



# FAME

Feminist African Manifesto  
for Entrepreneurship



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# FAME

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# SUMMARY



Africa is bursting with entrepreneurs finding local solutions to context-specific challenges and Sub-Saharan Africa boasts the world's highest proportion of women entrepreneurs, estimated at 26 - 30% (WEF 2022). Yet, they are underrepresented, underfunded and undersupported by existing policy infrastructure. Their boldness, innovation and earning potential is being restricted by modest policies, limited implementation and low access to mechanisms which would help them grow and sustain their businesses.

Women entrepreneurs may also face societal pressures based on traditional gender roles or responsibilities in marriage and motherhood which may decrease their willingness to engage with and ability to find access to financing, role models, mentorship opportunities, and professional connections.

Introducing FAME: the Feminist African Manifesto for Entrepreneurship, a project born of the well-documented need for policies, policymakers and policymaking processes to work better, in order for African women founders to thrive. i4Policy's FAME project aims to support policymakers in developing innovative and radical policies to help women entrepreneurs in a complex startup environment, by promoting and creating participatory processes convening experts and stakeholders in workshops to co-create foundations for feminist innovation policies.

FAME stemmed from the knowledge that African women entrepreneurs are underrepresented and inadequately supported in start-up and entrepreneurship policies. It contributes to the growing recognition of the importance of feminist perspectives and approaches, new understandings, collaborations and pathways in policy development and the growth of inclusive, sustainable and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems.

FAME, by definition, is 'the state of being known or recognised by many people because of your achievements, skills and more'. It emanates esteem, prestige and distinction, which in our small way, via this platform, we hope to contribute towards for African women founders.

We believe that genuine feminism is intersectional and inclusive by nature and therefore, by this virtue, our emphasis on African, Black, Women, in particular those with other characteristics that compound potential areas of discrimination, is deliberate. FAME captures the

essence of daring to be/do different. We want to contribute to African women entrepreneurs being recognised, supported and having their ideas implemented. We want policy solutions to be steeped in lived experience, designed for sustainability and invested in from diverse funding sources.

## Feminist policymaking

Feminist policymaking should be the norm, not the exception, given [half of Africa's population is female](#). However, it is generally accepted and reported that good intentions on gender and development policies have been hampered by a [failure to support them](#) with strong institutional mechanisms for implementation (AU, 2024). [One choice](#) (St Denny, Cairney, Kippin 2022) for policymakers pursuing tangible change is between 'soft' instruments that rely on voluntary take-up, such as benchmarking and the issuance of recommendations, and 'hard' instruments, which are imposed and include penalties for non-compliance.

Alongside fresh and intentional policymaking, [The UNDP 2016](#) Human Development report highlights four areas of legal reform essential to creating fairer conditions for women entrepreneurs. These include:

1. Family law, for example, removing head of household and related provisions that diminish women's legal capacity and economic autonomy.
2. Land tenure, which has the potential to facilitate and encourage mandatory joint land tilling and other means to allow women greater access to land.
3. Labour and employment laws, key to addressing restrictions on women, including married and pregnant women, on type of work, working hours etc.
4. Customary law, that governs the daily lives of many women, especially rural women, and often contradicts statutory provisions

By developing policies that are co-created with and intentionally supporting women and girls, governments will improve their socio-economic prospects which in turn will benefit society at large. Catering to women entrepreneurs' specific needs is crucial for economic growth as women [drive the labour force](#) in most African countries, while McKinsey Global Institute's studies (2015) show that increasing women's participation in policymaking leads to higher GDP growth through increases in higher-skilled women in the



labour force and women's employment in high-productivity sectors.

Female entrepreneurs often differ from their male counterparts in terms of lived experience, societal dynamics, mindset and their attempts to build, sustain and grow businesses. Bespoke policies accounting for these divergences should form the basis of feminist policymaking. Some key reasons for gender-inclusive entrepreneurship policies are discussed below.

[The World Bank](#) (2018) states that in Africa, women entrepreneurs tend to concentrate in sectors such as hospitality, food, retail, hair salons and textiles and wholesale trade (Bardasi, Sabarwal and Terrell, 2011), which tend to be smaller and less profitable than male-dominated industries. Lower start-up costs (Storey and Greene, 2010) and human resources contribute to this trend, however, they tend to also be more crowded and competitive as a result, which can limit scalability. These elements may hinder credit access, where company size, revenue and reporting are often eligibility criteria, alongside business registration status - the process for which is sometimes iterative and unclear - presenting another challenge for informal or fledgling startups. [The World Bank's](#) research found that women entrepreneurs in Africa are more likely to self-select out of the credit market due to perceived low creditworthiness compared to men, further isolating them from the support they need.

Women's networks are typically dominated by other women, which can perpetuate gender-based limitations to information (Smeltzer and Fann, 1989). Furthermore, these networks are mainly family and friends, which has distinct advantages, such as financial investment, childcare and general encouragement. However, the same individuals can drain resources away from the business, especially if there is pressure to spend money on familial responsibilities, instead of on their business (World Bank, 2018). Examples of this are found in research by Fafchamps et al. (2011) which notes instances of women in Ghana spending cash grants intended for business use on household expenses and transfers instead.

In Africa and around the world, culture, tradition, religion and habit place greater shares of household, childcare and familial responsibilities on women than their male counterparts. This directly impacts access to wage jobs, many of which have inflexible hours, while childcare provisions are often non-existent. Entrepreneurship is many women's only option to make a living for themselves (Minniti and Arenius, 2003; Mitra, 2002).

Feminist policymaking shouldn't be perceived as 'radical' or 'innovative', given its clear and wide-ranging benefits. As is commonly said, 'women's issues are everyone's issues' - it's time for policymakers to step up for women: Africa's societies, economic growth and future depend on it.

## Research methods and ecosystem engagement

To anchor our research and build networks around our subject matter, we have shared our vision and gathered insights from stakeholders across Africa, including joining AfriLabs' Annual Gathering 2023 in Kigali, Rwanda, a key event in Africa's tech and entrepreneurial calendar to drive sustainable growth and innovation. The session brought together a small group of African female founders and representatives from policy bodies and iNGOs to explore specific policies required to improve the sustainability and impact of women-led businesses and highlighted the need for existing incentives and initiatives to go further.

We also hosted a policy laboratory in Accra, Ghana with a group of women entrepreneurs in Accra, leading startups in diverse industries including agriculture, fashion and tech. The session uncovered the realities of building businesses in Africa, discussed the entrepreneurship policy environment, and generated policy solutions, ranging from ideas that could be implemented today, to moonshot ideas of the future.

Lastly, powered by [AfriLabs](#), we hosted a webinar for the African startup community, to share their experiences starting businesses and gather views on overcoming barriers to growth. This webinar allowed us to reach the wider pan-African community and included representatives from 8 African countries.

