

Women Pioneering Change: How Their Leadership Fuels SDG Progress

By Pamela Uzoma



Image source: [Women in Africa](#)

Introduction

From local communities to the global stage, African women play a remarkable and leading role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals within the continent¹. This article examines the concept of women leadership and highlighted policies, campaigns, and organizations championed or led by women in key fields, including healthcare, education, economic empowerment, political participation, and ending violence against women.

A Shift in Leadership Paradigm

Throughout history, women have faced diverse barriers and marginalization, but with the paradigm shift, more women are now smashing through these constraints for sustainable development. Not only are they mobilizing the global climate movement, they are also pushing for social protection, and dismantling systemic gender/racial discrimination. Across the continent, studies have shown that women leaders inspire a better future for all². From grassroots activists to heads of states, women are

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs>

² <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/03/ten-african-women-leaders-we-admire>

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demonstrating that their voices and perspectives are essential for building a just and equitable world. Here's a closer look at women at the forefront of the race for SDGs 2030.

Empowerment Through Education

The impact of Women's leadership in Education, a cornerstone of SDG 4, is significant. Angeline Murimirwa (Zimbabwe), the Executive Director of the [Campaign for Female Education \(CAMFED\)](#) been a driving force in advancing SDG 4 in Africa. CAMFED focuses on girls' education and empowerment, especially in rural communities. By providing scholarships, mentorship, and supporting girls' leadership development, CAMFED contributes to improved educational opportunities and outcomes for girls, particularly in countries like Zimbabwe, Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia, and Malawi. Other women-led organizations that push for girls' education, include '[Let Girls Learn](#)' in Kenya, this organization ensures that girls have equal access to learning opportunities.

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment, a central element of gender equality and a core tenet of SDG 8 has experienced major contributions from women as well. Ndidi Nwuneli, a Nigerian, continues challenging Africa's misrepresented image of "Lazy" and "Hungry" through her work. She has established impactful initiatives like Nourishing Africa, Sahel Consulting & Nutrition, AACE Food Processing & Distribution, [LEAP Africa](#), and sits on the board of major organizations, all aimed at empowering African youth through job creation and leveraging the potential of the food and agriculture sectors for prosperity³. Nkem Okocha, founder of [Mamamoni](#), also offers a range of digital financial services to address the needs of underserved women in Nigeria. These services include agency banking (POS services), third-party money transfer, and bills payment.

Advancements in Healthcare and Well-being

The significance of women's leadership reverberates throughout healthcare as well. One of such women leader is Dr. Shivon Byamukama from Rwanda. She leads an organization ([Babyl Rwanda](#)) delivering healthcare through mobile phones to 3,000 Rwandans daily, reducing travel and wait times and enabling anonymous, nonjudgmental consultations on sensitive topics. Her pivotal role contributes to the transformative future of healthcare consumption in her community.⁴ Organizations like the [African Women's Development Fund](#) (AWDF) Led by its CEO, Françoise Moudouthe, have also been instrumental in supporting women's health initiatives across Africa. The organization provides grants to various women-led projects, including those focused on improving healthcare access, maternal and child health, and promoting sexual and reproductive health rights.⁵

³ <https://news.globallandscapesforum.org/52527/8-african-women-shaping-the-future/>

⁴ <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/ideas/articles/5-inspiring-women-rwanda-senegal>

⁵ <https://awdf.org/who-we-are/meet-the-team/>

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A Push to End Violence Against Women

SDG 5 explicitly addresses gender equality and eradicating violence against women. As women-led organizations and movements are at the forefront of challenging gender-based violence, Binta Diao, a native of Senegal whose life was disrupted by child marriage, transformed her destiny with the help of [Tostan](#), an organization also in Senegal. She reclaimed her rights as a woman, became an advocate against harmful practices, started a successful business, and now hosts an educational radio program, using her experiences to empower women and ensure a better future for the next generation. She gained recognition from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for her efforts so far in pushing to end violence against women.⁶

Moreover, Global campaigns like "Me Too" and "One Billion Rising" are also gaining traction in Africa by not just raising awareness about sexual harassment and violence but also advocating for legal changes and policy reforms to protect women's rights in the continent.

Political Participation and Representation

Women's leadership in politics is pivotal for the realization of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Across Africa, Women leaders globally are advocating for policy changes that advance gender equality, human rights, and social justice. An example is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first democratically-elected female president, who guided Liberia through post-war reconciliation and the Ebola Crisis, earning global recognition and a Nobel Peace Prize for empowering women. Today, she remains a powerful advocate for enhancing women's political engagement and inclusion in decision-making⁷. Increased women's representation in parliaments and governments underscores her determination to influence decisions that directly impact women's lives.

The Road Ahead

Women's leadership stands as a driving force in the race toward achieving the SDGs by 2030. From healthcare to education, economic empowerment to eradicating violence, women-led initiatives are steering tangible progress toward gender equality and sustainable development. As we celebrate progress, it is also imperative to recognize the journey ahead and the ongoing challenges in achieving the SDGs in 2030. Societal norms and biases continue to hinder women's full participation in various sectors. To advance women's leadership in the context of the SDGs, there are several pathways to consider; Supporting women's education, promoting gender-inclusive policies, fostering mentorship and networks, amplifying women's voices within the community, and, more importantly, full government participation. Hence, as societies increasingly recognize and harness the potential of women leaders, we move closer to a world where the SDGs are not just impractical concepts but rather a tangible reality founded on principles of equality and active citizenship.

⁶ Ibid 3

⁷ <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/03/ten-african-women-leaders-we-admire>