on ensuring that none of its citizens are left behind and that everyone's voice has the possibility of being heard. I am a believer in the power of stories. This is why this year's edition brings in the voices of real-life women who have surmounted different challenges to themselves becoming the 'first' in whose footsteps others will follow. These include the first female Chief Justices of Kenya and Ethiopia among others.

Young girls in coming generations will know that they too can one day dream of being Presidents, Generals, Ministers, parliamentarians if their calling is in public governance. If they choose to follow other fields, they will be able to believe that the world needs both female and male leaders to drive positive change that is inclusive for all.

"I can honestly say I have few regrets at all when I think back over my life. There is nothing I would have done differently. **Everything I did, every action I took, matched the circumstances of the times.** If I could live my life again, I would live it in exactly the same way."

— Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *This Child Will Be Great*

Context

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022, it will take another 132 years to close the gender gap.

"In our African societies, women are both the smallholder farmers, but also the ones responsible for most of the domestic tasks and household chores such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of children and sick relatives. Despite this, they are the ones with the least access to resources," says Zimbabwean philanthropist Tsitsi Masiyiwa.

Despite all these limitations, African women are drivers of progress, and this yearly publication is dedicated to celebrating their efforts and contributions towards Africa's success. Centring on African women's progress throughout 2022, the report notes the achievements of women at the highest levels of the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary.

This report aims to humanize women on the forefront of public governance on the continent, showing them as people who have surmounted various challenges, overcome the greatest of barriers, fought hard and worked tirelessly for their place in leadership. They are women who believe in the potential of the continent and all that can be gained by making sure that everyone has equal opportunities and access to fully contribute to the Africa we want to see.

There have been a lot of wins in the past decades, but also there is so much more ground to cover. For the handful of countries that are approaching gender parity in governance positions, there are still tens that have only a handful of women in roles of public governance. This is why the work we do with the Amujae Initiative that was founded in 2020 is extremely important to us. That of creating, nurturing, and expanding the network of accomplished women public leaders across Africa and ensuring that future generations will have a wealth of female leaders to turn to in driving the continent's development forward.

Shifts in Women's Public Leadership in 2022

Women in Legislative Assemblies

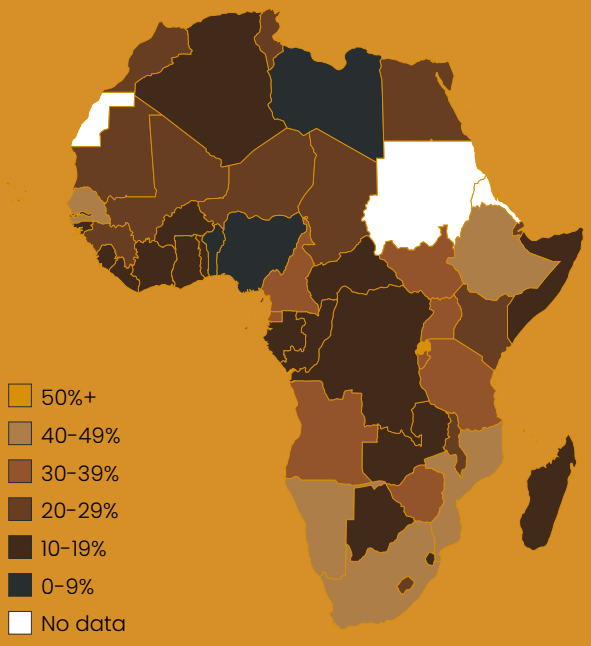
Since the adoption of the AU's Agenda 2063 — a blueprint for achieving sustainable development by 2063, African countries have seen numerous substantive changes in the gender make-up of legislative governments. As of November 2022, women hold 26.3% of positions across Upper and Lower chambers in African countries, which is almost at par with the global average of 26.4%.

Though the rate of increase has remained stable over the years, women's representation varies significantly across the continent.

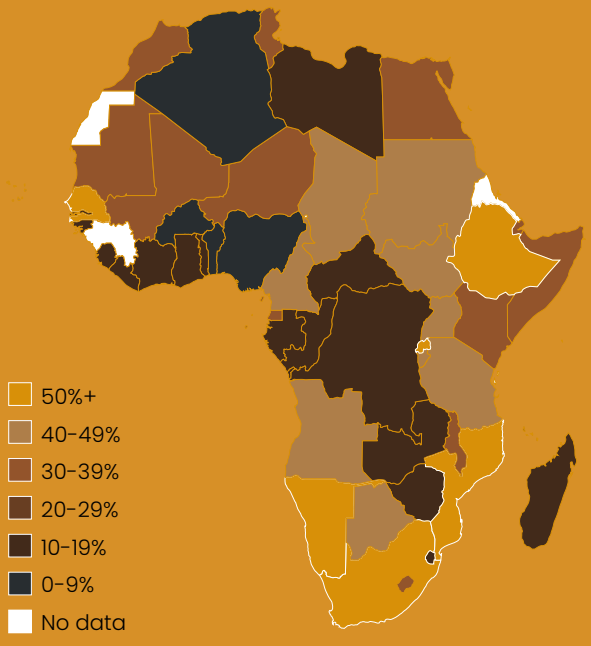
"I take my hat off to all women and in particular those who have made a decision to play in the political arena...they are heroes...whether they make it or not, is irrelevant... they are heroes."

— Tsitsi Masiyiwa, *Zimbabwean philanthropist*

Percentage of women in lower and upper chambers



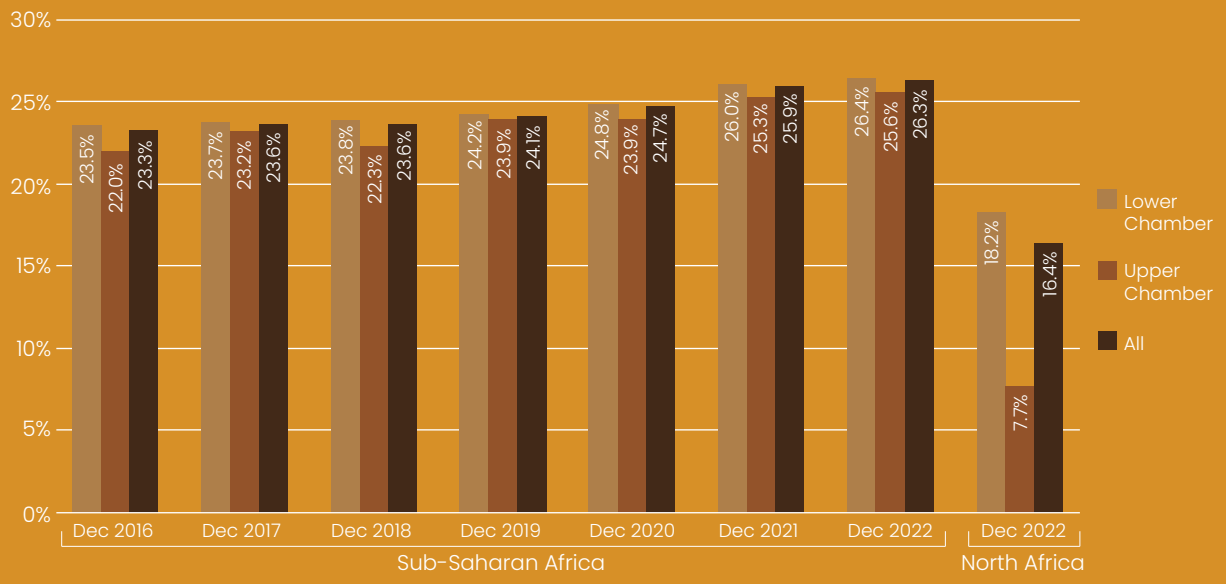
Mapping Africa's representation in legislative assemblies, 2022



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union: Women in national parliaments, 2022

Women's Representation in African Legislatures, 2016-2022

The top African countries with the highest representation of women in legislation are Rwanda (61%), South Africa (47%), Namibia (44%), Senegal (43%), Mozambique (42%) and Ethiopia (41%.) An additional six countries also exceed the minimum one-third threshold that many countries have recently passed for gender parity. These are Cape Verde, Burundi, Tanzania, Cameroon, Uganda and Sudan.



Countries with most women in parliament, 2022

1. Rwanda 61%
2. South Africa 47%
3. Namibia 44%
4. Senegal 43%
5. Mozambique 42%
6. Ethiopia 41%
7. Cabo Verde 39%
8. Burundi 38%
9. Tanzania 37%
10. Cameroon 34%

Countries with least women in parliament, 2022

10. Eswatini 12%
9. Sierra Leone 12%
8. Botswana 11%
7. Rep. of Congo 11%
6. Liberia 11%
5. The Gambia 10%
4. Algeria 8%
3. Benin 7%
2. Burkina Faso 6%
1. Nigeria 4%

Africa's largest economy—Nigeria—notoriously shows up on both lists of countries with the least women in parliament (4%) and also the lowest for ministers at 10%.

