



AUSC
African Union Sports
Council



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Gender Equality and Women Empowerment through Sports in Africa **ADVOCACY BRIEF**





INTRODUCTION

Girls and women across Africa continue to face many disadvantages and challenges. The African Union aims to reduce or eliminate the major constraints to gender equality and women's empowerment, that women and girls can participate fully in economic, political and social activities. Participation in sport can help break down gender stereotypes while empowering girls and women. Sport offers an innovative approach to addressing issues of gender-based violence, disempowering ideologies and cultural beliefs that inform and shape unjust and harmful practices against women and girls in Africa and beyond.

Today, millions of women and girls are still silenced and deprived of their rights, including the right to participate in sport and physical activity as a gateway to health, social participation and sporting excellence. From the highest level to grassroots sport, women remain disadvantaged and sometimes marginalised. African male footballers have found ways to build careers as highly paid professional players, coaches, club owners and executives. The opportunities for African women footballers, on the other hand, are at a much lower level. Such inequalities are widespread across almost all sports. Globally, for every 100 hours of sports coverage on television, only 4 hours are devoted to women's sport. Although women make up 40% of the world's sports participants, women's sports receive only 1% of global sports sponsorship. Men dominate coaching positions with only about 1 in 5 coaches training girls and women at competitive level being female.



AN UNEQUAL PLAYING FIELD: FACTS AND FIGURES



Lack of participation and access to opportunities.

Family pressures, poverty, lack of choice, minimal resources, lack of female role models all contribute to non-participation and high drop-out rates.



The under-representation in leadership positions. Gender stereotypes in sport still often keep women in subordinate positions and disempower them.



Violence and unsafe sports environments contribute to traumatic experiences, mental health problems and missed opportunities for women and girls.



Time poverty. High levels of unpaid work and childcare costs keep women and girls under-represented as participants and in other roles in sport.

In many African countries, the traditional assumptions about gender roles, socialisation, and occupation of separate spheres are still visible. The gendered division of labour in the home hinders women's participation in leisure activities such as sport. Women have less time to participate in sport or leisure activities as they spend about 55% of their total work time on unpaid work, compared to 19% for men. Even when women enter the workforce, they face a significant gender pay gap. The gender gap can be seen, for example, in women's national football teams, where they may earn as little as 1 to 5% of the bonuses earned by their male counterparts. Women tend to find themselves in amateur or semi-professional sports, where they have to make huge sacrifices, such as taking unpaid leave, quitting their jobs or dropping out of their studies in order to compete at a higher level.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is one of the most pressing issues facing African societies. SGBV occurs mainly because of the societal expectations associated with each gender, as well as inequalities between women and men. Across Africa, women and girls who are exposed to violence in the home and in public spaces are not adequately protected in sport.

Women are under-represented in leadership positions with less than 20% of women serving on the governing structures or boards of sports organisations. The development of pathways from playing to leadership is minimal as women and girls continue to face risks to safe access to sport.

If you cannot see it, you cannot be it. Women in sport are under-represented in all roles, as athletes, coaches, referees, staff, and spectators in the most elite and grassroots sports. If women are invisible, they cannot inspire others. As a result, this lack of representation has a negative impact on the participation of women and girls in sport (for development) activities, who have no role models to look up to.



The main barriers to sport participation for women and girls are gender-based beliefs and attitudes, cultural barriers, economic constraints, lack of leisure time, and limited access to equipment and safe spaces.



AUSC ROADMAP TO GENDER EQUALITY

Today's perception of gender inequality in sport stems from the fact that women primarily occupy private or domestic spaces as primary caregivers. Such gender role identification shapes social norms and cultural practices in society and in the sporting environment.

The Maputo Protocol (adopted in 2003) and the AU Gender Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment are guiding documents that inform the AU Agenda. Aligning and integrating these commitments with regional and national gender equality strategies is critical for focused collective action by the sports community.

The AU Sports Council (AUSC) is instrumental in the implementation of the AU Agenda 2063, in particular Aspiration 6: "An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children." This is in line with the AU Sports Council's Statute to promote, advocate and defend a culture of gender equality in the domain of sport (Article 5) and a key objective of the AU Policy on the Sustainable Development of Sport in Africa, which encourages Member States, AUSC regions and sports federations to develop and mainstream gender equality, and safe and inclusive sport policy frameworks to empower girls and women. By harnessing the collective power of sport and Sport for Development (SfD), the AU Sports Council provides a roadmap for governments and policy-makers in Africa to consider the development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and practices.



GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH SPORTS

Through sport, women and girls gain access to safe spaces, build self-esteem, become resilient and learn how to use their voices- all important building blocks on their path to emancipation and independence. Sport showcases the strength, capabilities, and empowerment of women and girls. It provides a public platform to challenge traditional beliefs, while changing the symbolism of public spaces and recognising women's rights and achievements. Sport is also about protecting and intentionally designing safe spaces that promote sensitive discussions around issues of sexual rights, risk-taking and human agency. By engaging men and boys, SfD raises awareness of gender equality issues and emphasises the important role that men and boys have to play as allies and role models of positive masculinity in their communities. Sports celebrities, well-trained teachers, coaches and youth leaders are important agents of change towards a more tolerant and gender-equal society. Family, culture, public media and sports communities shape gender identities in a variety of ways. Famous female athletes can have a powerful influence on society and inspire girls around the world. Female role models have a key role to play in challenging change stereotypes and gender harmful attitudes.



