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5 Policymaking from the Margins

Reflections on the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of AU Agenda 2063

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Introduction

Intersectionality¹ is a complex yet vital resource in understanding the possibilities for transformation within marginalised communities within African policymaking. Its applications dynamically shift with community, national, regional, and international political settlements that dictate the level at which the marginalised access political economic space (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Looking at African women’s lived experiences of power and participation through a limited understanding of the nuances of oppression is not tenable for the transformation project at hand. Our perception of (in)equality is determined by the locus within society from which we experience privilege and oppression (Nzegwu, 2006, p. 194). Where 70% of the continent is under the age of 30—Africa is young (United Nations, 2024). Likewise, where 50.14% of the continent identifies as a woman—Africa is female (Wangou et al., 2023). Africa is therefore, at her core, both vertically and horizontally intersected at the experiences of youth and women who remain subjugated against the matrix of hierarchical power and patriarchy at continental policy level. Even in this, the experiences of these women are different. Where African women and young African women on the ethnic, indigenous, religious, and linguistic margins and others do not feature as deliberate points of reference in policymaking towards *The Africa We Want*, universalist applications of tokenised equality will continue to guide the policy narrative, subsequently replicating inefficient pathways for inclusive development (Nzegwu, 2006; Sow, 2003).

There is merit in framing access, agency, and power of African women and young people at continental level policymaking as compared to their social developmental outcomes both continentally and internationally. The chapter further interrogates intersecting continental ideals of gender equality by reflecting on the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (hereafter “FTYIP”) for the African Union’s (hereafter “AU”) Agenda 2063. Reflections focus specifically on Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063, which calls for “an Africa whose

1 For detailed discussion on intersectionality, see the Introduction of this edited volume.

development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children” (African Union Commission, 2015, p. 8). Throughout the chapter, intersectional analysis is interwoven to impress a nuanced basis upon which continental policymakers can move beyond imprecision when looking at African women and young people’s experiences in policy planning and implementation.

Historical inequalities relating to present exclusion cannot be ignored as African women and young women remain on the global margins politically, in education, and in formal economic participation (Collins, 2000, p. 248). To buttress this system-level observation, standpoint theory is to be applied to assess the “people-driven” mandate of Agenda 2063. Examining the realities of the most marginalised in society will illuminate whether implementation is truly people-focused or metric-focused. Intersectionality is therefore useful as a tool to understand lived experiences, and not “as a way to identify problems that need to be solved” (Gouws, 2017, p. 22). Here, an assessment of the FTYIP (2014–2023) as it pertains to African women and young girls is necessary to understand the exclusion and potential economic contributions of the marginalised in relation to Agenda 2063. The Agenda 2063 goals to be discussed are Goal 17 (Full Gender Equality in all Spheres of Life) and Goal 18 (Engaged and Empowered Youth and Children) (African Union Commission, 2015).

The two questions underscoring this chapter are the following: *Does the African Union’s analytical disposition when engaging with Agenda 2063 inherently perpetuate inequalities amongst African women? Moreover, how does this affect monitoring for Agenda 2063 when measuring its success during the reviews of each implementation period?* As Africa faces the “decade of acceleration”, highlighted under the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (hereafter “STYIP”) of Agenda 2063 (2024–2033), there is a need to use the aforementioned inclusive feminist analytical lenses as examination tools to evaluate equitable pathways towards the inclusive implementation for *The Africa We Want* (African Union Commission, 2024). This will be complemented by an evaluation of Goals 17 and 18. There will also be a discussion on notable challenges as potential opportunities at intersectional dialogues for transformative policymaking. Lastly, there will be a brief look at the African Continental Free Trade Area (hereafter “the AfCFTA”) Agreement as one of the main flagship projects of Agenda 2063 with the promise of inclusive economic growth. The overall aim of this chapter is to recentre the positional understandings of African women and young people as active participants at the continental policy table. This is the only way to ensure that pathways to implementation can be targeted towards impactful transformation.

Endorsing Standpoint Theory and Intersectionality as African

Standpoint theory is pivotal in advancing Agenda 2063. Coined by Collins (2000), the praxis of the theory allows for metanarratives of social advancement

to be framed around the experiences of the most marginalised in the context that it is used as Agenda 2063 emphasises inclusive growth and sustainable development. The very methodology behind standpoint theory centres the voice of the voiceless in the development processes, leading to policies that address communities in context. Scholars such as Mama (1997), Oyěwùmí (1997), and McFadden (2002) have utilised standpoint theory to critique how Western-centric analytical lenses often fail to address the specific needs and realities of African communities. Standpoint theory posits that marginalised groups have distinct, valuable insights into social structures that can be drawn from their unique social positions. It remains useful in continental policymaking by foregrounding the experiences and viewpoints of those often excluded from policy discussions. As a result, it engrains equity and sustainable inclusion as a way of thinking about policies and their implementation from the outset, thereby promoting inclusivity, good governance, peace and security, cultural renaissance, and sustainable development.