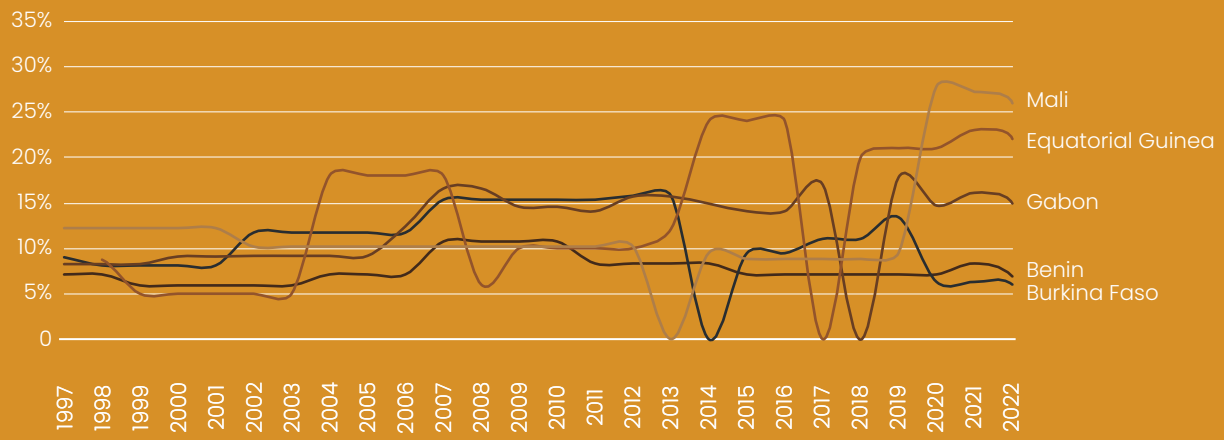
Countries with declining representation

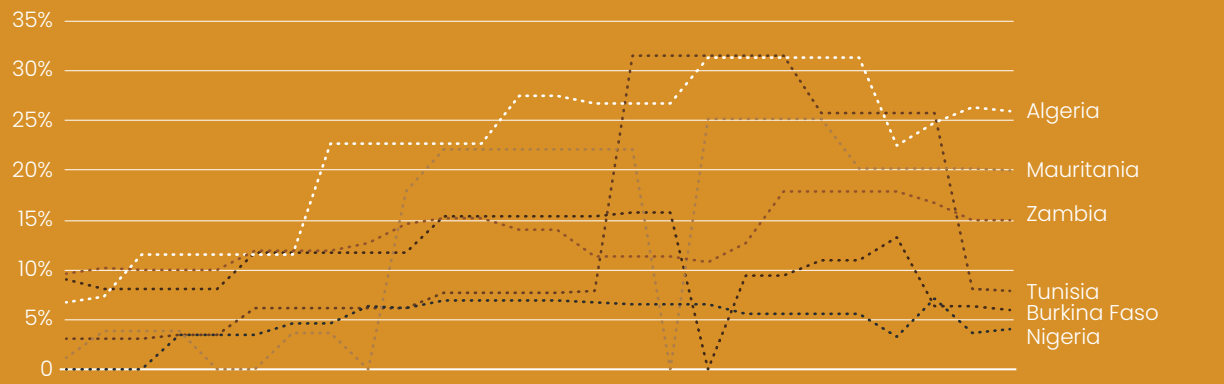
The countries with the largest dip in the proportion of female parliamentarians from 2021 to 2022 were Benin (17%), Gabon (7.4%), Burkina Faso (4.8%), Mali (4.7%) and Equatorial Guinea (4.3%).

When we look at a longer time-frame of five years, we get a better picture of where a continued decline is being experienced rather than a one year episodic change. With this longer timeline, the countries that emerge as having a great decline in the proportion of women in parliament are Algeria, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mauritania, Tunisia and Zambia with compounded annual growth rates (CAGRs) of -20.9%, -11.5%, -6.4%, -4.5%, -3.7% and -3.5% respectively.

Algeria's drastic decline is attributed by activists and researchers to the government's decision to abolish the country's gender quotas.

Countries with declining representation, % of female parliamentarians





Declining representation based on 5 year CAGR, % of female parliamentarians

"Public opinion matters…In this global age individuals are sometimes tempted to believe they have no power, not even collectively….Against a united and committed public, even the harshest of governments cannot stand."

— Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *This Child Will Be Great*

Countries with increased representation

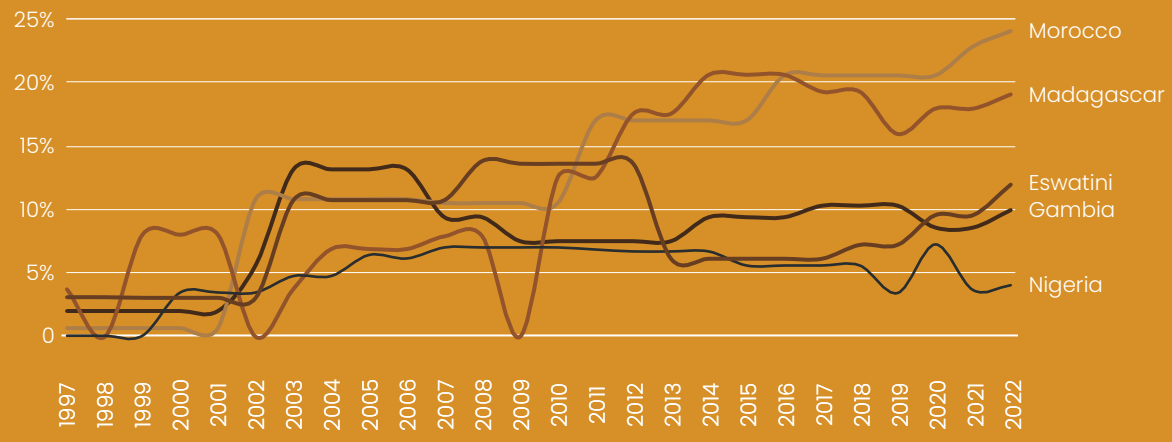
From 2021 to 2022, the highest rise in female representation in legislatures was in Eswatini (25%), Gambia (16%), Nigeria (10.8%), Madagascar (6.3%) and Morocco (5.3%.) It should be noted that a big jump in one year is likely to be seen where the baseline was already very low i.e. it's easier for a country to move from having two female MPs to having four (a 100% jump) than it is to move from having 50 to 100 (still a 100% jump.)

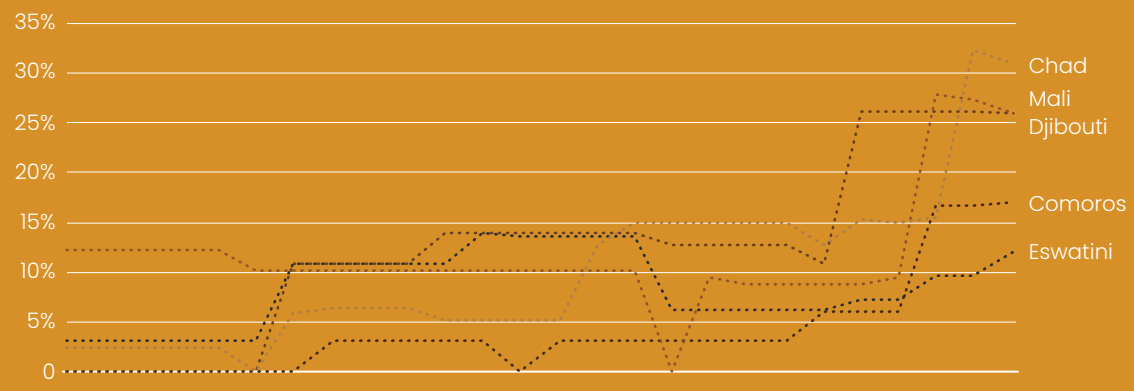
A one year jump could also be seen where there is a general longer term decline. A good example is Nigeria, which has experienced a 6.4% annual average decline over the past five years, but in the midst of that was the one year 10.8% jump from 2021 to 2022.

To get a longer term view, a 5 year CAGR is a good balance. Assessed from this timeline, the countries with the highest rise are Mali (24.1%), Comoros (23%), Chad (19.4%), Djibouti (19.3%) and Eswatini (14.3%.)

For the most part, the list of countries with the highest five year jump is dominated by countries where the female representation has historically been low, meaning that a small jump from say, 8% to 10% female representation, represents an impressive 20% annual growth, but might be quite small in actual figures.

Top risers from 2021 to 2022, % of female parliamentarians





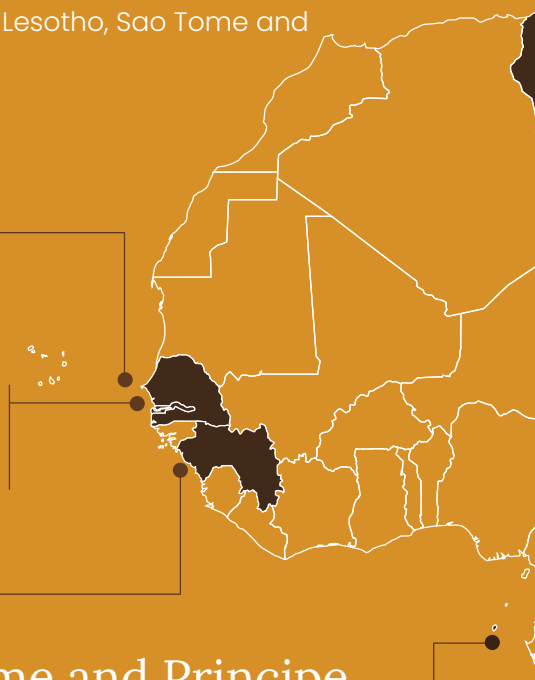
Top risers based on 5 year CAGR, % of female parliamentarians

"You don't understand that every little thing you do affects sisi watu wadogo [small people]."

— Wanjiru Koinange, *Havoc of Choice*

Highlights from Parliamentary Elections in 2022

Ten African countries held parliamentary elections in 2022: Angola, Republic of Congo, The Gambia, Guinea (transitional national council), Kenya, Lesotho, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Somalia and Tunisia.



Senegal

National assembly elections were held on 31st July 2022 with women getting 44.24% (73 of 165 available seats.)

The Gambia

The Gambia held elections on 9th April 2022 with women accounting for a paltry 5.66% of elected seats. That is 3 out 53 positions. Two additional women were nominated bringing this number up to 5.

Guinea

On 5th September 2021, special forces led by Colonel. Mamady Doumbouya, announced they had ousted President Alpha Condé (in office since 2010) and suspended the Constitution. The junta, which called itself the National Rally and Development Committee (CNRD), announced the dissolution of the Government and National Assembly. Later that month the CNRD unveiled a transitional charter with a plan to get the country back to civilian rule.

The charter does not specify the duration of the transitional period. It provides for a transitional parliament and Transitional National Council (CNT) to be appointed by an interim President.

On October 1st 2021, Colonel Mamady Doumbouya was sworn in as the interim president. He promised to organize free and transparent elections without specifying when. On 6th October, he named Mohamed Beavogui, a former civil servant and UN official, as prime minister.

On 6th November, the interim government announced that candidacy for CNT would open from 8th to 22nd November. The CNT which comprises 81 representatives is mandated to have at least 30% women.

On 22 January 2022, the Transitional President appointed 81 members, including 24 women, to the CNT bringing female representation to 29.63%.

Sao Tome and Principe

Elections were held on 25th September 2022 with women accounting for 14.55% (8 of 55 elected seats.)

On 8th November, the newly elected National Assembly held its first session and elected a female speaker, Celmira Sacramento. On 10th November, President Carlos Vila Nova appointed Patrice Trovoada as the Prime Minister. Prime Minister Trovoada said he would aim to ensure that 40% of relevant public service positions would be held by women.

