



United Nations
Global Compact

GENDER EQUALITY IN AFRICAN BUSINESSES BEST PRACTICES



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	04
GENDER EQUALITY IN HEALTH EMERGENCIES: REFLECTIONS ON WOMEN AND COVID-19	05
KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE	07
GOOD PRACTICES ACROSS AFRICA	08
GENDER EQUALITY GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES FOR BUSINESSES IN AFRICA	10



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ABOUT GLOBAL COMPACT LOCAL NETWORKS IN AFRICA

As part of the United Nations Global Compact and the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, Global Compact Local Networks in Africa work with more than 600 companies and stakeholders across Africa to support responsible business practices on the continent.

For almost ten years, the ten Global Compact Local Networks in the Africa region have been working with business to raise awareness and build capacity on gender-equality issues such as gender-based violence, sexual harassment, investing in women's health and women's entrepreneurship. Every year, Local Networks across Africa, in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation, Sustainable Stock Exchanges (SSE) Initiative, United Nations Women, the World Federation of Exchanges and Women in ETFs, organize stock exchange bell ringing events to raise awareness of the business case for women's economic empowerment and opportunities for the private sector to advance gender equality and sustainable development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In Africa, gender equality is an economic issue, as well as a social one. Empowering women in the economy and closing the gender gap in the world of work are key to achieving the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As the engine for jobs, innovation and investment, business has a critical role to play in advancing gender equality and empowering women. Businesses across Africa stand to benefit from the full participation of women in the workplace and many have taken concrete measures to ensure that women are given equal access to economic opportunities on the continent.

Although Africa is leading the global average on women's representation on corporate board and executive committee positions, at 25 and 22 per cent respectively,¹ across the continent women on average earn 32 percent less than men. The situation is even more acute in northern and southern Africa, where men can earn between 200 and 500 per cent more than women.³

Men and women in Africa face complex challenges in the workplace. However, women are disproportionately affected, with significant and often unseen systemic challenges preventing them from achieving their full potential.

Businesses in Africa are increasingly recognizing gender equality, as outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5, as a top global sustainability challenge and consider it an area where they can have a positive impact.⁴ However, more concrete policies and practices geared towards addressing key issues that disproportionately affect women in the workplace need to be mainstreamed to allow women equal opportunities to productive employment opportunities.

It is important to recognize that the fight for gender equality remains as important as ever and business must be at the forefront of addressing the critical social inequality challenges that women face in the workplace, as well as supporting equal opportunities for women to participate in the marketplace and in their communities.

This collection of case studies and business guidelines, compiled by Global Compact Local Networks across Africa, highlights how business and other partners are working to advance gender equality. Including company examples, as well as key resources and relevant gender-equality activities taking place at regional and local levels, this report hopes to inspire and challenge more companies to move from commitment to action and to play a leading role in ensuring that gender equality means business.



Women's Empowerment Principles Gap Analysis Tool training workshop in Lagos, Nigeria. Photo credit: Global Compact Network, Nigeria

1,2,3. World Economic Forum, 'Mind the 100 Year Gap'. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>.

4. UN Global Compact, 'Activities to support advancing the SDGs in Africa'. <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/interactive/sdgs/regions/africa>

GENDER EQUALITY IN HEALTH EMERGENCIES: REFLECTIONS ON WOMEN AND COVID-19

The gender dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic require a unique and tailored approach from business. Since the first cases of the novel coronavirus were reported in Africa in March 2020 and the decisive actions taken by governments to contain the spread of the virus, COVID-19 has had a profound effect on the lives and livelihoods of millions across Africa. However, women have shouldered a much greater burden as a result of the already existing social, cultural and economic inequalities that women and girls face in Africa.

Women frequently make up the majority of the healthcare force in many countries across Africa and, at home, are more likely to be caregivers for the sick, making them three times more likely to be exposed to infectious diseases. This is further exacerbated by national healthcare systems, which rely on women's unpaid caregiving in the home to offset formal health systems, but do not provide adequate protocols, support or protection for home-based care providers during health emergencies.

In addition, the stay-at-home policies and lockdown measures across Africa have had a more pronounced impact on women. Women make up the majority of workers in the informal sector. In sub-Saharan Africa, 89 per cent of women operate in the informal market, increasing their economic vulnerability when infectious disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19, result in quarantine and isolation measures that disrupt the daily subsistence of informal workers who rely on their jobs as street vendors, domestic workers and petty goods and service traders to earn a daily wage.