This approach addresses historical inequities and empowers all African communities to contribute to, and benefit from, the continent's development regardless of their positionality in the matrix of intertwined privilege(s) and oppression(s). As Africa progresses towards the goals of Agenda 2063, the insights from marginalised standpoints will be crucial in shaping a prosperous, equitable, and unified future where the AU must ensure that its policies are not just representative, but also effective. There is scope to engage with the approach as an implementation, and indeed acceleration, tool for the realisation of the STYIP's mandate. This would enhance equitable resource distribution and opportunity access, aligning with the AU's vision of prosperity. Likewise, it would be particularly useful for offices such as the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission, which leads advocacy efforts for the ratification, domestication, and implementation of continental frameworks such as the Maputo Protocol and the African Youth Charter, which guarantee rights and representation for marginalised communities.²

As a complement to intersectionality, standpoint theory is indispensable in advancing the developmental outcomes of marginalised groups in Africa. It ensures that the unique perspectives and knowledge of these groups are recognised and valued, leading to more inclusive and equitable social policies and practices. By addressing historical and structural inequities, enhancing participatory research, and challenging epistemic injustice, standpoint theory facilitates a deeper and more authentic engagement with Africa's diverse minority communities. Where the mandate of Agenda 2063 is ambitious, narratives of the most marginalised will continue to give voice to those who fall between the

2 With the Maputo Protocol being ratified by 45 countries and the Youth Charter has been ratified by 41 countries, it is clear that the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission has support from African Union member states to advance its core mandate. It thus serves as a model directorate to include in this evaluation.

cracks of capacitation and developmental integration in society. Additionally, standpoint theory could act as a methodological resource in addressing epistemic injustice and at the same time aid the mandate for localisation of indigenous knowledge at a continental level (Fricker, 2007).

The call for intersectionality and standpoint theory to be adopted as analytical thinking tools is not to discredit the progress that has been made in advancing African women and young people's rights. This has been seen through, amongst others, the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, whose structures allow for continent-wide collaborative policy development and harmonisation; multi-stakeholder policy platforms; accountability monitoring of member states' compliance with their obligations; and advocacy and awareness of the aforementioned.³ As Sow (2003, p. 73) rightly highlights, when reflecting on the globalisation of women's human rights, "[w]omen's claims to equality have been strengthened by the international recognition of universal human rights, and by scrutiny of the extent to which these rights are upheld in particular contexts". Though the universality of rights is theoretically imperative, not all women in Africa enjoy the protections of a rights-based implementation process. This is where advocating for a centring of intersectional analyses within continental-level policymaking is critical.

The Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission defines collaborative work for impact on a common agenda as a "coordinated effort involving multiple stakeholders to promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment as well as youth development. This collaborative approach is key to achieving the objectives outlined in Agenda 2063."⁴ The deliberate push for the notion of intersectionality as an "analytic disposition" as noted by Cho, Williams, and McCall (2013, p. 795) would further advance the readdressing of power dynamics that limit the rights, agency, and participation of African women and youth. Notably, the acknowledgement that intersectional thinking, rather than reference to intersectionality as a concept and the citation of its literature, is what determines change (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795). Intersectionality further politicises how the gender and the youth demographics are viewed and their transformation evaluated in Africa. The generic labelling of the "African woman" must be complicated if sustainable transformation is to be realised. In particular, young, rural, and urban poor women's experiences bear great importance when thinking through this on the continent. Across ethnic, political, economic, generational, and other intersections, gender stratification cannot be viewed, nor measured, in policy as one-dimensional. Where continental policymaking is concerned, there is a need for nuanced systemic understandings of discrimination and the framing

3 Written interview extract from Ms. Prudence Ngwenya, Director of the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission. Interviewed 23 July 2024.

4 Written interview extract from Ms. Prudence Ngwenya, Director of the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission. Interviewed 23 July 2024.

of equality, as juxtaposed with power hierarchies stemming from ethnicity, politics, culture, age, and other differences, for African women and youth. This is particularly true given the agenda-setting role of continental policy-making (Aldrin Salskov, 2020, p. 252).

Tracing intersectionality does not happen within a vacuum outside the praxis of negotiating power. Nzegwu (2006) addresses intersectionality within the African context by examining how various axes of identity, such as gender, class, and ethnicity, intersect to continuously shape the experiences of African women. Buttressing prior writings of Oyěwùmí (1997), Nzegwu (2006) critiques Western feminist frameworks that often overlook or misrepresent the complex realities of marginalised African women by failing to include contextualised understandings in their approaches.⁵ Further, Nzegwu (2006) argues for a more nuanced understanding that considers specific historical, cultural, and social conditions in Africa.