## What to expect from this policy brief

Anchored by i4Policy's mission to bring citizens, communities and governments together to co-create the future, this report is an early-stage framework to support policymakers mainstream gender into entrepreneurship policies. It outlines some of the foundations of gender-inclusive entrepreneurship and innovation policies in Africa, based on data gathered and lived experiences of African women. It's also a social commentary and call to action for shifts in government approaches and entrenched social norms to accomplish entrepreneurship's full potential on the continent.



# SETTING THE SCENE

Imagine, you are a young woman who recently graduated from one of Africa's most prestigious universities. You graduated with an upper-class degree in Engineering and decided to become an entrepreneur. You want to use technology to create a solution to one of Africa's biggest problems. You bootstrap to raise initial funds to start your business. You join an incubator to create your first minimum viable product (MVP). You crowd-source for additional funding. You join an accelerator to grow. You search for investors and pitch, pitch, pitch. You receive some funding and become one of only 2% of women entrepreneurs in Africa to do so in 2023. You pitch some more and you're unsuccessful. You crowd-source again. You become tired. You become weary. You realise life commitments mean it's virtually impossible to continue.

Now imagine you are a female entrepreneur who did not attend a prestigious university. Someone who has not heard of incubator and accelerator programmes to be accepted into one, who does not have the fortune of receiving funding to support their venture, who has never really considered what life as an African women entrepreneur entails? Where do you go from here? With this policy brief, we aim to support women from across the spectrum to explore the possibilities of entrepreneurship not only for themselves but for broader economic and social prosperity.

## What the data tells us

Entrepreneurship for African women is not a new phenomenon. [As noted](#), Sub-Saharan Africa boasts the world's highest proportion of women entrepreneurs, estimated at 26 - 30%. Unfortunately, the vast majority of women entrepreneurs suffer from inadequate support and societal pressures that limit their ability to engage in productive entrepreneurship. If we look at funding statistics, support for women entrepreneurs in Africa is severely lacking.

In 2023, startups with solo female founders or all-female founding teams secured a mere 2% of total funding, while a significant 85% of funding went to solo male founders or all-male founding teams ([The Big Deal, 11 Jan 2024](#)). Despite this disparity, women-led ventures in Africa managed to raise slightly above \$200 million, exhibiting a positive year-on-year growth of 7%, noteworthy given the overall funding decrease of -39% year-on-year. However, ventures led by men still dominated the funding landscape, with \$2.7 billion raised, spotlighting the stark gender imbalance in

funding distribution across Africa. Furthermore, as funding amounts increase, women's representation diminishes: 20% of companies raising \$100k+ in Africa in 2023 were woman-led, but only 7% raised \$10 million or more ([The Big Deal, 30 Jan 2024](#)). Evidence also suggests that being [Black and a woman compounds difficulties with accessing funding](#).

This data underscores persistent challenges for women founders in accessing funding. For those who manage to launch their business and secure funding, financial challenges are likely to persist. According to the World Bank, women entrepreneurs across sub-Saharan Africa [earn lower profits than men \(34% less on average, though with serious variation across the continent\)](#). Several reasons are given for this; gender discrimination, limited access to capital and assets, and a lack of a support network among them. Women have less access to markets, networks, technologies, and skills than male entrepreneurs and face [a daunting \\$1.7 trillion financing gap globally](#).

The data paints a bleak future for women entrepreneurs if something isn't done now. The data itself needs to be more nuanced. Insufficient disaggregated data hinders the ability to pinpoint and address the specific challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs. However, somewhat paradoxically, there is an abundance of research presenting comprehensive data collection at a higher level (e.g., global) that fails to delve into the granular details needed for context-specific solutions. So, "yes" to the calls for greater funding options, to improved networking and mentoring opportunities, to more targeted investment opportunities, but "more" of specific hows and by when for specific countries or regions. These are crucial elements often missing in the discourse around what needs to be done to alleviate barriers faced by women entrepreneurs.

***"Data and statistics Despite the data revolution, sex and age-disaggregated data remain notoriously difficult to access across all countries. Even where governments gather such data, it is often not analysed and used to improve policies and decision-making on gender"***

[AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment \(2018 - 2022\)](#)

The World Economic Forum's 2022 *Global Gender Gap Report* estimates it will take an average of 132 years to achieve gender equality globally; in 2020, that figure was **99.5 years**. This statistic shows the escalating global trend of gender inequality. Without collective, concerted efforts, the gap will persist and widen. This underscores the necessity for explicit measures to address and narrow this gap. For entrepreneurship, this means the implementation of gender-sensitive interventions to facilitate women's entry and sustained participation, without which risks the continued underutilisation and productivity of women in entrepreneurship spaces.

### Patriarchal Social Norms: Impact on Women's Entrepreneurship

Studies by Adom & Anambane (2019) and Overå (2003) indicate that [socio-cultural barriers to women's entrepreneurship stem from patriarchal discriminatory norms](#), constraining women's ability to exercise their entrepreneurial skills and socio-economic rights. Additionally, research by Bamfo & Asiedu-Appiah (2012) and Overå (2017)

respectively, suggest that [gendered barriers hinder female-led businesses' access to resources](#) and limit opportunities for women to enter male-dominated sectors.

Patriarchal structures and societal norms play a substantial role in determining caregiving responsibilities within households, impacting the available time for work or productive entrepreneurial activities. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), [85% of women in Africa are employed while also bearing care responsibilities](#). Additionally, [African women dedicate 3.4 times more time to unpaid care work than men](#), resulting in women working more hours overall when both unpaid care work and paid work are considered. Globally, despite some increase in men's involvement in unpaid care work in certain countries over the past two decades, the *reduction in the gender gap* for time spent on such responsibilities across 23 countries (that had available time series data) has been *minimal, at just 7 minutes per day*. At this pace, [it would take 210 years to fully close the gender gap in unpaid care work in these countries](#).