Furthermore, existing socio-cultural norms that place most of the burden of domestic labour and childcare on women create additional pressures for women in the workplace when it comes to balancing work and family. When schools are closed, this places the burden of care on women who are still required to put in their paid labour time.

At least 31 million women across the continent will face gender-based violence.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the measures taken to protect people and support already constrained health systems across Africa have left many women and girls vulnerable to violence by restricting them to unsafe home environments, exacerbated by increased stress, instability and fear as a result of the virus. The UN Population Fund estimates that due to lockdown measures, it is estimated that at least 31 million women across the continent will face gender-based violence, as was the case during previous health emergencies, such as the Ebola outbreak in West Africa from 2013 to 2015.⁵

In sub-Saharan Africa

89%

of women operate in the informal market, increasing their economic vulnerability.



5. The Conversation, 'Sexual and gender-based violence during COVID-19: lessons from Ebola'.
<https://theconversation.com/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-during-covid-19-lessons-from-ebola-137541>

WOMEN ARE ON THE FRONTLINES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT BUSINESSES TAKE GENDER-INCLUSIVE ACTIONS AND FORMULATE POLICIES THAT WILL ENSURE THAT ALL WORKERS — INCLUDING WOMEN AND GIRLS — ARE ABLE TO EMERGE FROM HEALTH EMERGENCIES BETTER, STRONGER AND MORE RESILIENT.

Both at home and in the workplace, health emergencies such as COVID-19 threaten the lives and livelihoods of all people, but women and girls are disproportionately affected.

It is crucial that all stakeholders respond to the gender dimensions of health emergencies in the design and implementation of their COVID-19 interventions.

Business is no different and has a clear role to play in safeguarding women's health, safety and economic opportunities during health emergencies.

Companies should determine what internal and external resources and capabilities they need in order to support the needs of women during health emergencies, identifying specific and practical interventions they can make across key areas to support female workers, both in and out of the workplace.

Corporate assessments of workers' health and safety needs often focus on traditional workplace issues, and while these critical issues must be addressed, these assessments often overlook the unique issues facing female workers and how they may be impacted by a health emergency.

Businesses should ensure they are incorporating a gender-sensitive approach by including women in the planning and decision-making for health emergency and disease outbreak protocols and responses. They also should provide flexible working arrangements, as well as paid sick and family leave for working parents and caretakers to ensure that women, who primarily take on the role of childcare and caregiving, are able to balance work and family duties.

Businesses can also encourage partnership and collaboration with organizations that provide legal, health and social services to domestic violence survivors. They should also offer safe and discreet reporting mechanisms in the workplace to allow workers to report instances of harassment and violence that health emergencies can exacerbate.

KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

1. INFORMALITY AND UNEMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN WORKERS

Africa boasts the highest rate of female business owners of any region with women owning a third of all businesses across the continent. Despite the high numbers of entrepreneurship, women face a myriad of challenges in moving their business from the informal to formal sector including, lack of financing and skills, and difficulties securing contracts or partnerships to join regional and/or global supply chains. In sub-Saharan Africa, women entrepreneurs are almost twice as likely to be operating in the informal sector, with only 15 per cent of formal-sector businesses having a woman as the managing director.⁶

Outside of entrepreneurship, women often face more challenges when seeking employment in the formal sector. In Mauritius, for example, although women are enrolled in tertiary education at higher rates than men, they represent only 39 per cent of the paid employment force and 59 per cent of the total portion of unemployed. The rate of unemployed educated females in Mauritius is almost double that of unemployed educated males.⁷ When women are locked out of opportunities to grow and sustain their businesses or join the formal workforce, this results in real economic losses.

2. WORKPLACE POLICIES OVERLOOK WOMEN'S WORK OUTSIDE THE OFFICE

Balancing childcare and work is a problem faced by mothers across Africa, many of whom operate without the support of formalized corporate structures and benefits. However, even women who work in the formal sector often find that their companies do not have workplace policies that recognize the extra responsibilities women hold outside the office in their traditional roles as mothers and caregivers. In 2019, only 18 per cent of Global Compact companies in Africa report having policies supporting working parents, such as parental leave, childcare and post-parental leave support, while only 17 per cent offered options to support work/life balance, such as flexible working hours, virtual working and part-time working.⁸

This is significantly lower than the global average.