Intersectional representation remains important within spaces of power where heteronormative ways of institutionalising power are reinforced. Policies must be designed with an understanding of how different systems of oppression interact. There is a need to domesticate insights into the benefits of intersectional analysis to emphasise the need for nuanced and context-sensitive approaches to address inequalities as they impact policy and practice (McCall, 2001). Where policies consider only one axis of identity, such as gender or race alone, they fail to address the compounded disadvantages faced by individuals who straddle the intersections of these identities. By employing an intersectional framework, policymakers can better understand and address the unique challenges faced by groups such as low-income or disabled women and youth, who might experience overlapping forms of discrimination in the labour market, healthcare, and education (McCall, 2001). Moreover, standpoint theory helps in not just identifying, but also granting voice to, and safeguarding agency for, marginalised groups. This leads to recommendations for more inclusive policy designs that consider the diverse experiences of marginalised groups. Those that do not do so fail the most marginalised in society—especially those located at the intersections of multiple marginalised identities (Collins, 2000). These conversations are not new to the continent, as they were highlighted in the final review report of the African Women’s Decade on Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (2010–2020) as part of the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) Strategy to advance commitments to Agenda 2063⁶ (African Union

5 Necessary critiques extend to liberal feminists such as Friedan (1974), whose analysis overlooks the broader socio-economic and cultural contexts shaping African women’s lives, and to Marxist feminists such as Hartmann (1979), whose framework does not fully capture how colonial and postcolonial economic structures intersect with local cultural practices and social norms to uniquely affect African women.

6 This is in line with the Gender Parity Principle enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union as well as the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA). The

Commission, 2022b). However, strategic application of what is already known must be mainstreamed.

When speaking to equality, hooks (1984) stresses that without intersectional approaches, symptomatic rather than root causes of inequality will continue to be addressed. The dismantling of these structures is informed by how layers of systemic oppression operate to further subjugate minority rights in society. Testing this at community level, while reflecting on the Onitsha women in Nigeria, Nzegwu (2006) notes that:

Onitsha women's agency and power ... was substantively secured by a sociopolitical system that conferred on them a series of rights that allowed them to wield political, social, economic, and spiritual power ... women's equality has to be secured by a formally constituted structure of power that accords them equal authority with men at all levels of society. Equality without structural reinforcement is not equality. In fact, the concept of equality that emerges from this position dictates a mutually reinforcing notion of power between men and women rather than one that comes from trying to wrest for women what men already have.

(p. 193)

Where heteronormative patriarchal standards are cemented both in physical representation in the policymaking room and in the political cultures that guide the articulation of the policy agenda, as the yardstick for framing equality, the voices and agency of women—more so minority women in Africa—fall through the cracks. Socio-political complementarity between those at the centre and those at the margins is needed for a shared vision for the future (hooks, 1984; Nzegwu, 2006). How we model power, agency, and access is then important to the transformative outcomes we seek. Here, the amplification of the observations of Nzegwu (2006) is important.

The scholar notes that where the Western model evolved from a societal structure centred on masculine privilege, the Onitsha model upheld gender complementarity in the quest for the “vital wellbeing of the society” (Nzegwu, 2006, p. 192). Nzegwu notes the Western model as a “restorative view of equality” (2006, p. 192). This view is insufficient for the transformative outcomes that Agenda 2063 seeks, as it merely rectifies “anomalies and [corrects] past wrongs by ensuring that women have whatever men have” rather than engaging with a broad and matrixed view of societal interests (Nzegwu, 2006, p. 192). Moreover, this narrow view is too “tied to correcting past mistakes, it is too restrictive of women's possibilities and does not provide adequate

Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and Agenda 2063 are other expressions of support by AU Heads of States for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment on the continent.

opportunity for thinking about equality when women and men are similarly empowered” (Nzegwu, 2006, p. 192).

The aim in intersectional application is not to merely restore; it is to capacitate, understand, and transform the developmental futures of those at the margins in a way that dismantles the structural exclusion they may face. This requires inclusive participation of diverse voices, particularly in the policy development phase (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003). The importance of intersectional applications in policy development and implementation is to amplify and nuance the voices and histories of those on the margins. Efforts without a dissection of hegemonic power structures will, in fact, reinforce tokenistic accordance of inclusion towards women and young people on the margins of the continental Agenda 2063 implementation mainstreaming (Nzegwu, 2006, p. 192). The Onitsha model, as well as many other examples seen from women’s participation in policy and politics across Africa, supports the case that intersectionality as a concept is only divorced from the African narrative of inclusion by semantics.

