**3. Advancing Women’s Leadership in Public and Private Sector**

In 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, a total of 189 countries adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action under which they uphold gender equality and would particularly advance women’s right to leadership and representation in public and private sectors. Over the last twenty years, African states have adopted various legislations and institutional mechanisms, including quotas for women in public and private institutions, at the continental, sub-regional and national levels to further women’s leadership and effective participation in government and private spheres. Since 2003, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (or Maputo Protocol) has been ratified by 36 African Union member states and signed by 48, making it one of the highest ratified instruments in the African Union[[1]](#footnote-1). In addition to stressing women’s sexual and reproductive rights and health, the Protocol requires through Article 9 that state parties ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision making; recognizing women as equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of state policies and development programs[[2]](#footnote-2). Across sub-Saharan Africa, women’s share of employment in the nonagricultural sector (estimated at 33.1% in 2010)[[3]](#footnote-3) is improving, as well as the percentage of women aged 15 and above with ‘at least some secondary education’ (63.6% for females and 76.3% for males in 2012)[[4]](#footnote-4).

Despite the aforementioned progress, gender imbalance in public sector and business leadership remain serious concerns in sub-Saharan Africa. Women are particularly under-represented in leadership and decision-making positions in public and private sectors. The percentage of women senior officials in public administration, in Africa, remains very low and is below 30 percent in most African states, with the exception of Botswana (45% in 2009) and South Africa (35% in 2011)[[5]](#footnote-5). In the private sector, gender disparities also persist in terms of equal access and participation in leadership and decision making in business, financial and trade management. Whereas the percentage of private firms with female participation in ownership is in the 10 to 30 percent range across sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage of firms with a female top manager is even lower with most African countries being in the 10 to 20 percent range[[6]](#footnote-6). While further research and more data is needed to compare the quality of leadership that African women and men leaders relatively provide in the public and private sector, there is little doubt that gender discrimination undermines the economic and other potentials of African states. In fact, the International Labor Organization (ILO) states that an additional $1.6 trillion USD (in Purchasing Power Parity) could be generated if the gender gap in employment to population was reduced[[7]](#footnote-7).

The paper will argue that barriers to gender equality in leadership and participation in public and private sector are not only rooted in customary or cultural value and belief systems, but also in some contemporary institutional settings and practices. In the process of identifying and explaining factors that contribute to gender imbalance at the managerial level in the private (business) sector, we will utilize quantitative and qualitative data from Women Business and the Law, UN Women, African Development Bank (AfDB), UNESCO, the World Bank, the Human Development Report 2014, and Ernst & Young, to name a few. The expected outcome of this research is to identify and illustrate underlying and root causes of women’s leadership gap in Africa, as women are severely underrepresented in leadership and decision making in public institutions and corporations. Through this process, we will also underline the role of stakeholders in these issues and ways in which they can make a difference—all of which will inform policy and decision making in favor of gender parity and particularly women leadership in business and public affairs.

*3.1 Analysis of Existing Gender Gaps in Leadership and Public and Private Institutions*

Around the world, women are vastly under represented at the board level of organizations. Women currently hold only 4.2 percent of Fortune 500 CEO positions and 4.6 percent of Fortune 1000 CEO positions[[8]](#footnote-8). Women’s leadership and economic potentials remain largely untapped and under-utilized in many cases. To start with, based on available gender disaggregated data on professional African women’s occupations, the number of women high skilled laborers and technical workers in African countries is very low compared to men’s: 67% male and 33% female in Ethiopia; 55% male and 45% female in Mauritius; and 65% male and 35% female in Uganda; with Lesotho, Botswana and Namibia and South Africa representing a few countries with higher percentages of female high skilled laborers than males[[9]](#footnote-9). This leads one to ask what kind of barriers do current and prospective women business leaders face in the process of climbing the corporate ladder and maintaining executive positions once they reach the top?

