



RESEARCH REPORT ON:

THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICS AND
DECISION MAKING IN AFRICA



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INTRODUCTION

Women constitute half of the world's population and comprise 50 percent of the labor force, yet makeup 1 billion human beings living in poverty, their participation in politics and decision making is very limited.

As of 2017, only 23 percent of all seats in parliaments and senates globally were held by women (Chalaby 2017; Radu 2018). Even though African women have a history of political involvement notably during the liberation struggle, their involvement in the national liberation movements were not acknowledged after independence. But, after forty years of gender activism, capacity building, lobbying and human rights awareness and adoption of strategies for policy and advocacy interventions, African women have remarkably improved their representation in various political leadership positions in several countries and regional institutions. The growth of constitutionalism and democracy has created new ways for increasing women's access to political power. In 1960, only one percent of African legislators

were women (Tripp, 2003). Souad Abdennebi-Abderrahim notes that today, this share has increased and reached twenty percent. Transition countries have particularly benefited from a favorable environment for women's participation and Rwanda became a shining example by achieving gender parity with 56% women representation in parliament (UN Women, 2018).

Gender equality in politics and decision making is a prerequisite for any successful democracy. Democracy, whichever angle it is looked at, cannot be gender blind and exclude the participation of the majority who in the case of Africa are young women. There is an entrenched nexus between democracy and gender equality.

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INTRODUCTION

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1979, and which came into force in 1981, was inspired by the notion of gender equality and ending all forms of discrimination against women in all spheres. One hundred and seventy nine countries are party to the CEDAW Convention, Gender equality in politics and decision making is a prerequisite for any successful democracy. Democracy, whichever angle it is looked at, cannot be gender blind and exclude the participation of the majority who in the case of Africa are young women. There is an entrenched nexus between democracy and gender equality. The Convention

on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1979, and which came into force in 1981, was inspired by the notion of gender equality and ending all forms of discrimination against women in all spheres. One hundred and seventy nine countries are party to the CEDAW Convention, meaning that gender equality has become part of customary international law.

Democracy, whichever angle it is looked at, cannot be gender blind and exclude the participation of the majority who in the case of Africa are young women. There is an entrenched nexus between democracy and gender equality.

¹Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)

² Study on discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life, including during times of political transitions-

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

There were two lead researchers, one based in Southern Africa (Zimbabwe) and the other one based in Western Africa (Senegal). The lead researcher from Southern Africa (Zimbabwe) covered Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda. The Lead Researcher based in Western Africa (Senegal) covered Ghana, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, The Gambia, Chad, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Each lead researcher worked with an assistant researcher.

As a non-experimental exploratory research design, this study combined both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods through the form of an online questionnaire and key informant interviews to collect the data from the selected countries in East, Central, West, and Southern African countries. These finalized data collection tools were submitted to AWLF for approval before being administered. The consultants also borrowed tools and strategies like Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) through the lens of Afro-feminism as a decolonial project. The main objectives of this approach were to:

- ❖ Reclaim the rich histories of Black women in challenging all forms of domination, particular as they relate to patriarchy, race, class, sexuality and global imperialism, by searching for individual stories, pictures, booklets, art, video recordings, music and other popular genres, and accommodations made for local language use.
- ❖ Eliminate the “invisible power structure that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of direct colonialism”, by presenting drafts and collaborating with the participants.
- ❖ Highlight in the questionnaire and interview questions the importance of raising the specificities linked to cultural beliefs in the various societies across the regions.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Using this research approach, the survey data collection process was split into two strategies: a traditional and participatory approach. The traditional data collection strategy included sending out the survey as prepared to a wide range of participants. The second part involved inviting our participants to a virtual meeting-up with young African women leaders via the Zoom Online Platform to present the research methodology and receive feedback and guidance from the participants. The invitation for the virtual meet-up was sent out via email, WhatsApp, Twitter and cell phone. A total of 15 participants representing West, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa responded to the invitation and were able to join in via Zoom.

At this meeting, the purpose of the research was made explicit, participants were able to ask questions and discuss the issue at hand in a virtual safe space among fellow African Women Leaders from across the continent. The questionnaire was presented, and through a participatory process, participants were able to provide feedback via sticky notes through the interactive Jamboard Google Application and adopt the questionnaire. Based on this process, a final survey questionnaire was developed and sent out to finalize the study.

Allowing the young African women leaders from across the continent to weigh-in on the methodology, critique the initial data collection tools and learn from each other resulted in a culturally responsive approach to data collection strategy and research analysis

METHODS / TOOLS

The researchers deployed a self-administered survey questionnaire via Kobo Toolbox to young women in politics, leaders of political parties, feminist organizations, civil society organizations, as well as gender/feminist academics in selected countries from Southern, Eastern, Central, and Western Africa. For ease of completion, the questionnaire was designed with simplicity, comprehensibility, and user-friendliness. The questionnaire focused on, among other things, opportunities and challenges for women participation in politics and public office. A total of 139 questionnaires were administered from the four regions; Southern, Eastern, Western, and Central Africa.