Intersectionality presents itself as a powerful analytical tool to examine the political and socio-economic location of the marginalised. An apt analytical tool to use in African policymaking, I posit that intersectionality in African continental policymaking must focus on broadly participatory engagements to understand the root causes of marginalisation rather than ruminate over addressing the symptoms when thinking through aspirational policies.

A mindset shift is needed to understand the unit of analysis when looking at the aforementioned demographics of the continent. Borrowing from Collins (2000, p. 299), it is important to internalise that the matrix of intersectionality as an “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organi[s]ation, which shape Black women’s experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women”. It is then important to centre African women and young people as the units of analysis when engaging with the outcomes for the STYIP (Collins, 2000, p. 228). Here, Nzegwu’s call for equality with structural reinforcement is realised (2006, p. 193). Further, this standpoint is critical to understanding the systemic applications of Agenda 2063 as it aims to build more efficient, capacitated, and equitable transformative futures for *all* on the African continent. This is plausible where intersectional engagement with knowledge, empowerment, and power allows for triadic interrogation that is necessary to restore agency and sustainable transformation within society. Through this blueprint focused on triadic interrogation for holistic inclusion, intersectionality opens space to identify bridging connections within the structural matrices that dominate those on the margins (Collins, 2000).

Implementing Intersectionality in Policymaking

As Crenshaw (1991) notes, intersectionality provides a more comprehensive understanding of social issues by acknowledging the multiple dimensions of

identity that affect individuals simultaneously. This approach can lead to more effective and equitable policies through a holistic understanding of the intricacies at play. As has been extensively discussed, it is also an inclusive concept which addresses the needs of the most vulnerable in society (Crenshaw, 1989).

As a result, it also presents target-based interventions for policymakers by indicating otherwise missed layers of complex disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1991). However, as a methodology, there is still work to be done when integrating it into multilateral engagement strategies. Though valuable as an analytical tool and resource, its resource intensity and complexity in real-life policy application on a large scale make it daunting for many policymakers (Crenshaw, 2015). While intersectionality offers a valuable framework for understanding and addressing complex social issues, it also presents challenges in terms of implementation and resource allocation. Nevertheless, the benefits of crafting policies that are inclusive and responsive to the nuanced realities of diverse populations underscore its importance in contemporary policymaking.

Goal 17 and Goal 18: Ruminations on FTYIP

“The one being carried, does not know how far the town is”—African Proverb

The lack of prominence given to the issues of minority groups within the framing of the continent’s aspirational agenda allows for many voices to be silenced. Yet, minorities—especially women and young girls—continue to be the stronghold and backbone of many African communities. As the African proverb above explains, it is not those who are at the centre of power that feel the burden of exclusion; it is those who are on the margins who, more often than not, carry multiple forms of oppression. Where this is not acknowledged in agenda setting, tensions arise in the quest to achieve aspirational goals. Following from this, *The Africa We Want* cannot be realised without due focus and attention being given to intersectional critiques of the AU Agenda 2063 implementation data and goals. This section provides a reflection.

Going into the FTYIP for Agenda 2063 in 2013, Sub-Saharan Africa was losing an estimated US\$95 billion annually between 2010 and 2014 by not addressing the gender gap in economic participation (UNDP, 2016, p. 73). At the time, this was about 6% of the region’s GDP. African governments were aware of these and other trends impacting women and youth, and their negative implications for national, regional, and continental, developmental, and economic potential. Despite this, action to address gender equality remained limited during the FTYIP. Scant budgets and tokenised policies continue to plague those working to capacitate minority voices towards agency and transformation on the continent, where societies are judged by how they treat and make provisions for the empowerment of the most vulnerable populations in society (Mutua, 2011, p. 461); there is something to be said about this at the crossroads with the data on progress filtering down from the African Union. If Agenda 2063 seeks to rely on the potential of African women and young people, with the acceleration set to happen in the STYIP, the data must be

examined within intersectional parameters to give an accurate account of the progress being made.

As noted in the introductory remarks of the chapter, Goal 17 (Full Gender Equality in all Spheres of Life) and Goal 18 (Engaged and Empowered Youth and Children) will be discussed (African Union Commission, 2015). Goal 17 of Agenda 2063 advocates for “Full Gender Equality in all Spheres of Life”. According to African Union Development Agency tracking data (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024), the continental score⁷ for this goal stands at a seemingly impressive 81%. Key targets include securing women’s equal economic rights, including property ownership and inheritance, contract signing, saving, business registration and management, and access to bank accounts by 2025, alongside achieving a minimum of “30% representation of women in elected offices at local, regional, and national levels, as well as within judicial institutions” (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024).

