



**GENDER-RESPONSIVE DEVELOPMENT:
OPPORTUNITIES FOR CO-OPERATION
BETWEEN THE AFRICAN UNION, ITS MEMBER
STATES AND DENMARK**

Acknowledgements

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The authors would like to thank Emilie Marie Falk Due for her assistance in compiling and analysing the data from the UN Third Committee online archives. We also express our gratitude to all the experts and scholars who generously contributed their time and knowledge at different stages of this study.

Part I of the paper builds on the research done in the frame of Global Norms on Eliminating Violence Against Women (GLOW) in Ethiopia research programme, funded by the Danish Consultative Research Committee for Development Research (FFU).

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DIIS Working Paper 2023: 11

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ISBN 978-87-7236-124-6 (pdf)

DIIS publications can be downloaded free of charge from www.diis.dk

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ABSTRACT

To examine possible common ground for co-operation between certain African countries, the African Union (AU) and Denmark, this study reviews the gender equality priorities of the AU and nine of its member states. The study explores (I) the priorities, contestations and gaps in the AU's gender governance; (II) the status of and priorities in gender-responsive governance at country level; and (III) African priorities in global gender policy spaces. Noting AU's focus on harmful (traditional) practices, women, peace and security, sexual and reproductive health and rights and women in decision-making, there are opportunities to build on this existing work. A closer look at some member states shows that countries' engagement with gender equality issues is shaped by their internal stability, changes in political regime and approach to governance. At the global governance level, not all countries participate equally and the Africa Group rarely participates with a common voice.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Considering the changing political climate across the world, women's rights and gender equality are agreed to be generally desirable but involve many contested details. Through the lens of Danish development co-operation, this Working Paper reviews the gender equality priorities of the African Union (AU) and nine of its member states. It considers the Danish 'pragmatic' foreign policy approach that seeks common ground with diverse cross-regional partners on the one hand, and gender in Danish development priorities on the other. As such, the paper discusses the priorities, contestations and gaps in the AU's gender governance (Part I); the status of and priorities in gender-responsive governance in diverse African countries (Part II); and African priorities in global gender policy spaces with a focus on the United Nations (UN) Third Committee (Part III).

The Working Paper demonstrates that some of the key thematic areas furthered by the AU include: the elimination of harmful (traditional) practices and violence against women; women, peace and security (WPS); sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); and women in decision-making and leadership. That said, medicalised abortion, rights of gender non-conforming people and sexual harassment continue to be contested issues within the AU. These contestations appear primarily in the national, regional and UN-level engagements of member states. The tensions also provide some context for the AU's uncertain role as the African voice in the UN system. On the one hand, the diversity of African politics challenges the AU as a convenor and secretariat of the Africa Group. At the same time, its offices function to serve the Africa Group and facilitate common positions. Considering the complexities of the AU's normative role on the continent and beyond, the paper argues that there are opportunities to build on existing work, notably on SRHR, the African Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), and WPS. At the same time, women's economic development and the gender/climate nexus are two areas where more focus might be expected in the future. That said, due to donor dependency and an expert-driven rights regime, AU's development partners may need to consider the challenges AU faces regarding its legitimacy and authority to enforce its agenda, as well as the lack of impact reporting regarding AU activities. These two challenges make it difficult to estimate what the real effects of the AU's extensive initiatives on gender equality truly are.

A close-up of nine selected member states of the AU and the UN demonstrates how diverse political contexts shape gender-responsive governance. The Working Paper takes the categories adopted by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) as a starting point. These are: fragile states (Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Somalia); poor and stable states (Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda); and transition economies (Egypt, Ghana and South Africa). The country categories were examined through key findings from the country reviews (Annex 2), national interlinkages with the AU and the UN and the implications these have for development co-operation. Broadly then, Part II of the Working Paper demonstrates that regardless of significant contextual differences, some similarities can be identified. For instance, unstable countries tend to have weak

women's movements and the governments are less likely to prioritise gender equality issues. Yet, more conclusions could be drawn from across the different groupings. For instance, cases show that a change of political regime causes disruption and a change of direction in gender equality work. In Ethiopia, it initially appeared to be a positive change. Besides, authoritarian tendencies in countries like Egypt, Ethiopia and Uganda raise questions about how to choose between democracy and development as far as the well-being of women is concerned. Not least, it became clear that economic development is relevant for women across the board, including in 'transition economies'. The review also revealed varying engagement with the AU system among the member states, including various AU champions of gender equality (on eliminating FGM, VAWG and gender and development).

Examining how those nine countries participated in the UN General Assembly Third Committee's decisions on gender equality and women's rights was an inroad to understanding their political priorities around gender. A review of the Third Committee resolutions and amendments on gender over the last five years showed that the Africa Group promoted two issues: eliminating FGM and obstetric fistula. Elements of SRHR, the legitimacy of global institutions and the language of intersectionality were the most frequently contested issues. The voting patterns did reveal not only irregular participation by several countries (particularly Burkina Faso, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda) but also diverse positions on regressive amendments. Egypt became an outlier in terms of sponsoring regressive amendments – something the other eight countries in question do not tend to do. These patterns of limited participation can be explained by African countries preferring to introduce resolutions collectively via the Africa Group due to capacity deficits. Financial means, staffing and access to expertise impact countries' ability to actively participate in multilateralism.

Drawing from regional, national and global gender governance examples, the study proposes five key implications for development co-operation and cross-regional partnerships. First, going with the grain or building on demonstrated successes is useful for making sure that the relevant expertise and political commitment are there. Second, when looking at new issues, a local buy-in will enhance the chances that the partnership has the intended impact and aligns with priorities on the ground. Both of these takeaways are challenging in that they require deep contextual knowledge and the ability to make adjustments. They also speak to the third point, which is the imperative to 'do no harm'. Not doing harm can take on many meanings as sometimes advocating for or financially supporting a marginalised group (i.e. LGBTQIA+ community or suppressed CSOs) may result in further ostracising. Fourth, socioeconomic development continues to be a key challenge for women across diverse African countries. Choosing the appropriate strategy in this regard is complicated due to the complex histories of donor dependencies and diverse strategic visions on the continent. This leads to the fifth and final point, the role of CSOs in fostering gender equality. The extent to which CSOs can drive change hinges on political context, but where possible, CSOs should be empowered to define their own priorities and agenda. Strengthening the capacities of CSOs will also enhance their position in informing the AU's

gender governance, and perhaps linking it more credibly with the demands of diverse women on the continent.

INTRODUCTION

In the world of changing geopolitics, countries are reconfiguring the grounds for partnerships and collaborations. This study takes its starting point from the Danish development co-operation strategy, in the context of a 'pragmatic turn' in Danish foreign policy and seeks to identify the priorities and common ground on gender equality between Denmark and diverse development partners across Africa. A key question for Denmark is how to stand by its longstanding values and priorities while building bridges with actors who might not share those. A possibility is to turn its attention to where values overlap and where diverse partners can 'find each other'. The importance of gender equality in Danish development co-operation is reflected in the Strategy for Denmark's Engagement with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2018-2022) and The Strategy of Denmark's Engagement with the African Development Bank (2020-2024). Denmark has also collaborated with the AU on the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa (2020-2022). In this light, a deeper understanding of the overlapping policy priorities in the gender equality sphere, fruitful directions for co-operation, as well as potential challenges, are necessary for Denmark to meaningfully support its partners in fostering gender equality across Africa.

The pan-African regional governance body, the African Union (AU), has an elaborate and progressive normative architecture on gender equality that has unexhausted potential for improving gendered disparities on the continent. The AU's Agenda 2063 outlines continental aspirations to achieve inclusive and sustainable development, including Goal 17 on 'Full Gender Equality in All Spheres of Life'. Agenda 2063 is harmonised with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 5 on gender equality. Additionally, the AU has adopted a progressive women's rights framework (Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women, adopted in 2003 and ratified by 44 of the 55 AU member states), a Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, and has ongoing campaigns on issues like FGM, child marriage and positive masculinity. Additionally, the AU's human rights body, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, interprets and monitors the existing African women's rights mechanisms. The AU's approach to gender equality is consolidated with existing global women's rights frameworks, however, it lacks engagement from the member states.

While most AU member states have committed to gender equality through legislation and policies, a closer look at individual countries reveals some challenges and tensions. Following the categories of the Danish strategy document the World We Share 2030, the study examines the political priorities around

gender of the following countries: a) Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Somalia (fragile states); b) Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda (poor and stable states); and c) Egypt, Ghana and South Africa (transition economies). While most countries in the world can do more for achieving gender equality, these case countries face unique obstacles due to political instability, conflict and economic challenges. Some have been unable to firmly criminalise child marriage, others have an outstanding disparity between women and men in the workforce and struggle with providing women access to family planning and reproductive care. Perspectives from select AU member states provide an excellent starting point to qualify the pan-African perspective and indicate convergences and divergences between the AU and its member states' gender equality priorities. This point, and how those priorities translate to multilateral negotiations, are further examined through a review of country positions at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee. In this global policy context, some African countries find themselves on opposing sides of the political spectrum.

Therefore, this study engages with the following questions: How do AU and selected member states' gender policies converge and diverge? How do the selected AU member states engage in international gender negotiations regionally and globally? What are Danish and AU's intersecting priorities in gender equality that could translate into alliances in global policy negotiations? Discussing these questions will help answer a broader question about how Denmark can support the diverse gender equality efforts on the continent. The analysis is presented in three parts: firstly, the priorities, contestations and gaps in the AU's gender governance are discussed (Part I); then, the status of and priorities in gender-responsive governance and development in diverse African countries are examined (Part II); and finally, African priorities in global gender policy spaces with a focus on the Third Committee will be examined (Part III). The Working Paper also includes comprehensive annexes that map the AU's gender equality architecture (Annex 1), a review of gender equality in the nine countries discussed in this study (Annex 2) and an overview of global gender policy spaces (Annex 3). In doing so, the Working Paper seeks to bring different layers of governance structures into conversation with each other. Considering an increasingly contested gender equality discourse internationally, with evident conservative backlash in several countries, regional bodies may become potent forums for addressing issues of ownership and local legitimacy of the gender equality discourse. This study will highlight the synergies of the Danish and African partners' priorities and opportunities for enhancing gender equality in Africa through gender-responsive development co-operation.

BACKGROUND: GENDER IN DANISH DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION

Gender-related issues have been a priority for many years in Denmark's development co-operation (Engberg-Pedersen, 2016). In 1978 the Danish MFA published a document discussing aid-supported activities for women and during the 1990s and the 2000s gender equality was one of three cross-cutting issues that were expected to be integrated into all aid-supported activities. Today, Danish development co-operation and its approach to gender equality are outlined in documents like the *World We Share* (2021-2025), the *Global Climate Action Strategy* (2020) and the *Strategic Framework for Gender Equality, Rights and Diversity in Danish Development Assistance* (2014). While the *Priorities for Development Co-operation (2024-2027)* only mentions gender issues once, it commits to maintaining the annual commitment to women's rights.¹

According to the **World We Share** strategy, gender equality is one of the basic tenets of democracy and human rights which are presented as the basis for Danish development co-operation. This includes a human-focused approach, especially protecting marginalised and vulnerable groups and the rights of women and girls. Although clearly stated, gender equality is no longer as high on the agenda as when it was a cross-cutting issue. The document highlights the focus on fragile states and contexts, whereby governments are unable to provide security, freedom, employment, access to healthcare, education and other basic services, including water and energy. In terms of gender equality, the *World We Share* highlights women's economic and political empowerment as central to economic growth and democratic governance (p. 14). In particular, the Danish approach to gender equality focuses on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), whereby Denmark pledges to forge alliances internationally. Issues like maternal mortality, child marriage, family planning and female genital mutilation are brought up as some of the major concerns (p. 17).

Regarding the Danish approach to the nexus between humanitarian assistance, development and peace (hum/dev/peace nexus) the following gender equality-specific actions are emphasised:

- Promote sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in humanitarian activities.
- Take the lead and promote activities in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence against girls and women during displacement crises, partly through providing support for survivors.
- Promote equal opportunities for girls and women during displacement crises, partly through securing access to the labour market, quality education and participation in decision-making processes (p. 27).

¹ This is outlined in Danish policy document 'Regeringens Udviklingspolitiske Prioriteter 2024: Plan for udgiftsrammer for udviklingsamarbejdet', 2024-2027: 8.

The strategy also commits to working with the African Union on stabilisation and conflict prevention in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

According to the **Government Priorities for Danish Development Co-operation** document, development assistance to development countries must commit 25% of all funds to climate change-related activities, and an additional 5% to environmentally related activities, prioritising climate adaptation initiatives. The focus on gender equality, particularly sexual and reproductive rights, is a continuity from previous years. Danish funding commitment also focuses on SRHR, with funding going primarily to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), relevant CSOs across the world, the Joint UN Programme on HIV and AIDS as well as UN Women and Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. In 2021-2022, Denmark chaired 'Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies', a global initiative that was launched in 2013, bringing together more than 90 countries, donors, civil society organisations and UN institutions.

Denmark's **Strategic Framework for Gender Equality, Rights and Diversity** emphasises that gender equality is primarily a matter of including women in social institutions so that they can exercise the same rights as men. However, gender equality is also a matter of challenging existing power structures that exclude women's particular concerns and, finally, gender equality should be decomposed to adequately cater for the multiple and intersecting identities that shape women and men (Engberg-Pedersen, 2018). The framework prioritises human rights and democracy, inclusive green growth, social progress, and stability and protection, and is, accordingly, in harmony with concerns raised in later general strategies.

Denmark is guided by the above policies both in its bilateral development co-operation partnerships and in global policy negotiations. Aligned with the Danish turn towards a pragmatic approach to foreign policy, building cross-regional partnerships is a key priority. In addition to being active as part of the European Union (EU) group in UN platforms like the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Third Committee at the UNGA, Denmark is also a major donor to UN agencies that work on the issues of women (UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF and UNFPA) (Interview #15). As a major donor, Denmark accesses the board meetings and can negotiate with other member states regarding the priorities and programming goals of these agencies. Additionally, Denmark promotes SRHR issues in New York through funding the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Friendship Retreats where delegates will get to know some of the SRHR-related challenges over a weekend. The retreat is aimed at countries on the 'middle ground', particularly those of the Global South, and facilitate discussions on language, negotiation tactics and alternative positions.

PART I GENDER AT THE AFRICAN UNION

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) co-convened regional conferences to negotiate African common positions on women's rights during the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) together with the UN Economic Commission for Africa. In 1992, the OAU established its first Women's Unit under the auspices of the Labour and Social Affairs Division (Tornius, 2023: 750). From there on, and particularly in preparation for the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, diverse developments regarding women's rights took place on the continent. In the 1990s, many women's organisations were created, but women in Africa also mobilised to show a common front for ensuring women's voices would be included in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. In the context of these developments, the reform from OAU to AU involved inscribing women's rights and gender equality into the AU's constitution and its pan-African ambitions. While the AU's gender governance involves diverse parts, including legal frameworks, soft law, policies, institutions, campaigns and events (see Table 1, and extensive review in Annex 1), the sections below focus on giving an overview of the priority policy areas, contested issues, the AU's role in multilateral space and finally, the opportunities and challenges of working with the AU structures.² These sections build on existing scholarship, previous research on gender and the AU, and publicly available information.

² This overview is valid in 2023.

Table 1. Gender at the African Union at a glance

Legal frameworks	Soft law	Policy frameworks	Main institutions and offices	Civil society access	Current campaigns	Annual events
The Constitutive Act (2000)	General Comment No. 6 (2020)	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy (2018-2028)	Specialised Technical Committee (STC) on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	The Economic, Social and Cultural Council	What African Women Want	Gender Pre-Summit
The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981)	Joint General Comment on Ending Child Marriage (2018)	Maputo Plan of Action II (2016-2030)	Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYD)	Gender Is My Agenda Campaign	African Women's Decade on Financial and Economic Inclusion (2020-2030)	Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity
Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003)	Guidelines on Combatting SGBV (2017)	Gender Policy 2009	Office of the Special Envoy of Women, Peace and Security	The Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation	Continental Initiative to End Female Genital Mutilation	Africa Forum for Women, Peace and Security
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990)	General Comment No. 2 (2014)	Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality (2004)	Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development	African Women Leaders Network	Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa	African Girls Summit (past)
	General Comment No. 1 (2012)		The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women	African Network of Women in Infrastructure	Campaign to End Child Marriage	
				Pan-African Women's Organisation	Gender Parity Project 2025	

Note: Author's own compilation, detailed in Annex 1.

Priority areas

The AU clearly prioritises the **elimination of harmful (traditional) practices** in its pan-African policy agenda. In particular, the AU is concerned **with FGM and child marriage**. Harmful social practices are pointed to in Agenda 2063 but were already central to the African Charter on Child's Rights (1990) and the Maputo Protocol (2003). Child marriage is addressed by AU's soft law and FGM, child marriage and other harmful practices are prominent across AU's policy frameworks. The main institution in charge of addressing harmful practices is the

Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS) (particularly African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child known as ACERWC, see Annex 1). At the sub-regional level, the brief of Ending Cross Border FGM (Mombasa, 2019) claims that Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda have pledged to strengthen co-operation to eliminate FGM in the region.³ The African Union and the government of Tanzania recently hosted the 2nd International Conference on Female Genital Mutilation (9-11 October 2023), supported by the Spotlight Initiative, EU and UN. The Spotlight Initiative's regional programme in Africa is a collaboration with the African Union (among other key partners) and addresses sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, harmful practices, and sexual and reproductive health and rights 'including FGM and child marriage'.⁴ Multiple recent or ongoing campaigns, such as 'What African Women Want', 'Saleema Initiative' and 'Campaign to End Child Marriage' address harmful practices and they are central to the AU's Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity. Importantly, these issues speak to the AU's wider ambition to draft and adopt **the African Convention on Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls**, an objective that is regularly linked up with changing harmful gender norms on the continent.

Secondly, the AU's agenda on **women, peace and security (WPS)** had a particular momentum in 2019 with the AU's annual theme of 'Silencing the Guns'. WPS is part of the Maputo Protocol and part of AU's gender policy frameworks. The Office of the Special Envoy on WPS (AUC) produced annual reports of the WPS implementation using the reports from the Continental Results Framework. Notably, the WPS agenda is linked up with the CSOs and non-state actors via platforms like Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) and FemWise. WPS is a policy area Denmark has supported in the past (2020-2022), particularly the Office of the Special Envoy's advocacy for WPS national action plan development by member states, Continental Results Framework for reporting and accountability and capacity development of Peace and Security Department staff, knowledge exchange and dialogue, Quick Impact Projects and technical support for the Special Envoy's office. One of the concerns around AU's WPS agenda is its reliance on the work of the Special Envoy, Bineta Diop, and her skill and stature in navigating the AU system. Her office, not unlike other AU gender offices, has limited permanent staff and relies on donors for seconded staff and consultants – something she has been skilful in attracting. Consequently, her office does not have the capacity for continued presence in the member states and to support their WPS work on the ground. This applies to much of the AU programming.

Third, the AU has a demonstrated commitment to **sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**. The Maputo Protocol set a precedent in including SRHR, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has qualified the articles related to abortion and HIV/AIDS. SRHR is explicitly addressed in Maputo Plans

³ 1st Regional Inter-Ministerial Meeting to End Cross Border FGM, 15-17 April 2019, Mombasa, Kenya, sponsored by UNFPA and ICPD25. These are four out of the nine countries addressed in this study.

⁴ Spotlight Initiative, 'Africa Regional Programme: Annual Narrative Progress Report 2022'.

of Action and Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy. The 'What African Women Want' and CARMMAPlus campaigns both suggest that SRHR is central to AU's gender policy. CARMMAPlus focuses on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health. FGM and child marriage are often included in the SRHR policies. Denmark has a special interest in supporting SRHR in development co-operation and it might be an interesting direction to explore with the AU. However, there might be some challenges regarding the definitions of sexual rights as understood in global normative agreements (OHCHR, 2023), especially regarding the termination of pregnancy as part of reproductive health. That is regardless of the high number of maternal deaths resulting from unsafe abortions (Grimes et al., 2006).

Another policy area worth mentioning is **women in decision-making and leadership** in Africa. While it is regularly mentioned in the AU normative frameworks (Agenda 2063, Maputo Protocol, Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) as well as AU's policy frameworks and campaigns), the key initiative in this regard is probably the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN). The AUC has committed itself to gender parity, which is indeed visible regarding its commissioners, and has launched a Gender Parity Project too, but compared to some of the other policy areas, this field has been given less attention. It could be because AUC can use some member states as examples for notably high numbers of women in political decision-making positions (e.g. Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa) (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2019). That said, women still face violence and discrimination upon entry to politics, and struggle to finance their candidacy. The AU's engagement with member states on equal participation in decision-making could be strengthened.

Contested issues

The AU's institutional, policy and legal frameworks tackle gendered inequalities from a broad range of angles. The AU's documents in no way conflict with the existing global agreements, and rather build on them and reference them directly. Therefore, the contested areas require some exploration of the tensions beneath the policies. The below outlines key areas of contestation within the AU: abortion, queer rights, sexual harassment inside the AU and donor dependency. These impact how priority areas for intervention are identified and argued for, and which areas are nearly invisible in the AU's approach to gender equality.

