

Africa Human Development Report **2016**



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

Accelerating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa



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Cover: These patterns are a conceptual reference to societal growth and progressive policymaking. Their repetition reflects a structural foundation and the ascending colour blocks stand for growth and development within existing structures. The African fabric patterns represent a common traditional dress for men and women and a major source of trading activity for women in the Continent.

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Foreword

This 2016 Africa Human Development Report on gender equality follows the 2012 Africa Human Development Report, which looked at the importance of assuring food security for all Africans. Both reports share a common objective of addressing what might be considered two unfinished agenda items on Africa's development trajectory. Both have long been recognized as important priorities for the governments and citizens of African countries.

This year's report on gender equality reviews the ongoing efforts of African countries to accelerate the pace of assuring women's empowerment through all spheres of society – in the home and community, in health and educational attainment, in the workplace, and in political participation and leadership. While significant progress has been made across numerous fronts in most countries, gender equality for African women and girls is still far from satisfactory. To address the gender gap, this report adopts a political economy approach to gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa.

A key message of this report is that giving more concerted attention to gender equality will be an important and long overdue stimulus to faster and more inclusive human development and economic growth for the entire continent. A policy and programming focus on harnessing the potential of women is an important economic and social driver for more inclusive and sustainable development. Policies and programmes that unintentionally leave out or disenfranchise women will never be successful over the long term. Nor can inclusive growth be achieved if women's empowerment is compartmentalized, or seen as a separate activity from what are traditionally perceived as the core functions of government.

Simply stated, accelerating gender equality is a core function of government, involving multi-sectoral efforts that include national and local government entities, non-governmental actors, civil society organizations and the

private sector. Similarly, addressing gender equality in such a holistic way dovetails with, and reinforces, the ambitious agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which African governments and the international community as a whole have set for the coming 15 years. A holistic approach to gender equality will also bolster the achievement of Agenda 2063 of the African Union. This 2016 Human Development Report therefore provides a framework for operationalizing SDG 5 on gender equality, in particular, and all the SDGs, in general.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that this report has been written to encourage policy debate and discussions on what further steps are needed to ensure that gender equality is more fully integrated into national agendas and ongoing policy dialogues across Africa. The report has been prepared with diverse audiences in mind – African policymakers and practitioners, other development organizations, the private sector, civil society, academia, and Africa's citizens, young and old. It is hoped that the report will engage and stimulate active discussion and consensus on the different pathways each African country can take in addressing this critical development challenge and fundamental human right – gender equality.



Helen Clark

Administrator

United Nations Development Programme

Preface

On behalf of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, I am pleased to present this second Africa Human Development Report on the topic of Accelerating Gender Equality in Africa.

Gender equality is not a new development priority for African countries. Indeed, its importance has long been recognized, with the African Union and its predecessor, the Organization of African Union, taking a leading role in espousing the rights of women and girls dating back several decades. The African Union has designated 2016 as the year of Human Rights with a focus on Women's Rights, while 2015 was the year of Women's Empowerment and Development. However, progress in achieving gender equality has been slower than hoped and inconsistent for many African countries.

This report on gender equality is thus aimed at refocusing attention on what continues to be a critical development challenge, at a time when Africa has been undergoing a period of significant and unprecedented economic, social and political change. The fast pace of economic growth in some African countries only a few years ago has been dampened by the recent global downturn in demand for many primary commodities. Political and civil unrest driven by inequality, localized disputes and unmet expectations continue to affect many countries in Africa. Also, the Ebola epidemic of 2014 and drought in East, West and Southern Africa in 2015/16 demonstrate how vulnerable and fragile even rapidly improving African societies can be to unexpected shocks and downturns. Under such conditions, African women often bear a differentially greater burden as mothers, caregivers and family providers.

In the analysis that follows, the report highlights where progress has been made in addressing gender equality and what and where the remaining shortfalls and challenges are. It first provides a synopsis of Africa's

human development progress using UNDP's different human development indicators, with particular attention to the two indicators that measure gender development and gender inequality. The report further analyses gender trends and comparisons in terms of health, education, economic opportunities and barriers, as well as political representation and leadership. Attention is also given to the underlying and root causes of persistent gender inequality, including negative social norms in slowing the pace toward gender equality and the policy dilemmas that African governments face in reconciling legal norms and precedents with detrimental social customs and traditions.

The report further reviews the policy and institutional approaches that African governments have used to address gender inequality and accelerate the pace of women's empowerment and access to equal economic, social and political opportunities. Throughout the report, comparisons are made between African countries and between the Africa region and other developing regions, notably Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The final chapter of the report offers an agenda for action through a policy and strategic framework that places gender equality at the centre of the development agenda. Four broad 'pathways' are suggested that offer a policy and programme framework to accelerate gender equality and fully integrate gender into the broader development agenda.

These four pathways entail:

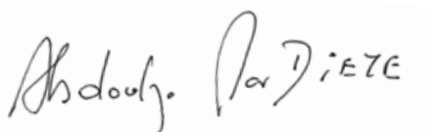
- supporting the adoption of legal reforms, policies and programmes to advance women's empowerment;
- supporting national capacities to promote and increase the participation and leadership of women in decision-making in the home, economy and society;

- supporting capacity to implement multi-sectoral approaches to mitigate the impacts of discriminatory health and education practices; and
- supporting women to gain ownership and management of economic and environmental assets.

The rationale for these pathways is that only by ensuring that women receive the same economic, social and political opportunities by shifting from legal to substantive gender equality can governments assure that their progress in economic growth and human

development is fully inclusive for all their citizens and sustainable in the long term.

We hope that this report stimulates discussion and debate on what remains a critical challenge and unexploited opportunity for Africa's future.



Abdoulaye Mar Dieye

Assistant Administrator and Director of the
Regional Bureau for Africa

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The report preparation process was coordinated and directed by Ayodele Odusola, Chief Economist and Head of the Strategy and Analysis Team, UNDP Africa. The AfHDR project team was led by Angela Lusigi. Key team members included Eunice Kamwendo, Yumna Omar, Ahmadou Mboup, James Neuhaus, Khady ba Faye, Yechi Bekele, Jonas Mantey and Yihua Lyu.

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The dedication of the lead writer, editing,

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