However, the targets for economic and property rights as well as political participation or inclusion cannot be ideated as targets in isolation from contextual variables of: religion, education, access to reproductive rights, protection in conflict,⁸ ethnic belonging, and other experiences of structural exclusion that African women and young girls face. With little progress in other Goals that impact economic and property rights such as job creation, it is difficult to imagine that there is a real shift in addressing the lived realities of vulnerable women in society. Additionally, where unfavourable business environments and legal frameworks continue to hinder women’s participation in the economy, many women who are privileged enough to have access to the aforementioned still rely on the credibility of their country’s credit rating profile, for example, to be able to conduct business—this while navigating a “US\$42 billion financing gap for African women across business value chains, including US\$15.6 billion in agriculture alone” (AfDB, 2024).

The evaluation yardsticks employed by the AU in framing the targets of Goal 17 miss the mark on addressing the root causes of African women’s inequality. Worryingly, when asked about the under-addressed cross-cutting areas affecting women for the fulfilment of Goals 17 and 18 under Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063, the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission lamented the following: limited capacity to meaningfully engage in decision-making processes, weak women and girls’ movements across the continent, discriminative laws and policies, limited resources allocated to gender programming and initiatives, social norms and practices

7 At the time of writing, the last review date, thus the latest year of data available, was in 2021.

8 See Olonisakin, F. (2011). “Women and Security Governance in Africa”, *Security Sector Governance in Africa: A Handbook*, Bryden, A. and Olonisakin, F. (eds). Lit Verlag., for a more detailed discussion of gender sensitivity approaches at the intersection of conflict in Africa.

exacerbated by patriarchal norms, gender-based violence, child marriages, and female genital mutilation practices.⁹

As is a trend in African policymaking, the thinking behind solution building and knowledge creation employs neoliberal, market-based Western approaches in a *restorative* bid at gender equality rather than a proactive one. Moreover, a lack of acknowledgement of the anchoring tenets of economic inclusion, such as planned provisions for reproductive labour, provisions for women seeking to monetise vocational skills instead of engaging in STEM (as is the focus in the targets for Goal 2), and contextualised indigenous knowledge on political organisational formations, amongst others, is problematic.

Structural reinforcements of equality must follow its implementation and subsequent acceleration (Nzegwu, 2006, p. 193). The AU's Gender Parity Principle is to be celebrated; however, its efficacy in nuancing the transformation agenda is still lacking (Tsikata, 2015). As acknowledged by the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, strategies to navigate complex socio-economic, cultural and political landscapes across the African Union Member States remains a challenge.¹⁰ Without structural examination of people's lived experiences, there will be limited scope for the emancipation of the most vulnerable in society. Here, categorisation within intersectionality as an analytic disposition remains important (Cho et al., 2013).

The organisation of identities is a necessary process to illuminate and acknowledge them. Both women and young people as categorisations in policymaking are necessary to allow the visibility of their past, present, and future lived experiences. While the experiences of one category inform and are subsequently formed based on the group's multilayered experiences, it is important to understand that even within the categories accorded to individual lived experiences, contexts may vary. Categories must then not be subject to de-contextualised knowledge as a consequence of the application of ahistorical intersectional lenses (Garneau, 2018). Noted by Aldrin Salskov (2020), various categorisations hold various axes of socio-political power. These are formed through fluid intersecting ideals of power and agency over time. Categories form and inform each other through, but not exclusively, class, race, gender, geographical location, and economic positioning (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

A nuanced examination of gender equality and human security cannot be complete without interrogating the roles, potential, and positioning of African women and youth in relation to these goals. This is especially crucial when assessing the targets and priority areas set to achieve them. As Mutua (2011, p. 461) reminds us, “[i]ntersectionality means that discrimination is both vertical and horizontal and takes place at multiple levels amongst various identities”.

9 Written interview extract from Ms. Prudence Ngwenya, director of the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission. Interviewed 23 July 2024.

10 Written interview extract from Ms. Prudence Ngwenya, director of the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission. Interviewed 23 July 2024.

Where calls for holistic equality are being made in Goal 17 and calls for the empowerment of the next generation are being made in Goal 18, intersectionality remains an important examination tool.