To triangulate data collected from questionnaires, key online informant interviews were conducted with selected respondents from selected countries in the four regions. Examples of respondents for key informant interviews include

leaders of political parties, young women politicians, feminist scholars, and regional and international women's organizations working on women participation in politics, Clerks of Parliament, Public Service Commission. Interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, and other online platforms, depending on the priorities of each respondent. Consent forms were also designed and shared with participants.

SAMPLING

The researchers used purposive sampling; that is, respondents were selected from one country in each of the following regions of Africa: Western, Eastern, Southern, and Central. Research team members collected data from a predetermined pool of

respondents who are perceived to be knowledgeable on the subject matter; that is young women politicians, leaders of political parties, women parliamentarians, past, present, and future women electoral candidates, gender/feminist scholars, civil society organizations doing gender/feminist/related work and other identified institutions or individuals working around women participation in politics and public office.

Figure 1: Disaggregation of Research Respondents by age

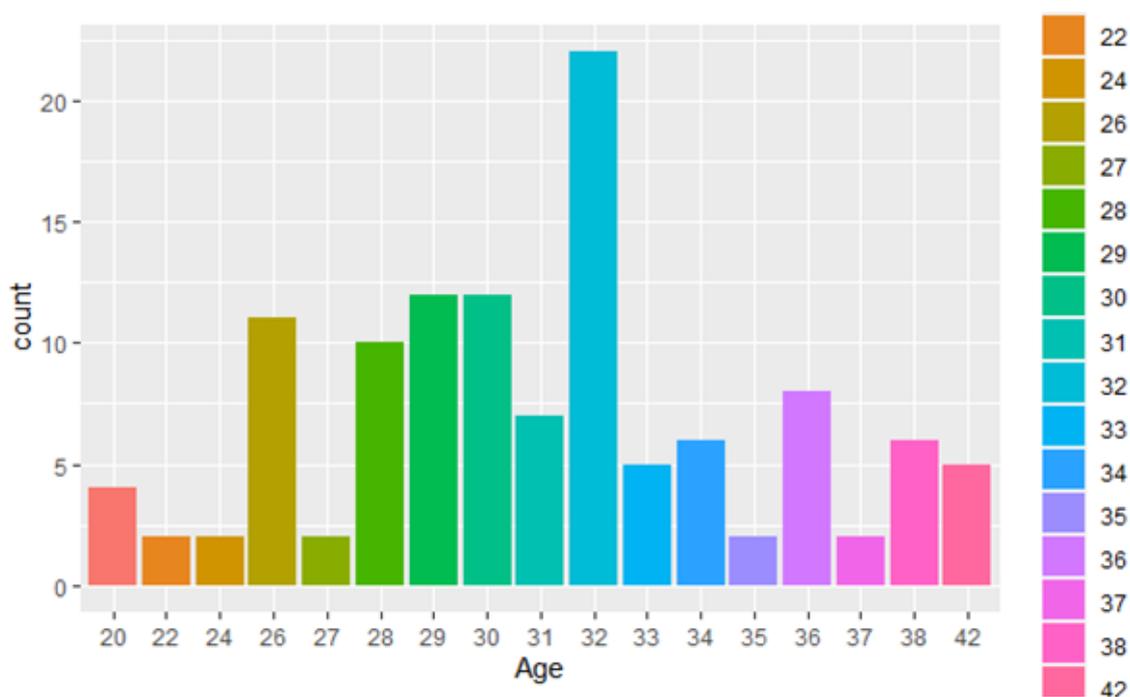


Figure 2: Countries from which data was collected

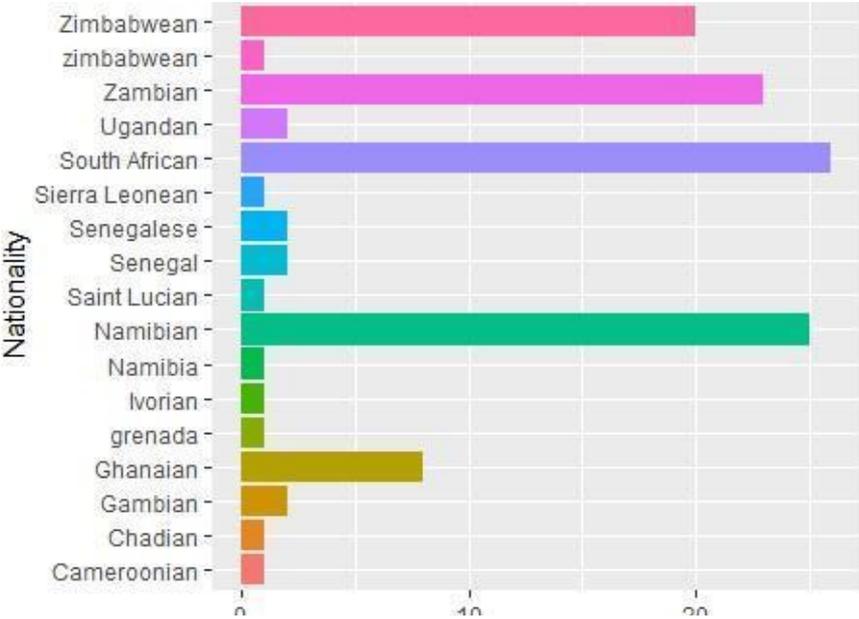
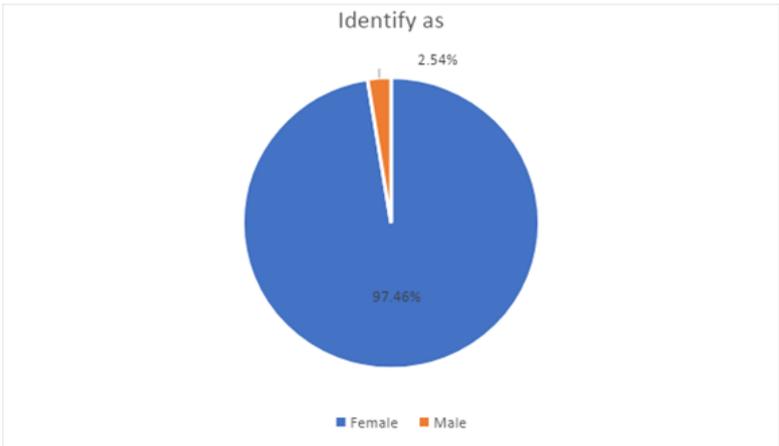