For women, who predominantly bear the brunt of childcare and family care responsibilities, failure to recognize and accommodate for working parents through flexible working hours, childcare policies and practices often leads to higher levels of staff absenteeism, as well as affecting women's employment and advancement rates and work hours.

3. SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) AGAINST WOMEN

A hostile work environment has negative consequences for all parties involved, but women are especially affected as the main recipients of harassment in the workplace and gender-based violence. Not only can hostile work environments have detrimental effects on women's physical and mental well-being, but they also result in real costs to business, from employee absenteeism and lower productivity to higher employee turnover.

In South Africa alone, gender-based violence costs the country between R28.4 billion and R42.4 billion a year – or between 0.9 and 1.3 per cent of its annual GDP.⁹ Recent awareness-raising and advocacy movements on the prevalence of sexual harassment and GBV across Africa are forcing organizations and business leaders to recognize that gender-based violence and sexual harassment are critical business issues.

However, business has yet to translate that recognition into action. Yet, only 29 per cent of Global Compact companies in Africa have dedicated sexual harassment policies in place.¹⁰

Even when these policies exist, identifying and enforcing compliance can be difficult when women are not given appropriate mechanisms and support structures to call out bad practices for fear of retaliation or negative job performance (e.g. decreased wages or working hours or forced overtime).

6. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), 'GEM 2016/2017 Women's Entrepreneurship Report'. <https://www.gemconsortium.org/report/gem-20162017-womens-entrepreneurship-report>.

7. UNDP Country Office in Mauritius and Seychelles (2017), 'Addressing Gender Equality Challenges'.

8. UN Global Compact, 'UN Global Compact Progress Report 2019'. <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/5716>

9. KPMG, 'Too Costly to Ignore: The Economic Impact of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa'. <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/za/pdf/2017/01/za-Too-costly-to-ignore.pdf>.

10. UN Global Compact, 'UN Global Compact Progress Report 2019'. <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/5716>

GOOD PRACTICES ACROSS AFRICA

It is imperative that business policies integrate a gendered lens moving forward and capitalise on existing best practices to support women's empowerment and gender equality. So what can businesses in Africa do to ensure that they are taking meaningful action towards addressing key gender imbalances in the workplace?

1. TARGET WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES

Businesses should look at opportunities to invest in women's economic empowerment and advance gender equality across their full value chains, from improving conditions for women workers, challenging restrictive gender stereotypes through marketing and advertising efforts, to procuring from women-owned businesses. Data from the first year of the Women's Empowerment Principles Gap Analysis Tool shows that few businesses in Africa are effectively implementing gender strategies across their businesses and value chains.¹¹ Businesses in Africa are thus missing the chance to create additional opportunities for leadership through improved performance. This could include setting concrete goals and targets for sourcing from female suppliers and offering business skills training or gender-sensitive credit and lending solutions to women entrepreneurs.

Two positive examples from Africa are:

RAWBANK
(DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
OF CONGO)

RAWBANK is the largest commercial bank in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The company has created training programmes to educate female entrepreneurs on the value of their newest financial service: leasing. These programmes are tailor-made to better understand the potential benefits and anticipate the different concerns for the women they are helping. When they make use of these leasing opportunities, female entrepreneurs not only gain access to enough capital for financial independence, but also receive support to move out of the informal economy.

YOUTH-IN
(MOROCCO)

Youth-In is a Moroccan-based social-engineering consulting firm that focuses on empowering female entrepreneurs in rural communities. Women living in the Chichaoua province in southern Morocco are forced to travel many kilometres a day to distribute their products because of the reluctance of their own village leaders and spouses to help. Youth-In established a digital incubator to assist women in the region with marketing and distribution activities. This allows female entrepreneurs greater opportunities to enter new markets, while also saving time and avoiding the logistical constraints of travelling.