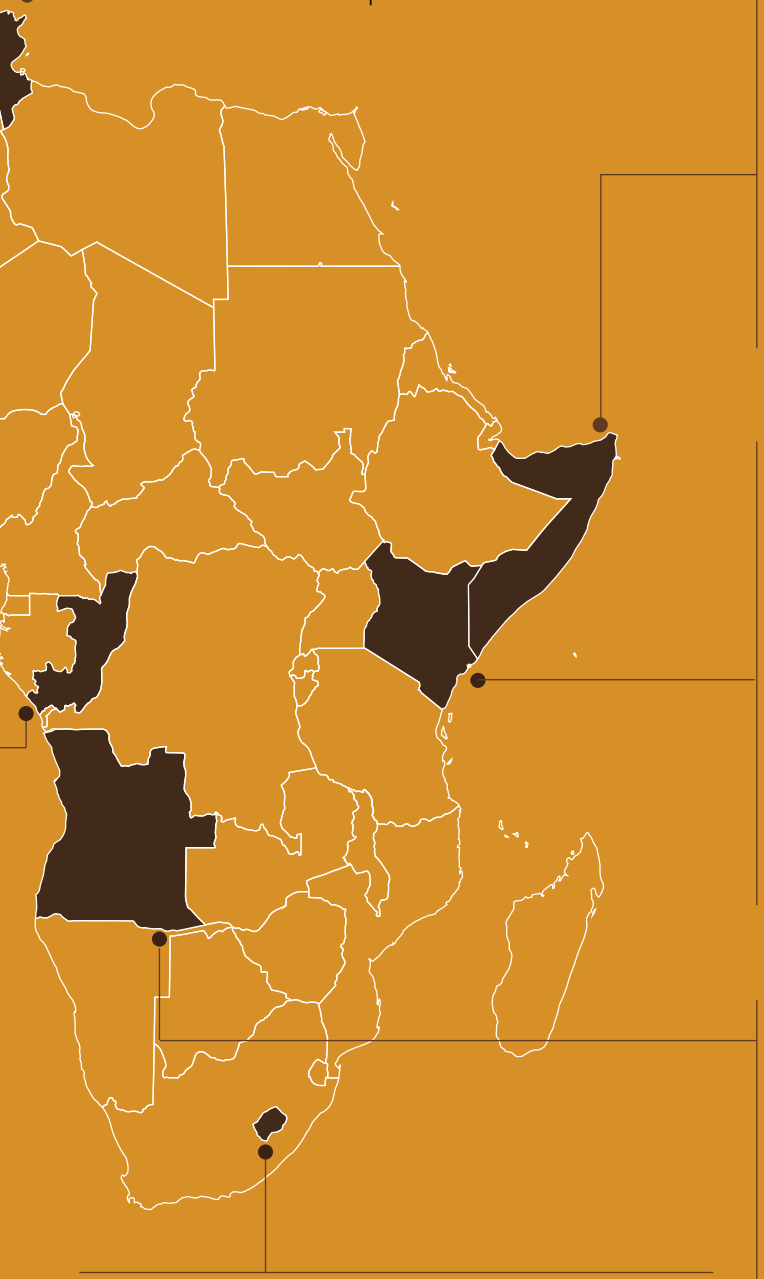
On 28th July 2022, the National Assembly approved the Political Parity Law that reserves a minimum of 40% of seats for women in elected bodies and the Cabinet. The law was due to come into effect on 19th November 2022 and thus was not applied to the 2022 parliamentary elections.

Republic of Congo

Elections were held from 10th July to 31st July 2022. Women got 16.56% of the seats in the national assembly elections (25 of 151 available seats.)

Tunisia

Parliamentary elections were held in Tunisia on 17th December 2022 to elect the third Assembly of the Representatives of the People. Run-offs are expected at the end of January 2023. As such, data is not yet available on how the 161 seats have been split.



Lesotho

National assembly elections were held on 7th October 2022 with women getting 25.83% of elected seats (31 of 120.) A female deputy speaker was also appointed from outside parliament bringing the number of women to 32.

The Senate, which comprises 22 Principal Chiefs, and 11 members appointed by the King, was renewed on 3rd November 2022. It re-elected a female speaker, Mamonaheng Mokitimi, as its President.

Somalia

Somalia held elections for the House of the People between 1st November 2021 to 5th May 2022. This was after holding their upper house elections from 27th July 2021 to 13th November 2021. That one had 25.93% of women elected. The country runs a Presidential-Parliamentary political system.

A total of 255 out of 275 members were indirectly elected between 1st November 2021 and 31st March 2022 of whom 223 members, including 41 women, were sworn in on 14th April 2022. The 2021-2022 elections concluded on 5th May 2022. As of 24th May 2022, there were 54 women out of 274 members, with one vacancy remaining. 19.7% of the elected members were women.

Kenya

Kenya held elections on 9th August 2022. For the national assembly elections, 23.43% (82 of 350) available seats were held by women.

For the senate, at which there were 68 seats at stake, 30.88% are held by women. Three women were directly elected and 18 other women were nominated as follows: 16 women members nominated by political parties according to their proportion of members in the Senate; one woman representing youth (aged between 18 and 34 years old) ; and one woman representing persons with disabilities.

Angola

Elections were held in Angola on 24th August 2022 with women getting 33.64% of the seats available (74 of 220.)

The ruling Popular Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA) retained its majority in the National Assembly, giving President João Lourenço a second term in office and extending MPLA's rule which has run from Angola's independence in 1975.

Despite this, MPLA's share of seats in the 220 seat National Assembly, dropped from 150 to 124, with the main opposition—National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA)—led by Adalberto Costa Junior almost doubling its seats from 51 t o 90. Carolina Cerqueira (MPLA) was selected as the new President of the national assembly, becoming the first woman to hold this post.

Fatoumatta Njai

National Assembly Member, Banjul South, The Gambia

As one of the handful of female parliamentarians in Gambia, Njai is a woman of strength and resilience who has fought hard for her place in a parliament that has only a handful of women and showed that in the face of party strife, a woman can successfully mobilize constituents and win on an independent ticket. She is also an Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center Amujae Initiative fellow expanding the network of accomplished women public leaders across Africa and ensuring that future generations will have a wealth of female leaders to turn to in driving the continent's development forward.

On how she got into public governance

"It never crossed my mind that I would be in politics. Gambia was under dictatorship from 1994 to 2016. It wasn't planned as it was very sudden and came about when in April 2016, our President became outrageous, arresting people haphazardly. People decided enough was enough and a movement which most of those in Gambia were not even aware of was created mostly by people from the diaspora and a group of women known as Kalama. I wasn't yet a part of the movement. At the time I was working for the government, a role I had taken up in 2015 after years working in banking. I got into civil service as I wanted to understand why people were staying there that long despite the people complaining about them. In February 2015, I joined the civil service. Some of my colleagues were arrested when issues began in 2016. I would also have been arrested if I was in the office at that time, but fortunately for me, I had gone out on a site-visit to a satellite institution. The lady that I shared an office with was arrested and sent to security services for days and we didn't know where she was. This started our movement and we decided the government must be voted out, not knowing that in the background, the Kalama revolution was also coming.

October is when all opposition parties came and decided to form a coalition to work together because the main leader of the opposition was arrested. My party was banned — the party that I had been born into that is, as I had never been active in politics. In September, when they formed the

coalition, every Gambian came together to make sure the opposition succeeded. In December the opposition coalition won, then there was a political impasse from December to February. A friend of mine told me to run for parliament as he said that if we had good laws, we would not have found ourselves in this situation. I had always wanted us to be a state with good institutions and good laws. I am a shy person, but he really insisted. This was January and elections were to be in April 2017. I had to prepare myself to run for elections within three months. It was the community that campaigned for me. Banjul has three constituencies. Primaries were held and I was elected to contest for Banjul South. This was how I got in. When I got in, I created a strong identity with women and youth throughout the country. I noticed the vacuum of female leadership. Fortunately for us, the President nominated two more women, getting us to five in total out of 58 parliamentarians. At the time, the speaker of the house was also female. I was also elected to the board that oversees parliamentary affairs. We had two other women on the board."

On being an independent candidate

"My second term was a tough one. Midway through my first term, I started having issues with my party. I felt disrespected as one of only two elected female representatives in the party, I felt I should have been given some leadership role in the party and that didn't happen. I also realized that the values I grew up knowing from that party were not being reflected. I decided to vie for leadership of the party. When the leaders of the party saw that I had gained support of all regions of the country, the executive connived and my delegation walked out of the congress. They planted new delegates and went ahead with the elections. As we speak, the matter is in court. It's been two years and I think the courts have also manipulated my case as I am in opposition, but with nowhere to lean. My case hasn't yet been mentioned. Any time I ask about it, they brush it aside. They haven't given a response to my case as they were trying to keep me from contesting in April 2022. If my party isn't willing to give me a party ticket, they likely assumed that as a woman, I would shy away from running as an independent. I ran as an independent candidate [and won], mobilized people, not only campaigned for myself but also against the party. I campaigned for another independent candidate [in a different constituency] against the party to show them that as a woman, I will not only take my seat, but I will also walk away with their seats, denying them a right to come to parliament. Showing them that we shouldn't just be victims. We can also victimize them as well."

On being an Amujae fellow

"Being an Amujae fellow came at the right time for me — when I was at my lowest. I realized I had a shoulder to lean on. My Amujae sisters were a great support following the issues I had with my party leading to my so-called expulsion and the case at the courts."

On the challenges of being a female leader

"We had 19 women contest and only three of us got through. In my last term, three of us were elected and two unfortunately lost. Political parties focus more on male candidates and give them constituencies that they know they will win. For example I had a colleague that I was with in parliament from 2017 to 2022, even though she wasn't elected, she was a very outstanding parliamentarian in the last election. In 2022, she wanted to

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contest and her party instead of giving her a constituency that she was strong in and she would definitely win, they gave her a constituency where there was no chance of her winning. We are given seats that are not winnable. Financially, men’s networks are also much stronger as men have the time and the space to network. For us women, networking is very difficult as we don’t know the type of people that can support us financially. Elections are a financial burden on women. You don’t only have to pay your way, but also all the pre-work to get this financing. It’s not easy for women.”

On her advice for women considering getting into public governance

“Be like me and don’t wait for a party ticket. If a party is denying you a ticket, go get that space for yourself. It is you that people will vote for, not the party.”

On her advice for voters

“When women make promises, they keep them. If we tell you we will do something, it comes from the heart and it comes from experience.”

On how she manages her role and motherhood

"I have a son who is doing his GCSE. Last week I came in from the US. I spent a few hours at home, then I went to Sierra Leone yesterday and I'm going back to the US in a few days. I make sure that every evening at 7 o'clock Banjul time we have a group call. They tell me about what they're doing and their challenges and I tell them about what I'm doing and my challenges. Wherever I am, irrespective of the time difference we make this time so that they don't lose track of what I do and why I am not home. They get to appreciate what I am doing when they hear about my days.

When I first got into parliament, they were very young but we went on campaign together. They were going door to door with me, sometimes attending meetings. What I protect them from is the insults and the threats. I ban them from social media. I recently had a death threat. My son went to school and he was told that there were threats to behead me because of something I had said. I told him this is just politics and it's why he shouldn't follow the discussions online because 'people will say I am a bad person, but you don't see me as a bad person.' I try to save my children from that."