## Box 1: Gendered Biases and Women's Entrepreneurship

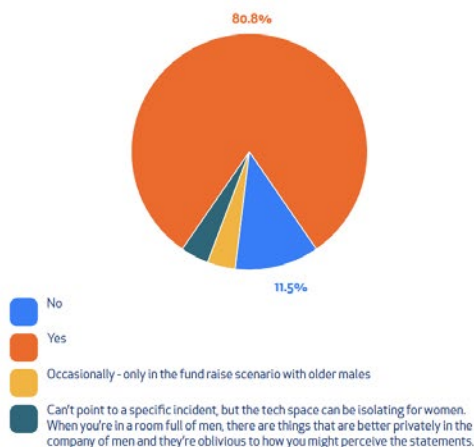
*"The **performance and status** of a business **does not depend solely on the individual's aspirations, characteristics or capacities**, but also on the **level of gender bias** in the environment of the entrepreneur. This includes **inequalities in time use, mobility, intra-household decision making** and responsibility for **unpaid care work** between men and women; **gender biases in-laws** on inheritance and land ownership; **inaccessibility of institutional support** for entrepreneurship development by women; **lack of women's agency** in public spaces; **inequalities in enrolment** in secondary education and access to vocational training; and **discriminatory practices, constraining norms and stereotypes** on what is 'appropriate' behaviour and what types of tasks, roles and duties women and men can perform."*

Gender-Aware Women's Entrepreneurship Development for Inclusive Development in Sub-Saharan Africa. Saskia Vossenbergh (19 January 2016)

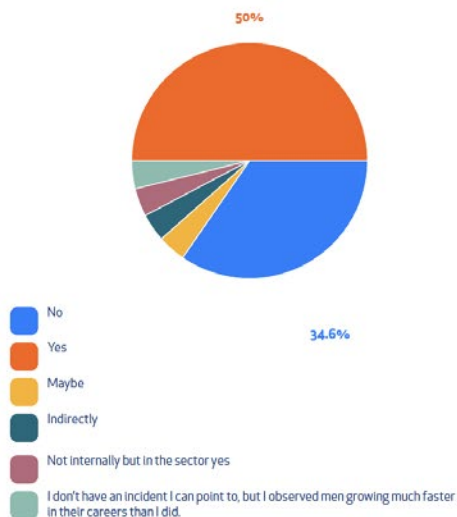
[Disrupt Africa](#), a prominent news and research platform covering startups, technology, and innovation in Africa, highlighted the challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs in its 2023 report "[Diversity Dividend: Exploring Gender](#)

[Equality in the African Tech Ecosystem](#)". Below we spotlight a selection of responses to questions that showcase just some of the challenges women entrepreneurs working in Africa face.

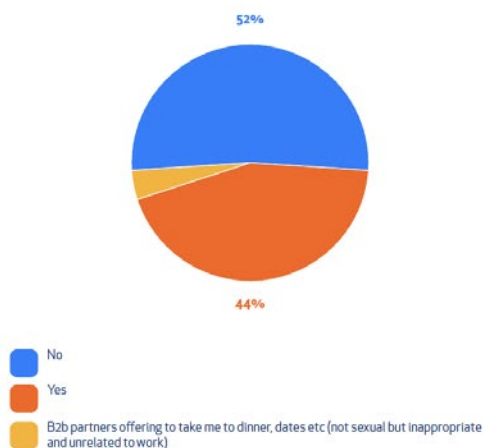
Have you perceived bias against you professionally because you are a woman?



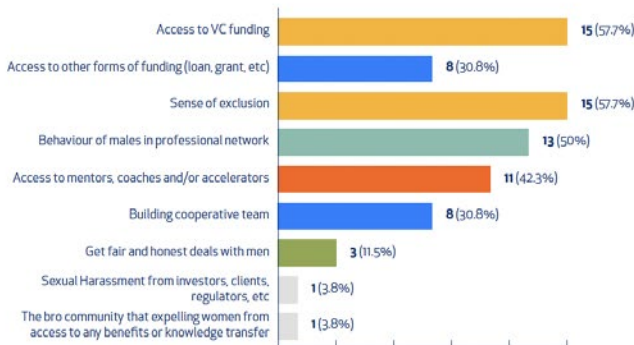
Do you feel you have lost any professional opportunities directly because of being a woman?



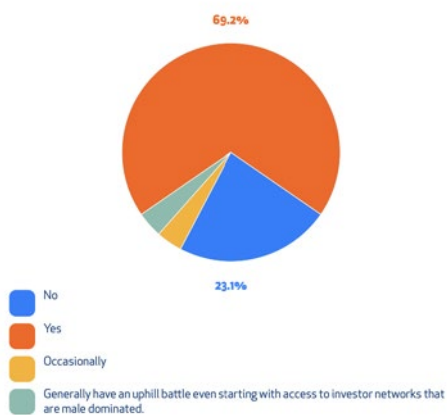
Have you ever been subjected to sexual advances in the workplace/professional environment?



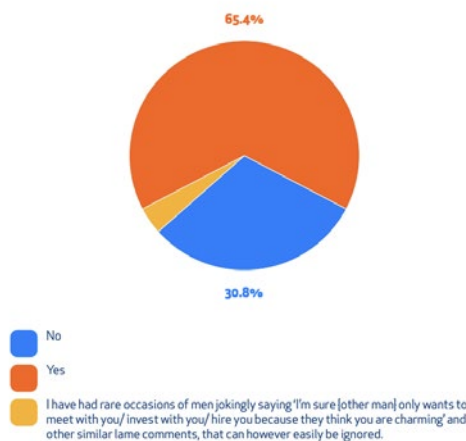
What is the biggest obstacle you have faced as a female founder?



Have you ever felt disadvantaged or negatively impacted by being a woman when speaking to a potential investor?



Has your professional position/responsibility ever been openly questioned because you are a woman?





These grim statistics reflect broader societal gender disparities and discrimination manifesting within entrepreneurial ecosystems in Africa. To overcome the challenges and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, interventions must be multifaceted and sustainable, addressing not only the challenges directly associated with working in the entrepreneurship sector but also broader societal issues (see: [Policy Recommendations](#)).

Despite these challenges, women prosper and support other women when given the opportunity. According to research from the World Bank Africa's Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) and Briter Bridges, women-led African startups were [twice as likely](#) to hire women and four times as likely to employ female managers. It is also estimated [each women-led firm is six times more likely to hire female employees](#) than male-led ones. Supporting women therefore not only helps rebalance an unjustifiable imbalance it also empowers women to support each other. Two poignant points are raised in [ILO's Women](#).

#### [Entrepreneurial Development Programme:](#)

- (1) \$5 trillion global economy boost if women entrepreneurs are adequately supported. (BCG, 2019)
- (2) Women's businesses have proven to be more productive, generating the same value production as men's with less working power

Enabling more women to enter the workforce supports additional women to enter, particularly when considering possible childcare support mechanisms (see: [Box 3](#)). These statistics highlight the importance of prioritising women not only for the sake of equality and equity but also as sound, pragmatic approaches to economic development.



# AFRICAN GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Interest, investment and innovation in and around startup policy in Africa are growing, however questions around intention and implementation remain, against the backdrop of other urgent national priorities, including infrastructure, education and healthcare. Africa's population is the youngest of any continent in the world and without sufficient action and meaningful engagement on these societal pillars, alongside entrepreneurship, governments [risk fuelling social unrest](#) and deepening disillusionment (Din-Kariuki, 2024). Critically, as reported by the [Tony Blair Institute](#) (Bayuo and Gakuo, 2023), governments must be ready to economically justify why resources are being allocated to startups instead of other public services, alongside developing robust impact measurement systems to avoid ineffective interventions.

