



Gender Equality in the East

Africa Community

The Thinking Watermill Society

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Introduction

- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Number 5 aims to create, and internationally promote Gender Equality.
- However, discrimination against women in multiple facets of society makes this a large obstacle to overcome.
- *Why Africa?* Women in Africa face great discrimination based on their gender, which inadvertently affects the economic development of the region. While there is gender inequality worldwide, countless research papers and studies show that there is greater gender-based discrimination in developing countries.

Did you know that:

Africa finds that gender discrimination leads to a loss of an average of \$95 billion every year.

-Africa Human Development 2016 Report

- Despite the odds, the East African Community (EAC) desires to achieve gender equality.

“The mainstreaming of gender in all its endeavours and the enhancement of the role of women in cultural, social, political, economic and technological development.”

-Article 5 (3) (e), The Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community

- Some may argue that there is gender equality on paper because of the present enactments. However, the situation on the ground in East African countries tells a different story.

Origin of Gender Inequality in East Africa

- The East African Community (EAC) represents the Partner States, namely:

1. **Burundi**
2. **Kenya**
3. **Rwanda**
4. **South Sudan**
5. **Uganda**
6. **United Republic of Tanzania**

“Gender equality requires that men and women should be on equal footing in terms of core functions (education, health, and nutrition).”

-United Nations Development Programme

- Where does gender inequality stem from in the EAC? Is it because of the culture, the perception of women, or poverty?
- Researchers argue that it is all this and more.
- A thesis by Ms. Eileen Wakesho Mwangi attributes gender inequality originating from the **patriarchal nature of the African society**, where women were viewed as subservient to men.

- For one, **wife inheritance** is still a practice in East Africa. This is where a widow is inherited as a wife by her husband's close friend or brother upon his death. For example, this is practiced by the Luo people of Western Kenya.
- **Dowry payment** is another cause of gender-based discrimination. Traditionally, the exchange of money or goods for a woman's hand in marriage was deemed as a form of wife purchase. This is why dowry is refunded to the woman's family as an act of divorce in customary marriages. For example, this is prevalent in the Luhya community in Kenya.
- These two traditions are among the most patriarchal cultural practices that cause women to be viewed as commodities.

| Partner State | Forms of Violence | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--|
| | Physical violence only | Sexual Violence | Emotional Physical, or sexual violence |
| Kenya | 45 | 14 | 39 |
| Uganda | 56 | 28 | 60 |
| United Republic of Tanzania | 40 | 17 | 29 |
| Rwanda | 35 | 22 | 40 |
| Burundi | 76.6 | 14 | Data Not Available |
| South Sudan | Data Not Available | Data Not Available | Data Not Available |

Percentage of Different Forms of Violence Experienced by Women (Aged 15-49)

Image source: [EAC Gender Policy \(2018\)](#)

- A research study by Ms. Seema Jayachandran, argues that economic success in Africa depends on "**Brawn-Based Production**" in fields such as agriculture and manufacturing. Since these activities require physical strength, these sectors employ more men than women.
- Cumulatively, this has led to gender inequality in the EAC which affects the role of women in the present society.

Gender Parity in East Africa Today

- According to the [United Nations Development Programme](#), the following are statistics of gender inequality in the world:
 - a) Women earn only 77 cents for every dollar that men get for the same work.
 - b) 35% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence.
 - c) Women represent just 13% of agricultural landholders.
 - d) Almost 750 million women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday.
 - e) Two-thirds of developing countries have achieved gender parity in primary education.
 - f) Only 24% of national parliamentarians were women as of November 2018, a small increase from 11.3% in 1995.

25% of the world's members of parliament are women.

-Inter-Parliamentary Union

- The figures in East Africa appear to contribute significantly to these statistics. Why is this so? The **lack of enforcement of laws promoting gender equality at the national level** is identified as the main cause.

“Without embracing gender equality in all spheres, regional integration, economic empowerment for women, productivity, and bridging the digital divide in the region is unachievable.”