To properly account for women’s leadership gap, it is important to briefly reflect on the role and position of women as crucial economic actors in sub-Saharan Africa. According to World Bank 2013 estimates, females (girl child and women) represent almost half of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa at approximately 50.02%[[10]](#footnote-10). Through informal cross-border trading, of which women make up 70%, women contribute an average of $17.6 billion per year to the 15 member states of the [Southern African Development Community](http://www.sadc.int/) alone[[11]](#footnote-11). Women labor force participation rates across sub-Saharan Africa is just as important at 66.9% in Southern Africa, 68.8% in East Africa, 68.3% in Central Africa, and 53.2% in West Africa[[12]](#footnote-12) . In spite of these numbers, women are overwhelmingly represented in the informal sector [[13]](#footnote-13) (see graph 1). These women in the informal sector are also less likely to be paid employees, let alone managers, in business than men[[14]](#footnote-14). For women, such gender-based differences in employment status have greater implications in terms of relative earnings and opportunities for starting and building a career.

**Graph 1: (%) Percentage of nonagricultural labor force in the informal sector**

**(1991-1997)**[[15]](#footnote-15)

1. ***Underlying Causes of Women’s Leadership Gap***

In sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world, discriminatory practices in talent acquisition and management (i.e. in hiring, developing and promoting talent) against women significantly contribute to women’s lag in leadership and representation in corporate enterprise boardrooms and mid-executive levels. According to a Harvard Business Review (HBR)2009 survey focusing on the leadership of 2000 of the world’s best performing companies, women are still are not treated as equals to men when it comes to high stakes positions: Women CEOs were nearly twice as likely as men to have been appointed to the job from outside the company — even though analysis clearly shows that inside-CEO candidates performed better over time, presumably because long-term growth depends on deep industry and firm-specific knowledge. Among companies surveyed, HBR further indicates that only 29 (or 1.5%) of their CEOs were women, an even smaller percentage than on the Fortune 500 Global list (2.6%)[[16]](#footnote-16).

Even when women business leaders are rated more highly than comparable male peers across a range of leadership behaviors, they are also rated lower than men on “envisioning”, the dimension most closely associated with effective leadership at senior levels. Senior-level women often suffer from this (stereotype) perception when appointments to top leadership positions are made[[17]](#footnote-17). Thus, women with stellar performance records can be held back because they are not seen as having the potential to lead at a senior level.

Research has found this especially to be true in cultures where being a visionary and other common male attributes are widely accepted as essential characteristics of leadership. Customs and social norms generally define the kind and degree of activities women can partake in, imposing restrictions on mobility or on engagement with actors beyond the household[[18]](#footnote-18).  In some countries, customary and religious leaders go as far as attaching divine approval to certain practices so that people who do not experience enough guilt or shame for not complying may also experience the fear of divine punishment, in addition to the prospect of being less desirable in the marriage market[[19]](#footnote-19). Such social and institutional structures produce mindsets, practices and conditions that impede women’s independence and leadership in the private sector and other areas.

In some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, such as Uganda, successful women and educated young women alike have been targeted, in recent years, in public places by men who take it upon themselves to reinforce ‘decency bills’ urging women not to undermine their African culture by dressing inappropriately. Much like in South Africa, mob mentality that leads to public stripping of women in urban milieus reaches dangerous levels when customary leaders (i.e. tribal and religious authorities) preach female subservience and blame women for dislodging men from their rightful places in modern societies[[20]](#footnote-20). In this regard, destructive social and institutional norms or those that are constructive to some and destructive for others (women and girls in this case) can create norm traps that make nearly everyone worse off[[21]](#footnote-21). In economic terms this means that African countries are positioning themselves to lose an estimated $1.6 trillion USD in Purchasing Power Parity because of current gender gap in employment to population[[22]](#footnote-22).

Meanwhile, some contend that one of the reasons why it is difficult to sustain and increase the number of women in senior management is that a significant number of women in secondary and tertiary education do not specialize in areas of studies and career fields, such as in engineering and agricultural sciences, where very few women already work. In that respect gender disparities are particularly marked in the agricultural sciences, for instance. In Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa at the postgraduate level only about 16 percent of graduate students are women[[23]](#footnote-23). Female students are concentrated in the humanities, social sciences, and health, with less than one third enrolled in science fields. Many considered agriculture as a masculine discipline, and women are not believed to have the physical, mental and social capabilities to succeed in it[[24]](#footnote-24).

