



**The Pan African Women Studies Unit at the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC), University of Johannesburg, South Africa.  
present**

**Women's ImPACT: Innovation and Sustainability in Africa (WIISA), Conference**

**Concept Note**

**August 30<sup>th</sup> - September 1<sup>st</sup> 2023.**

## **Introduction**

Gender equality is a right. Fulfilling this right is the best chance to meet some of the challenges of our time—from the economic crisis and lack of health care to climate change, violence against women and escalating conflicts. Women are more affected by these problems and possess ideas and leadership to solve them. Gender discrimination still holds too many women back and our world back too. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders in 2015, embody a roadmap for progress that is sustainable and leaves no one behind. Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is integral to each of the 17 goals. Only by ensuring the rights of women and girls across all the goals will we get to justice and inclusion, economies that work for all, and sustaining our shared environment now and for future generations.

Despite many global policies such as the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aiming “to leave no one behind” in development, gender inequality persists. This contention was supported by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which stated that “Although women account for over one-half of the potential talent base



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throughout the world, as a group they have been marginalized and their economic, social, and environmental contributions go in large part unrealized. The disproportionate impacts on women of the cost-of-living crises, the toll of conflict and displacement, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic that are experienced across our region, risk further setting back progress towards equality.

Innovation and Technology, the focus of this year's International Women's Day, presents powerful opportunities for gender equality and offers welcome hope during great challenges for women's empowerment. The regional progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) released revealed that the use of information and communication technology is the only target of SDG 5 ("Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls"), which African and the global economy is currently on track to achieve (UN-Women, 2021). While it is clear that much work remains to be done to catalyse progress on the remaining eight SDG 5 Targets, this important indicator of progress identifies innovation, technology and sustainability as an area with strong momentum towards effective change as we draw closer to 2030 and consolidate our efforts for gender equality. These targets can help women secure information, protection, education and employment and attain gender parity.

Most governments have abdicated their role in shaping economic structures under the influence of a neoliberal macroeconomic policy framework. They have enabled each person to participate and are self-reliant in the financial system (Berry, 2015: 510). This notion has reinforced existing disparities because inherently capitalist principles still govern the economic environment, which means African women remain marginalised according to the hierarchy.

The Institute of Pan African Thought and Conversation, University of Johannesburg, presents a conference titled "Women's ImPACT: Innovation and Sustainability in Africa (WIISA)",

*This initiative of IPATC, with supporting partners, is premised on eight (8) main factors.*

This is an international initiative to promote the role of women in all disciplines including, science, innovation, technology and engineering. The conference's mission is to inspire transformative actions and more effective development by understanding the impacts of the SDGs on women. The conference aims to build partnerships among its participants to identify, understand, and develop strategies to apply the gender lens in seven key areas to be debated in four panel session.:

1. Women and their role in the SDGs
2. Innovation and Technology
3. Climate Change and the Green Economy
4. Science, Education and Workforce
5. Financial Inclusion and Entrepreneurship
6. Governance and Leadership
7. Women and Mental Health.
8. Gender Based Violence



Its aim is to demonstrate that this can provide deeper insights, more effective programs and more sustainable outcomes in the context of development. The conference hopes to network with researchers and policy-makers, organizing awareness-raising activities and using dissemination tools and resources.

### **The Goal of the Symposium**

The overall goal of the symposium is to advance sustainable women's economic empowerment in line with the SDGs and Agenda 2063. The conference seeks to answer questions on women's current and future inclusion, innovation and leadership towards a sustainable economy and accessing digitalized jobs.

### **Conference Agenda**

The conference will feature five panels over two days, with a keynote speaker each day. The conference program will outline the key issues for each panel and provide a case study. Moderators for each panel will guide the discussion with the panellists, fielding general and specific questions to panellists, and then opening up to include audience participation.

#### ***Panel One (Plenary Session): Women and Impact: Innovation and Sustainability.***

*Here we seek to* examine the challenges of women in innovation and sustainability, the impact of the SDGs and overcoming gendered inequality in Africa. The outcomes include a substantive contribution of the African participant countries and indirectly the continent to the achievement of the United Nations (UN) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 5 – Gender Equality through this particular focus on SDG 5 targets as the foundation for African women to self-actualise with universal access to good education and skills development; quality healthcare enhanced by safe water and sufficient and nutritious food; decent living conditions; gender-based violence being the exception and not the norm to be financially empowered securing political, social and economic leadership and active citizenry in individual states but more so as a collective across the continent. In addition, it speaks to the Agenda 2063 aspirations 6, which aims to ensure “Africa will be a continent where all citizens will be actively involved in decision-making in all aspects of development, including social, economic, political and environmental. Africa will be a continent where no child, woman or man will be left behind”.