Companies in Accra take part in gender-equality training. Photo credit: Global Compact Network, Ghana

11. UN Global Compact, 'Women's Empowerment Principles Global Trends Report 2018'. <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/5615>

2. SUPPORT FLEXIBLE WORK AND CHILDCARE POLICIES

Given that research continues to show that companies that attract, retain and promote women employees have been more innovative and are better long-term investments, these are key areas worth attention from businesses. Companies in Africa must take cultural norms and traditional practices into account, allowing for appropriate and generous childcare and maternity leave policies. When there is a strong cultural expectation for women to care for their children, This provides companies the opportunity to offer serious business benefits through employee-supported childcare, attracting top female talent, as well as lower costs of employee turnover and absenteeism. Childcare options can range from low-cost interventions, such as negotiating discounts with external childcare facilities for employees, to more resource-intensive policies and practices, such as on-site crèches.

However, the effects show that when businesses invest in childcare, it is not only good for parents, but for the business as well, as in the cases below.

EAST AFRICA BREWERIES LIMITED (KENYA)

East Africa Breweries Limited (EABL) (Kenya) followed suit when their parent company, Diageo PLC, made the move to offer six months paid maternity leave and one month paid paternity leave for new parents. The policy took effect at EABL in July 2019, after it was decided that the previous time of three months was too short. This was especially true for new mothers working in sales, a department that did not have a private space for women to pump breast milk, as in the corporate offices. The Human Resources department was able to convince the EABL board that the a six-month maternity leave policy would directly benefit the company, as employees from different departments would be able to temporarily work in the new parent's position. Not only did this change give new parents the rest they needed, but it also offered valuable opportunities for employees to diversify their professional work experience.

BEWSYS (GHANA)

As an Information Technology (IT) company, Bewsys (Ghana) recognized the low female representation in their core software engineering department due to inherent and systemic gender inequalities that exist in the field, starting from education into employment. This disparity also affected women in real economic terms as on average, those employed in core services such as software engineering had a higher income than those in the support services sector, which was majority female. To ensure equal gender representation among its core staff, the company became more intentional in its hiring processes to increase the number of female engineers. To further create pathways for women to apply, the company adopted remote and flexible working policies for its engineering department in 2019 and has since expanded the policy to all departments in 2020. As a result of these interventions, Bewsys has increased representation of females in its engineering department to 40 percent in 2020.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES (WEPS)

The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) is a joint initiative of UN Women and the UN Global Compact that provides a holistic framework for corporate action on empowering women in the workplace, marketplace and community. As of 2020, over 3,500 global business leaders have signed the CEO Statement of Support for the WEPs.

Find out more at www.empowerwomen.org



3. DEVELOP GENDER-SENSITIVE TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND CULTURE

Business leaders have an effective role to play against gender-based violence. Businesses can consider establishing a contact person, for example, from the human resources team, for employees to report issues of violence and ensure the safety and privacy of staff seeking support. It is important that businesses disseminate information about available social support services that exist for victims and survivors of GBV. Companies across Africa should be looking to apply a gender perspective to their employee engagement efforts, integrating gender considerations into their human rights and compliance procedures and mechanisms. Specific policies that focus on harassment and workplace violence should be developed and should detail what is considered harassment and workplace hostility. It is also important for businesses to hold regular and compulsory training for both men and women on how to identify and address these issues. Additionally, formal structures in the workplace, such as women's mentoring and leadership groups, can ensure that women are sufficiently represented and have a voice to make sure their rights are not violated and that effective solutions are identified, as in the three cases below.

LAFARGE AFRICA PLC (NIGERIA)

Lafarge Africa plc (Nigeria) has created specialised mentorship and training programmes for female employees to address disproportionate gender representation in the male-dominated industry of manufacturing. The company regularly organizes sessions for trailblazing women engineers in the industry to speak at their locally organised staff events, in addition to ensuring gender-diversified graduate training programmes and other corporate social responsibility interventions.

DISTELL (SOUTH AFRICA)

Distell (South Africa) created the Gender Flagship Programme to encourage a working culture that would effectively attract and retain talented female employees. The programme was created to allow for greater socio-economic opportunities for women both inside and outside of the Distell value chain. This ranges from recognising female leadership and promoting women's empowerment within the company to facilitating harm-reduction projects for the wider community on fetal alcohol syndrome prevention.