Figure 3: Sex of Respondents



SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

The ability of women to participate in politics and governance is often shaped by norms and traditions that characterize the majority of African societies. The patriarchal system is so entrenched that the idea that women are inferior to men and that politics and governance are a male preserve is even accepted and internalized by some African women themselves. Traditional and cultural beliefs, particularly in rural areas where most African women live, ascribe differential roles to women and men. Traditional beliefs confine women to domestic roles such as caregiving and as such, inhibit them from venturing into public spheres. A respondent from the Democratic Republic of Congo had this to say:

“

Political parties for the most part use women as facilitators without any responsibility, at the end of the day, it is to appoint her to the head of the women's committees of the party with the role of dancing and singing for political tenors

”

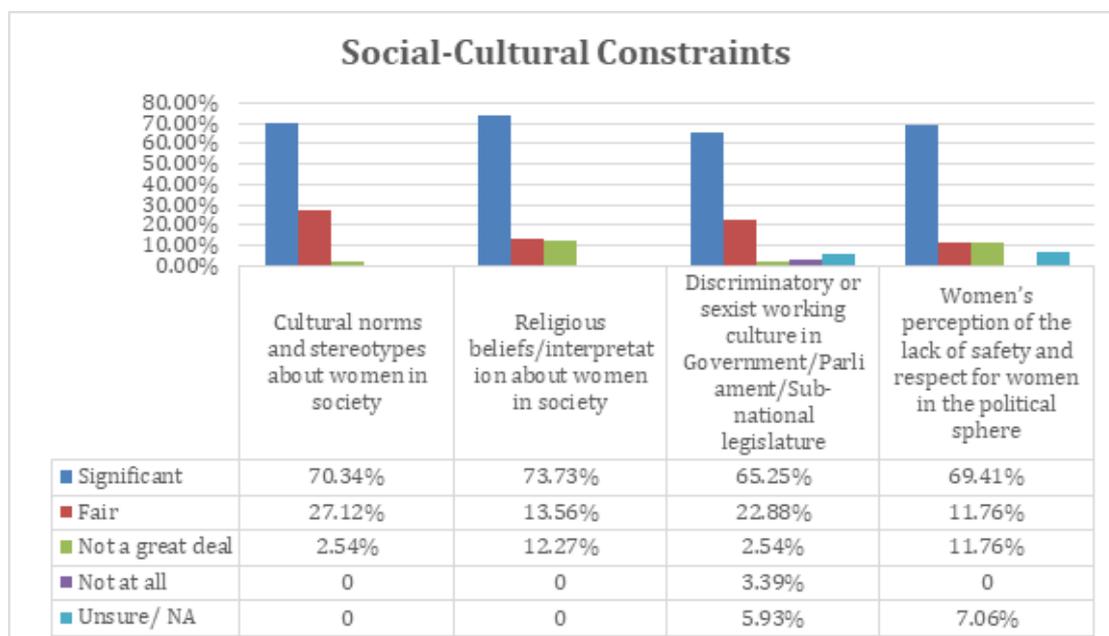
Political actors use violence as a tool to win political contests. The African political terrain is marred with rampant use by political actors of militant youth wings or state security agents to further their political ambitions. Electoral violence makes politics an unsafe venture for young women and hence, limits their participation in politics and governance. Because of violence, young women cannot participate either as voters or as candidates in an election. Violence against young women in elections is either overt or covert.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Physical violence entails inflicting physical harm whereas there is violence that involves gender-based hate speech which deters women from presenting themselves as candidates or voting elections.

Failure to address these electoral barriers creates an atmosphere that makes women have a negative attitude towards political activities. The notion that politics is a dirty game deters women from entering into politics. Some participants from Zimbabwe shared that when they stood for political office, they were labelled as “Prostitutes”, each time they held campaign rallies their campaign speeches were often interjected with “prostitute chantings that are often recorded and sent on social media thereby affecting their self esteem.

Figure 4: Social and Cultural Barriers to Women Participation



INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Many countries in Africa have made significant progress in promoting gender-sensitive laws and policies. Equality between men and women is explicitly provided for in many African countries' constitutions and international treaties and conventions to which they are party notably Senegal, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. African countries have also set up national gender machineries in the form of national gender commissions, ministries of women's affairs and gender for the advancement of women, and initiated strategies and policies in order to promote women's status notably women's political participation. However, these countries face several constraints to the operation of their respective mechanisms such as :

inadequate financial and human resources; lack of effective monitoring and evaluation systems and tools in place to follow up properly on implementation; and absence of national policies that deal with equality between men and women. In the majority of the countries where this research was conducted, participants indicated that the proposed strategies considered women as a homogenous group without specific strategies or quotas for young women.

In Cameroon for instance, the senate passed a law raising the quota system for women's representation to 30% but there are only 12 percent women in parliament and only 2 percent are mayors. In order to achieve a significant representation of women in politics, countries require not just gender-sensitive legislative frameworks but the political will to implement them. A key informant from the Democratic Republic of Congo had this to say:

“

These texts are beautiful, but it is their execution that remains utopian

”

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Institutions in any society are products of that particular society's norms and values, and the conduct of business in these institutions is determined by the same normative values. In patriarchal societies, institutions (governments, political parties, independent commissions, and judicial systems) are gender blind and very youth unfriendly .

This is demonstrated in Fig 5 below. In most countries, the most senior positions women can occupy are deputies of their male counterparts whilst young women are relegated to the youth wings of political parties. It has to be noted, however, that there are some countries like Rwanda, South Africa, Senegal, and Namibia which have done very well in terms of creating an enabling environment for women to participate in politics as shown in Fig.5 and 6. Interesting to note that countries that were progressive in advancement of women in politics also had more young women in leadership positions.

Figure 5: Percentage of Women Representation in Parliament

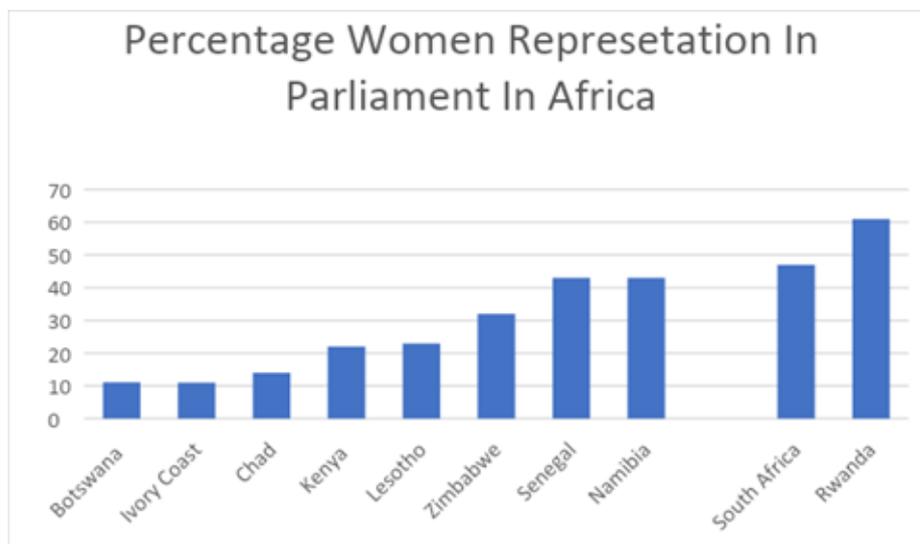


Figure 6: Percentage of Women in Ministerial Positions

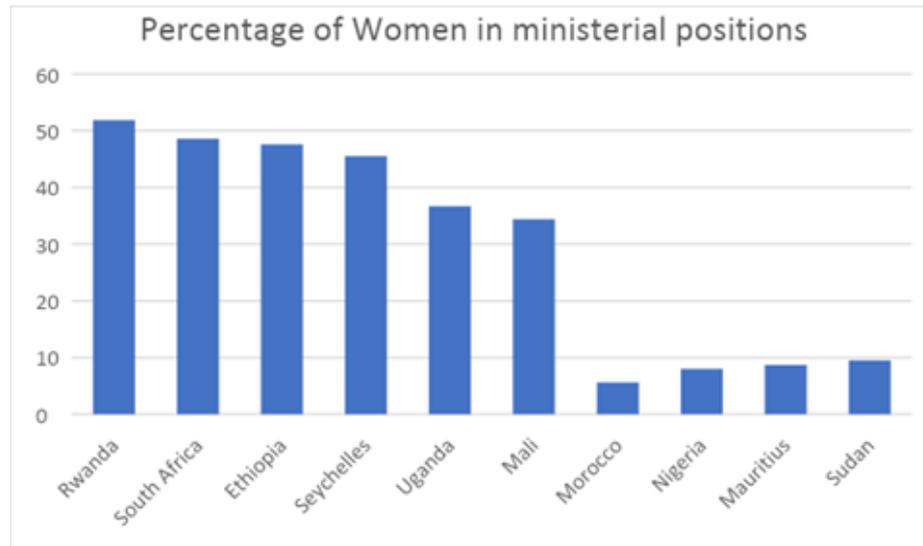
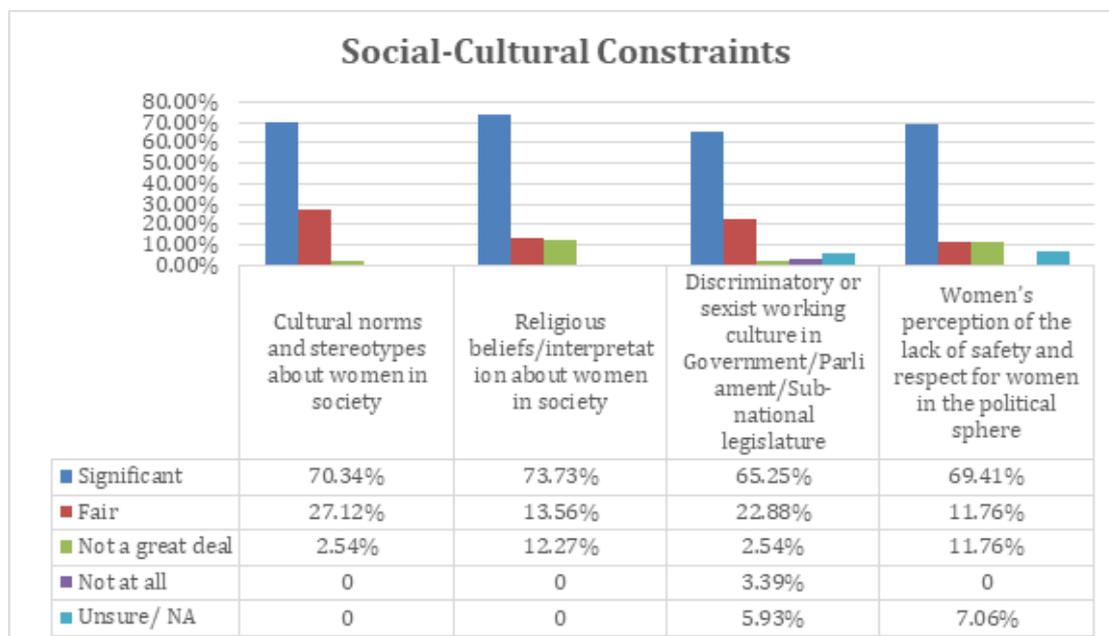


Figure 7: Institutional Barriers to Women Participation in Politics



TOOLS, CAPACITIES, AND RESOURCES

In most rural communities, women do not have access to information on gender equality. In other jurisdictions such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, there is a lack of effective education for young girls. This means that women are relegated to the periphery of the social stratum at the very beginning of their lives.

Lack of education lowers their self-esteem which impedes them from effectively participating in politics. The distribution of wealth in many countries is skewed in favor of men. Economic vulnerabilities of women not only lower their esteem but also ensures that women do not have sufficient resources at their disposal to either run as candidates in elections or to form and lead political parties. Very few organizations in the mold of the UN Women, Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) offer training to women leaders. One participant from South Africa shared that:

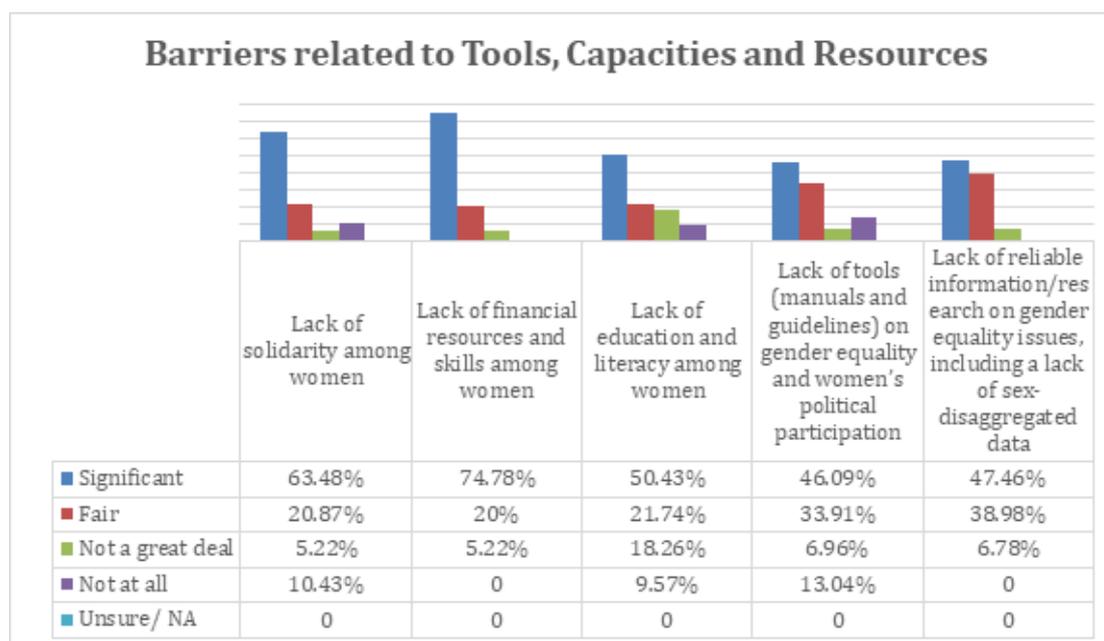
“

It is very difficult for a young woman to get resources to participate in politics and stand for political office due to high unemployment levels coupled with the double vulnerability of being young and being a woman.

”

TOOLS, CAPACITIES, AND RESOURCES

Figure 8: Women Access to Tools, Capacities, and Resources



BENEFITS OF PROMOTING MEANINGFUL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

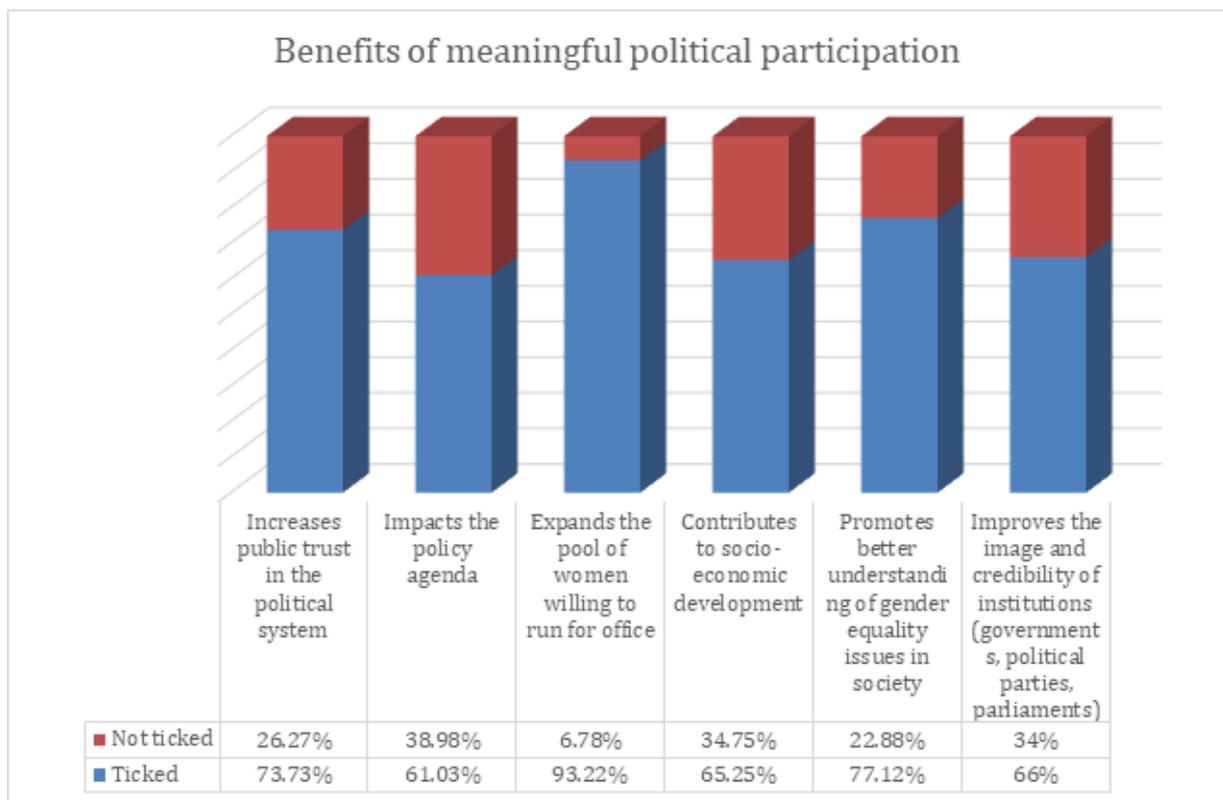
The involvement of women in politics and decision-making has become part of customary international law. There is a positive correlation between women's equal participation with men in power and decision making and sustainable development, peace, and democracy.

Countries that incorporate the perspectives and experiences of women into the decision-making processes are also likely to excel economically. Rwanda, being one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa, is a notable example in this regard, with approximately 60 percent of women parliamentarians and over 50 percent of women with ministerial positions. As shown in Fig.9 below, equal participation between men and women increases public trust and the credibility in the national institutions such as the

national institutions mandated to deal with gender equality issues, impacts the policy agenda such as in the case of Rwanda where the majority of policymakers (parliamentarians and ministers) are women and has the multiplier effect which increases the pool of women willing to run for public support. Countries that have advanced in women's participation in politics and governance such as Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, and Namibia have also expanded the pool of women role models, women mentors and have established best practices on gender equality. A participant from Senegal illustrated that "the Gender Equality Electoral law was the game changer in Senegal. It has to be expanded to appointed positions in Presidential cabinet and business boards. There is therefore need to make a deliberate effort to disaggregate the statistics on women's participation by age and also acknowledge and harness Africa's demographic dividends by creating an enabling environment specifically for young women.

BENEFITS OF PROMOTING MEANINGFUL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Figure 9: Benefits of meaningful political participation



STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS GOVERNMENTS AND STATE INSTITUTIONS

The majority of the respondents feel that in addition to having laws and policies in place which establish Gender Equality Institutions, which most Africans have done, governments and other state institutions must ensure the effective functionality of these institutions.

Most of the countries sampled from East, Central, Southern, and Western Africa have government ministries or departments specifically mandated to deal with Gender Equality. They also have other additional statutory institutions like the Gender Commission in the case of Zimbabwe and South Africa but whose names vary from country to country. In most African countries, these institutions are not adequately resourced to dispose of their mandate.

Very few countries (Uganda, Rwanda, and South Africa) have achieved success in this regard. The three countries have adopted gender budgeting (use of fiscal policy to address gender inequality) as part of their national strategies and scored significant successes. Gender budgeting, once adopted as a national strategy or policy, means that a country has committed to avail financial resources for the attainment of gender equality through supporting the effective functionality of state institutions mandated to promote gender equality. It entails availing financial and other resources towards the implementation of the gender clauses in the constitutions, fulfilling the country's international obligations on gender, and creating space for women access to skills, education, and economic opportunities.

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS GOVERNMENTS AND STATE INSTITUTIONS

Governments should consider making efforts to adopt in addition to gender budgeting, youth friendly budgeting which will cater for young women's aspirations. Gender budgeting tends to limit its purview to women and men without recognising the age dynamics.

Government and state institutions must also deliberately create space for their citizens to gain knowledge on gender equality. One of doing this is to embed gender equality in the curriculum for schools. The Midlands State University in Zimbabwe, the African Gender Institute in South Africa are some of the renowned institutions that have Gender Institutes that have gender programmes. Governments must also ensure gender-equal access to resources. Africa is endowed with natural resources such as fertile land, minerals, wildlife, and forestry.

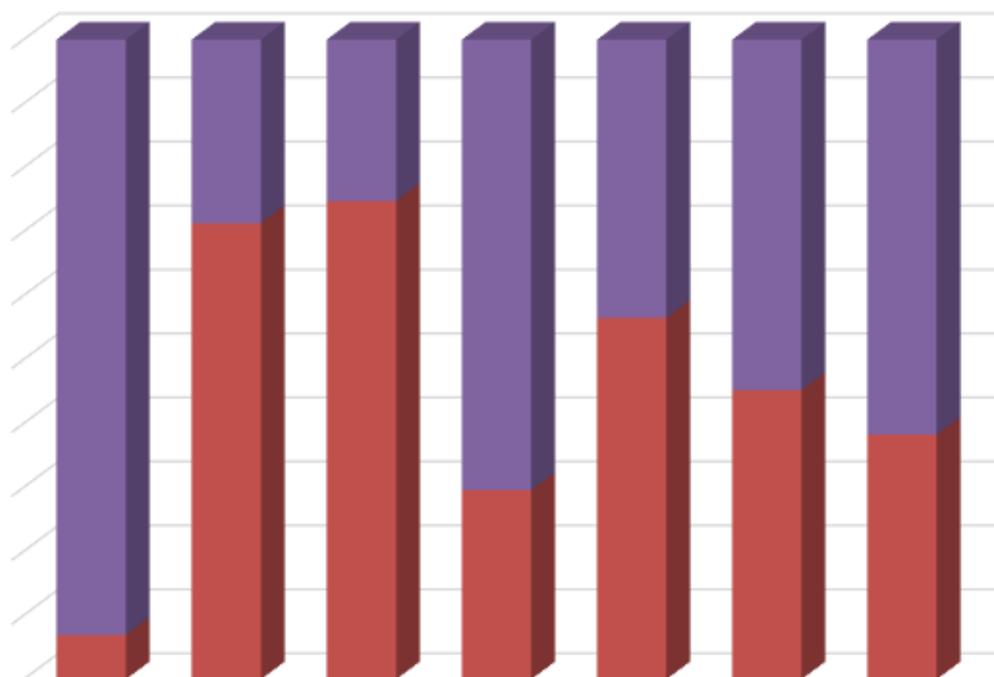
Promoting women particularly young women's access to these resources helps to address the economic vulnerabilities of young women and hence creates opportunities for them to excel in economic and public spheres. In Africa, access to land is a source of wealth and a symbol of prosperity. Young women's access to factors of production must be promoted. Governments must therefore take concrete steps in ensuring that young women have access not only to land but to land tenure security as well. Joint spousal registration of land and other properties must be made mandatory. In addition to land, governments must also develop programs aimed at financially supporting young women's entrepreneurship projects and enhancing their access to markets.

It is also the government that must put measures in place to address structural and Gender-Based Violence. The latter inhibits young women's political participation as it fosters male superiority by subjecting women to male dominance. Governments must also put measures to combat electoral violence which makes politics an unsafe venture for women. Statistics show that where there is political violence, women's participation is limited.

Governments and other state institutions including political parties should provide gender and age disaggregated statistics to allow stockholders to do tracking and putting measures to increase young women's participation in politics.

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS GOVERNMENTS AND STATE INSTITUTIONS

Recommendations by respondents on what governments need to do to promote women political participation



	Develop and adopt temporary special measures	Establish and ensure the effective functioning of gender equality mechanisms (Committees on Gender Equality, Research bodies, Gender Equality data collection tools)	Ensure a gender sensitive working environment and work towards Gender sensitive institutions /policies	Work to develop and implement gender equality in processes (elections)	Take initiatives to promote better understanding of gender equality issues in society (discrimination, domestic violence, socio-cultural attitudes)	Take initiatives to combat gender stereotypes	Ensure gender equal access to resources and infrastructure
■ Not ticked	93.04%	28.70%	25.22%	70.43%	43.48%	54.78%	61.74%
■ Ticked	6.94%	71.30%	74.78%	29.57%	56.52%	45.22%	38.26%