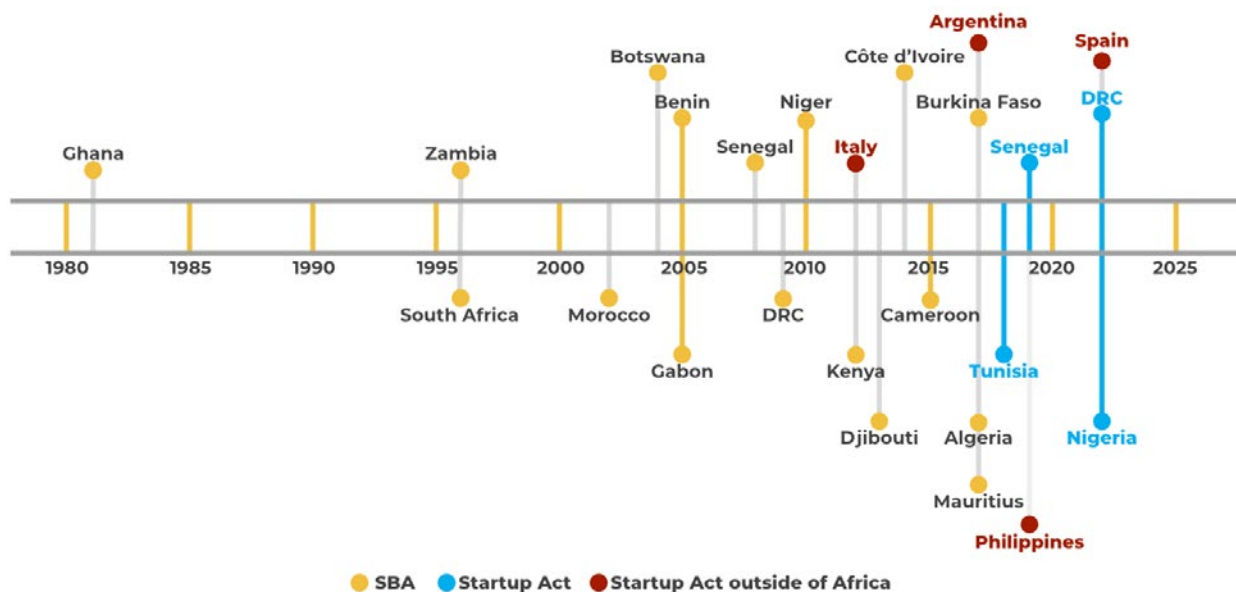
While managing this balance, policymakers must begin to shift from investment and inclusion by default, to investment by design: intentionally crafted, carefully curated policy infrastructure that supports women, without gaps or loopholes which counter the purpose for which they were intended. [As Batterbury has pointed out:](#) "Policies and institutions need to build on the strengths of a locality and be tailored to the prevailing socio-cultural environment for effective policy delivery" (Batterbury, 2002).

There is plentiful discourse proposing solutions for African governments to adopt and identify trends among existing entrepreneurship policies in Africa. Some important characteristics of existing

African SME policies, categorised by Matambalya (2000) and highlighted in the [Journal for Business Research](#) (2019) are (1) to alleviate the capital shortage, (2) to protect the SMEs using regulatory measures such as licensing and pricing, and (3) to import regulations.

The [Tony Elumelu Foundation \(2023\)](#) encourages policies supporting venture capital funds and small business loans to enhance entrepreneurs' access to capital, mitigate investor risk and foster startup support. They also suggest that by streamlining business registration and licensing processes, bureaucratic hurdles will formalise more businesses, increase access to finance and encourage transparency. Tax incentives, like reduced rates or tax holidays for SMEs would lower business costs, while investments in education and vocational training programs equip aspiring entrepreneurs with essential skills. Infrastructure like reliable electricity and transportation networks will boost competitiveness, while robust intellectual property laws will protect innovations and boost investment in research and development.

[i4Policy's Benchmarking report \(2023\)](#) recognises that entrepreneurship policies are increasingly gaining traction on the continent. It identifies 21 African Small Business Acts and Startup Acts, benchmarks and compares them. Seven key challenge areas are the lens through which the comparisons are conducted: finance, market access, support, governance, culture, infrastructure and human capital.



New, innovative policies are a positive and essential step, however, communicating with and educating those affected by policies requires long-term sustained commitment. We found that the majority of women founders at the Accra Female Founders Takeover (see: [Spotlight on Ghana](#)) had not heard of the Ghana Start Up Bill and weren't aware of how it might help them. This may be a symptom of the fact that the Act is still in draft form. However, it is still concerning as the consultation approach was deemed participatory. To ensure laws include relevant provisions for women entrepreneurs, they need to have an active, priority role in conversations and decision-making processes.

***“There’s apathy and a lack of trust between the private sector and the public sector. You could announce a gold rush from the government and most citizens wouldn’t believe it or pay attention. I think the place to start is paying attention — to learn about the things that are happening, embrace them, and find ways to participate. Once we start doing that, we’ll get a sense of how we can help mold forward-thinking policies that help our businesses”***

*- [Oswald Osaretin Guobadia](#) - managing partner at DigitA in Lagos, Nigeria*





# CURRENT POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

## Multilateral Agency Support Policies

Numerous organisations are actively engaged in supporting women’s entrepreneurship in Africa, recognising the significant socio-economic benefits associated with empowering women in business. By developing strategies, implementing gender-aware provisions and providing financial resources, mentorship programs, and capacity-building initiatives, these agencies aim to foster women’s economic independence,

promote gender equality, and drive sustainable development across the continent.

While we highlight a few of these agencies below (see [here](#) for even more examples), it’s essential to acknowledge the broader collective effort underway to advance women’s entrepreneurship in Africa alongside the need to do more.