-Dr. Kirsten Focken, during the International Women's Day Celebration (Arusha, Tanzania, March 2020).

- According to the 2018 EAC Gender Policy:
 - a) Women in the EAC form **more than 50% of the population**, and therefore hold the key to economic success.
 - b) The push for one-third majority for women in elective positions has considerably **increased** female representation in parliament in its partner states.
- The statistics of women in Parliament in each EAC Partner State are as follows:

i) Burundi:

- Overall, the presence of women in the [Burundi Parliament](#) is 37.8%.
- It's legislative branch comprises the Senate (*Inama Nkenguzamateka*) and National Assembly (*Inama Nshingamateka*) which have each reserved 30% of votes for women.
- There are currently 49.1% of women in the Senate and 36.4% in the National Assembly.
- Burundi ranks [number 34 in the world](#) for women representation in their government.
- Over and above, women in Burundi make up 55.2% of the workforce and thus [contribute greatly to the economy](#). In recognition of this, there have been efforts to eradicate gender-based norms and perceptions which hinder them from engaging and participating in humanitarian action.

ii) Kenya:

- The [Kenyan Parliament](#) is made up of the National Assembly and the Senate.
- There are a total of 290 elected members of the National Assembly, which comprises 47 women elected by registered voters from the counties.
- On the other hand, there are 16 women in the Senate who are nominated by their respective political parties, out of a total of 47 members.
- The National Democratic Institute 2018 report states that, during the 2017 general elections, for the first time in Kenya's history, women were elected to serve as governors and senators, and **29% more women** ran for office than in the previous election. This led to the largest number of women ever seated at all levels of the Kenyan government.
- Unfortunately, Kenya stands at [number 93](#) in the world ranking.

iii) Rwanda:

- Rwanda's Legislature has 62% of women, which is often accredited to the 1994 genocide. According to [researchers](#), the tragedy led to a change in societal gender roles.

-In 2003, President Paul Kagame called for increased representation of women following the passing of the constitution which has the requirement of reserving 30% of seats for women.

-In addition, the Rwanda Women Parliamentary Forum supports this cause by promoting the need for more than 30% representation of women in government.

-Its [bicameral Parliament](#) has two chambers: the Senate (38% women who are indirectly elected and appointed) and the Chamber of Deputies (61% women).

-It is currently the [leading country](#) in the world with the most women in politics. Nonetheless, Rwandan women in various professions confess that women empowerment stops at their front door, whereas there is very little gender equality in schools and workplaces.

iv) South Sudan:

-There are currently 109 women in the lower house, out of a total of 383 seats. Additionally, there are 6 women in the upper house out of 50 total seats.

-It's remarkable that South Sudan [ranks number 59 in the world](#) with a total percentage of 40.5% women in their government, despite the country's known traditions of undermining women.

-We find that [women have been active and influential](#) in the electoral process since independence. South Sudanese women won the right to vote in 1954, followed by the right to be elected in 1965.

-So far in the country, a change in local governance law has been made to match with parliament by applying a 25% gender quota.

-There is also an increase in women's political participation within parties and activists in campaigns.

v) Uganda:

-As of 2018, there were a total of 452 members of the [Ugandan Parliament](#), with 157 women (34.7%) present as members in the following ranks:

- 19 directly elected Constituency Members
- 120 District Women Representatives

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- 3 members of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Force Representatives (UPDF)
 - 2 Workers' Representatives
 - 2 Youth Representatives
 - 2 Persons With Disabilities Representatives (PWD's)
 - 9 Ex-Officio Members

-Uganda is currently [number 36 in the world](#) for representation of women in government.

-To add to its current efforts, the Ugandan Government has [partnered with the United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#) to ensure gender equity in public finance management, with the end goal to strengthen women's participation and engagement in this sector.

vi) United Republic of Tanzania:

-Tanzania stands at [number 33](#) of the world ranking of women representation in government.