IBR 2014 points to similar findings, indicating that at the global level fewer women than men enroll in subjects such as science and mathematics (which many businesses look for), and that 66% of businesses globally report that less than half of the graduates they employ are women[[25]](#footnote-25). Furthermore women are more likely to take jobs in the public sector where they hold over half of senior roles in education and social services (51%), more than double the global average. The survey pursues that businesses with strong links to the public sector are most likely to have women in their leadership teams, including education & social services (51%), healthcare (29%), hospitality (37%), financial services (29%), and other professional services (27%)[[26]](#footnote-26).

While workplace gender discrimination is a global issue, Ernst & Young reports that because of limited possibilities for advancement in their home continent, a significant proportion of degreed African women, nearly a third at 28 percent migrate out of Africa in search of suitable job opportunities. This is in contrast with only 17 percent of educated African men[[27]](#footnote-27).

Another barrier for women business leaders and in particular those with families is the burden of care (unpaid) work. Women in Africa, as in all parts of the world, face many barriers to their ability to exercise leadership and participation in public institutions and business, including family obligations and lack of child care, inadequate training, as well as the lack of a favorable political and or economic environment[[28]](#footnote-28). Women continue to bear most of the responsibilities for the home—caring for children and other dependent household members, preparing meals and doing other housework[[29]](#footnote-29). In all regions, women spend at least twice as much time as men on unpaid domestic work. Women who are employed spend an inordinate amount of time on the double burden of paid work (at the office) and family responsibilities; when unpaid work is taken into account, women’s total work hours are longer than men’s in all regions.. This problem is compounded by the fact that most business organizations in sub-Saharan Africa do not provide child care assistance to employees / working parents[[30]](#footnote-30) and in some countries securing time off through parental leave does not necessarily mean that employees can return to work and perform the same job (i.e. in some cases, an employee may be assigned to a different and even lower post). Consequently, some women must often choose between motherhood and careers. Whereas traditionally female jobs such as teaching mix well with motherhood (i.e. work hours and job expectations are manageable throughout the year), professional-services firms’ schedules are demanding and organizational cultures often gravitate around an up-or-out system which rewards those who are flexible—men and the few women working long hours, etc.[[31]](#footnote-31)

1. ***Root Causes of Women’s Leadership Gap***

Over the last decades, in some African countries, an increasing number of women have been transitioning to secondary academic institutions of learning in comparison to their male counterparts (see graph 2). In 2013-2014, average transition rates in general education from primary to secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa reached 68.97 percent for males and 69 percent for females[[32]](#footnote-32). In light of noticeable increases in elementary female enrollment and completion rates in these countries, one might get the impression that at least through formal education the growing talent pool of educated women might inevitably translate into more women assuming senior leadership roles in Africa’s growing private sector.

**Graph 2: Transition rates (%) from Primary to Secondary, General Education (2013-2014)[[33]](#footnote-33)**

Yet, gender disparities and particularly women’s unequal access to senior management levels in the corporate world persist for various reasons, including gender stereotypes. Among recent studies on gender diversity in the workplace one indicates that sexism takes two main forms in the work environment that affect women: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism[[34]](#footnote-34). Whereas hostile sexism—feelings of antipathy and hostility toward women—marginalizes and denies women leadership positions regardless of their education and career achievements and experience, benevolent sexism—subjectively more positive and benevolent feelings toward women—justifies women’s lower position compared to men because it presumes women’s inferiority by believing that women need protection from men and cannot succeed without them.

The research points to the fact that benevolent sexism is a benign form of sexism that can establish barriers to women leadership and career growth, just like the other more explicit and hostile kind of sexism.While the duality of sexism is subject to further debate and reflection, it matters to only retain that sexism stands in the way of leadership-ready and experienced women who can make a difference in the private sector and other vital economic areas. Though various measures and programs are being developed and tested to foster a culture of inclusion in board rooms in Africa and beyond, male obdurate attitude toward gender equality remains a serious and yet very complex issue to diagnose and effectively address. This is despite well noted links between diversity and improvements in business and economic performance[[35]](#footnote-35).

Institutional frameworks and government policies can also impact women’s career and leadership opportunities. A recent survey released by the World Bank Group indicates: in about 20 percent of sub-Saharan states (including Cameroon, DRC, Mauritania and Niger) a married woman cannot pursue a trade, profession or job in the same way as a man; in approximately 23 percent of African countries (including Botswana, Uganda, Egypt, and Benin) a married woman cannot apply for a passport in the same way as a man; and in an estimated 28 percent of African countries, among those surveyed in 2014, customary law is a valid source of law—even if it violates constitutional provisions on non-discrimination or equality[[36]](#footnote-36). In some countries women also decry the nonexistence and in many cases the non-implementation of harassment laws[[37]](#footnote-37). These are just a few examples to illustrate some of the ways in which institutional roadblocks undermine women empowerment initiatives in private organizations and societies at large.

1. ***Stakeholder Analysis***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Stakeholders** | **Interest in reducing gender discrimination and gender gap in leadership and participation in public and private institutions** | **Potential Impact (+ve/-ve)** | **Influence**  **(power to facilitate/impede)** |
| **Primary** |  |  |  |
| * Women senior executives (private institution) | \*More bargaining power  \*Increased networking opportunities and other resources | +  + | High |
| * Men senior executives   (private institution) | \*Diversified pool of qualified candidates for organization  \*Sharing privileges with other (women) colleagues and peers | +  +/\_ | High |
| * Corporate - Investors and Shareholders | \*Increased human capital and improved productivity  \*better PR (ex: to be well regarded as an organization that is as committed to inclusive growth as it is to Corporate Social Responsibility and shareholder profits)  \* New expenditures (programs) in support of working mothers | +  +  - | High |
| * Corporate – Board Members and Directors | \*Improvements in strategic advisory and leadership capacities: combining qualified women and men \*Maximizing good ideas; benefit from different experiences and viewpoints that mirror the interests, concerns, and expectations of men and women in consumer base.  \*Implementing board room quotas for women Leaders—Affirmative Action | +  -  +/- | High |
| * Women senior public officials   (public institution) | \* Increased bargaining power and networking opportunities | + | High |
| * Men senior public officials (public institution) | \*Diversified pool of qualified candidates for organization  \*Sharing privileges with other (women) colleagues and peers | +  \_ | High |
| **Secondary** |  |  |  |
| * Service Providing Organizations | \*Higher Productivity,  \*a more diverse talent pool  \*Provide additional resources to working mothers (i.e flextime, etc.) | +  +  - | High |
| * Manufacturing Companies | \*Higher Productivity,  \*a more diverse talent pool  \*Providing extra resources to working mothers (i.e flextime, etc.) | +  +  - | High |
| * Consumer Base / Service and Goods Recipients | \*Strong brand identification  \*increased customer loyalty | +  + | High |
| * Chamber of Commerce | \*increasing government support (ex: putting in place quotas for women in corporations can lead to corporate tax breaks and other state perks)  \* Implement industry-wide measures to support career women and working mothers | +  - | High |
| * Labour Unions | \*Increased influence (if women drive up membership) | + | High |
| * Women Advocacy Groups | \*More visibility and influence in policy design and decision making processes |  |  |
| * Vocational and Tertiary Education Institution | \*Support women training, education and job placement / apprenticeship in non-traditional career fields creates opportunities for collaboration with industry leaders and getting feedback from prospective employers on ways to improve quality of education and those of all graduates—not just women | + | High |
| * Ministry of Gender and Youth | Increase in number of educated women professionals and high skilled women laborers who can act as role models and most importantly as generators of development activities and employment for youth | + | High |
| * Ministry of Labor and Employment | Increased human capital and economic actors;  New businesses and employers can emerge | +  + | High |
| * Ministry of Health | \*More educated and economically empowered women and girls  \*Low maternal mortality rates, HIV infections, etc. | +  + |  |
| * Ministry of Justice | \*Adopting and consistently reinforcing anti… discrimination, sexual harassment and other legislations—Labor Law Amendments  \*Create deterrence value; self-policing among employers  \*improved legal framework for big business (FDI), entrepreneurs and society at large | +  + / -  + / - | High  Medium / High  Medium / High |
| **External** |  |  |  |
| * UN Organizations & | \*Increased development outcomes | + | Medium |
| * Regional Organizations (AU, etc.) | \*Increased influence of regional agenda and cohesion of member states (improvements in level of cooperation) | + | Medium |
| * International Development Partners | \*Priorities implemented  \*Opportunities for further collaboration | + | Low / Medium |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **High** | **Advocacy**  Corporate – Board Members and Directors  – Investors / shareholders  Men senior executives  Men senior public officials  Service providing organizations  Manufacturing companies | **Close Engagement**  Women traders  Ministry of labor  Labor unions  UN organizations (ILO, UNWomen, UNFPA)  Chamber of commerce  Ministry of Gender and Youth  Ministry of Health  Ministry of Justice |
| **POWER**  **Low** | **Awareness Raising**  Ministry of education  Consumer base/service & goods recipients  Vocational and Tertiary Educ. Institutions | **Empowerment**  Women senior executives  Women Senior public officials |
|  | **Low** | **INTEREST High** |

*3.2 Barriers to effective participation in Leadership in Public and Private Institutions*

***A. Policies and Legislations***

At the regional, continental and national levels, various legislations and landmarks have been passed and enacted over the last decades to advance women’s right; to stop and prevent gender discrimination and promote woman agency and equal right to leadership and participation in public and private enterprise.

According to Article 7-i of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1976, all individuals are entitled to fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind. Women in particular must be guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work[[38]](#footnote-38)*.* The African Union (AU)has also been a major legislating body and champion of women’s rights and gender equality in public and private affairs and institutions. In keeping with the Beijing Plan of Action (1995) and UN Resolution 1325 (2000) which recognize and promote important gender mainstreaming measures in public and private institutions, the African Union put into effect important legislations. For example, in 2004, elected officials and representatives of AU governments and member states adopted the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA). SDGEA not only emphasizes key gender issues, but also reiterates the need to implement earlier commitments that African leaders made to tackle gender inequality in various sectors[[39]](#footnote-39). The declaration realizes the unfavorable status women hold in relation to literacy and education and the negative impacts this brings about in all dimensions of women’s lives, including access to employment. In fact, the AU Parity Principle represents one of the most advanced global commitment to equal representation between men and women in decision making. Adopted at the Inaugural Summit of Heads of States and Governments of the African Union held in Durban, South Africa in 2002, its adoption demonstrated the commitment of the newly transformed African Union to address persistent gender inequalities in the continent[[40]](#footnote-40). Besides setting out a clear agenda, cultivating political will is just as necessary for sustaining an environment that enables the enforcement of the AU 50/50 Gender Parity Principle and the achievement of gender equality in Africa.

In spite of these progressive international and regional legislations and policies and African states’ attempts to own and implement them through constitutional reforms and other mechanisms, only a limited number of constitutional provisions and national development plans feature coherent and practical elements of gender equality. In some countries, national action plans concerning gender (i.e. how to fund, implement and measure gender policy progress and challenges) do not even have any relation to national development strategies or accounts / budgets[[41]](#footnote-41).

In Angola the Constitution has two main provisions dealing with gender equality: Article 18.1—all citizens shall be equal under the law and shall enjoy the same rights and be subject to the same duties, without distinction as to color, race, ethnic group, sex, place of birth, religion, ideology, level of education or economic or social status—and Article 29.2 which indicates that men and women shall be equal within the family, enjoying the same rights and having the same duties[[42]](#footnote-42). On the one hand, international observers acclaim Angolan legislators’ attempt to formally codify women’s right to equality and adopt legislations that address social, economic, legal and political dimensions of gender parity and discrimination against women. On the other hand, critiques are concerned about ambiguities in the language used in the aforementioned articles[[43]](#footnote-43). This is particularly the case since these constitutional provisions do not outright acknowledge specific issues under the umbrella of gender equality that women are particularly confronted with, such as discrimination in employment and career advancement, sexual harassment and so on. The Constitution also does not go far enough in securing women’s right to equally and fully partake in leadership activities in public and most certainly private institutions.

Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Constitution covers and elaborates on the concept of gender equality through various articles. Yet, in practical terms (i.e. in respect to implementing and reinforcing gender parity measures) the only party designated or put in charge of addressing gender disparities and discrimination against women is ‘public authorities who are entrusted with the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women while ensuring the protection and promotion of their rights[[44]](#footnote-44)’. This sort of flexibility of language leaves out responsibilities of key actors in the private and public sector (i.e. employers). This poses serious problems for women in DRC who already face a great number of obstacles at home, in business and in the workforce, for example: a married women in DRC is not allowed to… pursue a job/trade/profession in the same ways as a man; …sign a contract in the same way as a man; …register a business in the same way as a man; …open a bank account in the same way as a man; …choose where to live in the same way as a man; …to be head of household or head of family in the same way as a man[[45]](#footnote-45).

Meanwhile in South Africa, the government has laid a solid foundation in terms of policy, putting public institutions firmly on the route of transformation, so as to have to more women in management and leadership positions. Some women advocate groups agree that fighting sexism and other discriminatory practices against women have been fundamental tenets that are enshrined in the South African Constitution and that results to date have been positive: Whereas in 1995 the equity target was 30 percent representation of women in management positions, in October 2006 many government departments achieved the minimum quota, with records as high as 40 percent in managerial positions[[46]](#footnote-46). In neighboring Zimbabwe, women’s rights advocates also claim that the increasing number of women in policy and decision making positions has enabled women to gain important policy concessions, with the passing of the Domestic Violence Act[[47]](#footnote-47) in the Zimbabwean Parliament.

This latest point raises a number of important issues, including whether or not a surge in the number of women in senior policymaking and managerial positions in government and private institutions is a pre-requisite for lasting improvements and sustainable progress in gender equality and women empowerment. In other words, is it necessarily true that more women in government and corporate board rooms would yield more benefits for women in a given environment or state? Properly answering such pertinent questions would require a separate and holistic research with comprehensive disaggregated sets of data.

In the meantime, women’s rights advocates in Africa and other parts of the world contend that although increasing women’s leadership and bargaining power in private and public institutions is an important first step, it is just as crucial to address the fact that women in positions of power often do not have control over large budgets[[48]](#footnote-48). This limits not only their influence, but also their ability to succeed as leaders of public and private enterprises.

Another major problem related to this issue is women’s very low representation and participation (as employees and leaders) in non-traditional employment sectors, such as in extractive industries—mining, oil and gas exploitation / refinery management, construction, etc. Worldwide it is extremely rare to find any extractive industry companies with more than 10 percent female employment, with many being less than 5 percent[[49]](#footnote-49). In some countries this is because men have better access to education and therefore possess more necessary skills, because mining jobs may require a certain level of physical strength, or because of potential pregnancies (in terms of time this would take out of work, or the risks of exposure to chemicals). In other countries, discrimination is based on a combination of stereotypes within the extractive industries companies and within communities (often among both men and women) that mining or oil rigging work for instance is “men’s” work.

Discrimination in hiring practices can have cost implications for extractive industry companies, as well as women: First, discrimination against women may mean that companies overlook highly productive, effective workers and leaders, and drive up prices on the labor they use.

Secondly, women make up half the labor force, and discrimination against them is a barrier to private sector development and economic growth. Furthermore, evidence from mining operations in several countries indicates that as employees, women often show a greater willingness to respect safety and environmental safeguards. Mining companies in countries such as Chile, Ghana, and Papua New Guinea have discovered that heavy mining equipment (such as large trucks and shovels) operated by women is more efficient and incurs lower operating than equipment operated by men[[50]](#footnote-50). In such cases, where women do jobs more effectively than men, discrimination is even more costly and directly impacts the company’s bottom line.