On women who have inspired her

"In The Gambia we've seen a lot of female leaders, but as cheerleaders. They cheered for various men to go into power. Even with these constraints, there is a specific woman who really stood out for me. Her name is Augusta Darling Jawara. She was the wife of the first President. She contested for a seat in my constituency. She was the first woman to contest in parliament. She lost, but didn't lose hope. She realized that the lack of education was what was blocking women in many ways. She made sure she fought for women to stay in school. I always make reference to her. If she can lose the elections, but still identify in the 1960s the reason she had lost the elections, then fight for other women. That is worth applauding. She has paved the way for women. She was Christian and the majority of the girls who were not being sent to school were Muslim. She fought for us. I sometimes think that if it wasn't for her legacy, I could easily have been one of the many Muslim girls who didn't go to school.

I am independent and in parliament, but I still won't drop the court case. If I should drop that case, or fail, what impression am I leaving on that young girl in the village? Their parents will give me as an example saying, 'Look what they have done to her? And she gave up.' This is why I won't give up. I want that child to look at me and say 'she made it! And I can also make it [if I want to go into politics]."

On what she wants her legacy to be

"Before I leave parliament, I want to make sure we have [legal] accommodation for more women in parliament. I tried last year and it failed, but I am going to present it again. I know this bill recently went through in Sierra Leone. It gives me hope that even though this hasn't gone through in my country, it has gone through in one of the other ECOWAS countries.

For my legacy, I wish to be remembered as being a part of those that paved the way for women. I'll love to see the women bill that will enlarge the Parliament to accommodate more seats for women. The bill was negated by the speaker due to lack of quorum. I am hoping to reintroduce it as a committee bill instead of a private member bill soon. As the chair of the first gender committee which was approved by the parliament but only formed in April 2022, I want to see this bill pass."

Esther Passaris

Nairobi City County Woman Representative
August 2017-present

Esther Passaris does not give up. If she had not had a fighting spirit, she would long have given up on her mission of becoming a legislator. 2007 was the year that marked the beginning of her journey into politics, a bumpy ride that started off with losing three different elections — first the mayoral seat in 2007, then an MP seat in a 2008 by-election, followed by a 2013 woman representative's seat.

Finally she would be rewarded for her hard work and steadfast determination in securing the seat of woman representative in August 2017 with a re-election too in August 2022. These challenges despite the fact that she had long made a name for herself in Kenya as an astute businesswoman winning numerous awards for her innovative Adopt a light marketing campaign in the 2000s including the 2008 Order of Grand Warrior (OGW), 2009 UN Habitat Business Award and 2016 most influential Women in Business and Government by CEO Global, South Africa.

She is known as Mama Taa (Mother of Lights) for a very successful street lighting campaign that she started in the early 2000s.

> "One day I will write a book on how to lose elections."

On adopt-a-light and how it built her name as a community leader

"I was known for a long time as a marketer. In the early 2000s, I got out of my polygamous marriage [a move that drew a lot of public criticism when she sued her ex husband for child support] and moved to South Africa. It was when I was there that the idea came to me. One of putting street lights all over Nairobi, but branding them for corporate sponsorship. I came back to Kenya and started the campaign which was a huge success as it tackled issues of safety, gender based violence, but also made business sense."

On structures that make it even harder for women to succeed in politics

"I run like a governor and I get resources that are limited. I have to serve 17 constituencies and I get paid the same amount of money that the MPs get to serve one constituency. I have to deliver bursaries and projects, but as the woman representative, I only get KES 6 million/ constituency/year (~$48,000) while the MPs get KES 140 million (~$1.1 million). The men have made it even more difficult for women to be felt at the grassroots. Because we are not felt, Kenyans are even more angry at us. People will say 'Women reps do nothing', but how are you expected to deliver with such a small budget compared to MPs?

This past election we had 29 female MPs elected as single constituency MPs. That's less than 10% of the 290 constituencies. To this figure, they add 47 women reps, then top up to get the one third figure. Even women MPs fight women representatives. They know that one day a woman rep might run in their constituency. [There is a scarcity mentality that has been created, because really there are such few positions that women get.]

On the challenges of being a woman in governance

"It is a really tough job and you learn on the go. I went to university at the age of 50 as this was a requirement for running for governor. A lot of politics is emotive. If you are a politician who doesn't have the emotions to connect with constituents, you won't go far. Our elections are emotive, but there is also tokenism. It's not an easy space to be.

As a woman the challenges are even more. I have been attacked several times. There was even a time when I went to give a speech at the University of Nairobi and was held hostage for several hours by goons there. They were saying they would not release me if I didn't give them KES 100,000 [around $1,000 at the time.] They beat me up, took my phone and were calling me a malaya [prostitute.]

Even now, when we go to functions, male politicians can leave easily, but I need a lot of security and there will always be people hanging on my car.

You also get a lot of abuse for everything: the way you dress, your age and marital status. People will write on my social media pages, 'Wee uko na menopause, na unavaa mini.' 'You have menopause and you are wearing a minidress.' You have to have thick skin to survive as a woman in this space."

On one day having a female President in Kenya

"Yes! We will see a female President in Kenya during our lifetime."

Akangwarira paduri sekuhu!

“I’m sure in your language there are words that are used to describe women who are **dynamic** and **opinionated**. In Shona, there is one that is used against women who express themselves. It was said to me when I was young...‘***she’s too much of an extrovert and loud like a chicken when grain is being pounded***.’ You know how when grain is being pounded, it falls on the ground littering everywhere, then there will be these road runner hens, running around, eating here, grabbing the grain and running off? **They would describe any woman who had confidence in that way**.”

— Tsitsi Masiyiwa, *Zimbabwean philanthropist*

Wanja Maina

National Chairperson of the Jubilee Political Party in Kenya and a disability rights advocate

When she was a young child, Wanja wondered why other children were going to school and she was staying at home. Through her persistence she was able to get her mother to send her to school. On her first day in school, she didn't even have a school uniform on as it had been a rushed decision to take her in, but she was happy. A local tailor made her a school uniform in the shopping center that day. Eventually she would learn why she was not attending school. **"I found out that the other women in the community were telling my mum, 'Wait until she recovers, then you can take her to school.' Now that I'm 30 and still use a crutch to support my mobility, it's clear that I could easily have missed out on an education if my mother had listened to them."** Finally she would be rewarded for her hard work and steadfast determination in securing the seat of woman representative in August 2017

with a re-election too in August 2022. These challenges despite the fact that she had long made a name for herself in Kenya as an astute businesswoman winning numerous awards for her innovative Adopt a light marketing campaign in the 2000s including the 2008 Order of Grand Warrior (OGW), 2009 UN Habitat Business Award and 2016 most influential Women in Business and Government by CEO Global, South Africa.

Wanja's right leg got paralyzed at a young age following a doctor's injection.[5] She adds, **"Literacy levels of people with disabilities in Kenya and sub-Saharan Africa are so low. According to the UNDP, in the region, only 3% of disabled male adults are educated and only 1% of women. It was sheer luck. If I was just a victim of local norms, I would be illiterate right now without many opportunities."**

Her move into politics is guided by the belief that if you want to make real change, you have to be where decisions are being made and with the government's decision making authority, mandate and national reach, this is where she knows she can have a major impact.

On the main challenges

"When you have a disability, people want to pigeonhole you to a few roles just for people with disabilities. Why can't I be a Minister?

There is a real need for lots of gender sensitization. A lot of people have stereotypes about female leadership. Additionally when you have a disability, you have more issues not in your favor. People will likely try to limit you into a docket for people living with disabilities, which will always be underfunded. Then they will give you limited challenges and limited opportunities as they judge your ambition and ability based on your disability. Even in workplaces, I have seen how people can make assumptions about how great you

"When you have a disability, people want to pigeonhole you to a few roles just for people with disabilities. Why can't I be a Minister?"

are, based on having a disability. So now you deal not just with the challenges of being a woman, but also an 'incomplete' one."

On advice for women in public governance

"For women, you might face backlash and a lack of support from your family and sometimes sabotage. In some cases, your family doesn't want to support you because they fear for your life. On the negative side, they might be resentful or want to pull you down. Remember the case of the MP Peris Tobiko? She had set up a political meeting at her home for the then Deputy President William Ruto. Her own husband, brought in the police and other political leaders into the home saying that his wife had planned an illegal meeting without consulting him.[6]

Also women in public governance need to be ready for their private matters to be made public. For a woman everything including your marital status, fertility issues and age will be up for public debate. It's not the same for men. There are also those who will say, however good, however ambitious, however accomplished you are, **'She is just a woman.'**

We also need to speak about intersectionality of women. In my case, my

age will be a disadvantage, my gender, my disability, my marital status. Women have to overcome so many hurdles.

But working for people is beautiful as you can have a large impact if you are a good leader and you get to have this larger platform that allows you to work on issues of economic empowerment. Women need to remember to stop being overly nice. Don't fall into that trap. Have thick skin and also don't let yourselves get taken advantage of.

I was an average history student in school, but I remember in 2007/2008 when sitting for my high school leaving examinations, there was a question about 'Who was Africa's first democratically elected female President.' I was so happy to know the answer and I'm so happy that former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf continues to do work to inspire future generations of girls and women.

I think the work the Center [through Amujae initiative] is doing is great, and would love to also see female leaders with disabilities getting mentored as they even face greater challenges.

On advice for voters

"We need to do better as a people. In Kenya recently there was a move to impeach one of the few female governors for reasons that would never ruffle any feathers if she were a man. There is so much animosity and antagonism against women in power. In the case of Kawira Mwangaza, the men were mad at her. They were mad at her for the audacity of being a woman, the audacity of being an independent candidate and unseating the former governor [Kiraitu Murungi, who once laughed at his own joke[7] where he equated something to 'It's like raping a woman who is willing'] who has been a longtime member of parliament for the region. They had to punish her for all this. This is why the parliamentarians in Meru were even willing to work overtime during Christmas holidays to impeach her. Thankfully they were unsuccessful. This is what it is like to be a woman in politics. It's a constant battle."