Organisation	Description
<b>African Union (AU)</b>	<p><b><a href="#">AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy.</a></b> Pillar 1: focuses on maximising opportunities, outcomes and e-tech dividends which includes advocating for and lobbying e-Tech firms and financial institutions to fund start-ups and innovation hubs which promote gendered solutions and increase women and girls’ equal and effective participation in the technology space.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ <a href="#">Outcome 1.3 Technology &amp; E-inclusion:</a> Women and girls become more active users and influencers of the technological space and gender enabling E- solutions to be funded.</li> <li>□ Also recognition of men and boys’ role: The 48th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2004 recognised that men and boys can and do make contributions to achieve gender equality. Dismantling patriarchy is no longer seen by all men as a win-lose proposition. They look to the history and experience of the women’s movement to inspire them in their own struggles</li> </ul>
<b>African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)</b>	<p><b><a href="#">Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA):</a></b> Leveraging AfCFTA - comes with its challenges, but implementation and execution could greatly benefit women. <a href="#">The AfCFTA</a> has opened African businesses to a 1.2 billion people market but the female entrepreneurs are missing out on the opportunities because their businesses are mostly small, have low productivity and get little funding from governments and agencies. Provisions are being implemented to improve women’s success as entrepreneurs and actively engage with the AfCFTA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ <a href="#">AfCFTA provisions prioritise women entrepreneurs</a> by granting access to affordable raw materials and fostering gradual liberalisation to enhance competitiveness. The agreement also addresses women’s needs through designated sensitive products e.g., reproductive health products, preferential trade regimes, and measures facilitating their integration into larger value chains</li> <li>□ <a href="#">SheTrades: Empowering Women in the African Continental Free Trade Area—Phase II,</a> aligns with <a href="#">ITC’s One Trade Africa strategy</a> for regional integration, specifically targeting women entrepreneurs. The project aims to build a more inclusive AfCFTA by providing capacity-building, networking, and policy advocacy support to women’s business associations, leveraging the private sector for women’s economic empowerment, collaborating with ECOWAS, and fostering public-private sector dialogues on women and trade in selected countries.</li> </ul>

Organisation	Description
<b>International Labour Force - Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme (ILO-WED)</b>	<b>Women's Entrepreneurship Development: ILO WED Programme:</b> Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme (ILO-WED) seeks to redress existing gender imbalances in enterprise development through approaches aimed specifically at women, while simultaneously working with constituents to ensure that enterprise initiatives consider gender dynamics and inequalities in their formulation and roll-out. The programme applies a set of tested tools and approaches to support and create the conditions to enable budding and existing women entrepreneurs to start, manage and grow their businesses.
<b>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)</b>	<b>The Women Entrepreneurship for Africa</b> initiative hosted by the German government's development agency, GIZ and implemented by GFA Consulting Group, seeks to bridge the gap between solution providers and end-users by ensuring that digital solutions are tailored to the specific needs of women micro-entrepreneurs. This will foster an environment conducive to growth and innovation, ensuring that the digital solutions offered are intuitive, accessible, and impactful for the women and micro-entrepreneurs who will use them.

There are several African governments also working to support women entrepreneurs, but there is often a lack of gender sensitivity in pro-entrepreneurship policy formulation. As mentioned in [i4Policy's 2023 Benchmarking Report](#), the drafting and implementation of Startup Acts across Africa is gaining traction as governments continue to recognise the importance of fostering entrepreneurship in their economies. However, i4policy research has shown that women's entrepreneurship is one

area inadequately addressed in Startup Acts across the continent. Though some do, it is clear that more explicit, gender-sensitive provisions need to be included in Startup Acts and other pro-entrepreneurship policies to systematically break down the barriers and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs across the continent.

Below is a snapshot of national-level policies in Africa that include specific provisions to support women entrepreneurs.

### Gender-inclusive Startup Acts in Africa: A Snapshot

Country	Document	Year
DRC [2022]	Ordonnance... à la promotion de l'entrepreneuriat et des startups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In case of subcontracting to a startup led by women, young people (18-35) or disabled, tax exemption can increase to 50% from 40%.</li> <li>- Incubators and coworking spaces dedicated primarily to women, young people and people living with a disability.</li> </ul>
Ghana [2021]	The Ghana Start-up Act [Draft]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Startup Investment Fund aims to facilitate equity investments, as well as access to the existing Venture Capital Trust Fund (Act 2004).</li> <li>- Tax benefits for investors</li> <li>- Special attention to marginalized groups, with a minimum of 15% of public procurements to be allocated to women and 20% to persons with disabilities (within the allocation of 20% of government contracts being allocated to companies with startup certification).</li> </ul>
Mauritius [2017]	Mauritius 10 Year SME Master Plan	Environment: supporting the development of women-led businesses through specific policies and incentives, specialized training, women-to-women support networks and mentors, creation of more nurseries, etc



## The growing role of private enterprises and international actors

As governments across Africa grapple with developing policies to suit women-led startups, private industry and international actors have mobilised to fill the gap, developing schemes tailored for women entrepreneurs to access finance, deepen their network and respond to localised needs. To name a few:

- [Google for Startups Accelerator: Women Founders Africa Program](#) - designed to bring the best of Google's expertise, products, people and technology to women-led tech startups up to Series A stage, based in Africa or building Africa-centered solutions with technology. The program includes content and mentorship tailored to the unique needs of women founders and opportunities to network with our global women founders community.
- [International Finance Corporation - She Wins Africa](#) - designed to assist women entrepreneurs across sub-Saharan Africa by offering training, mentorship and networking opportunities that will help their startups succeed.
- [FirstCheck Africa](#) is an early-stage VC fund investing in technology-driven startups in Africa with at least one female founder or co-founder
- [Women in Africa - The JAMII Femmes initiative](#) aims to increase the impact of African women entrepreneurs on the African economy and to support the creation of innovative solutions for sustainable development that will

contribute to positive change in Africa by improving the quality of life for tens of thousands of people. JAMII Femmes is a great opportunity to develop skills, access a grant and join a network of 7000 women.

- USAID's [African Women's Entrepreneurship Program](#) (AWEP) supports the growth, profitability, and export of women-led businesses in Africa by bolstering access to capital, access to markets, skills and capacity building, and women's leadership. AWEP strives to assist African women in business to overcome gender inequities that restrict the growth and success of their businesses.

Another essential component of shifting the dial towards genuine support for African entrepreneurs is the much-needed rise of African female investors. Though this sits outside of government scope, it's important to note given venture capital's influence on startup growth. 'Affinity bias' ([Crunchbase, 2022](#)) describes the phenomenon of investors' inclination to fund, whether rightly or wrongly, people who look like them and share their background. According to IFC data, just 12% of senior general partners in sub-Saharan African private equity/venture capital firms are female. Globally, the number is even lower, at 11%. Which matters to African startups, due to the increasing number of global firms investing in the continent ([Blake, 2023](#)). By actively engaging more women - especially African women - investors, the likelihood of more funding going to women entrepreneurs increases.





# SPOTLIGHT ON GHANA

Ghana has become a significant player in Africa's startup ecosystem, serving as a gateway to West Africa and beyond, assisted by relative political stability, strategic location, and improving infrastructure. Ghana's startup ecosystem thrives on a diverse cultural mix, entrepreneurial spirit, tech-savvy youth, and a strong community spirit that encourages collaboration and innovation.

Ghana benefited from the ["funding heatwave"](#) of 2019 - 2022. Just behind the big 4 (Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya and South Africa), Ghana joins ["the next 5"](#) with over 500 startups, with 542 million USD in funding raised during this period across just under 100 deals. However, Ghana, alongside other African countries including the big 4, experienced significant declines in funding during the ["funding winter"](#) of 2022 to 2023, with an 86% year-on-year decrease in funding.