The African Continental Free Trade Area 'AfCFTA' Agreement and Agenda 2063

On 30 May 2019, the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area was entered into force as one of the main flagship projects of Agenda 2063 and one of the major successes of the FTYIP. A major success of the agreement has been the Adoption of the Protocol on Women, Youth and Trade included as an integral part of the AfCFTA. It stands as the largest trade agreement in the world, with 55 countries, a combined GDP of US\$3.4 trillion, and the potential to lift 30 million people out of poverty by eliminating trade barriers to boost intra-African trade. Where there is the potential to catapult millions out of poverty and drive Goal 4 towards transformed economies and job creation, the strategy remains vague and complex. Though the Second Continental Report on The Implementation of Agenda 2063 made headway towards Aspiration 2, which calls for an integrated continent united on the ideals of pan-Africanism (African Union Commission, 2022a), there is still a question as to how the implementation of pan-Africanism can possibly be measured.

In the realm of economic development, intersectionality can help address the multifaceted barriers that different groups face in accessing and expressing economic opportunities. Despite being often criticised as an elitist agreement, the AfCFTA bares the potential for economic growth for minority groups in Africa. This is shown firstly through economic empowerment. As the AfCFTA aims to stimulate economic growth and industrialisation, it will create jobs across various sectors. This can provide employment opportunities for minority groups, helping to improve their economic status. Likewise, with a larger market and reduced barriers to trade, the AfCFTA includes provisions to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs), many of which are owned by minority groups, to gain market access. This support can include capacity building, access to finance, and technical assistance. There is, however, an irony to note in the opening of these markets. Though this is true, Africa still maintains strict border policies, with many having access to regional markets in theory, but in practice still facing discrimination on the matrix of nationality.

Likewise, with the promise of capacity building and skills development for all, making people more competitive in the job market, visa requirements to work and trade in most African countries are still stringent and too expensive for most. In 2023, only Benin, the Gambia, Rwanda, and Seychelles offered visa-free access to all Africans. Likewise, in “only 28% of country-to-country travel scenarios within Africa, African citizens [did] not need a visa to cross the border” (Visa Openness Index, 2023). This vastly limits possibilities for

skills and technology transfer for those who live in economic precarity in their country and seek opportunities elsewhere.

The AfCFTA must be lauded for its deliberate attention to the needs of minority women and marginalised groups in society as well as the protection of indigenous products and local economies. However, a cautionary note is that the AfCFTA has no binding agreements that limit members from engaging in bilateral trade with external third actors. Resultantly, the cycles of production in some of Africa's economies may never be closed to outside interests. This risks divergent and regulatory trade reforms that might undermine the AfCFTA efforts, resulting in trade loss and trade diversion from African countries. Where there is no political will to close cycles of production, there are limited pathways towards challenging the systemic norms of the people most marginalised in society, in particular women and young people. For those who face the positionality of being a young woman within the context of a growing neoliberal market that shuns those systematically oppressed on the margins, the situation remains precarious. There is a need to engage regional economic communities (hereafter "RECs") as the building blocks to ensuring the efficacy of the agreement and inclusion of those at the margins by including standpoint theory and intersectional ways of thinking. An AU that understands the intersected implications of systemic oppression for the African young woman should negotiate for binding agreements on members. This, however, takes an intricate understanding of the proposed methodological resource—the aforementioned cautionary note from Crenshaw (2015).

The Practicalities: Social Determinants

Aspiration 6, as do Goals 17 and 18 of Agenda 2063, calls for the holistic empowerment of women and young people beyond the economic. Attention must be given to how key social determinants such as education progressed during this decade. Noted by UNDP (2016, p. 3), "social dimensions of gender equality, which involve trends in health and education, are key determinants of women's equality and empowerment". Development focused on women's enhanced human and social capital hinges on education. However, UNICEF (2022) notes that most African countries spent less than 20% of national budgets in education sectors. Of the 54 African countries, only Namibia achieved gender parity at the secondary and tertiary levels (African Union Commission, 2022b, p. 34). Additionally, resource mobilisation to improve quality of learning remains difficult. Few countries are like Zimbabwe, which "has the highest availability of textbooks in Africa, achieved through sustained investment" (McKenzie Global Institute, 2019, p. 25 as cited in African Union Commission, 2022b, p. 34). Furthermore, education expenditure as a percentage of total government expenditure remains poor where only 1 in 10 countries meets the 20% benchmark and 4 in 10 meet the "less ambitious" 15% benchmark (UNICEF, 2022, p. 3). Girls and young women are

cyclically and disproportionately affected by this, despite Goal 18's key targets to (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024)

- Reduce 2013 rate of youth unemployment by at least 25%; in particular female youth;
- End all forms of violence, child labour exploitation, child marriage and human trafficking;
- Full implementation of the provision of the African Charter on the Rights of the Youth is attained.

