



Strengthening Women-Led Institutions and Networks in Africa



PRESENTATION COMTENT


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2. Introduction: The Power of the Collective

Africa stands at a critical juncture. While we have made huge progress in democracy and development, persistent challenges weak institutions, corruption, and discriminatory policies continue to hinder sustainable development, especially in our rural settings.

The African proverb says, "If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." For generations, African women have understood this deeply. They have been the backbone of our economies, the custodians of our cultures, and the silent engines of our communities.

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Today, we are not here to speak of women as silent partners. We are here to celebrate and strategize around a powerful force for change: Women-Led Institutions and Networks.

From informal savings circles like Tanzania's VICOPA and Nigeria's Esusu, to formal advocacy groups like the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD), and powerful political networks, these collectives are transforming our continent. They are the structured vehicles through which women pool resources, amplify voices, and create lasting impact.

Our focus today is on how we can actively strengthen these vital institutions to unlock Africa's full potential.



3. Why Women-Led Institutions Matter?



“Strengthening Women-Led Institutions and Networks is not just the right thing to do — it is the SMART thing to do.”

It is the core of sustainable development and inclusive progress. In a world where women and girls still face immense barriers, empowering their leadership is non-negotiable.

Women-led institutions are not just a "nice-to-have"; they are a strategic imperative for Africa's development. Here's why:

- ❖ Drivers of Inclusive Economies: When women have access to capital and markets through cooperatives and business networks, they reinvest up to 90% of their income back into their families and communities, compared to 30-40% for men. This directly improves health, nutrition, and education outcomes.
- ❖ Agents of Peace and Social Cohesion: From the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace that helped end a civil war, to local mediation networks in the Sahel, women-led groups are uniquely effective in conflict resolution and building social trust.

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- ❖ Champions of Sustainable Development: Women are often at the forefront of climate resilience, sustainable agriculture, and natural resource management. Institutions like the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, founded by the late Wangari Maathai, Campaign for Good Governance {cgg} and 50-50 in Sierra Leone are testament to this.
 - ❖ Amplifiers of Voice and Agency: These networks provide a collective platform to challenge harmful practices, advocate for legal reforms (e.g., land rights, against GBV), and ensure that women's perspectives are included in policy-making at all levels.
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4. Progress Made in Other African Countries

Across our continent, we are seeing inspiring examples of success:

- ❖ **Rwanda:** With the highest percentage of women in parliament globally, Rwanda has embedded gender equality in its governance. This was achieved through strong political will and supportive institutions that mentor and fund women leaders.
- ❖ **Ghana & Nigeria:** The phenomenal growth of women in tech is being driven by networks like She Leads Africa and Girls in Tech Ghana. They provide mentorship, funding, and training, creating a new generation of female innovators.

Progress Made in Other African Countries

- ❖ Kenya: The Maasai Women's Trust has empowered women to become leaders in wildlife conservation and sustainable tourism, transforming their economic standing while protecting their cultural heritage.
- ❖ Senegal: The Réseau des Femmes en Politique (Network of Women in Politics) has successfully trained and supported hundreds of women to run for and win local elections.

These examples show that with the right support, women-led institutions can thrive and create transformative change.



Progress Made in Other African Countries

- ❖ Sierra Leone the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act 2022: This is the cornerstone of recent progress. Largely driven by the advocacy of women's groups like the Campaign for Good Governance 50/50 Group, Women's Forum Sierra Leone, and others, this ground breaking law mandates:
 - ❖ 30% Quota for Women: At least 30% of public and private sector jobs must be held by women.
 - ❖ Political Participation: A minimum of 30% of candidates for parliamentary and local council elections put forward by political parties must be women.

Current Challenges Facing Women-Led Institutions

- ❖ **Limited Access to Finance:** This is the single biggest hurdle. Many institutions struggle to access seed funding, loans, or grants due to a lack of collateral, discriminatory banking practices, or simply being "too informal."
- ❖ **Capacity and Skills Gaps:** Many groups excel in passion but need strengthening in areas like strategic planning, financial management, digital literacy, and advocacy.
- ❖ **Policy and Legal Barriers:** Outdated laws regarding property ownership, inheritance, and business registration can stifle the growth of women-led organizations.

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- ❖ **Digital Divide:** A lack of access to technology and digital skills prevents many networks from scaling their impact, accessing new markets, and connecting with global partners.
 - ❖ **Socio-Cultural Norms:** Deep-seated patriarchal attitudes can limit women's participation in public life and leadership roles, creating social resistance to their authority.
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How Do We Strengthen Women-Led Institutions?

Our strategy for strengthening must be multi-faceted and collaborative:

We must move from acknowledgment to action. Strengthening requires a focused strategy.


1. Intentional Funding: Donors, governments, and the private sector must create dedicated funding streams that are accessible, flexible, and long-term. This includes supporting operational costs, not just project deliverables.

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2. Capacity Building & Mentorship: Invest in comprehensive training in leadership, governance, financial management, and digital skills. Establish cross-border mentorship programs linking established and emerging leaders.
 3. Foster Digital Inclusion: Provide technology infrastructure, tools, and training to help these institutions leverage digital platforms for networking, advocacy, and e-commerce.
 4. Create Enabling Policy Environments: Advocate for and implement legal reforms that promote gender equality, protect women's rights, and make it easier for women-led organizations to register and operate.
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5. Facilitate Networking and Collaboration: Create platforms both physical and virtual for different women-led institutions to share knowledge, form alliances, and build a unified voice. South-South learning is key.



6. Changing the Narrative: Use media and storytelling to celebrate the successes of women-led institutions and shift public perception about women's leadership.



The Broader Impact of Strengthened Institutions

When we strengthen a single women-led institution, we create a ripple effect that benefits the entire society:

- ❖ **Economic Growth:** GDP rises as more women enter the formal economy and grow their businesses.
- ❖ **Food Security:** Strengthening women's agricultural cooperatives directly increases farm yields and reduces hunger.

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- ❖ Political Stability: Inclusive governance leads to more resilient and peaceful societies.
 - ❖ Achievement of Global Goals: The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality), are accelerated.
 - ❖ A Legacy of Leadership: We inspire the next generation of girls to see themselves as leaders, innovators, and change makers.
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Lessons Learned:

- ❖ Women are not a vulnerable group; they are an untapped resource.
- ❖ Collective action is more powerful than individual effort.
- ❖ Investment in women-led institutions offers one of the highest returns for sustainable development.
- ❖ Context matters—solutions must be locally rooted and culturally intelligent.

Conclusion:

- Distinguished guests, the call to action is clear. Strengthening women-led institutions and networks is not merely a "women's issue." It is Africa's issue. It is the key to unlocking a future of shared prosperity, resilience, and peace.
- Let us move from rhetoric to action. Let us invest not just with our funds, but with our faith, our policies, and our partnerships. Let us be the generation that truly went far, because we chose to go together with African women firmly in the lead.