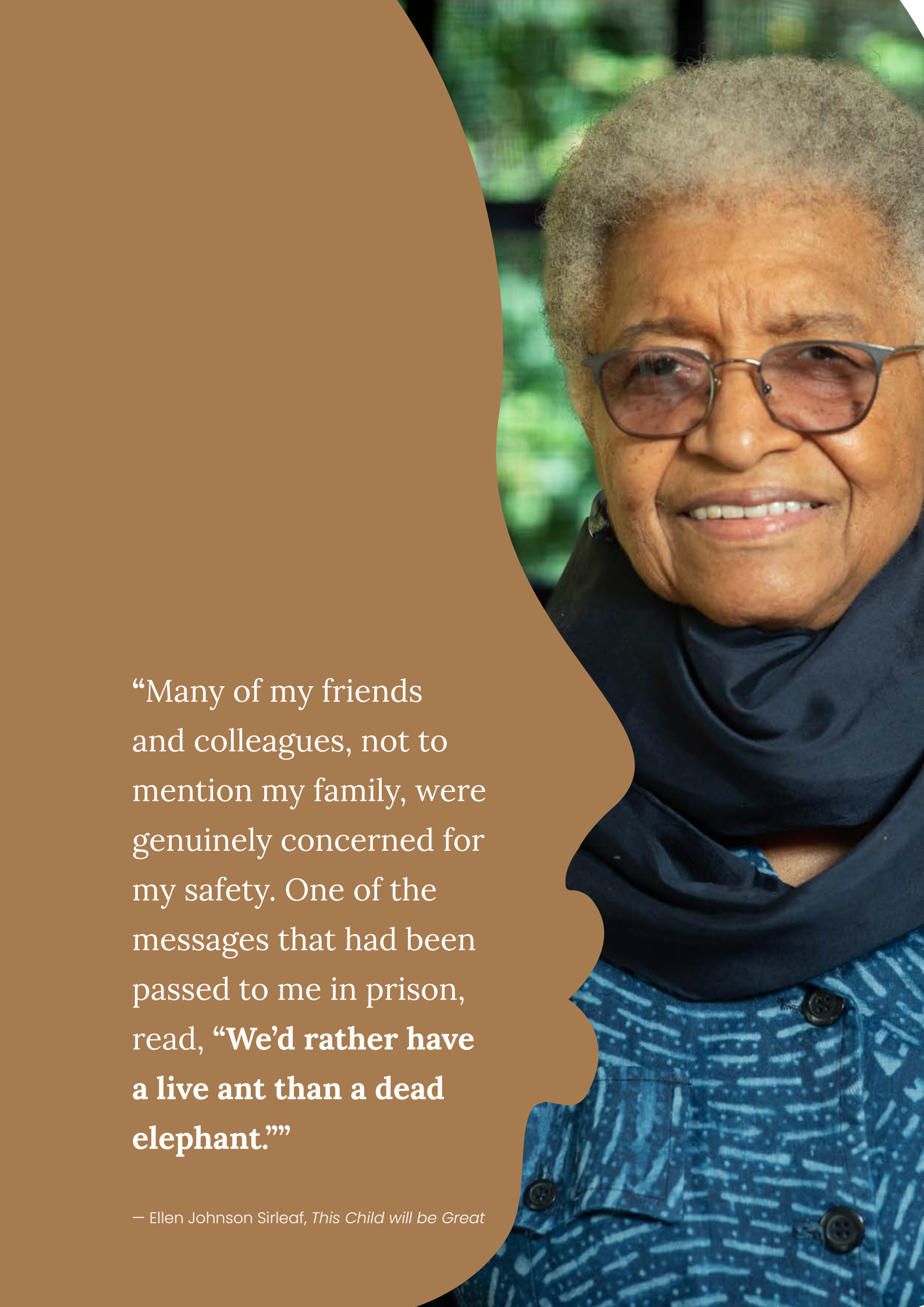
On female stories that have influenced her

When I was born, my grandfather was already an old man. He was in his 70s and what I recall was that he was the self-ordained owner of knowledge in the home. His attitude towards his wife and daughters was terrible. He never educated any of the daughters, but some of his sons even went to university. I remember him reading the Swahili newspaper and he would narrate to everyone what was in Taifa Leo [the Kiswahili newspaper.] Even as a child it disturbed me that he was the only one in that house able to read the newspaper and explain to my grandmother and his daughters what it was saying.

Now I understand it as patriarchy: This belief that the men are the ones to read for us, to make decisions for us women and how women were not supposed to read and access opportunities. He spoke to my grandmother so poorly. I knew I didn't want to be in that position where someone else is the one with such authority over me due to illiteracy. This explains why I love to read and have strong perspectives and opinions.

In boarding high school a teacher used to keep newspapers for me and I would read them on Saturdays as I really wanted to know what this thing is that only a man is meant to be reading on my behalf. It worried me that people like my grandfather with such problematic attitudes towards women are also the ones who get to make decisions regarding their lives.

My perspective and leadership style is based on my familial relations and how I saw this great imbalance between men and women. I want a fair society where everyone has the same rights and opportunities."



"Many of my friends and colleagues, not to mention my family, were genuinely concerned for my safety. One of the messages that had been passed to me in prison, read, **"We'd rather have a live ant than a dead elephant.""**

— Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *This Child will be Great*

Women Presidents & Prime Ministers

In 2022, no new female Presidents or Prime Ministers were appointed. This leaves the continent's tally at four with two women Prime Ministers who were appointed in 2021 — Uganda's Robinah Nabbanja and Tunisia's Najla Bouden Romdhane. They joined a group of previously appointed African prime ministers — Prime Minister Victoire Tomegah Dogbé of Togo, appointed in 2020; and Prime Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila of Namibia, who has held the office since March 2015.

15 African countries have had women prime ministers since Elisabeth Domitien was appointed as Prime Minister of the Central African Republic in 1975.

There are currently two female presidents in Africa — President Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia who was elected in October 2018 and President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania who replaced the late President John Magufuli in March 2021.

Currently, seven women are serving as Vice Presidents across the continent. All but one of these women became a Vice President before 2022: Jewel Howard-Taylor, Vice President of Liberia (2018–current); Dr. Isatou Touray, Vice President of the Gambia (2019–current); Rebecca Nyandeng Garang de Mabior, Vice President of South Sudan (2020–current); Mariam Chabi Talata, Vice President of Benin (2021–current); Jessica Alupo, Vice President of Uganda (2021-current); and Mutale Nalumango, Vice President of Zambia (2021–current). The only recently appointed female Vice President is Rose Christiane Raponda of Gabon, who was appointed as a Prime Minister in 2020 but is now serving as the Vice President of Gabon from January 2023.

> "Do not assess your chances based on how much people claim your opponents are disliked or reviled: **Love is not a currency at the ballot.**"
>
> — Ayisha Osiri, *Love does not win elections*

Highlights from Presidential Elections in 2022

In 2022, only four African countries held presidential elections: Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya and Somalia.

Somalia

In Somalia, thirty-nine presidential candidates registered to run for presidency with one being female. This is Fawzia Yusuf H. Adam, the Former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs (2012–2014.).

Kenya

In Kenya, none of the four candidates cleared to run for presidency was a woman, but the leading opposition candidate, Raila Odingo of Azimio chose a leading female politician, former Minister and former presidential candidate, Martha Karua, as his running mate.

Equatorial Guinea

In Equatorial Guinea, all the three contestants were male.

Angola

In Angola of the eight candidates who ran for presidency, one was a woman. This is Florbela Malaquias. She is an Angolan journalist, lawyer and politician who is the leader of the Humanist Party of Angola.

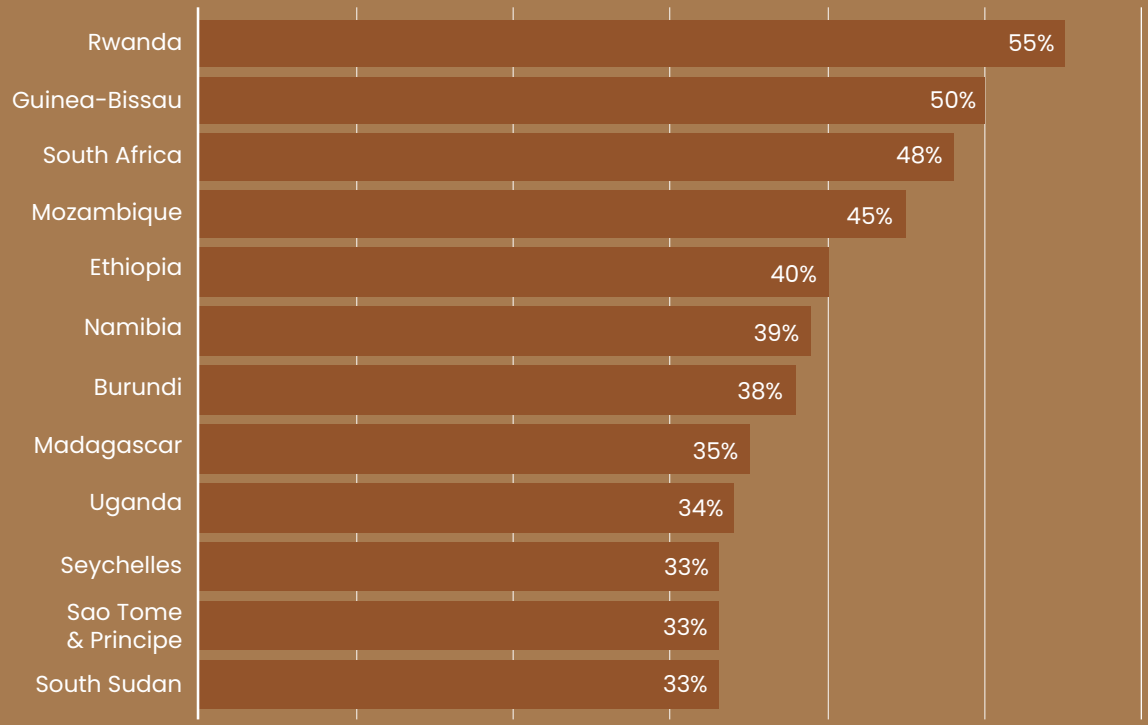
"[In my campaign] we also pointed out that the country had been led by men for 150 years —and look where that had gotten us."

— Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *This Child will be Great*

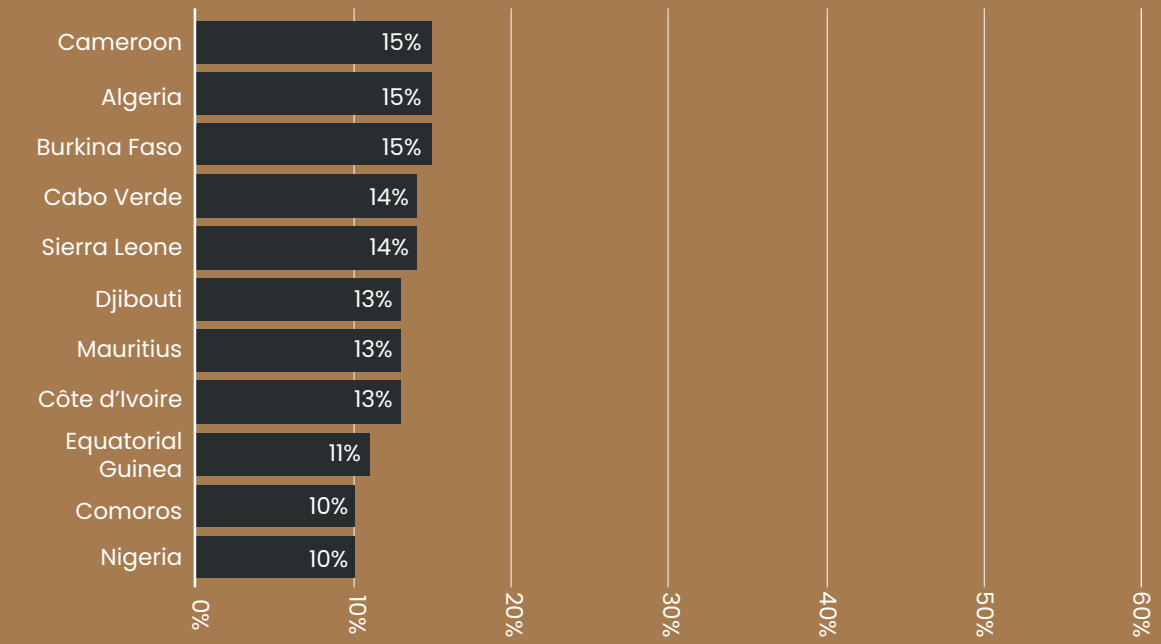
Women in Cabinets

A review of government publication, UN Women statistics and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)[9] indicates that ten African countries have above the one-third minimum threshold enacted in many African countries for female leadership with more than a third of their cabinet ministers being women. These are Rwanda (55%), Guinea-Bissau (50%), South Africa (48%), Mozambique (45%), Ethiopia (40%), Namibia (39%), Burundi (38%), Madagascar (35%) and Uganda (34%).

Countries with the highest proportion of female ministers, 2022



Countries with the lowest proportion of female ministers, 2022



Africa's largest economy—Nigeria—notoriously shows up on both lists of countries with the least women in parliament (4%) and also the lowest for ministers at 10%.

Manty Tarawalli

Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone recently signed a new landmark bill that brings women in the country a step closer to achieving gender parity. The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act includes a legal requirement for all designated private and public bodies in the country to ensure at least 30% of their workforce is female, in addition to dedicating 30% of all leadership and decision making roles to women.

This is credited to the relentless push by two women—the president's wife and gender minister (Manty Tarawalli)—who pushed the bill through parliament for the past 13 months, until it received presidential assent. The legislation also includes an additional two weeks of maternity leave (12 to 14), equal rights to own property, and punishment for those who violate women's rights.[10]

> "Only 12% of our parliamentarians are women, yet we make up 52% of the population."

"It's a big thing for Sierra Leone, but it's also a big thing for the continent. You know Nigeria tried to pass a similar law and parliament threw it out. It had to go to court. It's a huge thing, but we first have to start with legislation, then we will begin to see it become normal for women to be in governance," Tarawalli says.

On how she got into public governance

"I consider myself one of the lucky ones as I'm from the North of Sierra Leone and it is a highly patriarchal society, where girls rarely get the chance to be educated. My father was a General in the military. He was the head of the Sierra Leone armed forces and he was also the leader of an association for my ethnic group — the Kurankos — an association that brings together over 100,000 members across Sierra Leone and abroad. He was also a politician.

My mother founded the army wives cooperative society, a support organization for wives of army officers. The organization conducted a lot of training, capacity building and also ran income generating activities. I grew up seeing leadership and service first-hand. My mother and other women were fighting to be heard. Both my parents were very respected in the society.

I went to study in the UK and when my father died, there was a real physical leadership gap in my region. Remember, this is an area where a lot of women had not gone to school and men didn't have jobs. When my father died, though I was actually grieving myself, I felt a strong desire to step forward and to support my people. I started playing this role my dad had played in my own way, offering direction to my people.

Before you know it, I became a politician and was speaking for women and my people. I then became the first female Cabinet Minister from my region—the districts of Koinadugu and Falaba.

Now, I'm speaking for all women in the country and I realize that the gaps that exist where I come from, also exist for all women in my country. This was the reason for developing the bill. Only 12% of our parliamentarians are women, yet we make up 52% of the population."

On getting the bill to pass

"It wasn't easy. You have to develop it, put it through the cabinet, get it endorsed, take it to parliament, then it is passed to the president to sign. To get it through the cabinet, it took me two tries. The first time, it was 'no no no.' Men weren't supportive and the women in the cabinet didn't speak up. I came back realizing I have to try harder. I started lobbying, going to ministers one by one. When the conversation moved from a rights-based one, 'These are the rights of a woman, she's got a brain, she can contribute' and it moved to one on economic empowerment, they started to listen. 'We want to get to middle income status? We can't get there if 52% of our population are being left out.' It moved from 'Oh no! Women are trying to take over. Where do you want men to go? To the kitchen. Never!' to 'Ok. So that means I can have more money in my pocket? It means my community will ask less of me? It means our country will develop? Ok let's talk.'

So it passed the cabinet. Then it went to parliament and I did my first reading. It took 13 months of negotiations, sheer doggedness, talking and negotiation.

There were days I would leave parliament and go home and just cry. I knew I had to do this. I knew within myself that this is a calling. I am sitting in this position, not by chance. I have to make this change.

The ultimate moment came when I convinced the President to make a declaration publicly supporting it. The next day, I saw a different parliament with people supporting the bill. We moved from discussions of 'I don't want a woman taking my position. Who will be the women cooking and cleaning if they get into parliament?" to 'Let's talk about the contribution women will make in society to move our development forward.'

It was passed and became law on January 19th. Our next parliament will have

88 men and 44 women. We have never had this before. Women will now have access to finance without their husband's consent. Women will be able to inherit and buy land. Finally we have affirmative action that says women must be included."

On her drive and motivation

"I think I was born for this. When I was offered the position of Minister, many women called me to say, ' Don't take it. It's a vicious place. It's toxic. Women don't survive,' but I knew there is no way you can effect change without being at the table. It's my calling. I also get my strength from my Christian faith. I am standing on the shoulders of giants. This is what I have to do, till I hand it over to the next person. I have to endure through everything to get change."

On the challenges of being a female leader

"Women have limited opportunities which I believe is a veiled fear from men. Men fear the competition, they fear the space is small and they are guarding it. They know you have the talent. They know you can contribute. You might do it better. It is fear of losing control and having to face competition that makes them fight having women in the leadership space."

On her advice for women considering getting into public governance

"It is still a male-dominated environment, but don't be deterred by that. Your contribution matters. The female perspective is vital for us facilitating change and economic growth. It is better to be at the table than not be at the table at all. Don't give up. Be thick skinned."

On her advice for voters

"Women are the majority in Africa, but we are not seen. It is important that governance represents its people. No country in the world has achieved great success without having women in governance."

On women who have inspired her

"I had a fierce mother, so that directly impacted me growing up—being raised by such a leader. In school, we learned about great female leaders too such as Madam Yoko [the leader of the Mende people], Madam Ella[11] [the first woman to be Paramount Chief in Laiyamba Chiefdom and the first female MP of Sierra Leone], but I couldn't relate to them as I felt that at that time for a woman to be considered a leader, she had to become like a man. Femininity was not to be embraced. And I am a leader, but I am also very feminine. I love to dress up,but I am also a very strong professional and I do my work. The two are not exclusively different. Women shouldn't have to sacrifice any part of their individual identities to be considered leaders.

Then, came Madam Shirley Gbujama. She served as a Cabinet Minister from 1996-2007. She was very feminine, but also very strong. She was highly respected, dedicated, straightforward, and had a strong work ethic. I could relate to her. She was also curvy, dressed well, had makeup on, was married, but at the same time was revered, very strong, articulate and had her degrees. This is my woman. This is me!

Women have to be allowed to fully be themselves. We shouldn't have only one idea of what a female leader looks like."

On what she wants her legacy to be

"I want to be remembered as a woman who loved her people and who believed in God and trusted his guidance while using all her talents to help her womenfolk and her people move forward in life."

“Land is a form of wealth and a place where a woman or man can return her departed parents and create heaven for them right here on earth. Generations are buried on family land, and those still alive burn impepho and talk to their dearly departed asking them to pass on their prayers to the Supreme Divine Spirit. If women are deprived of land, where are they supposed to place their dearly departed and perform all the necessary rites and rituals? If women cannot own land, where are they supposed to live and farm?”

— Nokuthula Mazibuko Msimang, *The Daughters of Nandi*

Dagmawit Moges

First Female Minister of Transport & Communications (2018-2023), former Deputy Mayor of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Moges has had a flourishing career that has seen her rise up the ranks in public administration in the city she calls home. In 2007/2008 she was assigned at the sub-city level as the head of the Capacity Building Office. Within 3-4 months, based on her impressive progress, she was named the Chief Administrator of the sub-city level working alongside the Chief Executive Officer of the sub-city. After 9-10 months she was promoted to city level and ran the Micro and Small Enterprises Agency before serving as Bureau Head Chief and several positions up to Deputy Mayor of Addis Ababa. She then served for five years as Ethiopia's first female Minister of Transport and Communications. She is now the Director of the Peace Fund Secretariat at the African Union Commission.

She is also an EJS Center Amujae Initiative Fellow expanding the network of accomplished women public leaders across Africa and ensuring that future generations will have a wealth of female leaders to turn to in driving the continent's development forward.

On how she got into public governance

"From high school, I have always been in leadership roles. At that time I was the student council president. At that moment, serving your fellow students was an honor. I ran for it and got it. It was a girls' school—the American Mission girls school. History was my favorite subject and I got inspired by stories spanning ancient history, the dark ages, the middle ages, WWII.

After joining university, I started teaching in the same department that I had graduated from at Addis Ababa University. After finishing university, I was approached by some people from the city administration who told me they would want me to be engaged at the next elections. At that time, the ruling party had just lost the election in Addis, but won

throughout the rest of the country. There was a transitional administration that stood for 2-3 years. The ruling party said they had evaluated their mistakes and knew why they had not been elected and now wanted to come up with new faces, new energy and with young, vibrant leaders and '*you are one of the recommended leaders that we want to put forward during the election*'.

I needed to discuss this with my parents and my husband too as I was newly married and also this was a decision that would affect my entire family. We discussed the issue as a family matter, debated many points and at the end we decided that rather than complain about the administration while sitting at the sidelines, it's better to get in, do things in the right way. We came to the decision. I ran for election. I have served my sub-city, my city, my country and now I am serving the whole continent from the city I grew up in. It is an honor. I used to be impressed how policies affect the day to day lives of people and all the activities we carry out as citizens. When I got the opportunity, I took it as now I have the chance to design policies in a way that will serve the people that I love and respect. Every decision that you make in any policy document, it will affect the lives of people. We have to make sure they are ratified in a way that will benefit the people. There is nothing as satisfying as this."