*3.3 Effective Mechanisms to address gaps – analyzing gender quotas*

To address gender gaps in leadership and representation in public and private institutions, over the years, in some African countries government agencies and private companies have come up with different measures, including quotas. Quotas are generally adopted and implemented under the umbrella of affirmative action, which can be described as a variety of measures through which a percentage or number of protected group(s) in a given environment is afforded some level and sense of representation in an institutional setting with the right to partake in activities from which they were unfairly excluded at some point[[51]](#footnote-51). Quotas are designated and implemented in various ways and circumstances, with expected benefits of not only introducing diversity but also maximizing its countless benefits. Although a growing number of African countries are adopting quotas in their electoral systems, political parties, and branches of government through constitutional reforms and other methods, only a handful of states have legislations requiring corporations and businesses owned by government to have quotas for women at mid-management and senior executive levels. This is partially explained by the fact that it is extremely difficult and politically sensitive to amend a constitution to include a quota provision[[52]](#footnote-52). Whereas quotas in some countries are imposed on private and public sector employers by local or national laws, there are also cases where employers (board of directors / management) benevolently put quotas in place to foster a culture of inclusion and increase the number or percentage of employees from a certain demographic, ethnic group or sex. Despite growing support for gender quotas in private and public employment (excluding parliament in this project), some organizations, individuals and even women rights advocates staunchly oppose the practice.

It is well documented that women are grossly under-represented in senior management roles globally, holding only 24 percent of such positions. Recent analysis across 13,000 firms in 135 countries found that only 10 percent of large firms have female management[[53]](#footnote-53) .Despite the slow change, legal quotas and corporate governance requirements are likely to produce better results for women.

In South Africa, up until the 1990s, legislation meant that women were not permitted to work underground— in most extractive industries precisely. This all changed, and in 2002 the South African Mining Charter introduced quotas urging mining companies to employ a 10% female staff quota (where it was just 2% in the year 2000) [[54]](#footnote-54). The adoption of quotas (Mining Charter of 2002) in South Africa is particularly interesting in the sense that it was a part of broader measures intended by government to rectify injustices of its past by helping those who have historically been at a disadvantage, including colored people and women in this case. Since legislators and mining companies started applying quotas to bring in more women technicians and executives, there has been an increasing number of women board members. According to a 2013 PwC report on women in mining, at 21.05 percent, South Africa leads the way in the number of women senior executives in the top 100 listed mining companies worldwide[[55]](#footnote-55) (see graph 3 below).

**Graph 3: Average % Women on Boards of top 100 Listed**

**Mining companies, 2013[[56]](#footnote-56)**

With such progress being recorded through quotas, women rights groups and their allies introduced the 2014 Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill (WEGEB) which aims to broaden employment, education and health opportunities for South African women. Proponents of WEGEB claim that unlike provisions under Mining Charters which allow extractive industry companies to renew their licenses when they did not meet gender quotas, (if approved by legislators) the new Bill will mandate a 50 percent quota for women and stiff penalties for organizations that fail to comply[[57]](#footnote-57). Beyond differences between mining and other industries, it is important to mention that among emerging economies in Africa, South Africa has the highest overall percentage of women on corporate boards (17.9%)[[58]](#footnote-58).

Across sub-Saharan African other countries that have mandated gender quotas in corporate governance, such as Malawi, Kenya, and Morocco have not been as successful as South Africa. In Malawi, for instance, the Malawi Code II of Best Practice for Corporate Governance does not necessarily require a woman executive to be on board, since the selection process for the appointment of new members of the board “may also consider appropriate diversity of gender and/or social and economic background[[59]](#footnote-59);” this means a man from a disenfranchised group or background could easily fill in the job in lieu of a woman. In Kenya, the situation is worse, as women occupy only 44 out of the 462 seats on the boards of the 55 companies listed at the bourse, according to filings made to the Capital Markets Authority (CMA). This is a meager 9 percent. Kenya is, in fact, doing far much worse than Uganda and Rwanda, with the latter registering more than 50 percent of women in boardrooms[[60]](#footnote-60). According to Njeri Rionge, who has been a member and chair of several boards and committees, and is now a life coach and business mentor, women’s underrepresentation in boardrooms is significantly caused by companies’ recruitment style which is mostly done via exclusive ‘old-boys’ network[[61]](#footnote-61). Over a decade ago, best practices in women corporate governance agreed to incorporate gender diversity, but sadly, this has not been matched by appropriate action.

As a general matter, gender parity in Morocco is weak, despite recent attempts to improve the situation. In Global Gender Gap Report rankings, Morocco ranked 127 out of 134 countries in 2010 and slightly worse to 128th place in 2011. In a 2009 survey conducted by Sunergia / The Economist, Morocco did not do any better when it came to executive pay and women were ‘almost absent’ in the closed circle of CEOs: whereas men held roughly 85 percent of management positions, the percentage of women on boards of directors was an astounding 0 percent[[62]](#footnote-62).

The paucity of women on boards around the world suggest that quotas may need to be introduced to produce the ‘step change’ required to get women on equal footing with men in terms of access to the most senior positions in companies. Indeed, the proportion of business leaders who support the idea of quotas has risen in most parts of the world from 37% in 2013 to 45% in 2014[[63]](#footnote-63). At the same time, quotas can be controversial and some women have been hesitant to be seen in a tokenistic light rather than for their individual talent[[64]](#footnote-64). Among women opposing quotas in corporate and public institution governance, some compare quotas to ‘charity’ measures that undermine women’s ability to command respect as leaders in organizations and industries (such as extractive industries) that are already dominated by male figures who continue to determine rules of engagement in many respect[[65]](#footnote-65). In this logic, unlike men and other women that are hired without intervention, women leaders benefiting from quota seats might compromise their ability to advance issues in public and private organizations that can benefit fellow women in the workforce[[66]](#footnote-66). Some even go as far as saying that quotas in favor of disenfranchised groups such as women could be considered as the starting point of some sort of reversed discrimination[[67]](#footnote-67). Another important critique of quota systems in politics as well as in business is that as some organizations reach or approach mandated quotas they may resist the idea of hiring and integrating more qualified women.

*3.4 Policy Recommendations and Best Practices*

While the following recommendations and best practices are not exhaustive, they provide a few practical points for further reflection and learning:

* + The usage of board room quotas, as witnessed in South Africa since the early 2000s, has been a major success. Not only are gender based quotas empowering qualified and leadership-ready women in major corporations, but it is also enabling women to progress in the extractive industries at a significant pace.
  + At the regional level, organizations such as the Duke Corporation, a leader in custom executive education is promoting women executive leadership in the private sector by building a Pan-African bench or board of directors for the continent and providing networking opportunities for women[[68]](#footnote-68).
  + The Coca-Cola Company, in growing its Micro Distribution Centers, has committed that 50% of all new centers will be managed by women hoping to provide much needed advantage to women leaders in business and those interested in entrepreneurship[[69]](#footnote-69).
  + From the Kenyan, Malawian and Moroccan cases, one would note that designating legal quotas without implementing them does not bring about any desired change in respect to gender equality and women’s empowerment: Policy reform must be accompanied with political will and practical application of the law, to change the status quo. From the Kenya example, we would also retain that hiring practices must change to reflect the optimal level of inclusion that an organization and nation of laws expect to accomplish.
  + To raise awareness and increase women leadership roles in non-traditional careers (i.e. finance, etc.), African governments, international partners, as well as local and international non-governmental and private organizations have been working diligently to develop educational and mentoring programs in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) in support of young women’s education and career advancement in otherwise male dominated sectors;
  + In Mozambique, since 2004, through cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Culture and UNIDO an Entrepreneurship Curriculum Programme (ECP) has been started for secondary and technical and vocational schools. As a result of it many young women have been empowered to pursue careers and various business projects and initiatives have come from it[[70]](#footnote-70).
  + As multinational companies increasingly search for growth in emerging economies, they should explicitly focus on breaking down barriers and creating leadership and other opportunities for women. Companies that recognize women’s empowerment as a critical move toward increasing labor-force productivity and expanding their customer base and distribution networks will enjoy a competitive advantage[[71]](#footnote-71).

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