-In its 2015 elections, there were [1,039 women candidates](#) running for government positions, with 238 for parliament, 770 at the district level, 29 for Zanzibar House of Representatives and 2 for Presidency/Vice-Presidency.

-By 2019, it is reported that [36.9% of seats in Parliament](#) were occupied by women (145 out of 393 seats).

-There is still much to be done with the discrimination of women in Tanzania. For instance, the Marriage Act allows boys to be married off at 18, while this can happen at a younger age for girls. This promotes child marriages and takes away their freedom of choice at a young age.

| Country | Parliament (%) | | Cabinet (%) | | Parastatal Leadership (%) | | Public Service (%) | | Judiciary (Judges) % | |
|-------------|----------------|------|-------------|------|---------------------------|------|--------------------|------|----------------------|------|
| | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M |
| Uganda | 32.0 | 68.0 | 42.6 | 57.4 | DNA | DNA | 20.7 | 79.3 | 30.0 | 70.0 |
| Kenya | 27.8 | 72.2 | 28.6 | 71.4 | 18.0 | 82.0 | 36.6 | 63.4 | 35.0 | 65.0 |
| Tanzania | 36.8 | 63.2 | 21.7 | 78.3 | 30.0 | 70.0 | 39.1 | 60.9 | 41.0 | 59.0 |
| Rwanda | 64.0 | 36.0 | 46.7 | 53.3 | 37.2 | 62.8 | 45.0 | 55.0 | 43.6 | 56.4 |
| Burundi | 37.1 | 62.9 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 13.6 | 86.3 | 15.9 | 84.1 | DNA | DNA |
| South Sudan | 29.0 | 71.0 | 22.0 | 78.0 | DNA | DNA | DNA | DNA | 10.0 | 90.0 |

Percentage of Men and Women in Decision Making Positions

Image source: [EAC Gender Policy \(2018\)](#)

What Is the Progress in Eradicating Gender Inequality?

- [EAC efforts](#) include:
 - a) Creation of the EAC Gender and Community Development Strategic Plan and the 4th EAC Development Strategy (2011-2016) which provide guidelines for mainstreaming gender in EAC policies and programs.
 - b) The introduction of the EAC Gender Equality, Equity and Development Bill in 2016 by Honourable Nancy Abisai. Unfortunately, this is yet to be assented by the EAC partner states.
 - c) Organization of the EAC Conference on the Role of Women in Socio-Economic Development and Women in Business in the effort to actualize the goal established in Article 122 of the Treaty for the Establishment of Eastern Africa.

The first conference was first held in Kigali, Rwanda (2011), and the second in Nairobi, Kenya (2015).

- d) The launch of the EAC Gender Policy in Arusha, Tanzania in 2018 aims to provide guidance on the institutionalization of gender equality strategies in its member states.