Considering women's entrepreneurship in Ghana specifically, according to the [2021 Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs](#), Ghana ranks third in Africa for the proportion of women business owners, following Botswana and

Uganda. Botswana topped the list of African countries favouring women's entrepreneurship in 2021, scoring 56.3 points in the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE). It was followed by South Africa (54.9) and Ghana (51.1), indicating not only a high percentage of women-owned businesses but also formal support for women entrepreneurs, relative to other countries in Africa. Despite a significant element of necessity driving entrepreneurship in these economies, there is also a strong or even stronger element of opportunity. In Malawi, 51.3% of entrepreneurship is necessity-driven, while in Ghana, it's 39.9%, and in Uganda, it's 21.9%, compared to 48%, 59.0%, and 77.8% respectively for opportunity-driven entrepreneurship.

It's encouraging that women entrepreneurs in Ghana are primarily motivated by opportunity rather than necessity in starting their businesses, and there are existing provisions to support them. However, various obstacles and challenges confront women entrepreneurs in Ghana (see [Box 2](#)), that require explicit interventions to alleviate.

## Box 2: Obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in Ghana

*"Economic obstacles to women's entrepreneurship in Ghana are versatile and emanate from the entrepreneurial ecosystem. They comprise inadequate and limited access to resources of all kinds, including financial resources, human resources and social capital (Bamfo & Asiedu-Appiah, 2012; Hampel-Milagrosa, 2011; Sowatey et al., 2018). Other challenges are inadequate customers, non-payment of debts, high taxes and license fees, lack of space to operate, lack of capital equipment and difficulties with existing regulations (Bamfo & Asiedu-Appiah, 2012; Peparah, Buor & Forkuor, 2019)."*

Source: [Feminist Critique of Ghana's Women's Entrepreneurship Policies](#)

In the Ghana government's own words, the [Ghanaian Innovation and Startup Bill](#) project is 'a joint initiative by Ghana's private sector and the Government to enhance the startup ecosystem through co-created legislation...the Ghanaian Innovation and Startup Bill project is expected to provide startups with access to funding, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, protect their intellectual property, and create a favourable ecosystem for growth'.

A notable success under the Bill is the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Plan (NEIP), which provides business development services, startup incubators, and funding for women entrepreneurs. [Recent reporting](#) (Benson, 2023) notes the NEIP has trained over 45,000

entrepreneurs, 60% of whom are women, and has disbursed grants to over 9,000 businesses, with women-led enterprises receiving a sizable portion.

Although there are three explicit mentions of women, there is much more to do, around promotion, engagement and implementation.

***It's like sailing a ship on your own. Accessing funding is tough for entrepreneurs in general, but for a female entrepreneur like me it becomes even harder***

- Daniella Darlington, Copianto AI

**A lot of people consider your business a side gig...you have to tell them how serious and intentional you are**

*Ozioma Onukogu, Mino Creatives*

As the [Feminist Critique of Ghana's Women's Entrepreneurship Policies](#) points out, there are gaps in the government's efforts - from low representation of women in images within policy documents as well as limited operationalisation of gender awareness training. Although policies generally lean towards informal sector entrepreneurs, policies on childcare support and expanding decent physical infrastructure for informal workers were left wanting. Meanwhile, it continues, policies on capacity-building, such as mentorship and continuous professional development programs for women entrepreneurs in the formal sector are indiscernible.

Also worth noting is that there is some conflation of startups and SMEs in the Ghanaian context, heightened by the types of businesses women often start: catering, fashion, wholesale trade and so on.

### **THREE-STEP POLICY CHANGES DESIGNED BY AFRICAN WOMEN**

In November 2023, i4Policy hosted a policy hackathon dubbed the 'Female Founders Takeover' for a small group of Ghanaian women

Here's what they said:

entrepreneurs in Accra, Ghana, with a brief to co-design policy recommendations to support them grow their businesses, ranging from the tried-and-tested to the radical.

Several challenge areas emerged, including: Finance; Market Access; Human Capital; Governance; Culture; Knowledge; Infrastructure; General Support and Governance. The women identified Funding and Market Access as the most pressing areas for action, investment and engagement, which laid the foundations for the policy laboratory.

#### **The task**

Design three policies to improve support for African women entrepreneurs, under the following scopes:

- (1) **Stay grounded:** An existing policy that we need more of (more investment, more endorsement, more sustained implementation)
- (2) **A step change:** A more radical idea, which with political will and sustained effort, will have a desired impact.
- (3) **Magic wand:** Moonshot ideas, which feel impossible now, but can build the future we want to see.

## **Female Founders Takeover Accrea: Insights**



### **Funding**

**Stay grounded:** A policy that reserves funding for women entrepreneurs in each industry according to their needs

**A step change:** A dedicated body and websites that trains women to be investment ready for their business & serves as a guarantor

**Magic wand:** A women-only board that allocates government funds to support women entrepreneurs, acting as both fund allocators and accountability and support partners.



### **Market Access**

**Stay grounded:** Exclusive trade-show/expo for women-led startups only. A sector specific networking/pitching opportunity

**A step change:** A policy aimed at incentivising large businesses to partner with startups to boost publicity, branding, plus mentorship, etc.

**Magic wand:** Women entrepreneurs can be given a QR code (that validates one's identity) that allows them to ask for anything they want/granted access to anything/anyone that serves business needs

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**“The crucial role of female-led startups in Africa means that African governments and policymakers must address the socio-cultural constraints that limit female founders’ growth potential and reduce their engagement in the African start-up space.”**

[Aimée Dushime, Global Shaper, Kigali Hub](#)

Our research has shown that there are several ways in which African policymakers can actively support women entrepreneurs to excel, both in the short and long term. To develop context-specific solutions to the challenges and barriers women entrepreneurs face, policymakers MUST engage women actively pursuing careers in entrepreneurship and create a conducive environment that creates a pipeline of women encouraged to enter in the future.

**“Gender-aware women’s entrepreneurship development (WED) means taking into account the socially- and historically constructed identities, roles, power relations and modes of action assigned to men and women”.**

Saskia Vossenburch, [Gender-Aware Women’s Entrepreneurship Development for Inclusive Development in Sub-Saharan Africa](#)

## Short-to-Medium Term

We recommend 3 steps policymakers can take to help African women entrepreneurs in the short-to-medium term:

- **Conduct Policy Hackathons:** Accra Female Founders Takeover Policy Hackathon x 100. A mechanism to relatively quickly understand women’s entrepreneurship challenges and co-create the solutions openly and transparently. A lesson learnt from the Accra mini-hackathon was the need to go to where women entrepreneurs are or include innovative measures to capture the voices of a wider number of women (e.g., use mobile surveys), given women’s additional care responsibilities.
- **Gender-responsive financial support:** Financial constraints are cited as the number one challenge facing startups. As [noted earlier](#), women entrepreneurs face additional financial constraints when compared to men, therefore women-specific financial support mechanisms would help to narrow gaps in access to finance.