ANGLOGOLD ASHANTI (SOUTH AFRICA)

In an industry where gender-based violence is prevalent, mining company AngloGold Ashanti (South Africa) has taken a holistic approach through a series of mitigating measures in response to abuse prevention and survivor support. The company offers a 24-hour employee assistance programme where employees can call in to be connected to a social worker who can counsel them on their experiences and the trauma they have gone through. Through their Women in Mining programme, the company ensures the safety of their female employees in the workplace, implementing a "buddy" system to protect female miners working underground against violence and harassment. At the community level, the company works closely with police services and the Department of Correctional Services to address challenges where women and children are affected by domestic violence and with local NGOs that provide support to survivors and their families.



Ring the Bell for Gender Equality event at Nairobi Stock Exchange. Photo credit: Global Compact Network Kenya

GENDER EQUALITY GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES FOR BUSINESSES IN AFRICA

1

THE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES GAP ANALYSIS TOOL (WEPS TOOL) HELPS COMPANIES TO IDENTIFY STRENGTHS, GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THEIR PERFORMANCE ON GENDER EQUALITY.



for improvement, learn about best practices on gender equality globally, set concrete goals and targets, and measure progress over time and benchmark their own practices against their peers and industry standards.

The WEPs Tool is a free, user-friendly and strictly confidential online platform that helps companies to assess their current policies and programmes, highlight areas for improvement and identify opportunities to set future corporate goals and targets. Results are provided in a concise and clear format, so that companies can easily identify areas

The WEPs Gender Gap Analysis Tool is available at www.weps-gapanalysis.org or reach out to the Global Compact Local Network in your country to learn more about training workshops on the tool.

2

TARGET GENDER EQUALITY IS A GENDER-EQUALITY ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME FOR PARTICIPATING COMPANIES OF THE UN GLOBAL COMPACT.



TARGET
GENDER
EQUALITY



Through facilitated performance analysis, capacity-building workshops, peer-to-peer learning and multi-stakeholder dialogue at the country level, Target Gender Equality supports companies engaged with the UN Global Compact

in setting and reaching ambitious corporate targets for women's representation and leadership, starting with board and executive management levels.

Companies participating in Target Gender Equality have the opportunity to deepen implementation of the Women's Empowerment Principles and strengthen their contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 5, which calls for equal representation, participation and leadership for women in business globally. Companies are equipped with the latest data and research supporting the business case for gender equality and gain insights from United Nations partners and experts on how to accelerate progress on gender equality. Currently running in Kenya in 2020, the programme will expand to more countries across Africa in 2021.

Target Gender Equality Quiz

Is your company's response to COVID-19 gender-responsive? The impacts of COVID-19 are hitting women disproportionately hard. Before the onset of COVID-19, global estimates suggested that it would take more than 250 years – or ten generations – to achieve economic equality between women and men.

To avoid backtracking on progress that has been made and further widening the global gender gap, COVID-19 response and recovery efforts must recognize and address differential impacts on women and girls.

A ten-question quiz has been developed to help draw attention to the questions businesses should consider and actions they can take to ensure a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive response to COVID-19.

The quiz can be found at https://unglobalcompact.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_aUZOF7TfeRGcvLx

3

THE WEST AFRICA GENDER EQUALITY (WAGE) INITIATIVE OFFERS TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR COMPANIES IN NIGERIA AND GHANA TO SET MEANINGFUL TARGETS ON WOMEN'S EQUAL AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKPLACE.



The aim of the initiative is for companies to identify leadership practices on gender equality and identify common challenges across the West African region to tackle together. Interested companies can reach out to Global Compact Networks in [Ghana](#) and [Nigeria](#) for more information.

THE TEN PRINCIPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL COMPACT

HUMAN RIGHTS

- 1 Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and
- 2 make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

LABOUR

- 3 Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
- 4 the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
- 5 the effective abolition of child labour; and
- 6 the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

ENVIRONMENT

- 7 Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
- 8 undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and
- 9 encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

ANTI-CORRUPTION

- 10 Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL COMPACT

As a special initiative of the UN Secretary-General, the United Nations Global Compact is a call to companies everywhere to align their operations and strategies with ten universal principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. Launched in 2000, the mandate of the UN Global Compact is to guide and support the global business community in advancing UN goals and values through responsible corporate practices. With more than 10,000 companies and 3,000 non-business signatories based in over 160 countries, and more than 60 Local Networks, it is the largest corporate sustainability initiative in the world.

For more information, follow [@globalcompact](#) on social media and visit our website at [unglobalcompact.org](#).



United Nations
Global Compact

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The Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact are derived from: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption.