



“Pandemic” in a Pandemic: Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality is a prevailing global discourse and is particularly critical for Africa a continent drowned in patriarchy. Attempts are continually being made especially by gender inequality-conscious leadership in Africa to adopt international policies and implement national policies to promote gender parity. While African countries attained different levels of progress towards gender parity with these policies, the coronavirus pandemic that began in 2019 introduced another dimension to the gender equality debate globally. This study using the qualitative research method through pieces of literature analyzed the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality in Africa. It explored the potential for attaining gender equality in Africa by the years 2030 and 2063, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063, respectively. It examined how COVID-19 exacerbated the inequalities amongst genders in comparison with the state of gender equality before COVID-19. The study further evaluated the role of COVID-19 in the state of affairs of gender roles, especially in attaining gender equality. The paper went ahead to discuss how gender equality can be improved during a crisis. The paper argued that the pandemic had magnified and exacerbated gender disparities in Africa, affecting various aspects of women’s lives. Furthermore, it was discovered that this effect has caused setbacks in the advancement towards SDGs 2030 and Agenda 2063. Issues such as gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, and maternal mortality rates have experienced a notable increase. Therefore, in addressing these disparities, the paper recommends countries build equitable healthcare systems, create gender-disaggregated data production, implement policies to support women in the formal sector in managing remote work while balancing their domestic responsibilities and adopt gender budgeting practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a prevailing global discourse and is particularly critical for Africa, a country drowned in patriarchy. Hence, African leaders have made a conscious attempt to bridge the gap by adopting and implementing international and national policies to address gender disparity such as “the African Union Gender Policy, the South African National Gender Policy Framework, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the women in Africa, Agenda 2063, the Kenyan National Policy on Gender and Development, Nigeria’s National Gender

Policy, the National Commission for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Morocco.”¹ While some African nations have made significant strides toward achieving gender equality in certain areas, gender disparity continues to persist across the continent. Notably, South Africa and Rwanda have seen a 15% and 27% increase, respectively, in women's representation in middle management roles.² Egypt, Liberia and Guinea have made substantial progress by doubling their scores in terms of legal protection for women.³ African countries have also witnessed substantial gains in girls' enrolment in primary and secondary schools. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the results gotten with gender equality.⁴

The novel SARS coronavirus disease (COVID-19 virus) which was discovered in Wuhan, China has posed unprecedented challenges to global health systems and economies as Nations had to come up with policies and measures to curtail the virus. Some of the measures included working from home, lockdown, closure of borders, etc.⁵ However, the footprint of the virus did not go unnoticed as it affected the various spheres of society such as the socio-economic interest of the society, migration, trading and investment, etc. It also became more evident in the intricate web of gender dynamics.

Historically, epidemics and other intricate emergencies disproportionately affect women and girls, heightening their susceptibility to various forms of harm like economic insecurity, gender-based violence, social isolation, etc. For instance, during the Ebola Outbreak of 2014-2016 in West Africa, 80% of survivors of gender-based violence [GBV] were denied assistance at health clinics in Liberia.⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic was not any different as it was termed to be a crisis that needed urgent attention as its impact on women emerges as a critical dimension that demands scrutiny. On this note, the paper chooses to highlight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality in Africa using a qualitative content analysis approach. The article answers questions on how COVID-19 has affected gender equality. The study addresses the state of the continent's gender equality before COVID-19, As well as the aftermath following COVID-19. This article can be used to inform practice as policymakers can use the findings of the article to better understand gender equality and how to tackle gender disparity during crises, epidemics, and pandemics.

METHODOLOGY

The study in getting robust information and achieving a conclusive finding relied on qualitative methodology. The data collection process centred on the utilization of secondary data. A thorough examination and analysis of various relevant literature were conducted through the content analysis approach, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the subject matter.

Contextualizing Gender Equality

Gender equality is when women, men, boys, and girls of all classes and races have equal access and rights to freedom, resources, values, and opportunities.⁷ It is a situation where people irrespective of their gender identity are free to develop their abilities, freely interact, and take part in all facets of life, such as education, employment, healthcare, politics, and social interactions without being discriminated against or placed at a disadvantage. However, achieving gender equality involves

¹ AUGP, “African Union Gender Policy,” 2009,

https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender/African_Union_Gender_Policy_2009.pdf; WORLD BANK, “Assessing the Damage: Early Evidence on Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis on Girls and Women in Africa,” 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2022/05/25/assessing-the-damage-early-evidence-on-impacts-of-the-covid-19-crisis-on-girls-and-women-in-africa>.

² Karabo Mokgonyana, “Gender Equality in Africa Is Really ‘300 Years Away,’” *Mail & Guardian*, March 27, 2023, <https://mg.co.za/thought-leader/opinion/2023-03-27-gender-equality-in-africa-is-really-300-years-away/>.

³ Lohini Moodley et al., “The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Africa,” *McKinsey Global Institute*, 2019.

⁴ Anuoluwapo A Durokifa, “COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Achieving SDG5 in Africa,” *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development* 10, no. 3 (2021): 55.

⁵ Durokifa Anuoluwapo Abosede and Afolabi Ajadi, “COVID-19 Vaccines in Africa: Challenges and Implications for the Future,” *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, no. 11 1 (2022): 16–27.

⁶ Charlotte M Roy et al., “Impact of COVID-19 on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Services in Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and South Africa: A Cross-Sectional Survey,” *Frontiers in Global Women's Health* 2 (2022): 780771.

⁷ UNFPA, “Gender Equality,” 2023, [https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-equality#:~:text=Gender equality is%2C first and, and opportunities to exercise control](https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-equality#:~:text=Gender%20equality%20is%20first%20and,opportunities%20to%20exercise%20control).

challenging societal norms and stereotypes about gender roles particularly towards women. According to a study conducted by ILO, Women often find themselves in less advantageous positions compared to men.⁸ In Africa especially compared to other regions, the unique cultural, social, economic, and religious factors place women and girls in disadvantaged positions. Within numerous societies in Africa, women are frequently encouraged to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers ahead of pursuing education or career aspirations while men are expected to be the primary breadwinner and decision-makers in the household. This has led to widespread gender-based discrimination in access to education, leadership, employment, physical assets, and other opportunities.

Apart from these, there are also issues such as gender-based violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation with women and girls at the receiving end.⁹ However, there have been perceptions that women are the only ones who seem to be benefitting more from the “gender equality struggle” as many of the policies set up are contextualized to address women’s issues. However, this is understandable since women have played a pivotal role in advancing and fighting for gender equality initiatives even though both men and women face inequalities. For instance, men face issues such as societal pressure, lower life expectancy, bad health and rigid gender norms, parenting and caregiving, education, mental health support, etc.

The notion of gender equality is to ensure individuals of all genders have equal rights, opportunities, and treatment. It does not involve sidelining any particular gender. However, in the context of this study, gender equality will be evaluated through a women-centred perspective, recognizing that women and girls are more likely to be disproportionately affected by challenges, crises, violence, and gender discrimination.

Gender Equality’s Position Before COVID-19 in Africa

The female gender in Africa like the rest of the world has a higher representation of people.¹⁰ However, they are the most sidelined and marginalized. Durokifa categorized the disparity women in Africa faced into three primary domains: “violence against women and girls, gender inequality in decision-making, organizations, and governance, as well as health-related mortality and morbidity.”¹¹ It is not surprising that women have played a pivotal role in driving the development and implementation of gender equality, strategies, and policies. Thus, policies such as the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) now Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Agenda 2063, and other national policies have been implemented to drive the actualization of gender equality. An act that had yielded results even if no big steps had been recorded. For instance, women’s participation in leadership roles has witnessed a change although, it can still be recorded as minute in comparison to other countries in the world. However, in African standards, a change is evolving. In North Africa, the percentage of parliamentary seats held by women increased from 4% in 2000 to 25% in 2015 while in Sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of seats rose from 13% in 2000 to 23% in 2015.¹² In South Africa and Rwanda, the number of women in middle management roles increased significantly. With 15% in South Africa and 27% in Rwanda.¹³

Significant advancements have been made in achieving gender parity in primary school enrollment. In 2008, there were 91 girls for every 100 boys in primary schools, a notable increase from the 85 girls in 1999.¹⁴ Similarly, there has been a rise in the number of women participating in the formal economy compared to previous years. Concerning legal protection, Egypt has tripled its

⁸ ILO, “Gender and Development,” 2017, <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/economic-and-social-development/gender-and-development/lang-en/index.htm>.

⁹ Anuoluwapo Abosede Durokifa, “Navigating beyond the Crossroads: A Gendered Approach in Actualizing Agenda 2063,” *Gender and Behaviour* 17, no. 2 (2019): 12818–32.

¹⁰ Durokifa, “COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Achieving SDG5 in Africa.”

¹¹ Durokifa, “Navigating beyond the Crossroads: A Gendered Approach in Actualizing Agenda 2063.”

¹² Ikubaje-Aina, “Women’s Empowerment and Development in Africa: Strides and Tides,” *Year of Women’s Empowerment and Development towards Africa’s Agenda 2063* (2015): 17–21.

¹³ Moodley et al., “The Power of Parity: Advancing Women’s Equality in Africa.”

¹⁴ WORLD BANK, “Assessing the Damage: Early Evidence on Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis on Girls and Women in Africa .”

numbers over time, while Guinea and Liberia have seen their scores on women's legal protection double.¹⁵ The maternal mortality rate has been reduced by 9% in Algeria and 58% in Botswana. Despite these gains, African women are still faced with some harsh realities. A study conducted in North Africa by McKinsey Institute unveils that 53% of the female population successfully completed tertiary education; however, merely 9% of the women manage to secure middle management positions. Also, there is violence against women. While this appears to be a global scourge, Africa's record is worse than the global average.¹⁶ Additionally, there exists an unequal distribution of unpaid caregiving and domestic responsibilities, discrimination in public leadership roles, and a higher prevalence of child marriage in West and Central Africa compared to Southern and East Africa. Likewise, the continent has the highest average of maternal mortality.

These negating standpoints toward gender equality have been attributed to religion, culture, and tradition.¹⁷ According to Klingorova and Havlicek, religion in Africa through its doctrines imposes, encourages, and promotes a patriarchal setting.¹⁸ For instance, a study conducted by Irin revealed how a preacher of the word in Nairobi emphasizes to its congregation the absurdity of granting women equal opportunities as men.¹⁹ A belief that impedes the actualization of gender equality. Culturally, African doctrines and practices promote inequality toward women. According to Ndulo, in African customary law, a married woman is like an unpaid servant of her husband who is expected to cook, nurture the kids, and take care of him.²⁰ African culture is curated in a way that intensifies gender gaps through restrictive cultural practices like early marriage, assault, denial of education to girls, and preference of boys for girls. For example, In Namibia, there exists a practice known as "okujepisa okazendu," which involves offering one's wife to a guest as a form of entertainment. Meanwhile, in Cameroon, there is a tradition of breast ironing aimed at inhibiting a girl's physical development. In Malawi, there is the cultural practice of training teenage girls in sex techniques to satisfy men. Also, there are people set in their patriarchal minds who will not mind victimizing their partners over birthing female children over males.²¹

Overall, Africa's journey towards gender parity has witnessed progress compared to past years. According to the 2019 Gender Index Report, the equality index score gave an average of 48.6% equating to an overall gender gap of 51.4%.²²

Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality

COVID-19 not only affected lives and livelihoods but also exacerbated pre-existing inequalities with gender disparities as the focal point. Based on research conducted by the McKinsey Institute, women are found to be 1.8 times more susceptible to crises compared to men.²³ Hence, there is a risk that the little progress made in terms of equality could go into reverse. In Africa, women make up over 50% of the continent's total population and also contribute more to the high-labour market participation although, many of these women work in the informal economy setting. In other words, women were more likely to be at the disproportionate end of the pandemic output. Thus, this section delves into the impact of the pandemic on women highlighting areas such as health, economic well-being, education, and gender-based violence.

¹⁵ Moodley et al., "The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Africa."

¹⁶ Nobuhle Judy Dlamini, "Gender-Based Violence, Twin Pandemic to COVID-19," *Critical Sociology* 47, no. 4–5 (2021): 583–90.

¹⁷ Claudine Anita Hingston, "Towards Gender Equality in Africa: A Review of Aspiration 6 in Agenda 2063," *Journal of African Union Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 39–49; Durokifa, "COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Achieving SDG5 in Africa."

¹⁸ Kamila Klingorová and Tomáš Havlíček, "Religion and Gender Inequality: The Status of Women in the Societies of World Religions," *Moravian Geographical Reports* 23, no. 2 (2015): 2–11.

¹⁹ IRIN, "Why Involving Men Is Crucial," 2011, www.irinnews.org/report/93870/gender-equality-why-involvingmen-crucial.

²⁰ M. Ndulo, "African Customary Law, Customs, and Women's Rights," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, Vol. 18, Iss. 1, Article 5 (2011). Available at: <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijgls/vol18/iss1/5>

²¹ Durokifa, "Navigating beyond the Crossroads: A Gendered Approach in Actualizing Agenda 2063"; P Obaji, "No Girl Is Safe: The Mothers Ironing Their Daughter's Breast," Aljazeera, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com>.

²² ADBG and UNECA. "Statistical and Methodological Report. African Gender Index report 2019". 2020 <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-2019-methodological-and-statistical-report>

²³ Anu Madgavkar et al., "COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Countering the Regressive Effects," 2020.

Health Care: One of the primary gender disparities during the pandemic was limited access to healthcare. Women in Africa often face barriers to accessing quality healthcare, and these challenges have been further intensified by the COVID-19 crisis. According to a study by UN Women in partnership with UNFPA and other agencies in the East and Southern Africa region, “the Rapid Gender Assessments” [RGAs], all countries in East and Southern Africa except Malawi suggested that women were more likely to be covered by medical aid. Also, the maternal mortality ratio went a lot higher than it was.²⁴ Another study by AU revealed nearly 50% of its respondents who needed care during this period were delayed in accessing healthcare services.²⁵ In Kenya, healthcare services for pregnant women, chronic related sicknesses, and family planning were reported to have experienced disruptions since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁶ In Nigeria, antenatal and child immunization dropped by half.²⁷ Likewise, in Gambia, the maternal and child health target of immunization was reduced drastically.²⁸

Economic Wellbeing: In Africa, the informal sector is a significant source of employment for both women and men. However, women are overly represented in this sector which is more susceptible to economic shock. In other words, they are more vulnerable to job losses and reduced economic activities all of which impact women’s financial security. As a result of the imposed lockdown due to COVID-19 and the economic strain that came with it, there was increased unemployment, declined income resources, and access to social support. With women bearing more of the brunt. According to the World Bank, more women than men reportedly lost their jobs.²⁹ Another survey conducted by UNWESA revealed that over 60% of individuals, both women and men, in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, and South Africa experienced complete income loss or a reduction in their earnings due to the pandemic.³⁰ This situation created a toxic environment for perpetrators and triggered individuals in poor and disadvantaged homes to force their wards into early and forced marriages. While some became recipients of adolescent pregnancies based on “getting help”. In Larson’s study, a 15-year-old girl participant revealed that she was forced into an early marriage as a result of her family's economic difficulties. Another respondent of a similar age described her situation where she was married off in exchange for a 50-kilogram bag of rice.³¹

Education: The closure of schools and the transition to remote learning amid the pandemic have had a disproportionate impact on girls' access to education, thereby making them more vulnerable to risks like domestic violence, sexual exploitation, early marriage, etc. A study of 193 countries by the World Bank believed that women and girls were 1-21 times more prone to discontinuing their education than boys men and boys.³² Additionally, during the school closure in West and Central Africa, 60% of girls experienced a lack of learning materials, as opposed to 44% of boys.³³ In the East and Southern African countries, studies reveal that a substantial figure of girls/women could not keep up as the majority of the schooling activities were moved online.³⁴

It is worth noting that most girls in Africa are frequently expected to assume household duties, including caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings within the household. Hence, unsurprising

²⁴ UNWESA, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Men. Nairobi: UN Women and UNFPA, East and Southern Africa Regional Office*, 2021.

²⁵ WHO, “Responding to COVID-19 in Africa: Using Data to Find a Balance - Part II,” Partnership for Evidence-Based COVID-19 Response, 2020, https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2020-09/PERC_RespondingtoCovidData.pdf.

²⁶ UNWESA, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Men. Nairobi: UN Women and UNFPA, East and Southern Africa Regional Office*.

²⁷ WANEP, “The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Women: Lessons from the Ebola Outbreak in W/Africa,” 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sierra-leone/impact-covid-19-pandemic-women-lessons-ebola-outbreak-wafrica>.

²⁸ WANEP, “The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Women: Lessons from the Ebola Outbreak in W/Africa.”

²⁹ WORLD BANK, “Assessing the Damage: Early Evidence on Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis on Girls and Women in Africa .”

³⁰ UNWESA, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Men. Nairobi: UN Women and UNFPA, East and Southern Africa Regional Office*.

³¹ Krista Larson, “Families Marry off Daughters To Ease Finances Amid COVID-19,” 2020, <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/families-marry-daughters-ease-finances-amid-covid-19>.

³² WORLD BANK, “Assessing the Damage: Early Evidence on Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis on Girls and Women in Africa .”

³³ WORLD BANK, “Assessing the Damage: Early Evidence on Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis on Girls and Women in Africa .”

³⁴ UNWESA, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Men. Nairobi: UN Women and UNFPA, East and Southern Africa Regional Office*.

with UNWESA's findings that during the pandemic, many girls are being put to use compared to boys in unpaid domestic and caregiving tasks thereby impacting their access to education.

Seemingly, gender disparities in access to technology increased domestic responsibilities and safety concerns have led to a decline in girls' school attendance and a potential increase in dropout rates hindering their future opportunities.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): The COVID-19 crisis intensified gender-based violence across Africa. Due to the stressors of the pandemic, inclusive of lockdowns and confinement, a conducive environment was set up for GBV to thrive. According to the UN, cases of domestic violence increased by 20% during the pandemic.³⁵ For instance, in South Africa, during the initial lockdown that commenced in March 2020, the police received reports of 2,300 cases of gender-based violence.³⁶ In Uganda, 1,967 cases were reported between January and April 2020.³⁷ In Nigeria, there was a 60% surge in domestic violence against women, a 30% increase in sexual violence, and a 10% rise in physical child abuse during the same period.³⁸ In Bangui, gender-based violence increased by 69%.³⁹ In Egypt, 36% of women were the only ones who reported having experienced violence with many not coming out due to its social norms practices, and legal system.⁴⁰ In a study conducted by the World Bank, 68% of respondents in Ethiopia and 81% in Uganda believed that GBV has increased since the start of the pandemic. Additionally, a mapping conducted by UNWESA revealed that violence against women with disabilities is even more prevalent than among other groups of women.⁴¹ Undoubtedly, these figures are high because the lockdown and isolation policies set up in many countries resulted in women spending more time with their abusers. Access to support services was also compromised, making it increasingly challenging for women to extricate themselves from these situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving Gender Equality Amidst Crisis: Lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic

During crises, women and children are the most affected as they are at greater risk of violence and abuse. Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and aggravated existing gender inequalities while worsening previous results towards the actualization of Gender Equality as emphasized by SDGs and Agenda 2063. Hence, this section emphasizes the lessons learned from the pandemic on how to improve gender equality in the face of future crises. These are:

1. **Building Equitable Health Care System:** Lessons from COVID-19 underscore the need for gender-sensitive health care policies. Women's access to sexual and reproductive health services must be guaranteed during crises. Telemedicine should be promoted and made more accessible to people, especially to those areas where there is limited access to health care facilities.
2. **Inclusive workforce compensation:** A significant number of essential workers are women, and as reiterated in the previous section, many of the women lost their jobs while many became tasked with caregiving responsibilities. Hence, for women in the workforce, there should be adequate protection for women at work, fair compensation, and access to affordable childcare.

³⁵ Durokifa, "COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Achieving SDG5 in Africa."

³⁶ N. Lefafa, "Covid-19 Lockdown Provides 'Perfect Storm' for SA's GBV Crisis," The South African Health News Service, 2020, <https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/global-literature-on-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov/resource/pt/covidwho-1098319>.

³⁷ Luttamaguzi John Bosco and Nannozi Susanie Ggoobi, "Covid-19 and the Rising Levels of Domestic Violence in Uganda," 2020.

³⁸ T. Salau, "Addressing Surging Gendered Violence in Lockdown Nigeria," Women's Media Centre Women Under Siege, June 17, 2020; Ejiro Umukoro, "Source: Pulitzer Centre, 'Amidst COVID-19 Lockdown, Nigeria Sees Increased Sexual and Gender Violence, June 2020.," Pulitzer Center, June 5, 2020, <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/amidst-covid-19-lockdown-nigeria-sees-increased-sexual-and-gender-violence#:~:text=The Lagos State government-run,have yet to fully reopen.>

³⁹ UNDP, "In CAR, Violence against Women Is Surging amid COVID-19 Pandemic, Study Finds," Relief Web, July 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/car-violence-against-women-surging-amid-covid-19-pandemic-study>.

⁴⁰ Fotini Christia, Horacio Larreguy, and Elizabeth Parker-Magyar, "Connecting Egyptian Women to Gender-Based Violence Resources via Social Media during Covid-19," 2021, <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/connecting-egyptian-women-gender-based-violence-resources-social-media-during-covid-19>.

⁴¹ UNWESA, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Men. Nairobi: UN Women and UNFPA, East and Southern Africa Regional Office.*

While for women in the informal sector, the Government together with the private sector should assist in providing grants to women as well as subsidized loans with viable requirements.

3. **Holistic Gender Data:** There should be an investment in gender-disaggregated data production. This will make it easy to track disparities and inform/influence policies during a crisis.
4. **Gender-Responsive Policies:** Governments should develop and implement gender-responsive policies that address the unique needs of women and vulnerable groups in crises. For instance, family-friendly policies to support workers experiencing an increased childcare burden, labour market policies to protect workers and their jobs, etc.
5. **Inclusive Education:** This has been one of the key targets towards actualizing Gender Equality under SDG's and Agenda 2063. Hence, Governments have put in place different strategies to achieve this such as giving a quota for both boys and girls that is to be met by schools. "The education for all" slogan, amongst others are the many ways the government seeks to ensure that boys and girls have access to quality education. Ironically, there is still more to be done when it comes to this aspect. In many African countries, girls still face system barriers to education as a result of poverty, cultural norms, and discrimination.⁴² Therefore, governments should come up with initiatives that challenge stereotypes, and discrimination. They can come up with gender-sensitive curricula, making education mandatory and accessible to certain ages, and implementing punitive measures for people who fail to adhere to giving their wards irrespective of gender, educational opportunities.
6. **Gender-Budgeting:** The "Beijing Platform for Action" adopted in 1995 explicitly addressed gender budgeting as one way of securing equality between men and women. According to the Council of Europe, "Gender-budgeting is a gender-based assessment of budgets incorporating a gendered perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures to promote gender equality."⁴³

Gender- budgeting is a proactive approach to addressing gender inequalities within government fiscal policies and expenditures. This method ensures that public revenues are allocated to meet the unique needs of women and marginalized groups during crises. It allows the government to earmark funds for programs that support women's well-being, address gender-based vulnerabilities, and prioritize healthcare services tailored to women. Furthermore, it fosters awareness about gender disparities within government spending and promotes transparency and accountability in fiscal decisions. It also gives room for the government to prioritize gender-sensitive policies and programs leading to achievable gender equality results.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront and exacerbated gender disparities in Africa, affecting various aspects of women's lives. It has led to retrogression in the progress towards SDGs 2030 and Agenda 2063. Problems such as gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, maternal and mortality rates have witnessed a spike in rate. Therefore, addressing these disparities is not only a matter of social justice but also a fundamental component of an effective pandemic response and recovery. The pandemic has left life-long lessons on how countries can be prepared to address gender-specific needs during a crisis. Thus, the paper presented an actionable recommendation for policymakers, individuals, healthcare professionals, and the society at large to build a more resilient and equitable society. The paper emphasizes that policymakers, governments, and organizations should ensure they prioritize gender-sensitive approaches ensuring that women's needs are met and their rights are protected during and after a crisis. Gender equality is not just a goal but a fundamental requirement for sustainable development in Africa and the globe.

⁴² UNESCO. "Global Education Monitoring Report 2019: Gender report: Building bridges for gender equality, 2019"

⁴³ Dlamini, "Gender-Based Violence, Twin Pandemic to COVID-19."

⁴⁴ Esther Duflo, "Women Empowerment and Economic Development," *Journal of Economic Literature* 50, no. 4 (2012): 1051–79.

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