#### ***Panel Two: Women, Climate Change and the Green Economy.***

We seek to understand the challenges of climate change on women, the impact of climate finance and overcoming gendered food security inequality in Africa. Furthermore, we seek to examine the gender lens to job creation in the green transition in Africa and identify opportunities for women's participation in green jobs in key sectors driving growth in African economies. Lastly the Panel seeks to highlight initiatives on financial and digital inclusion for women towards a green economy and



provide solutions and employment opportunities for women in achieving a green economy. It further explores the role of Gender, Social Policy and Institutions and Political Participation.

***Panel Three: Gendered Transition into the Digital Economy and Economic Growth for African Women.***

How do we solve the connectivity gap and create opportunities for Africa's women and girls to be part of a more inclusive digital world? How do we provide access to digital technologies that allow Africa's women to benefit fully from the goods, services, and capital available across online markets? How do we leverage emerging technologies and business models to remove longstanding barriers to women's economic opportunities in poor countries? What examples have arisen in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that illustrate the embrace of new digital platforms, e-commerce, and mobile payment solutions?

***Panel Four: Strengthening Institutional and Policy Frameworks, Funding, and Networks to Advance Women Entrepreneurs.*** How can policy formulation promote and elevate women's entrepreneurship as a priority for African economies? How do we overcome the funding gap? How can we design banking products and offerings that African women entrepreneurs need? How do we strengthen corporate governance and legal frameworks to guide women entrepreneurs to on the international scene? What national responses to the economic impacts of COVID-19 have been successful in supporting women's entrepreneurship and getting funding to those who will most benefit?

***Panel Five: Women and Mental Health Awareness.*** Women self-care is still being treated as an afterthought instead of a priority. Proper mental healthcare prevents chronic illness and diseases. It involves a deliberate and intentional action that someone takes to maintain their health. It empowers women not to be bystanders in their own health optimization but having a balanced lifestyle physically, mentally and emotionally. The section explores the policies, approaches and initiatives by African states for proper mental health for women in all disciplines. How do we manage a balanced health lifestyle?

***Panel Six: Gender Based Violence and Impact.*** Africa continue to experience notoriously high levels of violence against women. In South Africa for instance, the latest police figures show that 10,818 rape cases were reported in the first quarter of 2022. The country has among the highest rape incidence in the world. How can gender-based violence in the continent be reduced? How can policy formulation mitigate and reduce gender-based violence as a priority for African economies? How do we overcome the challenges instigating violence? How other approaches can be explored to reduce gender discrimination and empower women?

**Key deliverables from the symposium**



1. To generate public debate through various media types, including Radio, TV, Newspapers, and social media.
2. To culminate in the publication of a special issue of a journal on “Women Innovation and Sustainability in Africa”.
3. The project will lead to the publication of 4 edited book volumes;
  - I. *African Women in the Green Economy: Inclusion and Transformation*
  - II. *Women Leadership in Diplomacy and International Relations: Representation and Participation*
  - III. *Women in Trade and Industrial Policy: Access and Inclusion*
  - IV. *Impact, Gender and Climate Change.*
4. In addition to the conference report, the organizers will produce a policy paper, which will also highlight key facts and figures on women entrepreneurs with infographics on the sectors they are engaged in, especially in the grassroots communities in African countries. The conference organizers will also create an informal working group focusing on research and policy. The working group will share its research and policy recommendations with groups of women institutes and academia and through the respective UN bodies, the Africa Union, the African Development Bank, and the African Export-Import Bank.
5. The emulating research will in partnership with Pan African Women Studies IPATC and other stakeholders will be used to develop customised technical programs and projects including implementation based on needs of international and corporate organisations.

### Participation and Format

The symposium will involve about 200 participants drawn from governments, Financiers, policy practitioners, academia, civil society, the private sector, and continental and global networks. It will be convened in a hybrid format involving a physical meeting and a virtual platform.

The symposium format will include, among other things, plenary and break-away sessions. Several keynote speakers will be invited to set the tone for the deliberations throughout the symposium.

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