The **AU has endorsed medicalised abortion** through the Maputo Protocol and consequent policies; however, this is only in the case of rape, incest or when carrying a pregnancy to term can cause serious harm to the mother or the child. A recent statement by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights points out that many countries have entered reservations to Article 14(2)(c) in the Maputo Protocol which addressed medical abortion and posits that in Latin America and Africa, nearly 3 out of 4 abortions are carried out in unsafe circumstances (ACHPR, 2023a). Additionally, defining 'safe abortion' as in 'accordance with national laws and regulations' in Maputo Plan of Action (2016) removes the pressure from the governments to reform policies around accessing

abortion (Munyati, 2018: 43). The main reasons for unsafe abortions are linked to restrictive legislation and social stigma around terminating pregnancy (Bankole et al., 2020). Indeed, the contestations by the member states are also visible through initiatives like the Geneva Consensus Declaration on Promoting Women's Health and Strengthening the Family (2021).⁵ The Geneva Consensus primarily refutes states' obligation to ensure access to safe abortion, co-sponsored by Egypt and Uganda (alongside Brazil, Hungary and Indonesia). The declaration is co-signed by 37 countries, including Burkina Faso, Kenya and South Sudan (case countries) and Benin, Cameroon, DR Congo, the Congo, Djibouti, Eswatini, Gambia, Senegal, Sudan and Zambia (other African states).

According to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) World Database, 32 out of 54 African countries have legislation that criminalises consensual same-sex acts with imprisonment (ILGA World Database). While the AU **has not taken an official stance on the rights of people with gender-non-conforming behaviours or identities**, it has been considered a 'no-go area' for some development partners (Interview #4). Indeed, the disagreement on lesbian, gay and trans rights has surfaced in AU-EU co-operation roadmaps, and is underlined by the AU's interest in prioritising socioeconomic rights (access to food, water and sanitation) (van der Vleuten and van Eerdewijk, 2020: 585). The challenges of adopting the Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment also stemmed from concerns of some member states that the references to sexual and reproductive health and rights could be interpreted as rights related to sexual orientation and identity. According to Dersso (2022), the AU member states used the discourse of 'African values', through the AU's Executive Council, to have the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL) observer status at the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights revoked (p. 39). After initial resistance, the African Commission withdrew CAL's observer status in August 2018. The Executive Council, unlike the AUC Secretariat, is governed by the member states and therefore it is difficult to judge to what extent these events signal the AUC position. Certainly, one can suggest that queer rights are not an issue for which the AUC would be willing to enter into conflict with its member states.

Not least, an issue that has not been widely publicised since the AU's 'Me Too' moment in 2018 is **the rampant sexual harassment of women in the AUC**. Following an anonymous allegation of sexual harassment, the AUC Chairperson instituted a High-Level Committee (HLC) to investigate the issue further. HLC submitted its report in November 2018 and highlighted numerous malpractices, including rampant sexual harassment of junior, temporary and volunteer female staff (African Union Commission, 2018). According to some reports, no measures had been taken by 2019 (Allison, 2019). More recently, the President of pan-African Parliament was accused of sexual harassment and assault, involving recorded evidence (Allison and Tsoroti, 2023). The AUC does not have a policy or

⁵ The Geneva Consensus Declaration was accessed on 1 November 2023 at: <https://www.theiwh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/GCD-Declaration-2021-2.pdf>

institutional set-up to address sexual harassment. The issue of sexual harassment has also been emphasised by junior women (consultants, member state representatives, volunteers) who have worked in the AUC between 2020-2023 (informal conversations). These women suggest that the unchecked inappropriate behaviour of AUC senior male staff undermines AU's gender policies among the member states.

Not least, the **AU is largely externally funded** (ISS Africa, 2021). Donors have experienced that if member states wish to contest some of AUC's activities, the 'external influence' argument will be used (Interview #4). From a donor perspective, AUC's donor dependency is a catch-22. If they finance AUC activities, it can undermine its legitimacy among the member states and if they do not, the member states' irregular budget contributions make it difficult for the organisation to deliver its mandate. In the case of African regional organisations, donor aid covers more than half of their budgets (Stapel and Söderbaum, 2023: 1700). Stapel and Söderbaum's research shows that donors adopt different approaches towards the AU, particularly in the agenda-setting phase vis-à-vis policy implementation. The EU is rather involved and intrusive both in the policy design and implementation process, putting considerable demands on the AU. It therefore can be considered to treat the AU as a 'bully'. Not least, AU's attempts to put the violations of African migrants' human rights on the agenda in AU-EU dialogues, and their rejection by the EU, have undermined the African buy-in into the EU's 'value-based' foreign policy (van der Vleuten and van Eerdewijk, 2020: 585). The UK on the other hand is engaged in policy design, but not so much in policy implementation. The UK is therefore named the 'overseer'. Germany and Sweden on the other hand are not getting involved in policy design. Germany is proactive in the implementation stage and therefore becomes the 'micromanager'. Sweden is rather hands-off in both policy design and policy implementation stages and therefore considered the 'Samaritan'. The Swedish strategy has been to focus on building the AU's capacity through 'human resource management, procurement procedures, IT facilities, communication procedures as well as core funding to cover salaries in the AU's peace and security council' (Stapel and Söderbaum, 2023: 1710), which from Sweden's perspective is aligned with both Swedish and AU's long-term objectives. Through these different approaches, donors certainly assert influence on how the AU operates. However, as the authors highlight, the direct effects these approaches have on development outcomes are yet to be investigated.

African Union in global gender governance

The AU has a Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations, located in New York. The AU also has observer missions in Geneva (to the UN and WTO), Washington (to the US), Belgium (to the EU) and Cairo (to the League of Arab States). EU, unlike the AU, has been granted an 'enhanced' observer position (UNGA Resolution 65/276) whereby the EU can make interventions and statements in the general debate (but not vote), circulate documents, present oral proposals and amendments agreed by EU member states and has the right to reply regarding EU common positions (Blavoukos et al., 2017: 452). The EU

countries therefore aim to speak with ‘one voice’ by agreeing on the EU joint position which is represented by a member state. It must be noted that some of AU’s and EU’s primary differences in capacity are so both by design and due to accessibility to resources. Namely, the AUC has limited funding, staff and mandate to effectively initiate political proposals, and AU’s legislative body (the Pan-African Parliament) is similarly lacking resources and mandate to guide the AU’s work (van der Vleuten and van Eerdewijk, 2020: 581). Unlike the AU, the EU is well-funded and with a clear and functional legislative mandate. To that extent, the role of the AU in the region is not best understood by comparisons with the EU, but by focusing on its relationships with member states, other international organisations and external partners.

While no other regional organisation has a comparable status to the one that the EU holds at the UN, the AU mission in New York does support the African non-permanent members of the UN Security Council (A-3) and the Africa Group. The AU serves as a secretariat to the Africa Group and coordinates the Group’s activities by convening meetings and providing logistical and administrative support. According to Ayebare (2018),⁶ the role of the AU in coordinating the Africa Group has been challenged by the divisions around the independence of Western Sahara. This became particularly pronounced after Morocco’s re-entry to the AU in 2017. Notably, the AU mission’s website includes references exclusively to women, peace and security (and African Women Leaders Network, see Annex 1.) in addition to more general information on the Africa Group and A3 at the Security Council. The mission is headed by Ambassador Fatima Kyari Mohammed.⁷

Research shows that smaller and less powerful countries are more likely to seek regional positions on the agenda. The negotiation of such positions is facilitated by a chair of the regional group, which in the Africa Group changes every month. While the AU does not have the right to vote at UNGA, its member states can make statements on its behalf and thereby represent regional positions (Panke et al., 2019: 747). Yet AU’s regional positions are rarely expressed, especially in comparison to the EU or Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (ibid.: 748). This has to do with unequal ability, willingness and opportunities to do so. Importantly, the regional groups see diverse challenges in seeking common positions in multilateral negotiations and many of these have a basis in diverging norms and values. Within the Africa Group, South Africa and Egypt often find themselves on opposing ends of the debate, and a similar parallel could be drawn between the Scandinavian countries and Hungary within the EU group (Interview #15). Regional statements are therefore likely to be less progressive than the views of some of their more liberal or open-minded members. From this perspective, regional groupings matter in the UN space, yet, there is still space for cross-regional bilateral dialogue between countries.

⁶ Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Uganda at the United Nations, New York.

⁷ Valid in November 2023.

Opportunities and challenges

Considering the AU's complex web of normative and policy claims on gender equality, and contestations within, the following section will offer some suggestions for consideration: a) gaps and opportunities for action; and b) potential challenges in gender co-operation with the AU. While not absolute, these considerations can provide direction for gender-responsive development co-operation.

Gaps and opportunities

In terms of programming, two key directions could be interesting to explore: economic empowerment and development and the gender/climate change nexus. While there are many more areas where the AU could take more initiative, these two thematic areas represent a persistent problem and an emerging problem, with the latter also increasingly informing the first. While the AU has adopted the African Women's Decade on Financial and Economic Inclusion (2020-2030), there is limited information available regarding the activities within this framework. That said, three funds should work towards enhancing women's access to finance: Fund for African Women (FAW), African Women Leadership Fund (AWLF) and Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa (AFAWA). Not least, Ghana has taken the leadership on this and President Akufo Addo was the one to propose a decade with this theme (African Union Commission, 2021c). In 2022, the AU launched the Women and Youth Financial & Economic Inclusion Initiative in Ghana. Therefore, there is certainly some momentum at the AU to develop this further. It is a policy area that may provide common ground with countries that have weak buy-in to rights-based approaches, as well as those affected by conflict and seeking economic recovery. The question is whether there is a comparative advantage in promoting women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion through the AU. For one, the African Women's Decade of Financial and Economic Inclusion ties in with the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). In 2022, the AU decided to develop a specific Protocol on Women in Trade for AfCFTA (Bayat, 2022). Since the AfCFTA implementation takes place at the national level, the AU is in a position to legitimately advocate for increased national efforts on women's economic empowerment.

A policy area that is currently rather invisible in the AU's gender programming is the climate/gender nexus and ensuring **gender-inclusive approaches to climate change** mitigation, adaptation and resilience. Indeed, the research that explores the gendered experiences of climate change and how climate change exacerbates child marriage, violence against women and other harms against women has become more visible in the past few years (Asadullah et al., 2021; Cohn and Duncanson, 2020; Csevár, 2021). Notably, the Nordic countries already collaborated with the African Union at COP27 in Egypt to highlight the gender dimension of climate change (Nordic Co-operation, 2022). This aligns with African countries adopting the Common Africa Position for CSW66 in February 2022 whereby African countries called for gender-sensitive climate change response (African Union Commission, 2022b). The climate/gender nexus is therefore a

policy area that is likely to be taken up by African regional actors in the near future.

That said, there are also opportunities to support AU's already more developed work on issues that Denmark has historically committed to. SRHR is one of those policy areas. As pointed to above (pages 12-13), the AU has a demonstrated commitment to advocacy for improved maternal health and mortality in its member states. Considering that SRHR initiatives often include addressing issues like FGM and child marriage, there are broad avenues for supporting AU in its **continental SRHR efforts**. This is also a policy area where the AU is a sounding board regarding the contested issues and some of the major divisions around access to safe abortion and the notion of sexual rights. While the AU will not be implementing interventionist SRHR programming in its member states, it acts as a convenor of state and civil society advocates and lends its legitimising power to national organisations and actors active in the field. In the international policy spaces, the Africa Group has repeatedly put forth resolutions on FGM and obstetric fistula, again showcasing the commitment of African countries to some elements of the SRHR. Denmark has a strong track record of supporting SRHR work by sponsoring the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Building on Danish successes in this field will bolster Denmark's image as a credible partner (discussion on credibility in EU-SADC gender co-operation by van der Vleuten, 2013).

Furthermore, the AU gender offices are putting considerable effort into developing the **African Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls** (AU CEVAWG). This is the outcome of two Men's Conferences on Positive Masculinity, cemented by the AU Heads of State and Government during the AU's 36th Assembly, in February 2023. The 3rd Conference on Positive Masculinity will take place 27-28 November 2023 in Johannesburg, co-hosted by President Azali Assoumani (Comoros) and AU Chairperson and H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa (South Africa). The Positive Masculinity agenda and CEVAWG bring together AU priorities on gender-based violence and harmful practices.

Last, the AU continues to ensure **WPS** is on the agenda, which is also reflected by the AU Observer Office to the UN. Denmark and the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS already have an experience of co-operation and it might be worth building on those foundations. In some ways, the WPS office represents a pocket of effectiveness when it comes to the African Continental Results Frameworks for reporting back on the implementation of WPS national action plans (80% of countries with national action plans do report back). These reports are then also reflected in the WPS annual report produced by the Special Envoy's Office. Considering the scarce information on WPS implementation by African countries, the AU's Continental Framework has been highlighted by numerous actors as an opportunity for peer-to-peer exchanges and learning (Tornius et al., 2023). Not least, the adoption of WPS national and regional action plans across the continent has also been accredited to the advocacy efforts of the Special Envoy's office (Haastrup, 2019). Building on those foundations could also strengthen Denmark's position as a candidate for the UN Security Council (2025-2026).

Challenges for co-operation

In a multi-polar, and many ways polarised world, the AU could have a major role to play as a pan-African normative actor. This may not be achieved through enforcing compliance, but rather by continued fostering of dialogue and bringing African states together at a more equal playing field than perhaps the UN can enable. However, the AU continues to be a site where diverse visions of pan-Africanism and good governance meet, and therefore the AU continues to seek legitimacy for its authority (Mickler and Sturman, 2021) A recent study suggests that unlike the Organisation of American States whose human rights treaties are driven by member states, the AU's human rights norms are largely driven by experts and bureaucrats (Lohaus and Stapel, 2023; the AU processes discussed in Tornius, 2023b). The AU's treaty language is often drafted by donor-funded consultants and member states only enter the picture at a later stage (Lohaus and Stapel, 2023: 392). This dynamic has led to a situation whereby there are few incentives, reputational or other, for committing to African regional human rights standards. At the same time, the study shows that states are most likely to ratify regional human rights treaties if their neighbours do so. Therefore, some interrogation of AUC's approach to diverse policy areas is justified. That said, there is also a cacophony of voices among the member states and different AU institutions regarding which policy areas deserve funding and intervention. Certainly, the member states are not keen on an interventionist AU, as is often the case with other international organisations. This disconnect is further enhanced by the fact that the AU has a very limited presence in the majority of its member states, is unable to hold its member states accountable and appears to inadequately address gender-based harassment within its own institutions.

Secondly, the lack of transparent reporting on compliance and impact of the AU's instruments and activities is a cause for concern. This issue can be divided into two broad categories. Firstly, the reports of AU member states regarding the domestication of and compliance with the AU's legal instruments are irregular. A review of the general comments on the implementation of the Maputo Protocol (by ACHPR) and Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW by CEDAW Committee) is notably uneven, with many more reports and general comments available for the latter. This suggests that African countries continue to prioritise reporting for the UN system, rather than the AU (discussed previously by Viljoen, 2011). Indeed, the UN agencies also provide the African states considerable technical support for reporting, a gap that the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria is attempting to fill in the AU's case (Tornius, 2023a: 6). The AU has also adopted different 'score cards' (see page 45-46 in Annex 1) to encourage accountability and reporting. Perhaps these have yielded some results, but this information is not publicly accessible. Recently, a training manual for shadow reporting on the Maputo Protocol and CEDAW was published (March 2023) (UNDP et al., 2023). Secondly, the AUC's activities lack impact reporting too. In some cases, there is no public information regarding the activities carried out as part of AU's campaigns and therefore the desk research fails to reveal the impact of the AU's gender governance. These information gaps indicate that: a) some of the plans, policies and initiatives lack implementation; b)

the member states and other partners fail to report back, even if implementation is taking place; and c) the AU offices lack the capacity and funds to publicise the information they have. From this perspective, the AU's gender institutions function primarily as high-level political advocacy actors, rather than norm-setters holding the member states accountable.

These serious challenges imply that AU's role in fostering gender equality is still debatable and indeed, it may lend itself to very limited impact for specific women in African countries. On a political level though, the AU brings together African Ministers, decision-makers, traditional leaders and civil society organisations to foster cross-regional experience sharing and networks. The AU's gender offices are rather good at highlighting the success stories in some countries to urge action in others. Therefore, the role of the AU, while it might change over time, is more centred around advocacy, dialogue and agenda-setting than explicit compliance with regional norms.

PART II GENDER EQUALITY PRIORITIES IN SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Considering the difficulties in achieving SDG 5 on gender equality and the broad commitment that countries across Africa have made to advancing women's rights and gender equality, international development co-operation can play a significant role in promoting those aims. To that end, this section examines the status and priorities of gender equality in African countries that Denmark prioritises as development partners or is interested in engaging with more. These countries are: 1) Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Somalia (fragile states); 2) Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda (poor and stable states); and 3) Egypt, Ghana and South Africa (transition economies) (See Annex 2 for country-level details). These groupings in themselves are not very helpful analytically as they primarily consider the economic status of the countries and not the sociocultural and legal contexts which inform gender inequality. Each category includes heterogeneous countries with diverging gender issues and approaches to address them. At the same time, parallels can be drawn between countries across the three categories.

The analysis is based on desk review and limited interviews with experts and practitioners in specific countries (see Annex 4). A major delimitation of this analysis is the lack of up-to-date and accessible data. The research process revealed conflicting accounts of some policy areas and there were also mismatches between interviewees accounts and scholarly analysis. These contradictions are acknowledged in the text and would require further data collection to be addressed. An effort was made to not consider data that was generated before 2015 due to its questionable relevance today, but in some instances, it was deemed more useful than not including any data. The challenges faced indicate a major gap in academic and verifiable knowledge when it comes to gender-responsive

governance in African countries, a problem which makes it difficult to ensure appropriate responses to gendered inequalities on the continent.

The analysis is presented by answering specific questions: What are the interesting findings? How do these countries link up with the AU and the UN on gender issues? How is this relevant for development co-operation? These questions are meant to evoke reflections on co-operation, shared development priorities and cross-regional alliances.

Gender equality in fragile states

What are the interesting findings?

The 'fragile states', Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Somalia, bear some significant resemblances in terms of gender equality issues. For instance, South Sudan is reported to have very low levels of FGM while in Somalia FGM is nearly universal. Nearly 80% of women in Burkina Faso have been affected by the practice while a large majority of Burkina Faso's population would like to eliminate the practice. With Burkina as an outlier,⁸ national legislation on FGM tends to be irregularly enforced. Politically, all three countries experience complex national security circumstances with governments that have limited legitimacy on the ground. At the same time, all three countries have high levels of child and early marriage. The three countries have some of the lowest literacy rates in the world. In terms of economic inclusion, women face high barriers to accessing land and resource ownership. Concerning SRHR, Burkina Faso, Somalia and South Sudan all have high proportions of women (30-40%) whose family planning and contraceptive needs are not met. While termination of pregnancy is allowed when a mother's life is in danger, and in Burkina Faso also related to other conditions, abortion is generally considered to be illegal. Most importantly, all countries lack clear and enforced legislation that would outlaw marriage for children under 18. In terms of women's rights movements, the three countries are in somewhat different places. Burkinabe women have successfully tackled FGM and until the recent regime change were working on changing the Family Law. Their efforts are interrupted by the current conflict. Somali women have been trying to insert themselves into political decision-making and peace negotiations but with limited success. South Sudanese women are struggling to find a common voice for influencing governance. Notwithstanding the efforts of women's groups on the ground, none of those countries appears to have strong and coherent women's movements. Conflict and violence have contributed to this. Overall, the AU's key policy areas of harmful practices (FGM and child marriage), SRHR, WPS as well as economic empowerment of women are all relevant to these three countries.

⁸ Burkina Faso started using mobile courts and an SOS excision hotline to ensure compliance. See also 'When and how the law is effective in reducing the practice of FGM/C: A cross-border study in Burkina Faso and Mali' by Josephine Wouango, Susan L. Ostermann and Daniel Mwanga (2020).

How do these countries link up with the AU and the UN on gender issues?

Burkina Faso and South Sudan are some of the co-signatories of the Geneva Consensus that emphasises family values and particularly challenges the right to access safe abortion. At the Third Committee (discussed below), Burkina Faso represented the Africa Group in sponsoring two resolutions on FGM. It also supported resolutions through ‘revisions’ on three occasions. Yet, its voting patterns indicate that it has not been among the more active countries in the Third Committee. Burkina Faso’s role can be understood in the context of its former president being the AU Champion of Eliminating FGM.⁹ The head of the AUC Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS) that addresses harmful practices (such as FGM and child marriage) at the AU happens to be Burkinabe too. Furthermore, the African Union/International Centre for Girls’ and Women’s Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA) is located in Burkina Faso’s capital. That said, currently, Burkina Faso’s membership to the AU and to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is suspended due to the military coup. Burkina Faso is still part of the UN, La Francophonie and Organisation of Islamic Co-operation. South Sudan has fewer overt connections to the AU other than the AU Liaison Office in Juba, the capital of South Sudan (African Union, Peace and Security Department, 2023). South Sudan is also the latest country to have ratified the Maputo Protocol. South Sudanese government has scarcely actively participated in the Third Committee proceedings and when it did so, it abstained in 4 out of 6 votes. Somalia has been rather invisible in the AU space and just like South Sudan, relatively absent from the Third Committee. However, when Somalia did vote, it was always in agreement with regressive resolutions. Somalia has not ratified the Maputo Protocol nor CEDAW. These findings reflect South Sudan’s and Somalia’s limited capacity to take part in international governance, but also South Sudan as the more centrist and Somalia as the more conservative actor. Overall, the instability of these countries creates challenges for their engagement with both the AU and the UN.

How is this relevant for development co-operation?

A major hindrance to promoting gender equality in Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Somalia is the lack of political will and prioritisation by decision-makers. Reportedly, gender work is largely donor-driven in both Somalia and Burkina Faso and all three countries lack genuine state-society debate regarding women’s rights and gender equality. This can stand in the way of making a real impact on the ground. That said, these countries exemplify the AU’s focus on FGM and child marriage in its campaign against harmful practices. While addressing such practices on their own can be beneficial, FGM could also be part of broader SRHR programming. Child marriage links with SRHR and girls’ education. In these countries, broader interventions in education and economic development are likely to benefit women. As Su and Yang show, progress in education levels and economic development can be more impactful for advancing gender equality than democratic governance in contexts where women’s basic needs are not met (Su

⁹ See a list of former and current AU heads of state champions here: <https://au.int/en/champion-presidents>.

and Yang, 2023). Not least, co-operation in these policy areas will likely be of interest to post-conflict or fragile states. Additionally, collaboration on WPS might be another way to engage with the security concerns of these 'fragile states' while empowering women in decision-making and tying women's experiences of conflict with reproductive health and protection from SGBV. This has already been picked up by some CSOs in Burkina Faso.

Gender equality in poor and stable states

What are the interesting findings?

Regardless of geographical proximity, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda represent different circumstances for gender-responsive development. Ethiopia and Kenya, with relatively autonomous ethnically divided regions, are internally diverse. The use of contraceptives, levels of FGM or child marriage then vary from region to region. Yet, some differences between the countries can be drawn out too. For instance, around 75% of Ethiopian women are circumcised. In Kenya, the numbers are down to 15% and in Uganda only 0.3%. Comparing the demographic data of the three countries, Ethiopian women are least likely to have secondary education and most likely to marry and get pregnant before turning 20 and have undergone FGM. Furthermore, the political dynamics and histories of women's rights in each of these countries are very different. Regardless of the different levels of authoritarianism in Ethiopia and Uganda in the past decades, all three countries have relatively strong women's organisations and legacies of gender equality struggles. Yet, the fact that civic space is or has been restricted should not be underestimated, even when countries showcase affinity to human and women's rights. Existing research shows that authoritarian governments commit to women's rights to signal value alignment with donors or to secure legitimacy as members of the international community (Hafner-Burton et al., 2008; Lebovic and Voeten, 2009; Nielsen and Simmons, 2015). Often their promises on women's rights remain without implementation. In other cases, some delivery on women's rights can be seen to make up for abuses of human rights in other areas (Donno et al., 2022: 10–11). The women's organisation then may be welcome to operate as long as they don't challenge the government directly. While this framing may be less relevant for Kenya, it shares some challenges with Ethiopia and other countries in the region: ethnically driven conflicts and contestations, high relevance of customary law and relative autonomy of regional governments. These can all pose challenges to implementing existing legislation and policies. To sum up, supporting local women's organisations, contingent on political climate of the time, can be a strategy to address the considerable diversity of gender issues in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

How do these countries link up with the AU and the UN on gender issues?

First, all countries in this group are part of the cross-border initiative to eliminate FGM, indicating alignment with the AU priority of harmful practices. The AUC Secretariat is located in Addis Ababa (the capital of Ethiopia) which may play into the 'guest' and 'host' dynamics. The AU's silence during the Tigray conflict and Ethiopia's undermining of the initiatives by the African Commission for Human

and Peoples' Rights to examine human rights violations are telling in this regard (Ojakorotu and Erameh, 2022). Ethiopia only ratified the Maputo Protocol in 2018 and with several reservations. In parallel, Ethiopia's President Sahle-Work Zewde is part of the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) and almost a regular speaker at the AU's gender events. At the UN level, particularly regarding the Third Committee, Ethiopia participated actively in voting but was never involved in proposing or endorsing resolutions on gender issues during the past five years as an individual country (as opposed to as a member of the Africa Group). In general, Ethiopia has been likely to vote yes or abstain regarding regressive resolutions. Uganda has an interesting track record in the UN spaces as it rarely participates in Third Committee votes and has rarely supported regressive amendments (e.g. language contestation regarding femicide). Uganda also paired with Germany in creating a Group of Friends of AWLN at the AU. Yet, Uganda is one of the co-sponsors of the Geneva Consensus on family values, to which Kenya too is a signatory. Both Kenya and Uganda only endorsed resolutions on gender issues at the Third Committee once (notwithstanding the Africa Group). While Kenya is one of the Generation Equality leaders of the Action Coalition on GBV it has consistently abstained from voting on regressive resolutions on VAW at the Third Committee. Neither Kenya nor Uganda is explicitly visible in the AU's gender initiatives. As such, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda deploy diverse strategies for engaging with gender issues in the international sphere. These strategies can be placed across a broad spectrum of progressive to conservative positions.

How is this relevant for development co-operation?

Firstly, the historical presence of strong women's organisations offers opportunities for supporting civil society associations that have broad networks across these diverse countries. However, the history of civil society crackdown in Ethiopia (Tornius, 2023a) offers a good example of how more authoritarian states may interpret empowering civil groups as supporting political opposition and meddling. Likewise, Uganda's President Museveni promotes women's empowerment in the same breath that he condemns queer and LGBTQIA+ women. That said, building on existing work, Uganda has positive experiences in WPS implementation, particularly bottom-up approaches. Kenya on the other hand has signalled at the global level commitment to eliminating VAW. While Ethiopia is currently a rather complicated context, President Sahle-Work Zewde's work speaks to promoting women's participation in decision-making. These all represent openings for co-operation which align with the AU's priorities. Similarly to fragile countries, co-operation on 'harmful practices' might also be perceived as neutral and welcome in these countries.

Gender equality in transition economies

What are the interesting findings?

Egypt, Ghana and South Africa represent perhaps the most contrasting cases for gender-responsive governance in this study, suggesting that relative peace and economic growth do not necessarily lead to similar women's rights priorities. South Africa is the most liberal country in Africa regarding queer rights and safe

abortion. It also has a high level of women in decision-making positions. Regardless of the relatively high number of women in politics, Egypt has outstandingly discriminatory legislation in place regarding women and divorce. Egypt has criminalised same-sex relationships (but not gender reassignment) and has a recent history of harassing and imprisoning women's rights activists. Egypt, Ghana and South Africa all have legally pluralistic systems with customary law being a prominent route to accessing justice. In this regard, Egypt has a legal loophole on FGM and South Africa has not fully criminalised child marriage. The main difference is, however, that Egypt has very high rates of FGM (more than 80%) while South Africa has very low rates of child marriage (1-4% with regional variability). In Ghana all child marriage and FGM are illegal. Less common harmful (traditional) practices are also affecting women from different age groups differently. For instance, young women in both South Africa and Egypt may be subject to virginity testing (VOA News, 2016). Elderly women on the other hand are not only at risk of witchcraft accusations in Ghana, but also in South Africa (de Jong and Pokwana ka Menziwa, 2022; Motsoeneng, 2022). In this context, women's rights in Ghana appear on a middle ground. While women are generally free to mobilise and enjoy relative legal protection, including (limited) access to medicalised abortion, Ghana struggles to implement existing policies. It has also criminalised same-sex relationships. Finally, with considerable variation, women (and men) in all three countries are likely to not complete their secondary education and enter wage labour thereafter. Women are particularly disadvantaged in the latter, yet unemployment is a shared problem between the sexes. To sum up, even countries with notably divergent gender politics can share related concerns around harmful (traditional) practices and women's socioeconomic development.

How do these countries link up with the AU and the UN on gender issues?

Egypt tends to figure in the international gender policy sphere as an illiberal actor. Alongside Uganda, it was one of the co-sponsors of the Geneva Consensus on family values. Egypt also co-created the UN Group of Friends of the Family in 2015. The Egyptian government has been more proactive than other African countries in the Third Committee, particularly sponsoring and endorsing resolutions (in 2022) that are regressive by nature. Regarding Egypt's engagement with the AU, it is one of the three countries that has not ratified the Maputo Protocol. In the Specialised Technical Committee on Gender (2020) Egypt vocally advocated against any wording (in all AU languages) of sexual rights which could be interpreted in relation to queer rights. Egypt also strongly opposed the proposal of the African Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, claiming that the AU has enough unimplemented policies. Ghana, or Ghana's President Addo, has emerged as an advocate for women's economic and financial inclusion at the AU. Particularly, President Addo is the AU Champion on gender and development issues and has been actively involved in the AU's Men's Conferences on Positive Masculinity. No less, at the Third Committee, Ghana has been likely to vote against regressive resolutions thus far. Ghana also coupled with Germany in creating a Group of Friends of AWLN at the UN in New York. South Africa has been particularly vocal on ending VAW at the AU level,

including during its chairmanship in 2020, and advocated for the African Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. President Ramaphosa too has been one of the African leaders prominent at AU's Men's Conferences. Somewhat surprisingly, South Africa has not been very visible at the Third Committee in terms of sponsoring or endorsing resolutions. Regarding regressive amendments posed at the Third Committee, however, South Africa voted consistently 'no' without exceptions. As such, it can be concluded that all three countries actively engage with the AU's gender governance, albeit with different intentions.

How is this relevant to development co-operation?

The key takeaway is that regardless of major political differences between Egypt, Ghana and South Africa, there are surprising overlaps in the kinds of discrimination affecting women. In broad strokes, education and economic empowerment appear to be as relevant as in economically weaker countries. Access to resources also becomes central to women's political participation in Ghana. This in turn poses some interesting questions on women in political decision-making. In Ghana, supporting women in competition with their male counterparts may require support for 'gift-giving' to their electorate. Additionally, women's rights activists face dire suppression by the Egyptian government regardless of the relatively high number of women in politics. Importantly, in Ghana and South Africa, there are opportunities to support civil society and women's organisations in defining their own agenda and priorities. At the state level, Ghana appears to prioritise economic development and South Africa eliminating VAW. Not least, South Africa will be an obvious partner for supporting the LGBTQIA+ community in Africa. Indeed, it is the only African country that has joined the UN LGBTI Core Group. In the case of Egypt, one needs to consider that women's organisations require funding for activities even if they are not free to criticise the state or actively advocate for legal reforms. Supporting Egypt's brand of state feminism would have to be seriously considered as it appears to be used as a tool for control and oppression rather than empowering women.

PART III NEGOTIATING GENDER EQUALITY AT THE THIRD COMMITTEE

The third part of this study examines opportunities for collaboration and partnerships between Denmark and African counterparts in global gender policy spaces. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Third Committee at the UNGA are among the most significant global spaces where countries negotiate positions on issues regarding gender equality (Interview #15). The following section empirically examines the

voting patterns of the case countries¹⁰ in the UN Third Committee context to examine their participation and priorities in negotiating gender equality norms and standards. The Third Committee is mandated to make resolutions on social, humanitarian and human rights issues and covers gender equality within its auspices. A mapping of the global spaces for gender equality can be found in Annex 3. This includes institutions where solidarity and negotiation are less relevant but which are informative regarding the national status of women's rights and gender equality, and indicate how states want to be seen in this regard. To provide a background for how global policy spaces could be useful for forging relevant alliances and to offer a deeper understanding of the voting patterns of the nine African countries (discussed in Part II), we examined all resolutions and amendments on gender issues between 2018-2022. These findings were then analysed to understand the priorities and attitudes of the Africa Group, particularly the nine countries discussed in this study. The section closes with a short discussion of opportunities for co-operation on gender equality in the international sphere.

Gender equality and women's rights at the Third Committee

Across the UN system, countries can show support for resolutions on women's rights and gender equality through sponsoring and co-sponsoring them. The Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Commission on Population Development (CPD) are such places but only when countries have their turn to participate. Similarly, countries can sponsor and co-sponsor resolutions at the UN Security Council, but only when they are mandated to sit on the Council. While the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) does adopt resolutions too, its main outcome document is the 'agreed conclusions'. UNGA Third Committee, then, is a forum where all member states can address issues about social, humanitarian and cultural affairs – including gender equality and women's rights. The Third Committee convenes once a year and makes decisions on proposed resolutions and amendments.

Basic, sometimes unwritten, principles of the Third Committee resolutions are that sponsors of a resolution facilitate the drafting process, provide background information and highlight the relevance and timeliness of a resolution (Interview #15). Countries may decide to become co-sponsors, but that happens towards the end of the process once the text is already drafted. Countries might signal that they are not entirely happy with the process, or the language, by not co-sponsoring at all or doing it very later in the process. Revisions in the Third Committee context are indicative of countries that support the general aims of the resolution but may not agree with all aspects of the document or the drafting process.

¹⁰ Discussed in Part II of the paper.

Resolutions and amendments

Between 2018-2022, the Third Committee adopted 18 resolutions on women's rights and debated 36 proposed amendments. In total, 54 collective decisions shaping the language and action on gender equality were made. The resolutions were predominantly adopted by consensus and only two resolutions were put up for a vote. Proposed amendments, on the other hand, were all voted on. At the Third Committee, unlike the HRC, amendments can be submitted as delegates sit in the room without prior notification (Interview #15). Except for Egypt, the African case countries primarily promoted global efforts to eliminate FGM and to tackle obstetric fistula. Egypt, on the other hand, sponsored and co-sponsored amendments that would largely be considered regressive or conservative. Examples of this include Egypt's contestation of the strong language on marital rape¹¹ or what can be interpreted as queer-inclusive language on women's rights.¹²

According to a study on African states' participation in international organisations (IOs), countries with small diplomatic staff and other capacity constraints are less likely to actively participate in international negotiations (Panke, 2019: 14). The same applies to small economies, authoritarian states and conflict-affected countries which are more likely to prioritise domestic affairs over international ones (ibid.). To that effect, Burkina Faso was not that active in voting on resolutions but represented the Africa Group twice and endorsed resolutions through 'revisions' three times. Burkina Faso was therefore one of the more visible African countries in the Third Committee archival records. Both times Burkina Faso represented the Africa Group (in 2022 and 2018) the resolutions were about FGM. Due to Burkina Faso's role as the African Union Champion on eliminating FGM (see page 22 above) it is appropriate to have Burkina Faso speaking on behalf of the group on this matter. Notably, Burkina Faso also represented the Africa Group the same year it had undergone two coups d'état and after it had been suspended by the African Union. In the case of obstetric fistula-related resolutions, the Africa Group has been represented by Senegal.

Kenya and Uganda endorsed resolutions through revisions twice, Ghana and South Sudan did so once while Ethiopia, Somalia and South Africa were never involved in proposing amendments or endorsing revisions. These numbers indicate that African countries use the Africa Group as a common voice in the Third Committee on issues they align around. The Africa Group proposed a total of six resolutions, three on eliminating FGM and three on obstetric fistula. Egypt was the only case country that took the initiative on its own. Yet, it must be noted that five out of six interventions in which Egypt participated took place under the auspices of the 77th Third Committee Session in 2022. This is an interesting finding because according to civil society interviewees Egypt began loosening its restrictions on NGOs and CSOs in 2021-2022 and approving more projects on women's rights and gender equality.

¹¹ A/C.3/77/L.62.

¹² A/C.3/77/L.60; A/C.3/77/L.64; A/C.3/77/L.65.

Voting patterns

Since countries co-sponsor and endorse revised resolutions somewhat rarely, their voting patterns at the Third Committee were reviewed for additional insight. After collating data on every vote on women's rights that took place in the Third Committee (a total of 38), the content of the vote was identified. As pointed out above, most of the votes were concerning proposed amendments by other member states and often requested withdrawing or changing language within the resolution. For instance, a proposed amendment by Sudan (A/C.3/73/L.60, in 2019) requested the removal of the 16th preambular paragraph in Resolution A/C.3/73/L.7/Rev.1 (on trafficking of women and girls) regarding the inclusion of gender-related crimes in the International Criminal Court's (ICC) Rome Statute. The proposal of such an amendment then has less to do with addressing trafficking and more with contesting the reach of ICC (see Table 2 below). We interpreted this example as 'regressive' or 'contesting' global forums and institutions.¹³

Similarly, regressive amendments on SRHR were suggested to resolutions on gendered approach to COVID-19 pandemic, on eliminating VAW and obstetric fistula alike. The nature and content of the amendments then reflect contestations of SRHR, rather than resolutions on VAW or obstetric fistula. Not all amendments would fall under clear categories of contestation or proposition, and the reasons for introducing these amendments would warrant further research. For instance, the US proposed an amendment to resolution A/C.3/75/L.19/Rev.1 (amendment A/C.3/75/L.60) requesting more vague language regarding access to healthcare. However, it is not obvious whether the US government relates it to SRHR or the states' responsibility to ensure all women can access appropriate medical care.

Similarly, the Russian Federation proposed amendments on three occasions (A/C.3/75/L.62; A/C.3/77/L.57; A/C.3/77/L.58) to replace 'including femicide' with 'also known as femicide in certain regions of the world' noting that 'femicide' is not universally recognised and should be replaced with wording from consensus-based resolutions. The hesitation to adopt 'femicide' can be linked to broader debates on how the notion is defined, and under which circumstances fatal attacks on women are considered to be gender-based killing (Bandelli and Corradi, 2021; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). It is therefore difficult to extrapolate that contesting the adoption of a new term equates with unwillingness to address the violence against and killing of women.¹⁴ However, undermining the endorsement of 'femicide' as part of the UN language does cast doubts on the systematic nature of the phenomenon and on whether it requires new interventions and policy approaches. While the amendments to frame femicide as not globally (or universally) relevant were always rejected, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda supported such a proposal in 2022 and South Sudan abstained.

¹³ Regardless of contestations of ICC on the continent, out of the nine case countries discussed in this paper, only Egypt voted in favour of this amendment.

¹⁴ We did not include the votes regarding the word femicide in Table 2 since the grounds for contestation remained unclear.

Other issues, like comprehensive sexuality and gender education, have historically been contested on the grounds of promoting loose morals and same-sex relationships (Goetz, 2020: 165). For instance, an amendment proposed by the US in 2020 requested wording that would emphasise cultural sensitivity (as opposed to culturally relevant) and interpretation based on existing national legislation.¹⁵ While this contestation speaks of regressive views on reproductive health and rights as well as LGBTQIA+ rights, it is useful to note that the contestation still pertains to education and knowledge about those issues. As the data shows, the case countries' votes on this, with the exception of South Sudan, generally reflect their broader voting patterns.

The review of the Third Committee resolutions and related amendments on gender equality between 2018-2022 indicates several trends (see Table 2). Firstly, SRHR appears to be the most contested issue, followed by the legitimacy of global forums and intersectionality. The question of intersectionality may as well be contested due to its linkages to sexual orientation, but either way, it speaks to addressing intersecting categories of marginalisation, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability and other identity markers. Secondly, Ghana and South Africa are the least likely from the case countries to support regressive amendments. Egypt on the other hand is most likely to support regressive amendments and Kenya is most likely to abstain from voting. When it comes to regressive language on VAW, the selected countries are rather likely to vote yes or abstain. An example of such a vote is amendment A/C.3/77/L.62, sponsored by Egypt, Libya, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia (co-sponsored by Russia and Yemen) against the inclusion of direct references to intimate partner violence and marital rape in resolution A/C.3/77/L.21/Rev.1. Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana and Somalia supported the amendment; Kenya and South Sudan abstained; South Africa voted against and Uganda was absent. The amendment was rejected.

¹⁵ A/C.3/75/L.71

Table 2. Votes on regressive amendments to the language of gender equality and women’s rights between 2018-2022

Country/ Policy area	VAW	SRHR	Global forums	Gender education	Intersectionality	Queer rights
Burkina Faso	A ¹⁶ A Y	N N N A A	N A		A Y Y	Y Y
Egypt	Y A A Y	Y N A N N N Y Y Y	Y N A N A Y	Y	A A Y Y	A Y
Ethiopia	A Y A Y	N A A A N N A A Y	A N A N A Y	Y	A A Y Y	A Y
Ghana	N N A Y	A N N N N N N N Y	N N A N N Y	A	N A Y Y	A Y
Kenya	A A A A	A N A N N N A N N	A N A N A N	A	N A A A	A Y
Somalia	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y
South Africa	N N N N	N N N N N N N N N	N N N N N	N	N N N N	N N
South Sudan	A	N A	A	N	A	
Uganda	A	N N N	A N N			

Note: Author’s compilation. A - abstained, Y- yes and N - no. The votes are inserted starting with the most historic one and ending with the most recent one. That said, not all countries in question were present at the same time and therefore the patterns can be different between countries.

Regarding SRHR, there is a trend towards supporting or not rejecting regressive amendments among the selected countries. Contesting references to global forums and institutions has been a mixed bag among the states in question with Egypt and Ethiopia more likely to abstain or vote yes. All countries other than South Africa are likely to support regressive amendments regarding intersectionality and queer rights (See Table 2). Generally, if all members of a regional organisation (RO) vote the same (either yes, no or abstain) the RO likely adopted a common position regarding a resolution or amendment (Panke, 2017a: 30). When countries diverge in their votes (some yes, others no or abstain) then the common position was not achieved. According to this observation, the Africa Group rarely negotiated or achieved a common position.

¹⁶ A/C.3/75/L.6 about adding ‘with appropriate direction and guidance from parents or legal guardians’ to girls’ in relation to action to justice systems for SGBV.

It is interesting that Uganda, which recently adopted an extremely anti-queer bill nationally, has not been present for any of the votes on intersectionality or queer rights language. The radical stances against LGBTQIA+ peoples' rights in Uganda's national context have therefore not directly translated to its multilateral strategy. Uganda's absence in the Third Committee voting is surprisingly pronounced (it only voted 11 times out of 38 in total). Similarly, South Sudan and Somalia have been relatively absent in Third Committee voting. However, unlike Uganda, these two countries have been facing major constraints due to national security and conflict. Regardless, when Somalia did participate, it voted yes for every regressive proposal tabled. South Sudan took a more moderate stance. According to Panke (2014), absenteeism in UNGA is symptomatic of a lack of 'financial, political, ideational and staff capacity' but also signals which issues are prioritised by a state. According to her, countries that experience pressures from CSOs are less likely to be absent from votes on social affairs. The interesting example of Ethiopia does not necessarily confirm or negate this claim. Regarding the regressive amendments, Ethiopia has abstained 13 times, voted yes eight times and voted no five times. Ethiopia is therefore certainly rather active (participated in voting 26 out of 38 times), but by abstaining did not agree with or condemn the amendment.

Discussion: gender in global policy negotiations

The analysis of the Third Committee voting revealed three main points to consider: a) countries come to the 'table' at the UN with different capacities to participate, and that shapes their behaviour; b) the Africa Group does not have a common voice when it comes to voting and therefore, their votes reflect more clearly country positions; and c) the above indicates that individual country delegations have some room to manoeuvre, which can, in turn, help with fostering cross-regional dialogue. These arguments will be unpacked below.

First, regardless of the 'one country-one vote' rule at the UN, it is clear that not all countries can participate equally. Countries come to the negotiation table with very diverse power resources. These may include economic and financial means to be leveraged in bargaining, but also staff and experts in ministries, diplomats in New York, budgets available, administrative support, relationships with decision-makers at home and so on (Panke, 2017b: 6). Additionally, diplomats may have more or less autonomy in deciding country positions regarding resolutions. Therefore, the votes recounted above should not be taken to be clear examples of a government's position, but rather helpful indicators embedded in a complex web of circumstances. Small and developing countries may opt for strategic engagement with the UN structures whereby some issue areas are considerably prioritised over others. It is therefore not possible to say whether Uganda's absence from the majority of the votes in the past five years has to do with a lack of necessary resources or its decision to deprioritise the Third Committee, and perhaps, particularly gender equality issues. With conflict-affected countries like South Sudan and Somalia, the challenges of distributing very limited foreign policy resources are more obvious. Not least, countries with limited resources may

be required to form their position based on limited information and expertise which could lead to abstention or voting based on rhetoric.

Second, the African countries do not speak with 'one voice' when it comes to voting at the Third Committee. Research on framing and consensus-building around Third Committee resolutions argues that a larger number of sponsors and co-sponsors indicates a broader consensus (Charnysh et al., 2015). The study has revealed which frames have been contested (SRHR, global institutions and the language of intersectionality), and the diversity of positions taken by the nine case countries regarding those contestations. For example, the nine African countries regularly voted against making the SRHR language more conservative (proposed by the US). Notably, a large majority of amendments were put forth by the US (14) or the Russian Federation (16) without co-sponsors. While their proposed amendments were equally rejected time and time again, these votes revealed discrepancies and misalignment between African countries. The lack of alignment between Africa Group countries suggests that while enabled and constrained by different capacities, as pointed to above, African delegations are more likely to vote based on country positions than regional common positions.

Third, while the lack of cohesion within the Africa Group may be considered a weakness, it also implies that African delegations have incentives to engage in cross-regional dialogue and build alliances beyond their regional group. Working in alliance with diverse partners, particularly Global South partners, and threading carefully regarding highly contested topics is central to not become siloed in the multilateral system (Interview #15). Insisting on an issue that alienates large numbers of country delegates will lead to isolation. Instead, one might consider how to build relationships with African delegations that have divergent views on the grounds of mutual respect and use this shared understanding to work towards language that everyone can 'live with' (ibid.). One of the interviewees emphasised building relationships with those whose country positions diverge from one's own is a major part of the negotiation process (Interview #8). The negotiators may be at odds with their government's position but will have to represent it anyhow. Therefore, it is not feasible to try and manipulate someone's position or change their mind. Rather, they may 'stay quiet' against a resolution at a strategic moment, which can help with the process. Building alliances therefore takes place on an ongoing basis and does not have guaranteed outcomes.

CONCLUSION: DISCUSSION AND KEY IMPLICATIONS

To conclude the themes outlined in the introduction of this Working Paper are revisited: to what extent do the AU and its member states' gender-responsive governance overlap? How do African case countries engage in regional and international gender governance? Which Danish and AU priorities could be translated to alliances at the international level? In doing so, the major opportunities and challenges of cooperating on gender equality issues will be

drawn out. This discussion sets the stage for five key implications that are drawn from the analysis of national, regional and global gender politics.

Openings

The AU and several case countries have prioritised harmful practices, eliminating VAW and SRHR in their gender-responsive governance. WPS is also prioritised by the AU but tends to be less of a national priority. Not least, these policy areas tie in with each other whereby harmful practices like FGM and child marriage are addressed in anti-VAW as well as SRHR interventions. WPS is intimately connected with conflict-related SGBV. Beyond and within the AU's initiatives, Kenya and South Africa have shown leadership in keeping VAWG on the agenda. When it comes to FGM, several case countries have high numbers of women and girls affected (Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia, less so Ghana, Kenya and Uganda). As the AU Champion on eliminating FGM, Burkina Faso's former president took leadership in addressing the practice both nationally and regionally. Similarly, child marriage is prioritised by the AU and a number of its member states. Out of nine countries, Burkina Faso and South Sudan have the highest levels of child marriage, followed by Ethiopia and Somalia. As said, the issues are indeed interlinked: poverty is associated with higher rates of child and early marriage, whereby girls are vulnerable to dropping out of education, intimate partner violence and teenage pregnancies. Teenage pregnancies in turn face high rates of maternal mortality (Bunting et al., 2016; Eyeberu et al., 2022; Maharaj, 2022). Harmful practices and VAW are generally accepted as undesirable by state actors and working on those issues is welcome by the governments in question. SRHR, however, is a more complex policy area. Governments tend to agree on the importance of maternal mortality and health. This is expressed by CARMMAPlus and the Africa Group's proposed resolutions in the Third Committee. According to UNFPA, African countries collectively reduced maternal deaths by 41% and under-five mortality by 33% between 1990-2010.¹⁷ Yet more than half of maternal deaths in the world take place in sub-Saharan Africa (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2022: 11) so more work remains to be done. The linkages between maternal mortality and unsafe abortion are unclear, even though lack of access to safe abortion is among the top five reasons for maternal deaths (Doctors Without Borders, 2023). Abortion continues to be contested by several African countries regardless of including medical abortion in the AU's Maputo Protocol and several subsequent policies.

Constraints

The connections between the AU, its member states and by extension the UN system are constrained by three key concerns: the institutional set-up of the AUC, its donor dependency and lack of accountability. Firstly, while the AU member states can introduce and discuss gender equality issues at the Assembly of Heads of State, Executive Council, Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), the

¹⁷ Maternal Health in Africa, Fact Sheet, UNFPA 2013, in preparation for CARMMA Summit 2013.

Specialised Technical Committee (STC) on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, and to a limited extent the Peace and Security Council (PSC), there is limited data and transparency regarding the debates at the AU level. According to Tieku (2017: 33-37), the institutional set-up and state capacity of African countries have led to the Assembly and Executive Council having become 'rubber-stamping institutions' of recommendations made by the PRC. There are major communication gaps between the different levels of decision-making. In this context, AU bureaucrats (alongside consultants) emerge as central actors in drafting AU's legal and policy instruments (ibid.: 40). The donor-dependency of AUC work deepens the perception that AUC staff is not impartial nor loyal to the member states. This causes tensions between the member states themselves, and between the member states and the AUC staff too. Additionally, AU lacks documentation of the impact of its different events, campaigns and institutions. Not only is there a lack of accountability, but there's also a lack of visibility of AU's gender governance in member states. For actors outside the regional gender space, the fact that AU works on gender equality often comes as a surprise. While AU's deeper engagement with member states appears to be desirable, it is uncertain whether the member states would be willing to engage with AU's gender institutions more tangibly.

Global contestations

At the UN level, the recent contestations relate, *inter alia*, to the notion of intersectionality or 'women in all of their diversity', femicide, intimate partner violence and references to the Gender Equality Forum. In 2022, Egypt, Ethiopia and Ghana supported all regressive amendments tabled by Guatemala (only 1) and Russia (6). In some cases, they were co-sponsors. These new contestations are associated with the wave of 'illiberal backlash' against women's rights across the globe. The antifeminist alliances were already forming ahead of the Cairo conference in 1994 and have brought together actors who contest different liberal norms around same-sex relationships, torture, affirmative action and gun control (Goetz, 2020: 165). In this context, the United States, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria have sometimes found each other as allies. The CSW is known to be a policy space where states promote weaker language on gender equality and women's rights than previously adopted (ibid.: 169). According to Goetz, the UN Women has also noted that it cannot rely on global consensus, and therefore the Generation Equality Forum provides an alternative route for issue-based alliances between the private sector, celebrities, state and multilateral institutions and CSOs (Goetz 2020, 174). However, the proposed amendments asking the references to the Generation Equality Forum to be removed¹⁸ suggest that there is a backlash against this approach.

Unlike Central and Eastern Europe, less research is available about domestic conditions for 'illiberal backlash' in Africa (Guasti, 2021; Guasti and Bustikova, 2023; Korolczuk and Graff, 2018). Some studies argue that conservative family

¹⁸ In Third Committee for instance A/C.3/77/L.61, but this was also noted by interviewees.

values have been adopted by some as 'African', and for instance, queer relationships are described as 'un-African'. These tendencies accept 'Christianity and colonisation as part of what they characterise as being traditionally African' (McEwen, 2017: 739). On the whole, it is important to keep the communication lines open with countries that might be convinced by conservative and regressive argumentation (perhaps Ghana, Kenya, South Sudan) but are not hard-liners. It might be more complicated to balance the trade-offs between countries that claim allegiance to gender equality and legally discriminate against women at the same time (such as Egypt, Somalia and Uganda). Considering the insistence on discriminatory laws, harassment of women's organisations, regressive statements at the global level, or radical anti-queer legislation, Denmark may prefer to look for alliances with countries that are less openly discriminatory against some segments of their population.

Key implications for gender-responsive development co-operation

The first takeaway is that in working with the AU and individual African states it makes sense to look for what is already working and where there is ongoing progress – in other words, to **'go with the grain'**. The literature on working with the grain emphasises sustaining a forward development momentum and building on the existing successes (Kelsall, 2011; Levy, 2014). More broadly, this speaks to the idea that Denmark and other donors may not be the appropriate actors to introduce new relevant policy issues in the gender equality field and are perhaps better placed to scale up or support ongoing efforts that state and/or CSO actors have a demonstrated track record of working on. Part I of this study has highlighted some of these in the AU context, for instance working on harmful practices, WPS or SRHR. Doing so will allow tapping into existing capacities, expertise, actors' networks and policies, and expanding these, rather than seeking to insert whole new skillsets and actor constellations into the picture. Yet, of course, such an approach needs to consider the broader context of politics, opportunities and actors and must be subject to careful reviews and adjustments to make sure that 'going with the grain' would not have adverse effects on vulnerable groups in society, e.g. women but also queer women (Edom, 2018). For instance, Uganda is often cited as an exemplary case of grassroots women's involvement in the women, peace and security agenda and an experience that other countries could learn from. Therefore, going with the grain could involve building on this legacy. However, if such programming is not inclusive or accessible for queer women, aligned with Uganda's current anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric, it could be perceived as tacitly condoning anti-queer policies and legislation.

Secondly, it is worth **looking for local buy-in** into new issues that have not yet been developed much. Interventions that cannot stimulate local commitment and interest are known to have limited impacts and will likely fall apart after the end of the project cycle. This is particularly relevant for bilateral partnerships but can also translate to the AU level. For instance, supporting the AU's work on women's economic empowerment or gender/climate nexus can build on the demonstrated desire to address those issues at the discursive level, but lack strategic action.

Regarding the member states, seeking out what the women's organisations are focusing their efforts around can be a good starting point for ensuring there is local interest in the policy issue. WPS in Mali could provide a useful example of an initiative which has stimulated limited local commitment. While on paper, much work is taking place on WPS, the reality is that it is not a priority of the women on the ground nor the government of Mali (Lorentzen, 2021). Conflict-affected women are more concerned about food and water insecurity, whereas the government is on the one hand vulnerable to donor priorities and on the other focused on winning the conflict. The case of Burkina Faso, and to some extent Somalia, both give evidence to this. Of course, often the governments' and CSOs' interests are also not directly aligned, which leads to the point made above – specific engagement should be based on a thorough contextual understanding and remain open for adjustments as the political context changes.

Third, a key priority should be to **do no harm**. This too requires careful consideration of the politics of development co-operation in a particular bilateral or multilateral context. If Danish support for certain agendas may reduce their credibility and sense of ownership among African partners, then it may be worthwhile to take a different approach. For instance, if donors supporting the work on queer rights or perhaps abortion-related programming in the AU (or priority countries) are perceived as meddling, undermining the gender offices' reputation or paying off the CSOs, then perhaps this support is not very helpful after all. In the case of Ethiopia and Egypt, we have seen that when a government is clamping down on local human rights actors then working with CSOs could put them at risk, as well as harm the bilateral dialogue between countries. There are reasons to reconsider how will funding CSOs exacerbate this problem and what kinds of partnerships can prevent backlash. The 'do no harm' becomes more complex once one has to decide between development and democracy (Hagmann and Reyntjens, 2016). Funding seemingly apolitical health and development projects that can benefit a broad range of women, yet supporting state-led gender equality programs under challenging political regimes could be interpreted as condoning or ignoring human rights abuses. At the same time, it is clear that pulling out all development aid for women in such countries would indeed do them harm. In this regard, it will be useful to consider and compare the long-term and short-term effects of certain development interventions and partnerships.

Fourth, **economic development** continues to be a major concern for African governments and peoples. It is broadly accepted that gender equality can foster economic development and growth (Adoho and Alpaslan, 2022; Kabeer, 1997; Naveed et al., 2023) and that women's access to resources, property, employment and education are also central for their independence and position in a society (True, 2012). As a pan-African regional organisation, the AU may provide vehicles for economic development through targeted projects and programming and is well-positioned to ensure women are included in the process. Not least, the socioeconomic development challenges on the continent are also perceived to be tied up with 'colonial and paternalistic' attitudes of Western countries and global financial institutions which have undermined, if not denied, the legitimacy of homegrown initiatives (Mutasa, 2018: 190). While the AU could then provide

some leadership in this area, the member states so far have only marginally engaged with its socioeconomic strategies (ibid.: 192). It remains to be seen whether the development of AfCFTA will fulfil the expectations of improved financial infrastructure on the continent and ease of trade and entrepreneurship. Regardless, socioeconomic development will be crucial for millions of citizens across the continent, many of whom are women. It will be difficult for people to prioritise political rights or human rights when their basic needs are constantly threatened to be unmet. Not least, there are plenty of human rights norms that are no longer contested by member states of the AU, but instead are contested by people in the localities where they are violated (such as FGM and child marriage). While working on those issues remains relevant, economic empowerment and development initiatives are not contested in the same way and therefore have the potential for more significant impact.

Fifth, **civil society**, broadly conceived, will be central to fostering gender equality in the region and individual states (Adams, 2006; Cochrane and Birhanu, 2019; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). When countries and organisations lack the political will to implement gender equality policies, strong civil society can hold the states accountable for their commitments. In the case of the AU, it is the regional and national CSOs that use African regional normative frameworks to argue for the local relevance of international gender equality norms when engaging with their governments. Civil society actors also face numerous challenges in policy advocacy at the national and regional levels. Particularly, engaging with the AU's institutions requires resources (staff, expertise, funding) for travelling abroad and taking full advantage of the events (Interview #2). Engaging with policymakers and other NGOs requires staff capacity and resources. At the national level, CSOs often straddle implementing development projects and advocacy work. Local organisations often lack access to funds and the related capacity to shape their own agenda and end up as implementing partners of international donors and organisations. This dynamic is indeed not conducive to a strong and independent civil society and can fuel suspicion from the government. It will be useful to consider what kinds of flexible partnerships and affiliations could enable and empower locally embedded civic actors to define and pursue their context-driven agenda.

To sum up, the building of cross-regional alliances between African actors and the AU could consider (i) to focus on a few themes of overlapping interest among Denmark, AU and AU member states, (ii) to undertake simultaneous efforts at the country level, at the AU and in global forums to interact, discuss, build trust and personal relations with relevant diplomats and organisations, and (iii) accordingly, to strengthen the capacity to do so and to coordinate MFA action across the three levels. All this can be pursued from a pragmatic foreign policy perspective, seeking common ground and shared values.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. African Union's gender governance architecture

Normative frameworks

The African Union has adopted diverse normative frameworks to address and guide the progress on women's rights and gender inequality on the continent. Here, normative frameworks are understood as African international human rights legislation that addresses the needs and protects women and girls, and those documents that qualify how international women's rights norms shall be interpreted and implemented on the African continent.

Continental development framework

Agenda 2063- 'The Africa We Want' is the dominant AU framework for the continent's common goals of sustainable development and growth. African Union's Agenda 2063 is explicitly aligned with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Agenda 2030 (UN Women, 2017: 9). Notably, the Agenda 2030 (and SDGs) was informed by the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (CAP) (African Union et al., 2016). When the negotiations for SDGs were themed 'The World We Want', the African Common Position became called 'The Africa We Want'. Yet, there are some major differences too (Munsami, 2019, see Table 3.).

Table 3. Differences between Agenda 2030 (global) and Agenda 2063 (African)

Variable	Global Agenda 2030	African Union Agenda 2063
Goals	17	20
Targets	169	174
Timeline	15 years	50 years, implemented in 10-year phases
Content		Africa-specific goals like: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A united Africa, either federal or confederate• Establishing functional continental financial and monetary institutions• African cultural renaissance• Functional and operational peace and security architecture
Implementation	State level	Regional Economic Communities (RECs) central

Note: Author's compilation, based on Munsami 2019.

Gender equality is addressed by Goal 17 of Agenda 2063 and Goal 5 of SDG's. The Agenda 2063 aims for 'full gender equality in all spheres of life', highlighting eradicating violence against women and harmful social practices; women's economic empowerment; and political participation (Agenda 2063: 41). The SDG's wording is to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. In terms of content, the Agenda 2063 mentions reproductive health and rights in different parts of the document, but not as part of the women's rights or gender equality goal, like Agenda 2030 does (see 5.6 of Agenda 2030). Agenda 2030 also

puts more weight on the value of care and domestic work (5.4), whereas Agenda 2063 is more focused on rural women accessing productive assets (Agenda 2063: 41).

Legal frameworks

The **Constitutive Act** was adopted in 2000 as the founding document of the African Union in its transition from the Organisation of African Unity. It commits the African Union to promoting gender equality in Article 4(l).

The **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights** or 'the African Charter' was adopted in 1981 and makes little mention of women or gender equality (Stefiszyn, 2005: 375). Article 2 of the African Charter notes that its provisions shall apply to all people, regardless of sex among other categories. Only Article 18(3) addresses women directly, saying that states are responsible for eliminating all discrimination against women and protecting the rights of the woman and the child.

The **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa** or 'the Maputo Protocol' was adopted in 2003 by African Union Heads of States and came into force in 2005. The document was compiled from the draft produced by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, a draft convention on harmful traditional practices that the Inter-African Commission was working on together with the African Union Commission Gender Unit, and later on civil society comments and revisions (Murray, 2005; Wandia, 2013). The Maputo Protocol is a legally binding international human rights framework which criminalises all forms of female genital mutilation and cutting, sets the minimum age of marriage at 18, decriminalises abortion on certain grounds, and addresses women's rights in conflict and the rights of minority women (Tornius, 2022).

Forty-four out of 55 African Union member states have ratified the Maputo Protocol by 2023. Out of the case countries addressed in this study, Egypt and Somalia have not ratified it. Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda have ratified it with reservations. Only Botswana, Egypt and Morocco have not signed the document as the first step towards ratification. The most contested are parts of Article 14 on Health and Reproductive Rights, with reservations from Algeria, Cameroon (via Declaration) Kenya, Mauritius and Uganda (Rwanda lifted its reservation recently) (Equality Now, 2021). Secondly, Article 6 on Marriage, or parts of it, has been contested by Algeria¹⁹, Ethiopia, Mauritius and Namibia. Recognising customary marriage is one of the key areas of contestation.

There are also numerous challenges in domesticating the Maputo Protocol and accountability. For one, African countries appear to enter reservations more readily to the Maputo Protocol than they have to the Convention of Eliminating All Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) (Tornius, 2023a: 4).

¹⁹ Recent reports do not suggest that Algeria has standing reservations, for instance the '20 Years of Maputo Protocol: Where are we now?' report by Solidarity for African Women's Rights Coalition (SOAWR), Equality Now, and Make Every Woman Count (MEWC), 2023.

Additionally, African countries are more likely to report on CEDAW implementation than the Maputo Protocol (Frans Viljoen, 2011). To that effect, the African Union Commission has adopted the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index (MPSI). So far, 19 countries have submitted reports on the implementation of the Maputo Protocol (Solidarity for African Women's Rights Coalition et al., 2023: 24).

The **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** (ACRWC) was adopted in 1990 and came into force in 1999. The framework is particularly relevant for girls' rights as it sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years, and therefore effectively criminalises child marriage. Article 21 on 'protection against harmful social and cultural practices' is interpreted as addressing female genital mutilation among other practices (Bouah and Sloth-Nielsen, 2021). According to a recent report, it has been ratified by 89% of African Union member states (African Union Commission, 2023a: 26). Botswana, Egypt, Mauritania and Sudan have entered reservations on different articles (no overlap). Egypt made reservations to Article 21(2) regarding child marriage; Article 24 regarding adoption (although this is under review and a similar reservation to the CRC has already been removed); Article 30(a-e) regarding the special treatment of children of imprisoned mothers; Article 44 which establishes that the Committee²⁰ can receive Communications; and Article 45(1) regarding the Committee conducting investigations in member states (Sipalla, 2019: 196). According to Human Rights Watch, the reservations on child marriage and fostering of children have been withdrawn (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The treaty is not ratified by DR Congo, Morocco, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Somalia, South Sudan and Tunisia.²¹

Soft law

The below provides an overview of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights general comments interpreting the rights of women and girls as per the existing African human rights treaties.

General Comment No. 6 on the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol): The Right to Property During Separation, Divorce or Annulment of Marriage (Article 7(D)) was adopted in 2020 and ensures women's rights in case of disintegration of the family unit or partnership, including women's right to an equitable share of the couples joint property, including within plural legal systems.

Joint general comment together with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) on ending child marriage was adopted in 2018. It elaborates on the obligations of State Parties as per Article 6(b) of the Maputo Protocol and Article 21(2) of the African Children's Charter regarding the legal age of marriage. The joint general comment specifies the

²⁰ Committee here refers to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) that oversees the implementation of the Charter.

²¹ As per the treaty document.

measures that states should take to ensure the prevention of early marriage and the rights of the children affected by such marriages.

Guidelines on Combatting Sexual Violence and its Consequences in Africa was adopted in 2017. It provides guidance on how states should implement their international and national commitments to eliminating sexual and gender-based violence.

General Comment No. 2 on Article 14.1 (a), (b), (c) and (f) and Article 14. 2 (a) and (c) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa was adopted in 2014. It interprets state obligations regarding women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. It covers rights about family planning, contraceptive methods and the spacing of children, and access to information and education regarding SRHR. Secondly, it addresses the right to access safe abortion in cases of 'sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the foetus'.

General Comments No.1 on Article 14 (1) (d) and (e) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa was adopted in 2012. It qualifies state duties for ensuring that women can exercise their right of self-protection against HIV.

Policy frameworks

The **Maputo Plan of Action** (2007-2015) and Revised Maputo Plan of Action (2016-2030): Continental Policy Framework on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights addresses political leadership and governance; legislation and institutionalisation; promotion of gender equality; information, education and communication; needs of youth and other vulnerable populations; improving the functionality of health systems; partnerships and multisectoral collaboration; and accountability related to sexual and reproductive health. It covers issues ranging from maternal mortality, and HIV to FGM and child marriage.

The **Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality** or SDGEA was adopted by the AU Assembly in 2004 to affirm African countries and leaders' commitment to gender equality, gender parity and annual progress recording as per their commitments to international, regional and national gender equality norms.

The **Gender Policy** was adopted in 2009 and is now expired. The Policy was to guide the implementation of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment as per the commitments made by African governments and their regional institutions.

The **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy** (2018-2028) is a regional plan for achieving the gender equality goals of Agenda 2063 (see Table 4).

Table 4. AU’s Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy, 4 key pillars

Pillar	Content
Maximising (economic) outcomes, opportunities and tech e-dividends	Education and care work Economic empowerment and financial inclusion Technology and e-inclusion
Dignity, security and resilience	Health, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (SRHR) Harmful traditional practices (HTP) VAWG and peace processes Human security
Effective laws, policies and institutions	Maputo Protocol Norm setting Institutional gender governance systems
Leadership, voice and visibility	Leadership Voice Visibility

Note: Author’s table, based on the AU Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy.

The policy was initially contested by the member states on the grounds of diverging use of language in French and Arabic, as well as the meaning of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Reporting

The **African Gender Score Card** was adopted in 2015 and is meant to be an annual report that measures national government progress towards implementing global and regional gender equality norms, such as the Maputo Protocol, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, CEDAW, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Dakar and Beijing Platforms of Action, Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and the African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. The latest, 2021 scorecard, was published with the support of the Spotlight Initiative.

The **Maputo Protocol Score Card and Index** was adopted in 2020 to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Maputo Protocol by the state parties. It would enable countries to comply with their reporting commitments but also assess progress and identify gaps.

It is not clear to what extent either of these score cards are taken up by the member states.

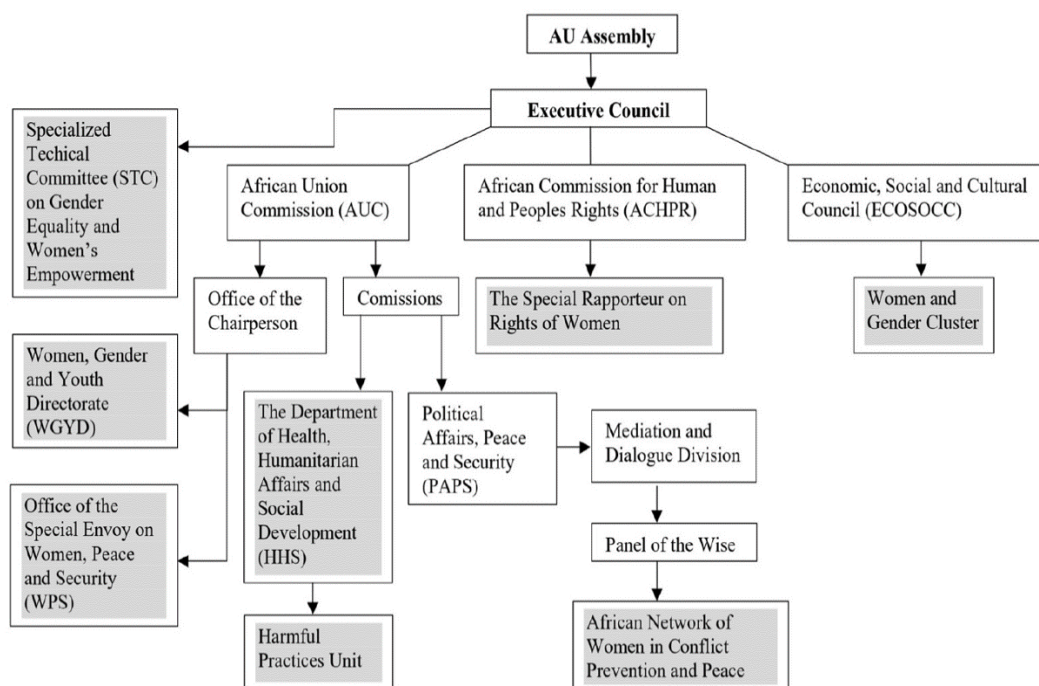
The **Continental Results Framework (CRF)** was adopted in 2019 to monitor countries’ implementation of their national action plans on the women, peace and security agenda and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Countries and regional economic communities (RECs) should report back annually and from their report, an annual report is compiled. In the past few years, 80% of the countries with national action plans reported back (Tornius et al., 2023: 17).

Institutions and offices

The African Union is made up of several institutional bodies. The **African Union Assembly** consists of heads of state and governments of African countries and is a decision-making organ. The member states are represented by Ministers of Foreign Affairs or other designated officials at **the Executive Council**. The Council is mandated to make decisions on behalf of the AU and answer directly to the Assembly. It is in charge of facilitating and enabling AU's partnerships with other organisations.

The **African Union Commission (AUC)** is the secretariat of the African Union, and responsible for convening the member states and enabling the implementation of their collective policy decisions. AUC is made up of bureaucrats, experts and member states' permanent representatives (**Permanent Representatives Committee** or PRC) who all participate in AUC day to day in different ways. According to research, the AUC bureaucrats have notable decision-making power (Tieku, 2021) due to understaffing. The AUC is sometimes considered another international party to negotiate with by the member states (Tornius, 2023b). Not least, member states have reservations about the interests at play at the AUC as it is more than 70% donor-funded. The **African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)** is tasked with interpreting the African Union's human rights commitments and ensuring accountability for implementation. The ACHPR responds to emerging human rights violations; however, its public statements do not carry enough weight to discipline the member states. There are challenges with ACHPR independence on one side, as it is tied up with member states' interests; and the fact that member states tend to ignore the ACHPR pronouncements.

Figure 1. Compilation of most relevant gender institutions within the African Union system (published in Tornius, 2023b: 749)



The **African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights** was established in 1998 and came into force in 2004 after more than 15 countries ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Court is considered to be handicapped by design, as once countries have ratified the above Protocol, they are required to make a Declaration whereby they accept that individuals and NGOs can directly put forth cases (African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2023). While 34 African Union member states have ratified the Protocol, only eight have submitted the Declaration in question.

Importantly, the African Union structures have specific offices that are designated to work on gender equality. The **Specialised Technical Committee (STC) on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment** is a closed space where representatives of member states, the relevant African Union offices, and UN representatives participate and set the agenda for gender equality in the African Union. The STCs have decision-making power, as agenda points are first debated by the Experts, and then agreed on by the Ministers. The final decision-making will be done at the Executive Council or the General Assembly, but the Technical Committee should have ironed out any major points of contention. A case in point is the AU's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy which was negotiated at the STC over multiple years due to disagreement over language and

translation of sexual and reproductive health and rights (Tornius, 2023b: 18–19). The 7th STC took place in December 2022. Among the decisions taken was the establishment of a new reporting mechanism: AU Gender Observatory (AUGO).²²

The **Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYD)** was previously known as the Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) and answers to the Office of the AU Chairperson. The Gender Unit was first established at the Organisation of African Unity in 1992 and was reformed alongside the organisation's transformation into the African Union. Over the years, the Directorate has been led by a number of permanent and acting directors. The WGYD is responsible for facilitating pan-African gender policies and strategies, to implement the commitments AU member states have collectively made on gender equality. While the WGYD works together with other gender offices within the AU system, it is the leading body for gender programming in the AU. Some of its key outputs are results of collaboration with international donors and partners, such as the UN agencies, but also bilateral development partners. In addition to facilitating pan-African gender equality frameworks, it hosts continental campaigns, high-level and advocacy events and other initiatives to encourage the engagement of member states with regional gender equality aspirations.

The **Office of the Special Envoy of Women, Peace and Security (WPS)** was founded in 2014 and is located in the Office of the Chairperson of the AUC to advocate for the inclusion of women in peace-building and conflict resolution processes. The Office has been held by Madame Bineta Diop (from Femmes Africa Solidarite) since it was launched and Diop has been intimately involved in shaping the African Union's gender agenda since the 1990's. The Special Envoy of WPS works closely with the Department of Peace and Security as well as the Department of Political Affairs (Interview #5). The Office of the Special Envoy is also in charge of mainstreaming gender into the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (Abdullah, 2017: 14–15). The African Peace and Security Architecture and the Peace and Security Department launched the Gender, Peace and Security Programme for 2015-2020. Notably, the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS developed the Continental Results Framework to ensure accountability and reporting of the WPS implementation through national action plans. AUC and the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS produce annual implementation reports.

The **Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS)** at the AUC is headed by H.E. Amb Minata Samaté Cessouma from Burkina Faso (since 2022). Among other specialised offices, HHS hosts the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). ACERWC has a Special Rapporteur on Child Marriage and Other Harmful Practices, Hon. Hermine Gatsing Kembo. In terms of women and girls, the HHS focuses on child marriage, FGM and other harmful practices (African Union Commission, 2022c, 2022d).

²² African Union Gender Observatory website: <https://go.au.int/en>.

The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women is currently Honourable Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie (since 2021). The Special Rapporteur's main role is to be a focal point on women's rights issues at the Commission and to support AU member state governments in implementing regional women's rights policies. Additionally, the Special Rapporteur is to embark on missions to disseminate the AU women's rights instruments, but also follow up on their implementation. Not least, the rapporteur is to collect relevant data and information and provide guidelines to the state governments on women's rights (see activity report at ACHPR, 2023b).

Other institutions that pursue the African Union's gender equality goals

The African Union/International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA) is located in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso and seeks to promote girls education on the continent. CIEFFA's advocacy largely consists of facilitating high-level and CSO stakeholder meetings, as well as hosting specific projects such as capacity-building workshops.

The Pan-African Parliament (PAP) is to become the legislative arm of the African Union. PAP was established in 2004 but has not entered into force because it has not reached the threshold of member state ratifications (currently at 15 out of 28 needed). Therefore, PAP has limited decision-making impact. Every member state that has ratified PAP is entitled to representation by five people, one of whom must be a woman. PAP hosts a Permanent Committee on Gender, Family, Youth and People with Disability which promotes gender equality and oversees relevant policy development. Recently, the Committee has embarked on developing a model law for gender equality (Pan-African Parliament, 2023).

The New Partnership for Development (AUDA-NEPAD) is mandated to facilitate evidence and knowledge-based technical assistance to member states and RECs, support policy development and implementation together with partners, mobilise resources and oversee regional and continental projects as per Agenda 2063. In terms of gender equality, NEPAD hosts the Spanish Fund for African Women's Empowerment and Gender, the Climate Change and Agriculture Support Project (GCCASP) supported by Norway and has mainstreamed gender into its programming.

The Fund for African Women (FAW) was created to mobilise and distribute resources as part of the African Women's Decade (2010-2020). It appears that the selected candidates for funding from between 2014 and 2020 are only receiving their applied funding now (African Union Commission, 2023d). The AU has published a list of 101 organisations that have been selected as recipients between 2011 and 2019, these include civil society and state offices working on gender equality. Since the Women's Decade is over, the fund is being repurposed into the Trust Fund for African Women (African Union Commission, 2021b).

Civil society at the African Union

There are different ways in which civil society actors can participate in African Union decision-making and policy implementation. Those engagements are largely organised through consultative meetings or high-level advocacy events. However, the CSOs face a high bar to access the AU, as becoming accredited as an observer or member of the relevant CSO platform involves procedures and formalities that are not easily accessible (Centre for Human Rights, 2023). The processes are also time and resource-consuming, therefore becoming exclusionary for many CSO organisations (Interviews #1 and #2). Additionally, low awareness of CSO access points and AU's gender equality work may also affect CSO engagement. Regardless, several CSOs have developed relationships with the AU institutions over the years.

The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) is located in Lusaka, Zambia and is an advisory body whereby CSO observers, including women's organisations, can give input to AU policy implementation. The General Assembly of ECOSOCC is convened every two years (LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, 2019). ECOSOCC has ten sectoral cluster committees, including one on Women, Gender and Development. The CSO members need to apply and qualify to become part of ECOSOCC.

Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) is the civil society platform for gender launched in 2002. GIMAC holds consultative meetings through which CSO's are invited to provide input on gender equality-related political discussions at the AU. GIMAC has 55 member organisations and it is hosted by the Femmes Africa Solidarite (FAS) Secretariat and housed by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (Tornius, 2023b: 15). GIMAC convenes meetings ahead of the AU General Assembly, in collaboration with the Women, Youth and Development Directorate at the AUC. Initially, GIMAC's key purpose was to hold the member states to account for delivering on the Solemn Declaration of Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA).

The Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise) was officially established in 2017 to eliminate conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence through engagement with and capacity building of women mediators. FemWise is located in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), as a subsidiary of Panel of the Wise (PANWISE) and within the Peace and Security Department of the AUC.²³ FemWise is said to include 465 members, including several prominent African women leaders (Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks, 2023). According to a recent press release, FemWise members have been deployed to AU Liaison Offices in Sudan, South Sudan, Chad, and Madagascar/Comoros, as well as supported electoral processes in Kenya, Lesotho and Nigeria (African Union Commission, 2023b).

²³ Operationalisation of 'FemWise-Africa': Strengthening African Women's Participation in Conflict Prevention, Mediation Processes and Peace Stabilisation Efforts: 2

The **African Women Leaders Network (AWLN)** was established in 2017 and focuses on promoting women's participation in decision-making roles by engaging Africa's women leaders in mentoring, advocacy and capacity-building work. The AWLN is supported by the AU and the UN, with a Group of Friends of AWLN to the UN as well as to the AU, in New York and Addis Ababa respectively. The first is led by Ghana and Germany, and the AU branch is led by Uganda and Germany. AWLN has national chapters in 33 African countries, as well as a youth caucus.

The Department of Infrastructure and Energy of the African Union Commission hosts the **African Network of Women in Infrastructure**, which was launched in 2019 (African Union Commission, 2020c). The purpose of the network is to support the private sector, civil society and state-led efforts towards gender-responsive, and inclusive, infrastructure development on the continent.

Last, but not least, the **Pan-African Women's Organisation (PAWO)** started as a civil society organisation in 1962, preceding the Organisation of African Unity. PAWO was initially focused on decolonisation and pan-African solidarity (Serbin and Rasoanaivo-Randriamamonjy, 2015), but was awarded the status of Specialised Agency of the AU in 2017. In the past, PAWO has been noted to mostly engage elite women and lack on-the-ground presence (Roy-Campbell, 1996). It is difficult to find any tangible information about the current work of the PAWO.

Ongoing campaigns

The AU has launched various campaigns to accelerate the achievement of gender equality goals. These are particularly useful for signposting which policy areas are priorities for the AU, and what is being done. However, what the publicly available information fails to reveal is the extent to which these priorities have been defined by donor interests; or the impact these initiatives have on either the practices of Regional Economic Communities (RECs), member states or communities on the ground. Certainly, these initiatives offer forums and networking opportunities for African actors working in the field of gender equality.

The **What African Women Want** campaign was launched on the 8th of March 2022 (Women's Day) to advocate for the implementation of the African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018-2022). The focus areas for the campaign are: shift from practical to strategic needs of women; ending child marriage, gender violence and harmful traditional practices; sexual and reproductive health and rights services; access to resources and STEM training; equal pay and unpaid care work; women's participation in decision-making; engaging boys, men and youth; and strong management systems including gender responsive budgeting. There is no detailed information available regarding the activities carried out under this campaign.

The **African Women's Decade on Financial and Economic Inclusion (2020-2030)** was launched by the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments in February 2020 to advocate for gender-inclusive sustainable development on the continent.

The goals of this campaign are to support women's access to 'financial products, technologies and services' and foster financial and economic independence of women, which according to the AU require overcoming barriers by gendered sociocultural norms (African Union Commission, 2021c). As part of the campaign, the AU launched the Women and Youth Financial & Economic Inclusion Initiative in July 2022 in Ghana (African Union Commission, 2023c). Ghana has been a central figure as Ghana's President H.E Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo is the AU Champion on gender and development issues.

The **Continental Initiative to End Female Genital Mutilation**, or the Saleema Initiative, was launched in 2019 and is due to be implemented in 2023. The former president of Burkina Faso, H.E Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, was the AU Champion on Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation; however, Burkina Faso has been suspended by the African Union following a coup in 2022 (African Union, 2022: 3; Connor, 2022). In 2020, six young women across the continent became the Saleema Youth Victorious Ambassadors. The initiative aims to drive social norms and cultural change around FGM, mobilise relevant capacity for policy and programme implementation, upscale continental data on FGM for effective advocacy and facilitate accountability (African Union, 2022: 13). The Saleema Initiative partners with the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, which is supported by the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative.

The **Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa** (Plus) or CARMMAPlus (2021-2030) focuses on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (referred to as RMNCAH in some policies). The campaign was launched in November 2022 and continues the agenda of a previous AU campaign of the same name which was launched in 2009. The main goals of the campaign are universal access to healthcare related to sexual and reproductive health, advancing implementation practices for improved maternal health and political dialogue between stakeholders to both mobilise resources and advocate for social norms and behavioural change.²⁴

The **Campaign to End Child Marriage** was first launched in 2014 (until 2017) and has now been renewed for 2019-2023. Strategic action plans are available for both generations of the campaign. The campaign focuses on providing direction to AU member states for eliminating child marriage and outlines the following interventions: appropriate policy, legislative and institutional mechanisms in place; improvement of social protection and services; social norms and practices change; monitoring, evaluation and data collection (African Union Commission, 2022a: 17-19). The campaign speaks to the African Common Position in Ending Child Marriage (2015) (African Union Commission, 2015) and Africa's Agenda for Children 2040 (ACERWC, 2015). Various relevant institutional actors have emerged in relation to this campaign. First, the Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child predates the campaign (established in 2001) and

²⁴ The website has been down throughout this study but there are supposed to be status reports, the latest in 2019.

appointed a Special Rapporteur on Child Marriage and Other Harmful Traditional Practices (currently Hon. Hermine Gatsing Kembo 2019-2024). There's also the AU Champion on Ending Child Marriage (H. E. Edgar Lungu, Former President of Zambia)²⁵ and the AU Goodwill Ambassador for Ending Child Marriage (Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, since 2014).

Gender Parity Project 2025 has its foundations in the Heads of State decision in 2001 and was reiterated in 2018, with the goal of achieving 50/50 male-female staff representation across the African Union institutions. It also seeks to ensure 35% youth representation (African Union Commission, 2020a). The project is said to also address the dealings with sexual harassment allegations and related punitive measures.

The Office of the Special Envoy on WPS launched the **#SheLeadsPeace** campaign in 2020 (African Union Commission, 2020b), but there are no updates available regarding any related activities.

Annual events

The African Union and its institutions organise diverse annual events regarding the priorities in different sectors. Gender equality considerations are mainstreamed through many of these, but the organisation also hosts annual events that are explicitly focused on advancing women's rights and gender equality.

For example, the AU Directorate of Women, Youth and Development in co-operation with partners like the UN Women hosts side events called the **Gender Pre-Summit** before the annual AU General Assembly. The 2023 meetings commemorated 20 years since the adoption of the Maputo Protocol, followed by a high-level advocacy event on the African Union Women and Youth Financial and Economic Inclusion Initiative (WYFEI 2030). Ahead of these annual meetings, the Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) usually organises the Pre-Summit CSO Consultative Meetings (in 2023, it was the 39th such meeting).

The 1st **Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity** was hosted in Kinshasa in DR Congo, under the leadership of President Tshisekedi, the AU Chairperson at the time alongside President Ramaphosa of South Africa, Sall of Senegal and President Akuffo-Adodo of Ghana, AUC and African Women Leaders Network. The African leaders present at the event adopted an outcome document²⁶ called 'Kinshasa Declaration and Call for Action of the African Union Heads of State on Positive Masculinity in Leadership to End Violence Against Women and Girls in Africa' (henceforth the Kinshasa Declaration) that enclosed 10 shared aspirations. The aspirations include eliminating violence against women by mobilising men in leadership and beyond to address harmful social norms and attitudes. Religious, traditional and political leaders are mobilised to address 'misconceptions and misrepresentations' of their belief systems which justify or exacerbate violence

²⁵ No information about possible replacement of AU champions is currently available.

²⁶ Congo Republic, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Togo.

against women. But the initiative goes beyond leaders, to also include youth, civil society and the private sector. The 2nd Men’s Conference on Positive Masculinity took place 10th of November 2022 in Dakar, Senegal and resulted in the Dakar Call to Action (African Union Commission, 2022e). At the time of writing this report, three consultative meetings on Positive Masculinity and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) have taken place: with CSOs (16 October, online), with traditional and religious leaders (17-18 October 2023, Kinshasa, DRC), African Women Leaders Network (30-31 October 2023, Moroni, Comoros).

The **Africa Forum on Women, Peace and Security** has been organised by the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS. It has been previously supported by Denmark and other development partners. In 2022, the third such forum took place in Addis Ababa (African Union Commission, 2022f), while the 2021 forum was hosted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic (African Union Commission, 2021a). The forums aim to convene regional and national leaders, decision-makers and practitioners in the field of WPS to take stock of the progress made as well as new and persisting challenges for implementation.

In the past, there have been several **African Girls Summits**, with the latest one in Niamey, Niger in 2021. The first African Girls Summit was hosted in 2015 in Zambia and focused on ending FGM. The second summit was held in 2018 in Ghana, focusing on ending child marriage. The third summit produced the ‘Niamey Call to Action and Commitment on Eliminating Harmful Practices’.

Annex 2. Country profiles

Category 1 – Fragile States

Burkina Faso

Demographical data points

From a population of approximately 23 million people, 76% of women aged 15-49 are affected by female genital mutilation (FGM). A recent study, whereby 43% of the young women participants had undergone FGM, shows that 74% of women participants and 76% of the male participants (a total of 1644 young people aged 12-20) wanted FGM in Burkina Faso to be eliminated (Greis et al., 2020). Research indicates that close to 31% of married women of reproductive age use ‘modern’ family planning methods (i.e. contraceptives) (Some et al., 2021). Nearly 52% of the girls marry before they turn 18 and about 10% marry before the age of 15. Around 50% of the child brides end up giving birth before turning 18 (UNICEF Data, 2022). According to UN Women, the literacy rate of girls and women older than 15 is 41.2%, surpassing the number of literate men at 32.7%. The number of out-of-school children is nearly equal between boys and girls, but there is little gender-aggregated data available regarding access to education (UN Women Data Hub). In 2013, it was reported that while 75% of agricultural foods were produced by women, female landowners make up only 8.2% of the total (The World Bank Gender Data Portal).

Policy and legislative gaps

In November 2017, the concluding observations of the CEDAW Committee called for improved implementation and enforcement of strategies, action plans and laws to eliminate child marriage and FGM, alongside other harmful practices. The Burkina Faso Family Code is, as far as the resources say, currently under revision (adopted in 1989). Family rights should be improved by revising the Personal and Family Code, setting the legal age of marriage to 18 and simplifying access to civil marriage. Additionally, an anti-trafficking strategy was requested, a change of the quota law from 30% to 50% of women in political representation and adequate birth registration. The CEDAW Committee requested decriminalising abortion and enhancement of reproductive health services. Access to abortion is restricted to the medical determination of pregnancy in case of grave health concerns, rape or incest, within the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. A recent study shows that in a context where induced abortion is not socially acceptable and is legally restricted, women seek out misoprostol to terminate their pregnancies through informal channels (Drabo, 2022). Rural women face challenges regarding land rights and access to land. According to the online database Equaldex, while more than 90% of the population is not supportive of LGBTQIA+ rights, homosexuality itself is not illegal while same-sex marriage is indeed illegal. Historically there has been no censorship for advocating or discussing queer rights and topics in public, it is unclear to what extent the change of regime has affected this.

Major achievements

The government adopted the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage (2016-2025). The amended Penal Code (2018) criminalises all forms of child marriage but does not shift the minimum age of marriage. The minimum age of marriage is 17 for girls and 20 for boys. Additionally, Article 380 of the Penal Code has criminalised female genital mutilation (FGM). The Penal Code also defined domestic violence for the first time in Burkina Faso. Former Burkina Faso president, H. E. Roch Marc Christian was also the African Union Champion on Eliminating FGM. According to an interviewee from an international NGO (INGO), the tackling of FGM is considered to be a success story in Burkina Faso and one that has also fuelled the CSO work on eliminating child marriage (Interview #16).

Law no. 010-2009/NA (2009) set a 30% quota for women in electoral lists of municipal and legislative elections. However, since most electoral districts have two seats the application of the law is complicated. According to the National Report on Beijing +25 (country reports found at UN Women), the main area lacking implementation is women's participation in decision-making bodies, and there's a downward trend in women in parliament, women as municipal councillors, mayors, and while there are increases in women in government, as presidents of institutions, as ministerial general secretaries and so on, the 30% quota has only been achieved in women governors (p. 15 of the report).

Civil society mobilisation

The CSOs and women's organisations have been proactively working on revising the Family Code, including roundtables and consultations on the proposed

amendments (Interview #16). There was openness to address this within Kaboré's government but with the coup's, these efforts have lost their priority and come to a halt. As a change of strategy, CSOs and NGOs are now advocating for the inclusion of women's voices in conflict context. According to another interviewee, the CSOs can be divided into a) those whose work is not directly affected by the regime change and continue business as usual, b) those who support democracy and are facing challenges, and c) those who are supportive of the current government and enjoy relative freedom of activities (Interview #13). In terms of women's organisations, the National Coalition to End Child Marriage (CONAMEB) has grown to nearly 70 organisations since its establishment in 2013. The Coalition for Monitoring the Implementation of CEDAW (Coalition CEDEF), includes a number of women's rights associations. CEDEF's main priorities in 2017 were articulated to the CEDAW Committee: law on domestic violence is only partially implemented and does not include a definition of marital rape; rural women need to be included in designing land charters; women need to be better represented in decision-making bodies. Issues like teenage pregnancy, sexual violence against girls in school, access to contraceptives, continued VAW and harmful practices, rural women IDPs and unsafe abortion (OHCHR, 2017). The database shows no academic analysis of the women's movement in Burkina Faso.

Political climate

The extrajudicial killings and attacks on civilians by both pro and anti-government forces resulting in mass displacement caused major protests by the population. In 2019, the government restricted media freedom to report on security force operations and visit IDP camps. In 2021 and 2022 the popular protests were shut down with protest bans and internet shutdowns (Human Rights Watch, 2023). There were two military *coups* in 2022, with the military government and President Captain Ibrahim Traore still in power. In this context, gender equality is not a priority in national politics and is discussed primarily to accommodate international partners (Interview #13). According to the interviewee, the political discourse is that you cannot promote civil liberties at a time when the country is not free (ibid.). In this light, loud criticism of the military government and the current regime can result in major trouble. Another interviewee points out that while organisations are not hindered from publicly promoting women's rights, the political instability and government changes have deprioritised women's rights issues further and made it difficult to keep it on the agenda (Interview #16).

South Sudan

Demographical data points

Exact and recent data is difficult to identify, but the UNICEF South Sudan country office reports that nearly 65% of women and girls have been victimised through physical and/or sexual violence in their lives, 51% have been abused by an intimate partner and 33% by a stranger (UNICEF South Sudan, 2019). An estimated 70% of South Sudanese children are out of education, the majority of

them girls (UNICEF South Sudan; Oxfam 2017: 25; Philipp, 2023). With 35% of the population literate, South Sudan has the third lowest literacy rate in the world (World Population Review, 2023). In 2013, 52% of girls were reported to marry before turning 18, and 9% before the age of 15 (Madut, 2020: 1). Prevalence of FGM is reportedly less than 1% (FGM/C Research Initiative). The violence in South Sudan affects gendered relations in various ways. For instance, the struggle over resources young men require to pay the bride price contributes to the conflicts (28 Too Many, 2020: 4). Additionally, military elites often reward the members of community-based armed groups by giving them 'wives' and thereby facilitating sexual and gender-based violence (Luedke, 2020, 2023). The payment of the bride price is also used to justify the ill-treatment of women or wives. Some communities also practice levirate marriage whereby in case of the death of the husband, the parents of the wife get to choose one of the brothers of the dead husband to marry their daughter and if need be, continue paying the instalments of bride price (Beswick, 2001). Nearly 40% of women in South Sudan are in polygamous unions.

Policy and legislative gaps

While the transitional constitution sets the legal age of marriage at 18, there is reportedly no governmental body to implement this and, due to low rates of literacy, communities rely largely on traditional knowledge regarding female maturity (Madut, 2020: 2). Currently, South Sudan has no permanent constitution, nor specific legislation to address discrimination against women or: combating gender-based violence; nurses and midwifery; a national family law; affirmative action; protection of survivors of trafficking in persons; combating HIV-related stigma and discrimination; and inheritance and succession.²⁷ While the country has adopted a national action plan on women, peace and security (2015-2021), this has not been systematically implemented.²⁸ Under the transitional constitution, the Penal Code Act 2008 and the Child Act 2008 are still in force; however, the CEDAW Committee has pointed out that marital rape is not defined in these. Not least, South Sudan has not ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime which addresses the trafficking of women. Abortion in South Sudan is allowed only to save the pregnant person's life (Guttmacher Institute, 2022). The Penal Code Act 2008 also criminalises same-sex intimate relations, but there is little evidence regarding whether this legislation is enforced (Human Dignity Trust, 2023).

Major achievements

The transitional constitution of South Sudan (2011) included progressive provisions for women's rights, including a general provision of gender equality, but also the right to participate in public life, be represented in government, legislative and executive organs, and undertake legislation to address harmful customary and traditional practice that affect women negatively, among others. However, the implementation of these provisions has been limited due to conflict

²⁷ CEDAW Concluding observations on the initial report of South Sudan, 2021, p.3.

²⁸ CEDAW Concluding observations on the initial report of South Sudan, 2021, p.4.

and insecurity in the country (Hove and Ndawana, 2017). In terms of political representation, women hold 28.5% of seats in the South Sudanese parliament (UN Women Data Hub).

South Sudan ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2015 and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women (the Maputo Protocol) in 2023. A draft Anti-Gender-Based Violence Bill was also submitted to the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in 2020 and is waiting for approval from the parliament (Atem, 2023).

Civil society mobilisation

Considering the many decades of conflict South Sudan has seen, the histories of Sudanese women mobilising are tied up with liberation struggles (Atem, 2023). According to Atem, post-independence, South Sudanese women have been building on the foundations of women's organising and new advocacy for political representation and gender-based violence. According to an interviewee, there are a number of active women's organisations but they are fragmented and lack a common direction (Interview #14). A recent win for civil society was the ratification of the AU's Maputo Protocol without reservations. According to the interviewee, this was a combined effort between the women's organisations and the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare. The women's groups are also advocating for the revision of three legislative bills: the GBV Bill, Family Law and the Constitution.

Political climate

According to Transparency International, South Sudan has the third highest level of corruption in the world (2023). In 2024, South Sudan is expected to hold its first general elections since it became independent in 2011. Elections were also expected to be held before 2015 but were cancelled due to violent conflict (Hove and Ndawana, 2017). The civil society in South Sudan is free to advocate on the issues that they find important and will not be subject to political persecution (Interview #14). There have been no recent heated debates, but rather a lack of political will and motivation by the government to prioritise gender equality issues.

Somalia

Demographical data points

A little over a quarter of both genders have received primary education, but the literacy rate of women seems to be increasing. While their overall literacy rate is 32%, 49% of women aged 15-19 are literate (Federal Government of Somalia, 2020: 51-52). That said, only 9% of women aged 15-49 are employed. Furthermore, only 12.6% of this employment is for someone outside the family (48.8% self-employed, 38.4% employed by a family member) (ibid.: 56 and 64). The median age for first marriage is 20 years for women and 23 for men. Sixteen per cent of women aged 20-49 were married by age 15, and 34% by age 18. Women have children on

average at the age of 21 (of women aged 20-49), while 14% of women had teenage pregnancies. Somali women have on average about 6-7 children (ibid.: 71). Only 1% of married women are using any form of contraceptives, although 38% of them express a desire to postpone their next birth by at least two years or to stop bearing children (ibid.: 83). According to the Health and Demographic Survey 2020, only 32% of births were attended by a skilled health provider. When it comes to violence against women, 15.3% of ever-married women aged 15-49 reported having experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence by their spouse (ibid.: 203). FGM is almost universal affecting 99% of Somali women. Seventy-six per cent of women wish to see the practice continue (ibid.: 211).

Policy and legislative gaps

Due to multiple civil wars since 1980, Somalia has experienced long periods without a central government. This rendered customary and religious law all important. With the new government in place, Somalia adopted a provisional constitution with gender equality specific provisions in 2012. Somalia's constitution can be interpreted according to international law, sharia law or the precedents in other countries (Article 40). Yet, the constitutional provisions are vague regarding child marriage (Noor Mohammed, 2015: 466). A child is defined as anyone less than 18 years old (Article 29 (8)), but marriage is allowed between one or both consenting parties that have reached 'maturity'. It is unclear whether maturity corresponds with adulthood. Additionally, arranged marriages within certain clans/bloodlines can take place in Somalia, whereby the marrying parties may not consent (ibid.). A recent study argues that adolescent-led early marriages have been rising due to intersecting norms condemning premarital sex, higher status of married youth and practical social shifts like decrease in parental oversight and access to social media and telecommunications (Kenny et al., 2019). In terms of women in leadership, a 30% quota for women in all branches of government has been discussed but not adopted (Noor Mohammed, 2015: 468). The Somali political system characterised by 4.5 quota system whereby four big clans who have equal shares in political positions, and minority clans form a consortium for half-share of the political representation (Horst, 2017: 296). In this context, women are not perceived to be competitive enough candidates. Abortion is illegal in Somalia, but pregnancy can be legally terminated when it endangers the life of the mother. Additionally, Somalia has no up-to-date legislation on sexual and gender-based violence and is not party to CEDAW.

Major achievements

The Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development was reinstated in 2014 and the National Gender Policy was adopted in 2016. Recently, Somalia adopted a national action plan on implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (2022) (UNDP Somalia Gender Equality Strategy (2023-2026): 5). Regardless of FGM in Somalia standing at around 98% (Noor Mohammed, 2015: 466), it is criminalised by the constitution alongside other 'harmful cultural practices'. The weakness of the central government will make it difficult to implement and deliver on those commitments.

Civil society mobilisation

According to Horst (2017), the Somali women's movement was nearly non-existent until President Mohamed Sia Barre started introducing a version of state feminism as part of the new socialist agenda in the 1970s. It involves including women in education, workforce and revolutionary efforts – but also reporting abusive partners (p. 392). Tripp (2016) has a more optimistic view of women's movements in the country and argues that while women were left out of the peace conferences between 1991-1999, they successfully mobilised to participate in the 2000 Djibouti Conference (p. 95). Women then formed a 'rainbow coalition' or a 'sixth clan' across the clan lines in the government to advocate for gender quotas in the transitional government. They also requested reinstatement of the 1974 Family Code whereby the court had to consent to polygamous marriages, it set out progressive inheritance rights, capped bride price, enabled marriage-related cost-sharing and division of assets in case of divorce (Tripp, 2016: 96).

Women organisations like the Somali National Women's Organisation, Somali Women's Development Centre, Somali Women's Leadership Initiative, and We are Women Activists, among others, mobilised and lobbied to ensure that 30% of women are in the House of the People (Affi, 2020). Women also advocated for women's right to become judges and presidents in the provisional constitution. The fact that the 30% quota was not included in the provisional constitution led to a walk-out by women delegates when the constitution was approved, and street protests in Mogadishu (Tripp, 2016: 98).

Political climate

Somalia's political sphere is significantly shaped by the Somali diaspora and 'returnees', including their diverse and hybrid value systems. Due to the prolonged civil war, waves of Somalis have fled the country and settled in Europe, the Middle East and North America (Horst, 2017: 390). Diaspora networks and returnee experiences play an important role in shaping political discourses in Somalia. Additionally, Somalia has a unique indirect democratic system whereby there are no 'one person, one vote' elections. Instead, the clan elders and civil society actors appoint delegates to the House of the People (parliament) which has 275 members. This process is widely considered to be corrupt, as well as disadvantageous to women candidates.

Category 2 – Poor and stable states

Ethiopia

Demographical data points

Ethiopia has a population of over 120 million people, slightly over half of whom are female. Ethiopia's Demographic and Health Survey (2016) shows that physical violence is the most dominant form of gender-based violence in Ethiopia, and over 33% of women reported to have experienced either physical, sexual or emotional violence. This is quite a difference from 7.2% of women who have reported having

experienced all three. According to the same study, the Somali region has the lowest level of reported SGBV, with women who admitted to experiences of sexual, physical or emotional violence at 9.4%. In comparison, 39.2% of Oromo women, 37.7% of Harari women and 37.1% of Amhara women reported such abuses (ibid.: 44). More than 75% of women aged 30-49 have been circumcised (Central Statistical Agency, Ethiopia and ICF, 2016: 45), a trend which is more prominent in Muslim communities but still affects more than 50% of women across religions. Afar and Somali women have the highest levels of FGM, at over 98%, while 23% of Tigrinya women are circumcised. According to the Demographic and Health Survey of 2016, only 36% of married women engage in some form of family planning, out of which 35% are using modern methods and 1% traditional methods (ibid.: 16). According to 2019 reports, this number has gone up to 40.5% (UNICEF Ethiopia, 2019: 31). Fifty-eight per cent of sexually active unmarried women were using contraceptives. Furthermore, 40.3% of women (aged 20-24) married under the age of 18 and more than 70% of girls give birth before turning 20 (UN Women Data Hub).