Sport programmes and activities need to be responsive to local circumstances and initiatives, reflect ownership and ensure uptake for optimal inclusivity, safety and gender equitable outcomes.



It is a shared responsibility among all stakeholders to ensure that women and girls have equal access to sports opportunities and create an environment where they feel safe, empowered, and equipped to pursue careers in sports.



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GOOD PRACTICES

In **Senegal**, many girls and women suffer from a lack of information about their menstrual cycles and access to hygienic products; in a study by Speak-up Africa, 84% of the young girls said that they did not feel well prepared for their first period. This limited awareness harms their health, education, sports participation, and consequently, their overall professional and social lives. To address these challenges, ApiAfrique, a Senegalese social enterprise founded in 2017 with a mission to reduce waste, preserve health, and promote women's empowerment, develops products and tools to support menstrual hygiene management (MHM). As part of their awareness trainings with (young) women, their families, and (young) men, ApiAfrique also uses the sports for development approach. Through SfD training, (young) women gain a better understanding of their bodies, feel more comfortable with their bodies, and receive the information and products they need to better manage their periods. By including (young) men in the programme, ApiAfrique aims to change menstrual culture in Senegal.

In the coastal town of Kilifi in **Kenya**, less privileged girls and young women experience early pregnancies, poor access to health, low levels of education and harmful patriarchal structures. Since Moving the Goalposts (MTG) was founded in 2001, the CBO (Community Based Organisation) has reached more than 50,000 girls and young women between the ages of 9 and 25, equipping them with knowledge, skills and providing opportunities in and through football. MTG offers multiple programmes, including comprehensive sexual reproductive health and rights information services during football leagues. Furthermore, the organisation uses the leagues as a safe route and pathway to careers and livelihoods, as well as an opportunity for participants to complete their education and become financially independent. Young women receive leadership and employability trainings, while also benefitting from job placement opportunities. MTG takes a whole community approach, aiming at providing safe spaces and changing mindsets in a patriarchal environment.





A CALL TO ACTION

THE AU IS CALLED UP ON TO:

- Update and align sport and SfD policies, provide guidance and monitor the alignment of national and regional policies and practices that feed into a collective agenda to advance gender equality.
- Engage in strategic advocacy, resource mobilisation and awareness raising on gender equality within the sport and SfD sectors.
- Promote a gender transformative philosophy and programmes in an integrated manner to bridge the gap between competitive sport and SfD.
- Promote gender equality at the African Games emphasizing on equitable side events and encourage African athletes to advocate for gender justice.
- Take policy decisions that encourage Member States to mainstream and recognise SfD and include it in national sports policies, strategies and budgets.



AU MEMBER STATES SHOULD:

- Develop policy frameworks that mainstream gender equality, safe and inclusive sport.
- Provide adequate sustainable, financial and institutional capacity to implement international, continental, regional and national commitments for gender-responsive planning, budgeting, programme design and research in sport development and SfD.
- Engage in multi-stakeholder collaboration to advance a collective national agenda for gender equality and to address duplication of efforts and resources resulting from fragmented intergovernmental and sectoral delivery systems.
- Strategically promote, fund and set targets for gender equality in sports participation, coaching, technical roles and leadership, while implementing sanctions for non-compliance with policies and legislation.
- Create an enabling environment for sport by ensuring safe participation, the protection of human dignity and protection of human rights and freedoms at all levels by emphasizing on implementation of safeguarding in sports policies and strategies.



THE BUSINESS SECTOR SHOULD:



- Partner with sports agencies to share a business model approach and contribute to the professionalisation of the sports sector by developing women's leadership, ownership, and entrepreneurship.
- Sponsor female athletes and high profile women's sports while consciously promoting gender equality in marketing and communications.
- Commit to the socio-economic empowerment of young girls by providing scholarships, work-based learning and career opportunities.
- Dedicate and monitor Corporate Social Investment (CSI) funds to sponsor NGOs and deliver results for women and girls in sport and SfD initiatives.

THE MEDIA SHOULD:



- Increase the visibility of women and girls in sport by allocating more airtime/ space to attract sponsors and audiences.
- Employ female journalists and promote gender-sensitive reporting in sport to counter gender stereotypes.
- Publish/communicate stories of successful female athletes who have overcome multiple obstacles and challenges to reach the top.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS SHOULD:



- Form partnerships with peer organisations, governments, development agencies and networks to collectively advocate for sustainable funding and access to resources to deliver gender transformative sport and SfD programmes.
- Engage in innovative ways and use sport as a catalyst to reach and address needs of the most disadvantaged female populations (e.g. refugees, teenage mothers, rural communities and persons with disabilities).



RESOURCES

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