On the challenges of being a female leader

"I was lucky because when I became a Minister, 50% of the cabinet was female and we also had the first female President and several high level positions were filled by women. I wasn't alone. We all came together. These changes could all have happened earlier [to ensure more women in public governance roles.] Women are capable of delivering. The only thing that was needed was political will.

"In my family, there are three girls. We have always been told that we are human beings and we are capable. It was only when I went to university that I started to realize that there is a differentiation between men and women. As I had grown up being told that I am capable of doing everything that I want, after that whenever anyone tried to raise some issues, it was already too late. I know what I'm capable of and they can't tell me what I can't do."

In my family, there are three girls. We have always been told that we are human beings and we are capable. It was only when I went to university that I started to realize that there is a differentiation between men and women. As I had grown up being told that I am capable of doing everything that I want, after that whenever anyone tried to raise some issues, it was already too late. I know what I'm capable of and they can't tell me what I can't do. We now need to work on the next generation telling them that they can do anything. When I was in high school, there were no significant number of women in political leadership. When I was in university, the only female Minister was the Minister of Gender Affairs. The next generation can look to us. We have lots of female leaders and our first female president that we are all very proud of."

On her advice for women considering getting into public governance

"If they have the intent of going into politics, they should go for it. There won't be anyone who will come and give it to them. It's theirs to take. The resistance and challenge will be there, but they should be confident and believe in themselves. We are all humans and we are created equally. There is nothing we can't do as long as we are committed. You have to take it by proving what you are capable of."

On her advice for voters

"The government that we are going to form, has to be a replica of the society that we are in. If the government doesn't look like the society we have, the decisions won't address the needs of all people - the young girls in school or women in all sorts of business."

On being an Amujae fellow

"It's a very good opportunity. When I need something from other countries, I know that I have sisters there who will facilitate it for me. When we are together, we get to share our challenges and learn. I also love the opportunity to learn from the pioneers — previous presidents, foreign ministers knowing the challenges they have faced is better preparing us to face our own challenges. We learn from them. Sharing experiences is helping us to back up each other. The journey is tough, but we are stronger together."

On women who have inspired her

"There was an empress who was the wife of Emperor Menelik — Empress Taytu. She played a significant role at the Battle at Adwa, the battle that Ethiopia fought for her sovereignty. Because of that war, Ethiopia wasn't colonized. Our forefathers paid a lot for that. During that war the role of the empress was quite significant. She said, *'I am a woman and I don't like war, but when it comes to the sovereignty of my nation, I will be the one at the forefront.'* This was what she said to the Italian representative at the time. Her role was monumental in that battle, from designing tactics for fighters, to protecting her citizens as a responsible leader. That kind of determination for the people she served is so inspiring."

On what she wants her legacy to be

"**To be a witness and inspiration for younger girls, that it's possible to break the glass ceiling and it's possible to be the first in different kinds of things. When I left my ministerial role, I was really eager to see more women leaders in my Ministry. It's possible to be the first, but this history of being the first has to end for the next generations. Let female leadership become normalized. They should see several female Presidents, Ministers and judges**."

“I take my hat off to all women and in particular those who have made a decision to play in the political arena…they are heroes…whether they make it or not, is irrelevant. The fact that they are stepping in and saying we want to put up a fight for economic empowerment for everyone, for social justice for all…**they are heroes**.”

— Tsitsi Masiyiwa, Zimbabwean philanthropist

Highlights of new African female cabinet ministers

Kenya

While President William Ruto pledged during the campaign to bring parity into his government, only seven women have been appointed, out of a total of 22 ministers.

Somalia

In August 2022, Somalia appointed Khadijo Mohamed Diriye as the Minister for Women and Human Rights Development (MoWHRD). Her priorities include the enactment of a sexual offenses law which has been long pending. She also plans to take the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security to the local population to promote women's meaningful participation in legislature and decision making. She also prioritizes achieving gender parity, not just in politics, but across all spheres and institutions within government and private sector.

Percentage of female cabinet ministers

"All this time, I've been afraid of my ability, when instead I should have been regarding it as a treasured weapon."

— Namina Forna, *This Gilded Ones*

Spotlight: Africa's female Ministers of Economy, Finance or Planning

Within the past few years, a few African countries have gotten their first female Ministers of Finance. Most recently that was Oulimata Sarr in Senegal, but also Vera Esperança dos Santos Daves de Sousa's rising to this role in Angola in 2019, was the first for her country. Currently there are eight African countries with a female Minister of Finance.

Angola

Vera Esperança dos Santos Daves de Sousa[14]

Took office in:
October 2019

Madagascar

Rindra Hasimbelo Rabarinirinarison[18]

Took office in:
August 2021

Botswana

Peggy O. Serame[15]

Took office in:
April 2021

Morocco

Nadia Fettah Alaoui[19]

Took office in:
October 2021

Gabon

Nicole Jeanine Lydie Roboty Mbou[16]

Took office in:
December 2020

Nigeria

Zainab Shamsuna Ahmed[20]

Took office in:
September 2018

Lesotho

Retselisitsoe Matlanyane[17]

Took office in:
October 2019

Senegal

Oulimata Sarr[21]

Took office in:
September 2022

Women in judicial positions

In contrast to the other branches of government, shifts in the leadership of the judicial branch are less frequent and are harder to track. In 2022, there were five female Chief Justices in Africa with two having been appointed as recently as 2021: Martha Koome (Kenya), Rehana Bibi (Mauritius), Meaza Ashenafi (Ethiopia), Nemat Abdullah Khair (Sudan), Maria de Fátima Coronel (Cabo Verde.) Meaza Ashenafi resigned on 17th January 2023.

Countries that have in the past had female Chief Justices include include Benin, Burundi, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea- Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone,Seychelles, Zambia, South Africa and Lesotho.

African women are not strangers to international and regional courts. Today, three African women—Miatta Maria Samba of Sierra Leone, Reine Alapini-Gansou of Benin, and Solomy Bossa of Uganda—are among the four African judges at the International Criminal Court of a total of 18 judges.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has 15 members. Of the three African members, only one is a woman—Judge Julia Sebutinde of Uganda.

Regional courts, such as the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR) and the ECOWAS court of justice, also reflect the increasing presence of women. Today the AfCHPR has 11 judges, of which five are women from Nigeria, Algeria, Malawi, Cameroon, and Tanzania. The President of AfCHPR is Justice Imani Daud Aboud of Tanzania.

The ECOWAS court of justice has only five judges, only one is a woman—Justice Catherine Dupe Atoki of Nigeria.

"These aren't the days to pretend you're only a wife or a sister or a mother...

We're more than this."

— Maaza Mengiste, *The Shadow King*

Chief Justice Martha Koome

Kenya's first female Chief Justice
May 2021-Present

Since Kenya attained independence almost 50 years ago in 1963, the country has had 14 Chief Justices: all of them men. That was up until Justice Martha Koome was selected for the role in 2021.

Martha Koome was born into a humble family in a rural village in Meru, an agricultural town in Eastern Kenya. She says, "I don't think I recognized discrimination when I was growing up. I was completely oblivious at the time. It was just how things were and I had not seen something else. I grew up in a village in a polygamous household where gender discrimination was practiced openly. I thought it was normal for girls to do all the domestic chores and for the boys to be exempt from housework. We had to go to the farm, dig, fetch water, prepare food, cook and serve the boys and men. I just assumed this was my destiny."

Education and her own peasant mother's determination for her children to have the things she didn't have herself, saw her become a prominent lawyer.

On her work as a family lawyer and seeing the way women struggled to access justice

"I started practicing law in a private law firm and I was employed somewhere where I was assigned cases for women and told, 'Look, this is for you Martha. These women

require a lot of time, emotional support and they pay little. We don't have time for them.' That law firm took those cases as a way of PR because maybe these women had been sent by someone they respect, but the work wasn't important to them, so they gave it to the newly hired woman associate.

I took on those cases, cases of women who had been married for many years, they had homes, they had cars, but overnight the woman is thrown out of the matrimonial home and within no time, the children follow her because they find the home is no longer a friendly place for them. These were successful and privileged women and just like that, they could lose everything.

It made me realize how the law is steeped up against the woman. It would be an uphill task for me to get an injunction to get that woman back home. It would be an uphill task to get her alimony for her to get a place to rent with the children, or even to get an order for the school fees and maintenance of the children. Even tougher was when you tried to claim the division of marital property showing that the woman has contributed. These women would lose everything, be living on the streets or in someone's garage despite the fact that they had built together with their husbands who had now kicked them out. I knew I couldn't do this battle alone. I joined FIDA [Federation of Women Lawyers.]"

"When did I believe I could become the Chief Justice of Kenya? There was a time I didn't even believe I could become a judge."

This would start her many years of fighting for a more just society. She went on to serve as the Chairperson of FIDA, a council member of the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) in addition to founding the East Africa Law Society. All of these forums ask for protection of the rule of law including reforms of laws especially affecting women.

On the archaic nature of laws that affected women at the time

"We were still governed by colonial laws e.g. the married women's property act of 1882 of England. It had been repealed long ago in England, but was still being applied to women in Kenya in the 21st century. There was a real gap. These were the women I was representing: women dispossessed of their rights, victims of gender based violence, children. I was a family law practitioner and found myself navigating these archaic laws."

On her advocacy for a more just society

"As a legal practitioner from the early 1990s, I entered the public space agitating for legal reforms, political reforms, constitutional reforms including in the manner in which judges are appointed. At the time, Kenya was a one-party state. We wanted a multi-party government. The only voices of opposition at that time were the law society and religious organizations. It was the time of the sending of the apostolic letter to the government, urging the government to respect human rights and also to stop detentions without trial.

FIDA too fought for what was needed to uplift Kenya's women. It asked for a constitutional reform [with Kenya getting a new constitution in 2010] so that all discriminatory clauses are repealed. At the time the constitution recognized customary law and that wasn't defined. It kept on shifting, but always in a way to

bring a woman down: A woman does not inherit property..Children belong to the man. FIDA also called for an end to workplace discrimination and the enforcing of a two-third gender policy so that women will be present as decision–makers in forums where decisions affecting them are made. Even for the constitutional review, it was a lot of work to convince men in power to include women from the districts. We influenced the constitution of Kenya Review Act to include women from every district as participants. We ensured there was a woman from every district who was in attendance and able to advocate their own rights as per issues of land, children, land, persons with disabilities, governance principles etc."

On her own experience with workplace discrimination

"Before going into private practice, I was employed at the state law office as a state council. I was told "You are married, you can't get a house allowance while my male colleagues would get it."