Policy and legislative gaps

Education and schooling are not compulsory by law in Ethiopia, and therefore, regardless of various policies and strategies, children might enter the school system at diverse ages and leave the system early. While the dropout rates between girls in grades 1-8 (11.4%) and boys (10.9%) are not drastically different, only 24% of Ethiopian youth are recorded to enter secondary school (grades 9-10) (UNICEF Ethiopia, 2019: 35).

Additionally, the federal law in Ethiopia forbids child marriage and sets the legal age of marriage at 18 (The Revised Family Code, 2000). This is however undermined by the allowance of regional family codes. Most regions have aligned their regional codes with the federal one, but Afar and Somali regions have not and still allow for marriage under 18 (Assefa, 2021). Existing literature also points out that while the Criminal Code (2004) addresses physical domestic violence, its definition is limited (Gudeta Guder, 2019; Salemot and Birhanu, 2021). In particular, the law does not cover intimate partner violence of those that are not cohabiting nor does it criminalise marital rape. There is no other legislation to address domestic violence in Ethiopia.

According to the Ethiopian Criminal Code, abortion is prohibited. That said, there are several exceptions, such as when pregnancy is the result of rape or incest; the pregnancy risks the life of either the child or mother, including childbirth; if a child is 'deformed' or if a mother is physically and mentally unfit to parent. A recent study shows that this often leaves practitioners in a position where they have to decide whether the patient is truthful regarding the legal grounds for abortion, and whether to object to or carry out the procedure (Ewnetu et al., 2021). The research, conducted in Addis Ababa, suggested that the relative flexibility of the law was successful in reducing unsafe abortion. A small sample study of women who had undergone unsafe abortions indicated that many women are unaware of the legal status of abortion, until what stage of pregnancy is it an option and where this service is provided (Getahun et al., 2023). Not least,

traditional authorities were sought out due to concerns about religious and cultural taboos which prevented women from seeking formal services. Finally, Ethiopia lacks adequate provisions for LGBTQIA+ rights, meaning that homosexuality is punishable by law and LGBTQAI+-positive content is censored (Equaldex).

Major achievements

Shortcomings notwithstanding, the Criminal Code of 2004 did decriminalise medical abortion, and criminalised female genital mutilation (FGM) (Tornius 2023, forthcoming). This has been followed by various measures like committees to eradicate harmful traditional practices, national strategies, roadmaps and campaigns to eliminate FGM and also criminalise medicalised FGM. In addition to FGM measures, setting a federal standard on underage marriage, as pointed to above, is an important precedent. The Ethiopian government was praised for appointing women into 50% of the ministerial cabinet in 2018 and for the country's first-ever woman president. With the cabinet reshuffle, the number of women has changed, but Ethiopia still has a strong 41% female representation in the parliament (Hilina Berhanu and Emebet, 2022).

Civil society mobilisation

Ethiopian women's organisations and civil society faced a challenging decade between 2009 and 2019 whereby human rights and good governance funding were not allowed to be sourced from the international community. Many organisations became depoliticised in the process and became more service-providing NGOs than voices of diverse interest groups (Pellerin, 2023; Tornius, 2023a). The reforms on the Penal Code and the Family Code were, however, outcomes of the efforts of women's organisations. The Network of Ethiopian Women Associations, the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, the Union of Ethiopian Women Charitable Association and more recently TIMRAN are some of the umbrella organisations active in the country. In August 2023 women's organisations are mobilising to ensure women's voices are included in post-conflict reconstruction and transitional justice processes.

Political climate

While the new reformist government promised a new era in terms of human rights, the armed conflict in the country's northern part, Tigray, strained the state-civil society relationships and measures of censorship and restriction have been deployed sporadically. Arbitrary arrests, states of emergency and internet shut-downs have not been unusual in the past years. Furthermore, tensions over the war in Tigray have contributed to increasing distrust between the Ethiopian government and the international community. While international organisations publish evidence and reports of violence, misconduct and mismanagement by federal forces, the state accuses international organisations of neo-imperialism.

Kenya

Demographical data points

Kenya is a country of over 53 million people, with slightly more than half of the population female. Yet, only 29.3% of women were in wage employment, as compared to 46.2% of men. (The World Bank, 2021). A recent Demographic and Health Survey (2022) is revealing regarding the situation of women: for instance, 31% of 19-year-old girls had ever been pregnant, with considerably higher levels among women who have no education (p. 16). There are major differences between counties, whereby 50% of the girls aged 15-19 in Samburu have ever been pregnant, compared to only 5% in Nyeri county. In terms of family planning, 57% of married women and 59% of unmarried women use modern contraceptive methods (ibid.: 18). Again, there are major regional differences, e.g. only 1.8% of women in Mandera use modern contraceptive methods, 2.8% in Wajir and over 70% in Laikipia and Nakuru, among several other places. Depending on access to resources, 69-99% of births were facilitated by a skilled provider (ibid.: 28). According to 2022 data, 33% of women own a house and 25% own agricultural land. The majority of women do so jointly with their spouses. Interestingly, the 2022 Demographic and Health Survey offers a comparison, showing that 34% of women in Kenya have experienced physical violence since age 15 and 27% of the men have such experiences too. That said, as women age, they are more likely to have experienced physical violence (ibid.: 83). By the age of 49, 18% of women had experienced sexual violence with the highest levels (30%) in the Bungoma region. These numbers were also higher among divorced or separated women. Most importantly, 71% of sexual violence is perpetrated by an intimate partner (p. 90). The FGM rate has gone down from 38% in 1998 to 15% in 2022.

Policy and legislative gaps

According to the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, termination of pregnancy is not permitted without threat to the mother's life or health. The latter must be determined by a health professional. A 2019 Supreme Court ruling amended the provision to include that pregnancies that are a result of rape can be carried out by professionals. According to CEDAW Concluding Observations (2017), there are inconsistencies between the constitution and some of the existing customary and religious law, particularly concerning Islamic family law (Mujuzi, 2021).

Additionally, while the Kenyan state has criminalised gender-based violence, including domestic violence, a practice known as 'beading' is still being practised by some Samburu communities. Beading takes place with the consent of the child's parents whereby a male relative is essentially marking a young girl as 'taken' and will be allowed to start preparing her for marriage through engaging in sexual activity (Nyangwesa and Trivedi, 2019: 122). Not least, marital rape is exempted from the Sexual Offences Act and not criminalised (Ngema, 2015). Similarly, other illegal practices like FGM and child marriage are being practised by some groups and communities in Kenya, signalling challenges in implementing existing legal frameworks. Homosexual activity in Kenya is illegal and punishable with incarceration. Regardless, acceptance of queer neighbours has increased by 10% in the past six years (Equaldex). The Kenyan constitution defines marriage as

an arrangement between people from the opposite sex, yet several communities in Kenya embrace marriage of two women as a cultural practice (Kareithi and Viljoen, 2019).

Major achievements

The Constitution of Kenya, 2010 adopted a two-thirds gender rule whereby no more than two-thirds of the appointees of any government body can be of the same gender. However, there are no provisions to ensure compliance before the votes are counted and no provision to address non-compliance after the fact (Berry et al., 2021). As Berry et al. have pointed out, the two-thirds rule has still contributed to increasing the number of women in government, which in turn has led to significant backlash and gender-based political violence. As such, only 29 out of 290 members of parliament (MPs) are women, which is only 10% (Ombuor, 2022).

Generally, Kenya is seen to have strong legislation on FGM and child marriage (Children's Act 2001, Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2011 and the Marriage Act 2014). Kenya also has a Sexual Offences Act (2006) and the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (2015). Kenya is one of the leaders of the Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence (Generation Equality Forum). Former President Kenyatta made 12 concrete commitments in 2021, including those of ending GBV and FGM in Kenya by 2026, a five-year road map (2021-2026) and country-specific actions (Generation Equality Kenya and Amref Health Africa, 2022).

Civil society mobilisation

The Kenyan Federation of Women Lawyers has been campaigning for safe and legal abortion. According to Saharan and Schulpen (2022), the donor dependency of Kenyan women's rights organisations has contributed to existing rifts between the groups. Additionally, there are concerns around the palatability of the notion of 'abortion' and women's groups sometimes prefer to use a more vague language around reproductive health and rights. Politically, the women's organisations and civil society in Kenya are free to operate and participate in politics.

There's evidence showing that CitizenGo, a conservative 'pro-life, family and liberty' online community, is heavily targeting Kenya and Ghana in Africa for anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQIA+ campaigns. Interestingly, while foreign-led, CitizenGo takes up the discourse that LGBTQIA+ and queer human rights are neocolonial impositions of Western values (Jackson et al., 2022).

Political climate

Kenya's political openness and democracy are primarily undermined by irregular ethnic clashes and electoral violence. While the conflict and clashes can be attributed to vigilante groups, their actions are often sanctioned by political actors (Magu, 2018). According to Reporters Without Borders, Kenya has a diverse media landscape, but much of the media outlets are owned by either politicians or their networks. Not only are media outlets vulnerable to political pressures due to the firing and hiring of disliked chiefs and editors, but the journalists are also

subject to attacks and harassment during election campaigns (Reporters Without Borders, 2023).

Uganda

Demographical data points

In 2019/20, Uganda's population was made up of slightly more women (50.9%) than men (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021: 10). In most households (69%), men are cited as the main decision-makers. In terms of education, 90.7% of men and 91.5% of women attend primary school (approx. age 6-12), and 79.2% of men and 78.3% of women attend secondary school (approx. age 13-18) (ibid.: 15). Post-secondary education (approx. age 19-24) is more difficult for women to access with only 19.5% attending compared to 27.9% of men. More women than men work in subsistence agriculture, 55.5% of women compared to 38.4% of men (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021: 65). The tendency is opposite when it comes to employment: 60.5% of men and 43.6% of women work. Out of these, 62% of the women work in 'vulnerable employment', meaning that work for themselves or for someone in the family. Women bear the bulk of the burden of unpaid care work (24 hours per week vis-à-vis 14 hours that men contribute). According to the National Household Survey 2019/2020 only 1.5% of women aged 15-17 are married.²⁹ The Household Survey also shows that many Ugandan women do not use modern contraceptives – in 2018, 55.1% of women aged 15-49 used them. The occurrence of FGM is low – only 0.3% in 2016. Lastly, in 2016, 29.9% of Ugandan women aged 15-49 had been subject to physical or sexual violence within the last 12 months (ibid.: 5-7).

Policy and legislative gaps

In 2014, the Ugandan government adopted the Anti-Pornography Act which has since come under fire and rolled back from too broad of a definition of 'pornography'. The Constitutional Court of Uganda deemed some of the provisions unconstitutional in 2021 (Article 19, 2021: 19). The CEDAW Committee's general recommendations also invited Uganda to revise the Act (2022).³⁰ There has also been controversy around the Sexual Offences Bill put forth in 2019 which was deemed to be discriminatory against queer communities while falling short of a comprehensive definition of consent (Human Rights Watch, 2021). CEDAW's general recommendations have invited the government to adopt the bill, which was indeed reintroduced in 2023. More notoriously, Uganda adopted the Anti-Homosexuality Act (2023) which allows for a death penalty in case of 'aggravated homosexuality' defined as when one party is not able to give

²⁹ Grey literature, such as UN databases and NGO reports, tend to put this number considerably higher with around 34% of girls marrying before turning 18. That said, these reports do cite the National Household Survey 2016. The latter is the same, but outdated, source of data.

³⁰ Concluding observations on the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Uganda, adopted by the Committee at its eighty-first session (7–25 February 2022).

consent due to age or disability, in case of predatory behaviour. Consensual acts of homosexuality may be punished with life imprisonment.

Additionally, the CEDAW Committee is advocating for the enactment of the Marriage Bill to update legislation on divorce and marriage which was adopted 118 years ago (Parliament of the Republic of Uganda, 2022). While marriage-relevant legislation can be found in other legal acts, issues like 'bride price', and matrimonial property would be addressed in the new bill coherently. The Marriage Act of 1904 also sets the legal age of civil marriage at 21, with exceptions, while the Customary Marriage Act allows girls to marry at 16 and boys at 18. The Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act follows the same logic as customary marriage, and the Marriage and Divorce of Mohammedans Act (1906) sets no minimum age for marriage (Wesaka, 2023). The latter have been deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court which set the age of consent to marriage at 18.

Major achievements

The Constitution of Uganda, 1995 is considered one of the most gender-sensitive in the world and involves a quota system for women in government. Currently, 34.9% of parliamentarians are women (UN Women Data Hub). Uganda is also acknowledged for its vibrant women's peace movement and bottom-up engagement with the global UNSCR 1325 and women, peace and security agenda (M'Cormack-Hale, 2012: 20) Uganda was the first African country, alongside Ivory Coast, to adopt a WPS national action plan in 2008. Uganda has extensive legislation on gender equality, for instance, the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2010), the Domestic Violence Act (2010) and the Domestic Violence Regulations (2011). There's also legislation to ensure gender-responsive planning and budgeting.

Civil society mobilisation

In the 1990s, post-conflict Uganda was one of the African leaders in terms of women mobilising autonomously and, in light of reconfigured gender roles in the conflict, pushing for gender-inclusive governance (Tripp, 2015: 54). In particular, Uganda has seen a strong women's peace movement and women mobilising for bottom-up peace initiatives. Yet, regardless of the progressive and well-established women's movement, activists are concerned about what they can say (Interview #2). Current president Museveni has presented himself as pro-women's rights (Delegation of the European Union to Uganda, 2020; Ssendendo, 2023); however, he is known to clamp down on his critics and opposition, including women (Tripp, 2021).

Political climate

Yoweri Museveni is one of the longest-ruling leaders in Africa (37 years). Since multi-party elections were reinstated in 2006, Museveni has held on to power through autocratic means like patronage and violence (Makara and Wang, 2022). For one, Museveni removed the term limit for president, and in 2017 the age limit was also removed (ibid.: 216). The repression of demonstrations and unrest through police might was instituted by the 2013 Public Order Management Act. When opposition candidate Bobby Wine was arrested in 2020, 50 people were

killed in the subsequent unrest. Other means, like limiting social media and mobile services and harassment and torture of political critics and opponents, have also been taking place.

Category 3 – Transition economies

Egypt

Demographical data points

According to the 2014 Demographic and Health Survey of Egypt, there is no major gap between girls and boys in their access to education. This is confirmed by statistics which show that nearly 50% of university students are female.³¹ Yet, the major progress in improving girls' access to education has not transformed into labour market participation (Assaad et al., 2020). According to the World Bank Database, only 18% of women are in the workforce (2022) compared to 24.5% in 2017. Also according to the 2014 Demographic and Health Survey, 59% of married women were using contraceptive methods and only 1.6% of them used traditional methods (p. 66). Furthermore, 17% of Egyptian girls marry before turning 18, even though this is the legal age of marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2019). Since there is no new comprehensive data, the research also cites the Demographic and Health Survey by saying that 87% of Egyptian women have gone through female genital mutilation/cutting (Khodary and Hamdy, 2019: 252). Most genital cutting is done by medical professionals. According to UN Women, more than half of Egyptian girls get pregnant before they turn 20. Additionally, 15.1% of women aged 15-49 years have been victims of domestic or intimate partner violence in the past year (UN Women Data Hub).

Policy and legislative gaps

While FGM is criminalised, Article 61 of the Penal Code in Egypt says that the procedure can be performed to avoid great harm and protect girls' lives. That is against the backdrop of the WHO's position that FGM has no positive impact on health (Khodary and Hamdy, 2019: 259).

The major legislative gaps, however, are in the realm of marriage and divorce. First, marriage is governed by either the church or sharia in Egypt. Christians have only two grounds for divorce, based on the decision by Pope Shenouda (2008), which are either adultery and sexual misconduct or a change of religion. It has since become very difficult to convert from one religion to another (Interview #7). In the case of Muslim divorce, men are allowed to unilaterally divorce from their wives in a swift process completed in a day, whereas women need to go through court proceedings that can take up to two years. Secondly, while adultery by both genders is criminalised in Egypt, men will not be imprisoned for more than six months, whereas women can be detained for up to two years (Interview #7). Not least, polygamy is permitted without the consent of the first wife. While the

³¹ Statistics can be found at [statista.com](https://www.statista.com). There is no data beyond gender binary.

husband is required to inform the first wife, this is often obscured and polygamy can be used as a smokescreen to formalise adultery.

Same-sex relationships are illegal in Egypt and according to the Equaldex online database, punishable with up to 17 years of imprisonment, hard labour or deportation. At the same time, gender reassignment surgeries are legal but require approval from the Al-Azhar Mosque or the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. Additionally, medical professionals are known to refuse to perform the procedure, making it difficult to access. Egypt is one of the three countries in Africa that has not adopted the African Union's Maputo Protocol. Regardless, it hosted a Regional High-Level Conference on the Elimination of Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation in Cairo in June 2019 which produced the so-called 'Cairo Call to Action', citing the Maputo Protocol.

Major achievements

Egypt often highlights that it has adopted the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030 (2017), making it the first country in the world who align their gender equality aspirations with SDGs.³² The Egypt National Observatory for Women (ENOW) was established to monitor its implementation. The post-revolution National Council for Women was independent from 'first-lady feminism' and the national machinery showed results in implementing the National Strategy for Combatting Violence Against Women, including early marriage, trafficking and others (Interview #6). Egypt is also seeing a record number of women in high-level politics, with 25% of women holding ministerial portfolios in 2018, and 18% in 2022. For the term 2021-2026, 28% of the Egyptian parliament's lower house is female, and 14% of the senate (Represent Women, 2022). That said, the parliament has yet to debate the Violence Against Women Bill put forth by civic groups.

Civil society mobilisation

During Dr. Tallawy's leadership of the National Council for Women, there was a synergy between the feminist movement and the national gender machinery, which led to effective policy change (Interview #6). The feminist and women's rights movement has been increasingly targeted by the state since 2014, reaching a peak in 2016 when many activists were detained, subjected to travel bans and their assets frozen. This has made it difficult for women's organisations to successfully advocate for the Violence Against Women Bill or update demographic data on issues like VAW, FGM, child marriage and others (Interview #6). Since 2016, the Ministry of Social Solidarity has had to approve all projects by civil society and NGOs, and for several years rejected large numbers of them (Interview #7). According to the interviewees, things have been improving since 2022.

Political climate

Egypt has been arresting human and women's rights defenders in large numbers between 2017 and 2022, primarily based on the accusation that they are threats to national security or have gotten their 'foreign' funds through illegal means.

³² Egypt's voluntary presentation on the review theme of CSW60, 13 March 2019.

According to an anonymous interviewee, international pressures were important for the release of political prisoners (Interview #7). The situation has improved since 2022 due to changing geopolitics and Egypt seeking to present itself as a centrist country between a more conservative Middle East and a liberal West. That said, there are still many political prisoners and advocating for their release will not be seen positively by the state. Civil society organisations are trying to navigate this by choosing their language carefully and many are choosing to not directly criticise the government (Interview #7).

Ghana

Demographical data points

In Ghana, 80.7% of women, compared to 56% of men, were in vulnerable employment in 2015 (working for themselves or for family). Just over 27% of men were paid employees compared to only 14.2% of women (Ghana Statistical Service, 2016: 34). Additionally, women earn on average only 70% of what employed men earn (ibid.: 44). According to a 2017 survey, 18% of women have no education and only 20% complete secondary education or receive more than secondary education. The numbers vary regionally with between 38-58% of women having no education in the northern, upper western and upper eastern regions, while 7-22% in the regions in the rest of the country (the southern part) have no education. Altogether, 54% of women are literate (Ghana Statistical Service et al., 2018: 12). On average, women marry at the age of 21.5. This has been steadily on the rise since 1988 when it was 18.1. Twenty-six per cent of women marry before they turn 18, 8% before they turn 15 (ibid.: 30). Medical abortion is legal and 20% of women aged 15-49 have had an abortion (ibid.: 88). According to a recent survey, there is a large gap in access to contraceptives: 60% of married women's demand for contraceptives is unmet (Ghana Statistical Service and ICF, 2023: 21-23). Furthermore, 24.6% of unmarried sexually active women have an unsatisfied demand for contraceptives. Overall, 2.4% of Ghanaian women aged 15-49 have undergone FGM (2017/2018 Survey; Sakeah et al., 2018). The practice is very unequally distributed with 32.5% in the upper west region, 13% in the upper east region and below 3% in all other regions (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018: 277).

Policy and legislative gaps

While not necessarily a gap, Ghana does not have an electoral gender quota and in 2017 only 13.1% of members of parliament were women (Bauer, 2019). According to Bauer's account, structural and direct violence against women in politics is a major deterrence for women. According to the Human Rights Watch UPR Shadow Report (2022), Ghana has legislation which criminalises 'unnatural carnal knowledge' which is interpreted as same-sex intercourse (p. 6). Additionally, the 'Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill' was introduced in 2021 which would ban all LGBTQIA+ advocacy, introduce conversion therapy as an alternative to imprisonment, as well as require a 'duty to report' improper conduct.