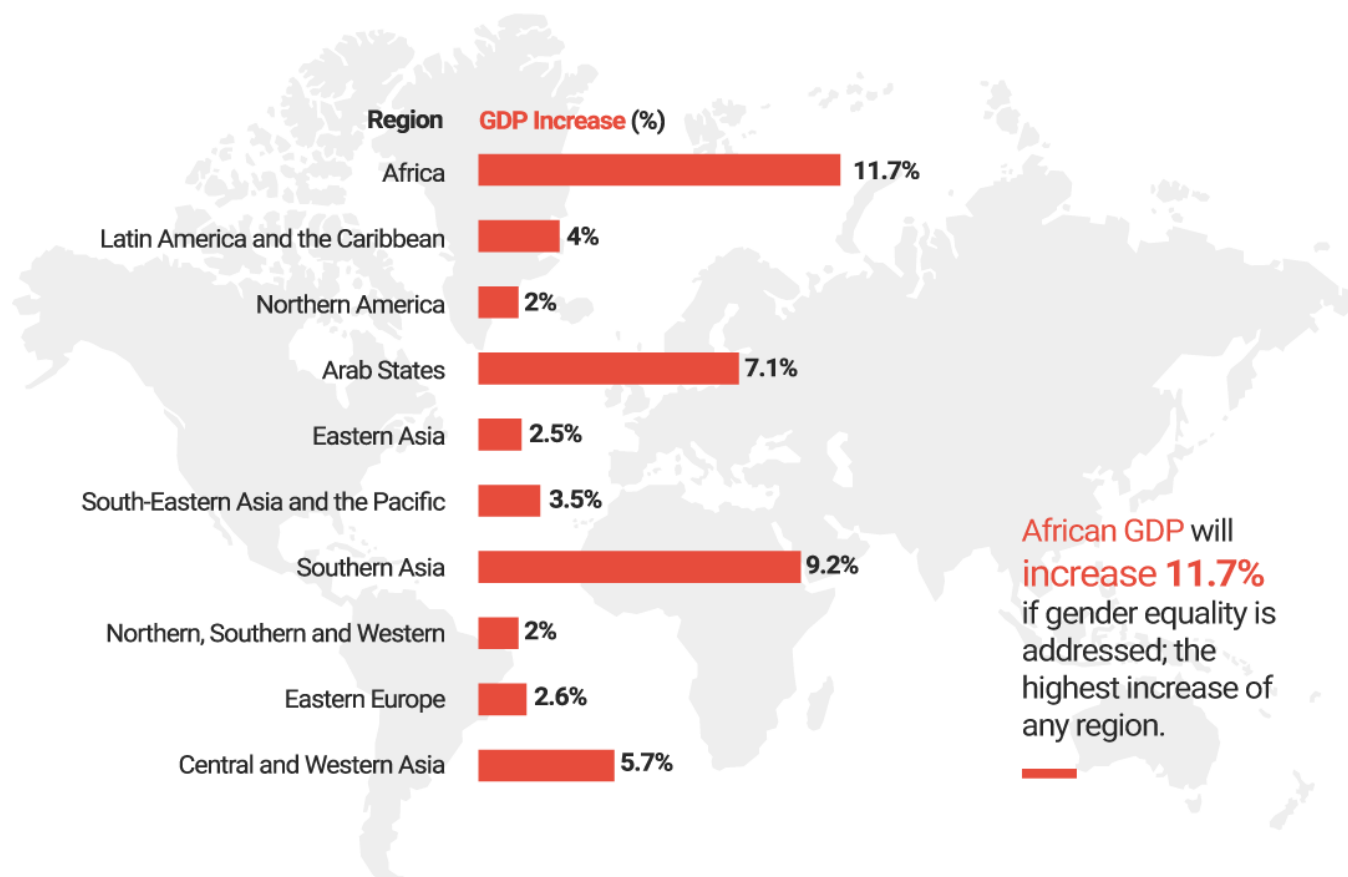
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- e) Collaboration with the German Development Cooperation in support of the International Women's Day 2020 event through the East African Community-Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (EAC-GIZ) programme to advance a gender-responsive and inclusive regional integration process.

“The Partner States recognize that women make a significant contribution towards the process of socio-economic transformation and sustainable growth and that it is impossible to implement effective programs for the economic and social development of the Partner States without the full participation of women”

-Article 121, The Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community

- Together with the active operation of non-governmental organizations, such as UN Women in Eastern Africa, the achievement of gender equality is no longer a pipe dream.
- However, according to Dr. Kirsten Focken, the EAC needs to fast-track the assent of the EAC Gender Equality Development Bill for these various goals to be actualized within the Partner States.
- Nonetheless, this will take hard work and continuous deconstruction of systems, policies and negative cultural mentalities that work against women's rights in the African community at large.
- With time, in the future of the EAC we hope to see more representation of women in parliamentary positions, eradication of gender-based discriminatory policies, and practices.
- The future of gender equality is very promising in this region!

GDP will increase by 2025 if gender gap is reduced



Calculate your gender pay gap: gendergap.africa

Source: International Labour Organisation, 2017

Designed by Fridah Oyaro



Image source: [The Elephant](#)