On becoming a judge

"I never even imagined I could be a judge. It felt like a very closed society that is only meant for a certain type of individual.

When I was the chairperson of FIDA, I was invited to join a donor-led forum for efficiency and equality in service delivery. I participated very vigorously. Justice Omollo [now a retired judge] asked me, 'Why don't you want to become a judge? I think you understand these issues very well." I was recommended by Justice Omollo and the forum.

When I was selected, I thought to myself, 'well, I have stood in these corridors waiting for justice for over 15 years, let me go see how I can dispense it myself now.'

The judges were not sensitized to know the plight of women in society. In 2003 I became a judge of the high court serving diligently in the family division. I spent three years in Nakuru giving judgment on the same types of cases that I spent decades working on as an advocate. I told myself that if I could manage Nakuru well—a very large area with lots of challenges and only three judges managing the whole region—I can very well be the Chief Justice of this country."

Advice for female leaders

"Ignore negative stories about women in power. They will always be told no matter what a woman does. Block your ears and just stay focused."

On role models

"I ignored every negative story told about women. My greatest influence was my mother. She worked hard, inculcating values of hard work, integrity, Christian values and urging us to remain focused on what we want to achieve. She just wanted us to go to school and make our living and be employed, not to struggle eking out a living on the land. Because of a strong mother, who had nothing but sheer hard work, prayer, discipline, encouraging us that there is better to come, I knew I could overcome obstacles."

On what she wants her legacy to be

"I want my legacy to be one of having made the judiciary became efficient, meeting the expectations of Kenyans, protecting the rule of law and upholding the constitution. I want Kenyans to see the judiciary remain independent and know that it is a beacon of hope for anyone whose rights were violated, giving efficient, real time service delivery."

On why women need to be decision makers in judicial matters

"It's important to have the other perspective. This is why diversity is important. Society is made up of both men and women. When it comes to justice, we need everyone."

Meaza Ashenafi

President of the Federal Supreme Court of Ethiopia
November 2018 - January 2023

Over the years, Ashenafi had a diverse professional journey ranging from judgeship to civil society leadership as well as working as an international civil servant. She got into a high-level public leadership position following the 2011 political reform in Ethiopia. In 2018, it was a historical moment for her to be appointed as the first-ever female president of the Federal Judiciary of Ethiopia, an opportunity she cherished, "welcoming the opportunity to lead a traditional yet critical institution to uphold the rule of law.".

"At the family, community and even state levels, women get the message that their role is domestic, reproductive and not leadership and public."

Her road to taking on this pivotal role was not an easy one. "I grew up around an area where I did not have exposure to media. I had the opportunity to see a television set when I came to the capital city of Addis Ababa when I finished my high school studies and was ready for university education at the age of 17."

On her history of advocating for women

"My story of advocating for women started when I and other female members of the 1997 constitution drafting commission succeeded in making sure women are accorded equal protection under the law. We have also advocated for affirmative action measures to rectify historical legacies of discrimination. Once the right is secured at the level of the constitution, it was time to establish an advocacy organization of lawyers called The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) which I led as a director for eight years."

For many outside Ethiopia, they might know of her from a film called Difret which is based on a groundbreaking case she worked on as the Director of EWLA). EWLA defended a 14 year-old-girl who was abducted for marriage and killed her abductor. After two years of court trial, she was set free on account of self-defense. EWLA's objective was to make sure constitutional guarantees are implemented.

On what keeps women out of public governance

"The main challenges keeping women from public participation are multifaceted. The foundation of the problem is rooted in the gendered division of roles assigned by the society. Progress has been made over the years through public policy, legal reform, and women's activism. For example, 25 years ago when I started activism, women members of parliament in Ethiopia were only 4%. Now they are over 40%. Since 2011, even further progress has been made. We do have a female head of state, and we have 40% women cabinet members. However, all the problems related to women's leadership are not behind us, embedded bias still plays a negative role. Women leaders should be able to lead and also fight these stereotypes. We are expected to be the role models and ensure doors remain open for subsequent women leaders."

On the role of women in the legal field in ensuring access to justice for women and girls

"Women lawyers have a critical role to play in promotion as well as protection of the rights of women. In Africa organizations of women lawyers played a key role in public awareness raising, legal reform in favor of gender equality as well as pro bono legal service. They should continue to deepen their advocacy work particularly by taking into account the changed landscape, new and persistent challenges. We need our strategies to be not only innovative and responsive but also proactive. The success of women's advocacy is dependent on how open and democratic a government is. For instance, in some countries, securing gender equality in family laws could not be achieved. This has to change and regional, global institutions such as the African Union and the United Nations have to continue supporting women's movements vigorously."

Advice for women who would want to enter public governance

"Women do hesitate to take leadership positions at all levels. This is mainly caused by two factors. One is due to the fact that socialization processes do not prepare women for leadership positions. At the family, community and even state levels, women get the message that their role is domestic, reproductive and not leadership

and public. The second challenge is of course the disproportional role women play in raising a family.

Despite these challenges, women should dare not to shy away from leadership positions. This is not only a privilege but also a responsibility. Women have to be a role model and also expected to provide service to the public. Myself and other women leaders should serve as strong examples.

Women who represent 50% of any society deserve the representation of leaders who look like them. It is both a matter of legal right as well as good governance."

On why female leadership matters

"Women take their roles and responsibilities very seriously. They are not as vulnerable to corruption and abuse of public office. Studies have demonstrated that social service provision improves when women are in leadership positions. The role that women leaders played in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic is a strong demonstration of women's transformative leadership. Since I came to office, the number of women judges has increased, women are appointed to judicial leadership positions, we have established 9 benches dealing with women and children's issues, sexual harassment policy is adopted, a bench book for violence against women adopted etc. I am sharing the example to demonstrate that having women in public office is beneficial and that women leaders in most cases are accountable."

On the power of her success

"Success is a relative concept. It is the goal you set for your life. But my secret is to have integrity, to be positive and to be fearless. Rest assured that integrity will make you fearless."

On how stories and culture can perpetuate negative stereotypes about female leadership and her female role models

"There are a lot of proverbs that show gender related messages, power relations and controls embedded in them. For instance, a proverb from one of the cultural communities in our societies goes like this:

'A village governed by a woman serves as a place where a donkey grazes.'

'A woman can't rule a country because she fears when the evening comes.'

Moreover, there were no distinguished role models in those days although there are historical figures such as Empress Taitu who played a strategic role with her husband Emperor Menelik. Taitu and Menelik mobilized their people to curtail the ambitions of the Italian colonizers in 1896 by defeating the fascist army at the historic battle of Adwa. Hence, Empress Taitu had played a critical role to preserve Ethiopia as the only non-colonized African country.

Although we learn these stories from textbooks, they are not immediate. They are inspiring but not with immediate impact. For me, my mother who is the mother of 5 girls and 4 boys was and remains my role model. She did not get the chance to go to school but she knew how to educate her children, she has a strong work ethic and has faith in human endeavors to overcome any challenge. She infused us with the power of education (without going to school), hard work and honesty and that is the story I like to share."

Aïssatou Seck

Senior Counsel at The World Bank

Aïssatou Seck is a lawyer and development finance professional. She started her career in the leveraged acquisition and structured finance in international law firms in Paris before transitioning to the development sector at the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations' specialized agency for information and communication technologies in Geneva.

She currently serves as a senior counsel for the World Bank in Washington, DC and Abidjan serving Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Burkina and Guinea. She is active in several initiatives designed to foster economic and legal empowerment, particularly for women, through pro bono advisory services, reproductive rights advocacy, training and mentoring such as the Women's Investment Club, the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises (they led a massive movement in 2020 that got rape to be considered a crime as opposed to a misdemeanor as it previously was[25]) and the Women in International Affairs Network. She is an MPA candidate at the Harvard Kennedy School where she is interested in exploring innovative ways public policies can support the private sector. She is an Obama Foundation 2022 Leader for Africa and was recognized as a "Woman to watch" by the Institute of African Women in Law.

On the role law can play in creating a more just, inclusive society

"Law shapes society, but can always be used to create wealth for certain groups, but also exclude others. I am passionate about using law to impact people's lives better. I am Senegalese, but was born in Nigeria and raised everywhere including Brazil and France. Everywhere I was, I saw that women face very similar challenges."

On her advice to women

"Be unapologetic. I'm unapologetic. Many women, however accomplished they are, are still being made to feel that they have to limit their full potential [so as not to intimidate men]. I never want to do that. I am unapologetic.There is no limit to what we can accomplish."

"I'm unapologetic. Many women, however accomplished they are, are still being made to feel that they have to limit their full potential [so as not to intimidate men]. I never want to do that. I am unapologetic."

On African women who have inspired her

"Of course President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. I am so proud every time I enter the Kennedy library and see her picture, knowing all she has done and what she means to female and aspiring female leaders on the continent. She broke barriers. I am also inspired by Oulimata Sarr who is now Senegal's first female Minister of Economy, Planning and Cooperation after an impressive career in finance and banking and most recently heading UN Women, West and Central Africa. I also admire Sheila Braka, the World Bank Chief Counsel for Africa."

On challenges that women face in leadership

"The first is internal. Many women are apologetic. I speak to female entrepreneurs with great revenues, but they will be scared of taking up something that can increase their revenues by 10x because they don't want to make too much and get in trouble with their husbands? Why would you limit yourself when you could be making millions? Women are scared of fully owning their power.

Of course there are also many external barriers with one being having few role models of women in power that allow women to see themselves as leaders. I think this is why the work that the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center is doing with the Amujae fellows is great work. Women need to see other women doing big things and knowing they can also do it too.

You have to do good work, that's the bare minimum, but you also have to go seek opportunities. Many women have the good student syndrome, 'If I just do good work, keep my head down, soon someone will notice me.' I completely disagree. Women have to put themselves out there. We have to get out of our shells and go get it!"

Endnotes

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About the EJS Center

The Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development (EJS Center) was founded in 2018 to be a catalyst for change across Africa by helping unleash its most abundant, yet minimally tapped power — its women.

Through a unique blend of programming, advocacy, research, and exhibitions, the EJS Center works to advance women's public leadership and development on the continent. Through its work, it envisions more voices heard, talents unleashed, and leaders launched that prioritize the aspirations of women.

The EJS Center was founded by former President and Nobel Peace Prize winner Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. As the first democratically elected woman president in Africa, Madam Sirleaf is passionate about supporting the next generation of women in public life. By helping women in public leadership to raise their profiles and advance their careers, the EJS Center seeks to amplify the voices of all women and girls across the continent.

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Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
Presidential Center For
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Building a Legacy of Leadership and Knowledge in a Center of Excellence

a Tubman Boulevard, Montserrado
Monrovia, Liberia

e info@ejscenter.org

w www.ejscenter.org