Abortion in Ghana is permitted under the Government of Ghana PNDC Law 102 (1985) in cases of rape, incest or when there are grave risks to the woman's or child's physical or mental health (Aniteye and Mayhew, 2019: 2). That said, Act 29 of the Criminal Code of 1960 notes that abortion is illegal, except for the abovementioned circumstances.³³ Several scholars have presented Ghana's legislation on terminating a pregnancy as liberal, but argue that the population has poor knowledge of the law and women are impeded by social norms in making their decision (Esia-Donkoh et al., 2017; Ewnetu et al., 2021; Rominski et al., 2017). According to an interviewee, abortion is illegal in Ghana, notwithstanding some exceptions, and the final decision about pregnancy is made by medical professionals and not the women themselves (Interview #12). Combined, these different factors lead women to seek out alternative access to abortion.

More generally, the concern in Ghana is regarding policy implementation rather than existing legislative gaps on gender equality.³⁴ For instance, while Ghana has a Domestic Violence Act (2007), 24.4% of women experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime, and more than 19% of women questioned had experienced it within the past 12 months (UN Women). Not least, Ghana is grappling with ensuring women are protected from witchcraft accusations (Mutaru and Adjeley Suta Alakija Sekyi, 2023). According to NGOs and human rights organisations, many women who have been accused of the occult have been banished to the 'witch camps' which are effectively informal prisons. The local discourses, however, appear to understand these camps as spaces of refuge when home becomes unsafe.

Major achievements

The legal age of marriage in Ghana is 18 with no exceptions (Girls Not Brides, 2022). That said, in some regions, the prevalence of child marriage is still at 28%. Additionally, Ghana has aligned its drive to end child marriage with that of the AUC campaign on eliminating child marriage. Similarly, the average prevalence of FGM in Ghana among women aged 15-49 is 2.4%. Ninety-four and four tenths of those who know about the practice would like to see it eliminated (FGM/C Research Initiative). FGM is criminalised by the Criminal Code Amendment Act (2007). Additionally, Ghana hosts the Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Training Centre and five of Ghana's 28 top military observers in UN peacekeeping missions are women, equal to 17.8%. This exceeds the 15% advocated by the UN.

Civil society mobilisation

According to Bauer, independent women's organisations in Ghana are a relatively new phenomenon due to the presence of military regimes until the late 1990s (2019). The Domestic Violence Bill (2007) was the result of a campaign by the Domestic Violence Coalition in Ghana (Anyidoho et al., 2021). While this was a

³³ Act 29, Criminal Offenses Act, 1960, Sections 58 and 67.

³⁴ Ghana Universal Periodic Review – 42nd session, 24th January 2023, Joint submission by Defence for Children International-Ghana (DCI-Ghana), Plan International-Ghana, Women Aspire Network, Gender Centre for Empowering Development (GENCED), Erudite Women Empowerment Foundation (EWEF) and Community Aid for Rural Development (CARD) with the technical support of Defence for Children International (DCI).

major success for the Ghanaian women's movement, women's organisations have been less successful in fostering policy implementation (ibid.). The other large umbrella organisations are the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT) and the Coalition on the Women's Manifesto of Ghana (WMC).

Political climate

Ghana hosts free and fair elections, and generally, it is an open democracy where civil society is granted freedom of expression. There is no intimidation of the civil society or opposition parties (Interview #12). Yet, women and/or minorities will face challenges in political competition. One of the reasons is the well-rooted practice of gifting public goods to the voters. This could involve development projects and contracts or perhaps providing transportation to voting stations by senior male political candidates. Women's lack of access to resources hinders their ability to campaign in that way. Furthermore, widespread corruption within Ghanaian political institutions and bureaucracies undermines the public's trust in the institutions of democratic governance (Brierley, 2020; Owusu-Mensah and Mathapoly-Codjoe, 2023). As this research is conducted, Ghanaians have been protesting 'abuse of law, power and process' among issues like economic mismanagement, the anti-LGBTQIA+ bill as well as human rights abuses (see #OccupyJulorbiHouse) (Okafor, 2023). This can be understood as a follow-up on the #FixTheCountry protest movement of 2021.

South Africa

Demographical data points

According to Mokoena and van Breda (2021), up to 60% of South African learners drop out of school before finishing their secondary education. While both boys and girls struggle with illness or disability and poor academic performance, many more girls are challenged by lacking school fees (22.5% compared to 15.5% of boys) and other family commitments (13.4% of girls compared to 0.5% of boys) (Department of Statistics South Africa, 2022). Numerous reports show that South Africa is seeing a rise in teenage pregnancies (Barron et al., 2022), yet definitive numbers are difficult to come by. In 2016, 16% of girls aged 15-19 had been pregnant – the same as in 1998 (ibid.: 252). During the COVID-19 crisis, teenage pregnancies had reportedly gone up by nearly 60% (Save the Children, 2021). According to the National Demographic and Household Survey (2016), 99% of the women who use contraception (60% of all women) use modern methods (p. 93). Lack of access to contraceptives is one of the reasons for rising teenage pregnancies during the pandemic. While abortion has been fully legal in South Africa since 1996, access to such services is unequally distributed across the country whereby facilities in rural and more conservative areas may obstruct access to safe abortion based on conscientious objection beyond existing regulation (Favier et al., 2018). Child and early marriage are not fully criminalised in South Africa, but the rates are within 1-4% of all girls (Girls Not Brides, 2018). Sexual and gender-based violence is a major problem in South Africa. While up-to-date records are difficult to obtain, 21.3% of women report having experienced

violence by an intimate partner (UN Women). No nationwide statistics are available for the total number of women who experienced sexual or gender-based violence. That said, reportedly one woman is raped every 3 hours in South Africa, the femicide rate is way beyond the global average and South Africa's rape statistics are supposed to be some of the highest in the world (B. Rapanyane, 2021; Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Govender, 2023).³⁵ Fifty-four and three tenths per cent of women participate in the labour force and 64.9% of men (Department of Statistics South Africa, 2023). Yet more women work in low-paid positions.

Policy and legislative gaps

Regardless of existing legislation, gender-based violence is an area that lacks implementation (Rapanyane, 2021) and that is largely due to shortcomings in the criminal justice system that is failing to hold perpetrators accountable (Maromo, 2019). Not inherently a legislative gap, South Africa has a plural legal system whereby customary law is part of the legal system. According to Nhlapo (2017), numerous judicial decisions on gender equality issues suggest that it is, however, a living law and therefore enforced by society and not by the state. In other words, customary law lies between 'the rule and the fact' (Wael, 2019: 61). According to Wael, there is no doubt that customary laws are gender-biased against women. However, many people prefer to resort to alternative conflict resolution mechanisms over the judicial route. NGOs have taken on some of the work of mediating disputes in South Africa.

According to CEDAW Concluding Observations on South Africa's 5th Periodic Report (2021), the existing Customary Marriages Act allows for child marriage (over the age of 15) with the consent of parents (p. 16). Additionally, South Africa has a Domestic Violence Act (1998) but there is no specific criminal offence of domestic violence, and bills like the Domestic Violence Amendment Bill, the Criminal and Related Matters Bill, and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act await adoption by the government (ibid.: 4). Furthermore, the existing Children's Act allows for virginity testing on girls above the age of 16 which involves invading their privacy.

Major achievements

Since 1994, women's parliamentary participation has been growing to about 40% with the establishment of a 30% voluntary quota (Gouws, 2016: 403–404). South Africa is one of the more pro-queer rights countries in Africa, if not the most open in this regard. Same-sex marriage and relationships are fully legal and any discrimination against these is prohibited (Equaldex). Regardless, South African lesbians are targeted by acts called 'corrective rape' whereby men 'punish' or 'correct' women's queer behaviour (Mwambene and Wheal, 2015).

Civil society mobilisation

South African women's movement has a history of anti-apartheid struggle, and has historically focused on the intersections of race, gender and poverty. That said,

³⁵ Surprisingly no data was found to say how many women have been victims of sexual and gender-based violence in their lifetime.

the broad-based Women's National Coalition, founded in 1992, is considered to have been influential in the transition to democracy (Mkhize and Mgcotyelwa-Ntoni, 2019). VAW has emerged as one of the key focus areas for the women's movement (Mitchell et al., 2017). The National Working Group on Sexual Offences (NWGSO) was formed in 2004 and laid the groundwork for the Shukumisa campaign (Gouws, 2016). Today, Shukumisa is a coalition of 60 organisations working explicitly on sexual violence. The aims of Shukumisa have been the implementation of existing GBV legislation through diverse initiatives like the reintroduction of Sexual Offences Courts, one-stop units for rape victims at police stations (Thuthuzela care centres) and monitors the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act.³⁶

Political climate

While South Africa has been hosting democratic elections since 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) has been in power ever since. Opposition parties are now thought to seek common ground to challenge the ANC stronghold (Magome, 2023). The 'state capture' of South Africa is largely associated with Jacob Zuma's government (2009-2018) whereby the administration sought to increase their control over key state institutions and high-level corruption (Peter et al., 2018). These included the press. While the current government, led by Cyril Ramaphosa, faces many socioeconomic challenges as well as corruption, there's space for free civil society and legislative independence. South Africa has also made headlines due to bouts of xenophobic violence targeting African migrants in the country. This is often due to assumptions and perspectives of foreign Africans as freeloaders on one hand, and as competitors for employment and opportunities on another, not least associating migrants with criminal activity and illegality (Masuku and Nkala, 2023). Finally, President Cyril Ramaphosa took opportunities to address gender-based violence as a Chair of the African Union and by hosting presidential summits on gender-based violence and femicide. South Africa's government has promoted the adoption of the Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls by the African Union.

Annex 3. Mapping global gender policy spaces

Considering the diverse concerns and gender equality priorities of different countries, the below section provides an overview of spaces for dialogue and negotiation. Anchored in the UN system, the below institutions are where countries make political agreements on how to eliminate all discrimination against women.

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Sessions on the UN Convention on the Status of Women (UNCSD) or Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the main intergovernmental body to promote women's rights and gender equality among member states. The follow-ups in CSW, ECOSOC and the UN General Assembly also function as a

³⁶ The website of Shukumisa does not include items after 2018.

reporting of implementation on the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action of 1995 (Hannan, 2013: 78). CSW is a functional commission of ECOSOC.

CSW is made up of representatives from the 45 member states elected by ECOSOC based on equitable geographical distribution: 13 from Africa; 11 from Asia; nine from Latin America and the Caribbean; eight from Western Europe and other states and four from Eastern Europe. Members carry out their duties for four years. The Bureau of the Council prepares the sessions and ensures a successful outcome. The bureau chairs are representatives of the five geographical/regional groups.

The CSW is carried out as annual two-week sessions in New York, UN HQ. Each year carries a theme that will be focused on, such as 'Women in public life – equal participation in decision-making' (2021) or 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age' (2023). In New York, countries negotiate as part of regional groups and these negotiations take place ahead of the plenary (Informal conversation, CSW participant, 5 September 2023). Designated country delegates would then present the agreed position. The main difficulty is in reaching the 'agreed conclusions', as many words and issues are considered to be 'sensitive'. 'Gender' is one of these or a reference to 'occupied territories'. Most of the coalition building, therefore, takes place outside the main event and throughout the year. Regardless, if specific negotiators are locking horns on a language question, it may be suggested they chat over the coffee break and find a solution (Informal conversation, CSW participant, 5 September 2023).

Human Rights Commission (HRC)

Forty-seven UN member states are elected to participate in the HRC, elected by a secret ballot majority vote at the UNGA. Each member stays on the Council for three years with an annual renewal of one-third of the council members (UN Human Rights Council). The regional breakdown is as follows: 13 African states; 13 Asia-Pacific states; eight Latin American and Caribbean states; seven Western European and other states; and six Eastern European states.

The HRC is relevant primarily because this is where the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process is located. The UPR process and shadow reports are useful for identifying country priorities but also for learning what the country delegations leave out from their reports (Interview #8). The system of shadow reports provides a good example of why supporting CSOs is important and how they can use international forums to hold the state accountable. UPR processes are also very much peer-to-peer spaces of negotiation with a lot of political weight, particularly regarding the 'agreed conclusions'. HRC holds three regular sessions a year during which resolutions can be adopted. For instance, 36 resolutions were adopted during the 54th regular session (OHCHR). Women's rights issues were explicitly addressed by the resolutions on unpaid care, maternal morbidity and mortality and education of the girl. In this context, countries can co-sponsor resolutions and be part of drafting the revisions. Additionally, HRC holds special sessions on burning issues such as the human rights impact of the ongoing conflict in Sudan (May 2023).

CEDAW Committee

The CEDAW Committee and its reporting procedures are not particularly relevant for forging international alliances with African countries. The country reports are commented on and provided feedback by a group of experts in the Committee, and not individual member states. Unlike the UPR treaty body, reporting is more expert-led and involves technical feedback (Interview #8). That said, the CEDAW concluding observations and general recommendations are useful for identifying legislative gaps in countries, as well as context-specific concerns regarding women's rights and gender equality.

International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) +30 and Commission on Population and Development (CPD)

ICPD was hosted in Cairo in 1994 and adopted a Programme of Action focusing on reproductive and sexual health and rights. Since then, UNFPA has supported five years of reviews of the implementation of the Programme of Action, ICPD +5; ICPD+10 and so on. Additionally, the Economic and Social Council established the Commission on Population and Development which gathers on an annual basis to review progress made on the Programme of Action. There are 47 members in the Commission serving four years at a time. The Commission produces resolutions, declarations and decisions regarding its agenda, resolutions serving as the 'agreed conclusions' based on consensus. In 2023, consensus was not achieved and therefore, an outcome document was not adopted due to disagreements on the language around 'comprehensive sexual and reproductive education' (United Nations Press, 2023). A recent study indicates the disappearance of language around abortion and comprehensive sexual and reproductive education, and there has been a push to focus on reproductive health from a family values perspective (Gilby et al., 2021). ICPD also addresses issues like FGM and child marriage. Denmark co-hosted the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25: Accelerating the Promise together with Kenya and UNFPA in 2019.

Friends of ...

There are informal formations of UN member states (such as Friends of Gender Parity; Gender Equality; Women, peace and security; ending VAW) that support the development of a particular policy area. Some groups are only convened for a year or two, others have more longevity (Interview #15). Most countries are part of numerous Groups of Friends but the information regarding which countries belong to what groups is not readily available (Interview #8). For instance, 65 countries are part of the WPS Group of Friends, but indeed, finding the list of member countries takes some effort (it can be found at Group of Friend of Women, Peace and Security, 2023). There is also the UNESCO Group of Friends of Gender Equality and The Grand Bargain Friends of Gender Group for which members lists have not been available. There is also a Group of Friends for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls with 94 members and observer states (Group of Friends for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls, 2022). There is also some fatigue among member states regarding these groups as

they all require some level of commitment (Interview #15). In terms of our case study countries, the following information could be found:

Group of Friends on WPS: Mali, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa

Group of Friends on VAW: Mali, Niger, Kenya

Some of the profound conflicts in this gender equality are reflected by these groups. For instance, the UN LGBTI Core Group, to which Denmark belongs, presented general comments during the opening of the CSW67 and subsequently Belarus took the floor on behalf of the UN Group of Friends of the Family (GoFF) which Egypt co-created in 2015. Uganda is the only other case country that is part of GoFF. The politics of group formation and activities is complicated because they may be used both to push particular views vis-à-vis a domestic audience and to signal adherence to views internationally. Although, being almost antagonistic according to their membership in the two above-mentioned groups, Denmark and Egypt may find common interests in relation to other gender-related issues. Not least, Groups of Friends might collectively be open to present more progressive statements than some of its members individually (Interview #15). The internal dynamics of such groups also involve countries who may not want to be seen taking certain issues too far as it might upset some of their regional neighbours. This is sometimes addressed by not listing members of the group in the main document and rather signing with the 'Group of Friends' which obscures the individual country positions to some extent.

Additionally, Groups of Friends have curious internal dynamics. For instance, the LGBTQI Core Group was created and is chaired by Argentina and Netherlands. As such, they have created a rule whereby countries can only join in North-South pairings. It took Denmark some time to join the group as finding a Global South partner may take some effort (Interview #15). While the Groups of Friends do not propose resolutions, the groups are very much about networking and alliance building. During the negotiations, these groups become very active on social media groups (such as WhatsApp or Signal) and actively discuss language and tactics regarding 'hostile' propositions. Beyond Groups of Friends, much of the negotiation takes place outside of the negotiation room: social media groups, corridor talk and bilateral meetings.

UN High-Level Political Forum and Voluntary National Review

The UN High-Level Political Forum (also known as HLPF) first took place in 2013 and replaced the Commission on Sustainable Development. It is a subsidiary of the UN General Assembly and ECOSOC, focusing on reviewing the progress of member states towards sustainable development pertaining to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 5 on gender equality. In 2023, 39 countries presented their voluntary national reviews (VNRs). The HLPF culminates with a Ministerial Declaration (or Political Declaration) which is taken back to member states governments for review. The follow-up and review take place in different forums. One is the Regional Forums for Sustainable Development, including the one convened by the Economic Commission for Africa ahead of the main HLPF. There are goal-specific reviews taking place each

year, where a lead UN agency will convene CSOs and experts at an expert group meeting (UN Women for gender equality). SDG 5 on gender equality was reviewed in 2022.

The structure of HLPF entails a five-day thematic week reviewing progress on SDGs, a three-day ministerial segment where national progress reports are presented, and the adoption of an outcome document. According to Beisheim and Fritzche (2022: 685), there are many side and special events taking place at the margins of HLPF. Reportedly, African countries do not always involve CSOs in the voluntary review process or do it as a formality with little to no space for criticising the state. By the same token, CSOs in Africa that are disengaged from the VNR process do not produce shadow reports (Mirugi-Mukundi, 2019). According to a recent study (Mert and Remling, 2023), the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in three major changes in HLPF practices. For one, many HLPF-related meetings and side events have remained virtual or in a hybrid format. This directly speaks to the second change, the breakdown of informal and aisle diplomacy whereby negotiators, as well as non-state actors, discuss and come to shared understandings. Third, the pandemic affected countries' commitment to SDG achievement negatively, both in rhetoric and practice. That being said, SDG became integrated into recovery efforts.

Generation Equality Forum

The Generation Equality Forum (or GEF) is a UN Women-led initiative to ensure the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action (1995). The launch of GEF was co-hosted by the governments of France and Mexico in 2021. GEF is a five-year initiative. The diverse stakeholders, including states, international organisations, NGOs, CSOs and private companies, are invited to 'make a commitment' for gender equality. To mobilise actors for specific actions they are part of thematic Generation Equality Action Coalitions. The themes are the following, including their African leaders (as of 2021):

- Gender-based violence (Kenya)
- Economic justice and rights (South Africa)
- Bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) (Burkina Faso and Denmark)
- Feminist action for climate justice
- Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality (Rwanda and Tunisia)
- Feminist movements and leadership (Malawi)

The Action Coalition leaders gathered in July 2023 in Rwanda at the Women Deliver Conference. The year 2023 is also the 'midway' of the Generation Equality Forum with stock-taking in September 2023. The main challenge with the Generation Equality Forum is that the decisions, agreements or best practices coming out of it cannot be legitimately referred to at CSW because they have not gone through the due political process, and therefore are not recognised (Interview #8). Since not all states participate and engage with GEF, and certainly not with all the thematic areas, the outcomes of the different clusters are not accepted by UN member states in UN policy forums. Additionally, unlike treaty

bodies, the voluntary nature of GEF undermines the reporting and accountability duties.

Another outcome of the Generation Equality Forum is the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA Compact). The initiative is to launch a Compact Monitoring Framework (CMF) whereby all signatories report back on their activities according to set indicators (The Compact: Women, Peace And Security And Humanitarian Action, 2022). The Compact has diverse board members, representing governments, UN agencies, regional organisations and CSOs. From African governments, the WPS-HA Compact involves Namibia and Sierra Leone; the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS (the AU); and the South Africa-based CSO African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD).

Annex 4. List of interviews

For the purpose of this study, we have anonymised all experts and practitioners who shared their insights.

#	Affiliation	Date
1	Ethiopian CSO	12 January 2021
2	Africa sub-regional women's CSO	10 February 2021
3	Africa regional women's CSO	20 February 2021
4	EU Delegation	17 March 2021
5	Former AUC staff	13 May 2021
6	Egyptian women's CSO 1	22 August 2023
7	Egyptian women's CSO 2	28 August 2023
8	Country Delegation	4 September 2023
9	Gender and development researcher	5 September 2023
10	Ghana researcher	18 September 2023
11	Somalia researcher	21 September 2023
12	Ghanaian gender expert and researcher	22 September 2023
13	Donor affiliated CSO expert	2 November 2023
14	South Sudanese women's CSO	2 November 2023
15	Danish MFA	7 November 2023
16	INGO in Burkina Faso	15 November 2023

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