- Direct financial support for women

entrepreneurs can come in the form of loans or grants for business development purposes. These can either be restricted, i.e., designated for specific purposes defined by the government, or unrestricted, i.e., a flexible approach where the entrepreneur has full discretion on how funds are used. Unrestricted funding gives entrepreneurs the autonomy and flexibility needed to innovate, scale, and address unique business challenges effectively. Therefore the more unrestricted funding available the better. However, unrestricted funding should be provided in situations where it will be used for strengthening business (e.g., innovation) as opposed to sustaining business (e.g., operational costs).

- Indirect financial support means supporting women entrepreneurs to dedicate more time/effort to their businesses by supporting other aspects of their lives. Support mechanisms could include subsidising caregiving support access (e.g., subsidised access to government-run or supported childcare facilities. See: [Box 3](#))

- **Preferential access to government contracts:** Apportioning a specific percentage of government procurement contracts to women entrepreneurs will those with viable products/services proof of concept (and more) as evidenced by the Government as a client.

## Medium-to-Long Term

In the medium-to-long term, we offer several recommendations that complement and expand on the short-to-medium-term recommendations. Effective implementation of these recommendations hinges on refining them through a participatory process. Therefore, we urge policymakers to collaboratively develop the context-specific aspects with the stakeholders who will be impacted - women entrepreneurs.

- **Conduct consistent and continuous in-depth context-specific gender-responsive research on support mechanisms** at the country and regional level, to gain an in-depth understanding of each country’s requirements to support women entrepreneurs, noting that:
  - Policy hackathons can support the collection of qualitative and



quantitative primary data, and

- Leveraging technology can support reaching as many women entrepreneurs as possible to add to the depth and breadth of data collected.

Analysis of gender disparities within distinct sectors and segments is essential to mitigate the impact and develop relevant solutions. Such data is crucial for crafting inclusive educational and support initiatives tailored to address the diverse challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs across various cultures and business environments.

- **Nurture training, mentoring and networking opportunities:** Another oft-cited challenge for all entrepreneurs and acutely so for women, opportunities to connect with people and businesses for learning and business support are crucial for any business' success. There are several ways the government can support adequate training, mentoring and networking opportunities. To do this most effectively and efficiently would be to partner with startup support organisations (SSOs. See: [TBI's Chapter 6: Nurture Connections Through Tech Networks](#)) who are already experienced in supporting startups to start, innovate and create.
  - Support incubators, accelerators and co-working spaces that have specific remits to support women, financially (e.g., favourable loans or grants) or in-kind (e.g., equipment donations or venue support). In turn, these hubs can better support women entrepreneurs.
  - Support the creation/continuation of mentorship schemes that match women entrepreneurs with men and women entrepreneurs who are in positions to impart their knowledge and help women entrepreneurs in their endeavours.
- **Create a Taskforce/Committee formed of policymakers and the broader entrepreneurship ecosystem** tasked with overseeing the implementation of mechanisms to support women entrepreneurs effectively and appropriately.

This taskforce should be majority comprised of women and include genuine allies. The Taskforce should lead in ensuring outputs and subsequent

recommendations developed from national and regional level research are actioned appropriately. The Taskforce could also support marketing efforts, e.g., the development and rolling-out of clear messaging campaigns to signpost women entrepreneurs to support mechanisms.

It must also be recognised that entrepreneurship-specific policies alone cannot create the conducive environment required to fully support women's entrepreneurship; cultural norms and practices alongside the way economies currently function will need to shift drastically for women to productively engage in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

We therefore provide two additional recommendations to support the shifts needed in education and cultural contexts:

- **Investment in STEAM Education:** Intentionally supporting girls from a young age to enter the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) space.
  - For example, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) has an initiative that works with schools in more impoverished areas to consider STEAM subjects to create a future pipeline of women who have the tools to launch startups in the future.
  - The additional emphasis on arts is deliberate. Approaching STEM education through the lens of both hard and soft skills will enable creative flair to be combined with technical skills to find innovative ways to solve problems.
  - Supporting innovation, often intertwined with technology-driven solutions, will position Africa to actively participate in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, not only as consumers but also as producers of novel products and services.

***“If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a nation” – Fanti (Ghana) Proverb;***  
attributed to Dr James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey (1875-1927)

- **Investment in childcare support:** As [outlined](#), women’s share of caring responsibilities results in distorted time allocations for non-care related activities. Policymakers should support, financially and/or in-kind, childcare organisations that enable women to focus on their endeavours. [Box 3](#) outlines several childcare models that could be adopted to ease the childcare burden on women whilst simultaneously supporting women back into the workforce.
  - Considering childcare support specifically, the vast majority of [African countries have some level of maternity pay support](#) (Tunisia with the lowest at approx. 30 days and Gambia the highest at 26 weeks). Given this and the nature of entrepreneurship, our recommendation focuses specifically on supporting women who want to (or must) reenter the workforce.

### Box 3: Childcare models to support women entrepreneurs in Africa

Governments, whether at the national, regional, or local level, [can strategically bolster private sector growth in the care sector](#), leading to a reduction in gender employment gaps. This approach not only creates job opportunities primarily for women but also enhances childcare services, thereby increasing female workforce participation. Particularly in rural areas with limited childcare markets and minimal private sector presence, [government intervention holds significant potential for widespread childcare improvements](#), with partnerships serving as a viable alternative in instances where full-fledged public provision may not be feasible due to fiscal constraints or political considerations.

The table below highlights various childcare models that have been adopted globally, including in Africa.

Model	Description
<b>Social Franchising</b>	A network of quality-assured childcare models catering to low-income women and families
<b>Cooperatives</b>	Cooperatively organised childcare facilities run by and for women (often due to the absence of public/private options)
<b>Market-Based Solutions</b>	Programmes that support (i.e., not directly engaged in childcare provision) innovative market-based solutions for childcare
<b>Partnerships</b>	Multistakeholder collaborations to meet the childcare needs of women

Source: Adapted from Table 1: Childcare Models Serving Women MSEs (micro and small enterprises) in [DCED Childcare Solutions for Women Micro and Small Enterprises](#)



# HONOURING WOMEN, INVOLVING MEN AND TRACKING SUCCESS

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While delivering this research, several areas of reflection materialised, which will be integral to further analysis, implementation and ultimately, the success of gender-focused entrepreneurship policy in Africa.

- Honour the entrepreneurs with locally sensitive research methodologies. For the founders we convened in Accra, every day is a work day and depending on the industry, their time is skewed towards weekday or weekend work. In some cases, it's flexible. We acknowledge the sacrifice the women made by spending half a day with us - possibly foregoing income - to share their experiences and generate policy ideas. Constraints acknowledged, research partners, funders and the wider ecosystem should prioritise meeting entrepreneurs in the field consistently over long periods to gather rich, live data sets to feed directly into decision-making processes. These women persevere despite socio-cultural barriers and numerous infrastructural constraints and we are deeply grateful for the time, effort and dedication to contributing to this work.
- African policymakers can address funding

challenges, biases and discrimination by adopting gender-focused policies, such as [Gender Responsive Budgeting \(GRB\)](#), which helps to improve the allocation of public funds to women-owned businesses, a view reinforced by the [African Union](#).

- [Involve men](#) in advocacy efforts and the implementation of solutions. Per the [World Bank's report \(2019\)](#), 'men are husbands but are also more likely to be bankers, inspectors, trainers, and policymakers... it is important to engage them at multiple levels in efforts to provide better opportunities for female entrepreneurs'. By securing buy-in from men in the home, industry and government, women entrepreneurs and society at large will benefit from their influence.
- Robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) frameworks should underpin existing and incoming policy interventions to remain accountable, relevant and adaptable. The i4Policy assessment methodology training outlines how policymakers can develop optimal MEL plans for entrepreneurship policies. [Learn more here](#).

# CONCLUSION



To truly make a significant impact, policymakers must go beyond what can be done acutely within the entrepreneurship space itself. Genuine change, as in many aspects of development, necessitates a systemic shift, and even more dauntingly, a cultural transformation. Women predominantly encounter challenges with access - in accessing finances, networks, and other resources, all of which are exacerbated by their gender. Cultural norms, dictating their exclusion from these domains, pose significant obstacles to their advancement. Moreover, responsibilities like caregiving further compound these challenges. While drafting policy briefs and enacting specific entrepreneurship legislation targeting women are vital steps, ultimate change hinges on the natural

acceptance of women in these arenas and the transformation of societal norms, including those surrounding caregiving responsibilities.

However, until systematic and systemic changes can occur, policies aimed at dismantling barriers for women in entrepreneurship should be actively pursued. Our call to action is therefore for policymakers to implement relevant recommendations and to listen to the voices of women entrepreneurs to adjust as necessary. By doing this, everyone, including women, will have the opportunity to take full advantage of the benefits offered by a thriving entrepreneurship environment.



# CREDITS - GHANAIAN WOMEN FOUNDERS

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- Doreen Raheena Sulleyman
  - Iota Lifestyle is a company that creates Afro-Avante-Garde Jewelry for the daring woman and man to celebrate their uniqueness.
  - Targeted Rights Initiative is a non-profit organisation that advocates for digital rights education, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable communities, to allow them to gain access to the digital world without fear of being exploited.
- Ozioma Onukogu - Mino Creatives
  - Mino Creatives is helping African Artists earn from their craft by giving them a platform where they can showcase their songs and get clients who would pay them to make customised music
- Bernice Barning - Information Governance Solution
  - Data Protection and Privacy Compliance Management.
- Daniella Darlington - Copianto AI
  - Our cutting-edge LLM/AI models are designed to help you build and deploy conversation search applications easily with a few lines of code for your enterprise data for improved information accessibility.
- Sylvia Appiah
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  - Fashion
  - Signature Coutour is a fashion house where we create handmade clothing while focusing on blending our designs with an African touch. Our clothing is ideal for African Corporate Women as well as casual wear. Our brand also pushes an agenda for sustainable fashion which is also a means to contribute our quota to preserve the environment..
- Karkie Teila
  - Kaylar Exotics
  - Kaylar Exotics is a sole proprietorship entity that provides a unique taste of pre-packaged foods, snacks, drinks and many more.
- Tracy Amponsah - Awuku
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  - Ourgriculture Limited is a leading agricultural company dedicated to transforming the agricultural landscape. We specialize in fostering agricultural excellence through trading, training, and sustainable farming practices. Our team is driven by a passion for agriculture and a commitment to sustainable growth. We welcome partnerships, investments, and collaboration from individuals and organizations who share our vision for a thriving and sustainable future in agriculture. Join us today and be a part of the agricultural revolution.

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    - a. Funding female-led organisations leveraging technology for good and locally led solutions centring women and girls.
    - b. Generation Equality Forum; <https://dashboard.commitments.generationequality.org/>
      - i. A number of commitments made (327 commitments from 279 commitment makers) to advance women and girls, including Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality. Worth reaching out to gain a better understanding of the commitments made: [actioncoalitions@unwomen.org](mailto:actioncoalitions@unwomen.org)

#### Journals / longer reports

1. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11365-021-00751-9>
2. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/13505084211015380>
3. [Gender mainstreaming in European policy: Innovation or deception?](#)

#### Events, funds and networking opportunities

1. For instance, the [Ghana Women Entrepreneurship Summit \(GWES\)](#) has become an annual event where women entrepreneurs can network, learn, and showcase their businesses.
2. <https://www.awieforum.org/awief-conference-2023/> - African Women Innovation and Entrepreneurship Forum
3. African Women Entrepreneurship Cooperative <https://www.weareawec.org/>





# RESOURCES FOR POLICYMAKERS



Here you'll find resources specifically designed for policymakers developing inclusive entrepreneurship policies in Africa.

- The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) (2021). [Gender-Sensitive Business Environment Reform: Why does it matter? – A policy guide](#),
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) [Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme](#)
- INCLUDE - Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Development Policies (2016) [Gender-Aware Women's Entrepreneurship Development for Inclusive Development in Sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Don't forget that i4Policy has several tools and assets to support and guide changemakers, including policymakers, via the [ecosystem.build](#) platform.

- The [Entrepreneurship Policy Toolkit](#) is designed for forward-thinking policy innovators who want to transform their entrepreneurial ecosystems and support their governments with policy reform through deliberation and cutting-edge evidence.
- i4Policy's 2023 [Benchmark](#) report identifies 22 African SBAs and Startup Acts, benchmarks them and identifies 15 other instruments for comparison. Find out what the highlights are and learn from our recommendations.
- The [Library](#) is a repository of information containing the original texts of ratified Startup Acts and Small Business Acts on the African continent.
- The [Learn](#) platform hosts online courses designed for policy actors in the entrepreneurial ecosystem to equip them with valuable skills, knowledge and resources to help them better shape policies that promote entrepreneurship and innovation.
- [The Pan-African Policy Taskforce](#) is a participant-led platform co-led by Smart Africa Alliance, i4Policy and The Tony Blair Institute. The Taskforce was created from a collective need voiced by the African startup ecosystem to cultivate connections, enable the flow of information, and provide a venue where specific expertise, learnings and best practices can be shared.





# FAME

Feminist African Manifesto  
for Entrepreneurship

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