There is no domestication follow-up mechanism or accountability structure for the implementation of the goals, this despite it being part of the mandate of the STYIP. To reiterate the African proverb, it is unfortunate that the policymakers, as *the ones being carried, do not know how far the liberation, transformation, and equality are* as they do not bear the lived-experience load the current younger generation have to carry. This is in stark contrast to Africa's military expenditure of US\$51.6 billion in 2023—a difference of +22% from 2022 and +1.5% from 2014 (Tian et al., 2024, p. 5–6). Nigeria, one of the countries that are powerhouses both in economy and in size, spent US\$3.2 billion of that total in 2023. This was inclusive of a “supplementary budget” that increased military spending by +34% (Tian et al., 2024, p. 6). However, the West African country spent just 6% of total government expenditure on education (UNICEF, 2022, p. 3).

Where women and youth remain disproportionately affected by conflict, aspirations for safeguarding national security and increasing human capacity development must not be seen as separate goals. Targets too must align and cross-pollinate to reflect the commitment to tackle all oppressions simultaneously (Mutua, 2011, p. 461). This is a major way to achieve equality for young girls, who are otherwise grossly disadvantaged through a lack of education—especially at the intersection of poverty, conflict, and health and wellbeing. An “estimated total annual economic losses due to gender gaps in effective labour could exceed US\$60 billion in sub-Saharan Africa” (UNDP, 2016, p. 73). Boosting spending for social determinants like education and health contributes to a more socially cohesive and productive society. Sadly, despite the 37th AU Summit in 2024 being focused on education, the same issues that the UNDP Africa Human Development Report lamented in 2016 remain:

African governments are generally well aware of the trends impacting on the status of women as well as the kinds of policies and programmes that could make a difference, but budget allocations to support necessary policy and programmes have fallen well short of the targets set by the AU for spending on the social sectors.

The lack of political will by those at the helm of power to actively champion those at the margins of society remains concerning. As the director of the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission notes, progress takes planning and investment:

There is a lack of comprehensive data on gender, women and youth issues across African Union Member States. It is therefore important to strengthen data collection and national institutions in charge of it. In addition, it is also important to capacitate those in charge of data collection because without data it is difficult to plan efficiently.¹¹

Data is needed to understand whether Africa is moving in the right direction or not. However, there is a misconception that there is a lack of data to measure implementation. There is data—it is just not cohesively funnelled, as technocrats and those working with marginalised communities continue to work in silos. This could, however, be an opportunity for intersectionality training and facilitation for those already doing the work as they engage with the practical applications of the policies present in feedback loops set up through the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate. This way, the disadvantage of resource intensity is eliminated as the work already being done is collated. Moreover, if policymakers can begin to think of intersectionality and standpoint theory as a resource tool for thinking through nuanced challenges, there may be scope to affect change in the way Africa plots and reviews its aspirational policies in the future.

Continental Challenges as Opportunities

Regional economic bodies must be acknowledged for their initiative in consolidating education partnerships such as the Global Partnership for Education, which continues with mainstream funding through national development planning offices. Though data for impact measuring remains scant as a monitoring and evaluation culture still needs to be consolidated on the continent, countries like Sierra Leone¹² and Ghana¹³ are implementing free education initiatives which are set to boast improvements in literacy, access, and inclusion of the girl child as young women enrolled in education. This, in turn, will create much-needed transition pathways from schools to job markets. The benefits in adopting intersectionality as a methodological resource in policymaking cannot be understated, particularly when impressing a nuanced lens

11 Written interview extract from Ms. Prudence Ngwenya, director of the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission. Interviewed 23 July 2024.

12 Through the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative.

13 Through Ghana's Free Public Senior High School policy.

upon continental policymakers to move beyond neutrality when looking at women's experiences in policy planning and implementation.

Africa's greatest assets are the potential of its youth and women. The time has come, however, for the capacitation and empowerment of these two demographics to move out of the *potentialised* and into the *realised* phase. The urgency given to the intersectional understanding of the implications of the gender gap in Africa seems to have not been fully realised by the FTYIP. Youth and women, though marginalised, simultaneously stand to contribute the greatest to the transformation of the African continent. It is important to figure out how to actualise their potential by amplifying avenues for knowledge, empowerment, and power which in turn support the agency, power, and participation of these demographics, and, indeed, those that hold the identity of being both a woman and being young, among other positionalities.

The lack of monitoring and evaluation culture at continental and national levels remains a challenge for the technocratic portfolios tasked with delivering Agenda 2063's mandate to the most vulnerable in society. As Ms Ngwenya aptly states, "it is very difficult to track progress without clear indicators and regular reporting. In this regard, it is very important to put in place effective reporting frameworks and report regularly."¹⁴ Further engagement with civil society, which has the tools to follow up on monitoring and evaluation of continental policies, is necessary, particularly as civil society has a middleman vantage point where it continues to engage directly with those on the margins of society who have limited access to political bargaining power. Here, there is an opportunity for scholars and researchers of intersectionality and minority studies to partner with civil society members working on continental mandates in this way to mainstream intersectional analytical praxis into monitoring and evaluation resource packs for distribution within national and continental government implementing bodies for the acceleration of Agenda 2063's mandate. On a realistic level, however, as I write this in 2024, the AUDA-NEPAD public dashboard has only been updated twice in the FTYIP.¹⁵ Where national statistical offices cannot be revived fast enough to support the data needed to address the needs of the marginalised, researchers and scholars have a mandate to do so in a visibly mainstreamed manner. This would be a stance which would be appreciated within continental leadership for the purposes of "policy formulation and implementation ... to strengthen policy coherence".¹⁶

The idea of the matrix emphasises connections and interdependencies rather than single structures of inequality. Intersectionality, by its very nature as an analytical concept, pushes back on the inaccuracy that gender stratification is linear. If the STYIP mandate as the "decade of acceleration" is to be

14 Through Ghana's Free Public Senior High School policy.

15 In 2019 and again in 2021 during major internal reviews.

16 Written interview extract from Ms. Prudence Ngwenya, director of the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission. Interviewed 23 July 2024.

successful, the way Africa thinks through policy development, agenda setting, and policy implementation must change.

With the STYIP stressing the need for local ownership and domestication for all the goals, it is important to unpack localisation and whom its outcomes serve. There is an opportunity to localise intersectionality as a key knowledge resource on the continent to 2033, and beyond, this as localisation remains important to the political buy-in of political projects by citizens. With “three in 10 citizens” not knowing enough about the RECs or the AU to “have an opinion” (Olapade et al., 2016), ratification is simply not enough. As key stakeholders, citizens need to know, be consulted on, and buy into policies for the results to show. This remains in line with the participatory objectives of capacitation and agency in minority studies.

Conclusion

The analysis of the FTYIP underscores the significance of intersectionality and standpoint theory in understanding and addressing the nuanced realities of African women and youth. These theoretical lenses are crucial for moving beyond superficial approaches to gender equality and ensuring that policies reflect the lived experiences of those on the margins, particularly within the context of Africa’s diverse socio-political landscape. The current framing of policy, as evidenced by the FTYIP, often fails to account for these layered experiences, thereby perpetuating inequalities even as it seeks to address them. Without a nuanced understanding of how different forms of oppression intersect, the policies risk being ineffective or, worse, reinforcing existing disparities.

Standpoint theory complements this by advocating for the inclusion of marginalised voices in the policymaking process. By centring the perspectives of African women and youth, policies can be better tailored to address the specific challenges they face, thus promoting more equitable and sustainable outcomes. This approach aligns with the broader goals of Agenda 2063, particularly Aspiration 6, which envisions an Africa driven by its people, especially women and youth.

The case for intersectionality and standpoint theory is not merely academic; it is a practical necessity for achieving the transformative goals of Agenda 2063. An intersectional approach is vital for policymakers to move beyond neutrality and consider the diverse experiences of women and youth in policy planning and implementation, and likewise, to mainstream nuance through the analytical tools argued for in this chapter. This is particularly important in the context of Africa, where the potential of these groups to contribute to the continent’s transformation is immense but often unrealised.

As Africa moves into the STYIP as the “decade of acceleration”, the way Africa thinks through policy development, agenda setting, and implementation must evolve. The analysis of Goals 17 and 18 within the FTYIP reveals the gaps that exist when intersectional perspectives are not fully integrated into policy frameworks. For instance, while there are laudable targets for gender

equality and youth empowerment, their achievement is hindered by the failure to address the underlying structural and systemic barriers that African women and youth face. Localisation of intersectionality and standpoint theory as key knowledge resources can help ensure that policies are more inclusive and reflective of the lived experiences of all citizens. This, in turn, will foster greater political buy-in and participation from the populace, which is essential for the success of Agenda 2063. In particular, this could help address the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in Africa's development through a more nuanced implementation of flagship projects of Agenda 2063 such as the AfCFTA. Here, intersectionality, as a methodological tool, is crucial for addressing economic development barriers. This is particularly evident where policies must consider the complex realities faced by minority groups to ensure they benefit from initiatives like the AfCFTA.

The future of African development hinges on the adoption of intersectionality and standpoint theory as essential analytical tools in the policymaking process. These frameworks provide the analytical depth necessary to understand and dismantle the complex privileges and oppressions that hinder the progress of African women and youth. By centring their experiences and ensuring that policies are reflective of their realities, the AU can move closer to realising the ambitious vision of Agenda 2063—a vision of a prosperous, equitable, and inclusive Africa for all.

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