CIVIL SOCIETY

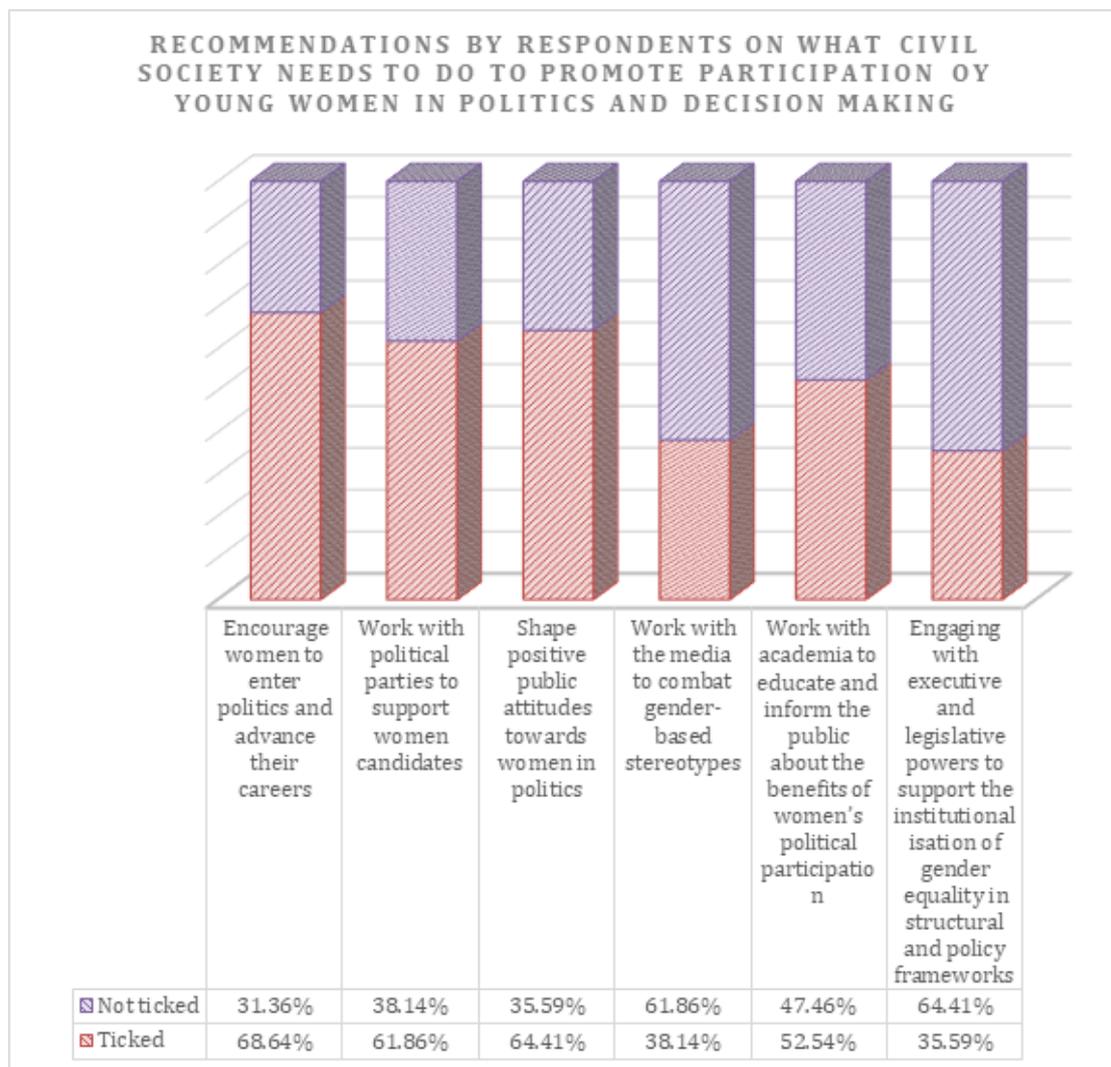
UN Women, African Women Leaders Forum, Gender Links, Just Associates, Africa for Women's Rights, the African Women Rights Observatory, The African Centre for Gender Development, the African Gender Institute, African Women and Communication Network, Association of Women for Research and Development, Association for Support to Women Entrepreneurs are some of the Civil Society Organizations in Africa which work on a broad array of issues ranging from political participation, addressing economic vulnerabilities, providing education, access to information, among other issues.

As can be shown in Fig 10, civil society organizations must engage in massive awareness-raising campaigns to encourage women to enter politics, develop projects aimed at deconstructing the traditional, cultural, and religious norms that perpetuate women marginalization, and must work with political parties to support young women candidates. They must also work to build and strengthen inter-continental and

even international synergies on women leaders and organizations working to advance gender equality. Respondents recommended that civil society organizations must work with the media to combat gender-based stereotypes, such as what the Association for Professional African Women in Communication is doing. Civil society organizations must also work with the academic to educate and inform the public about the benefits of young women's political participation and engage with the legislative and executive powers to support the institutionalization of gender equality. They must also intensify their advocacy on access to education by the girl child.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Figure 10: What Civil Society Organizations must do to promote women participation in politics and governance



YOUNG WOMEN THEMSELVES

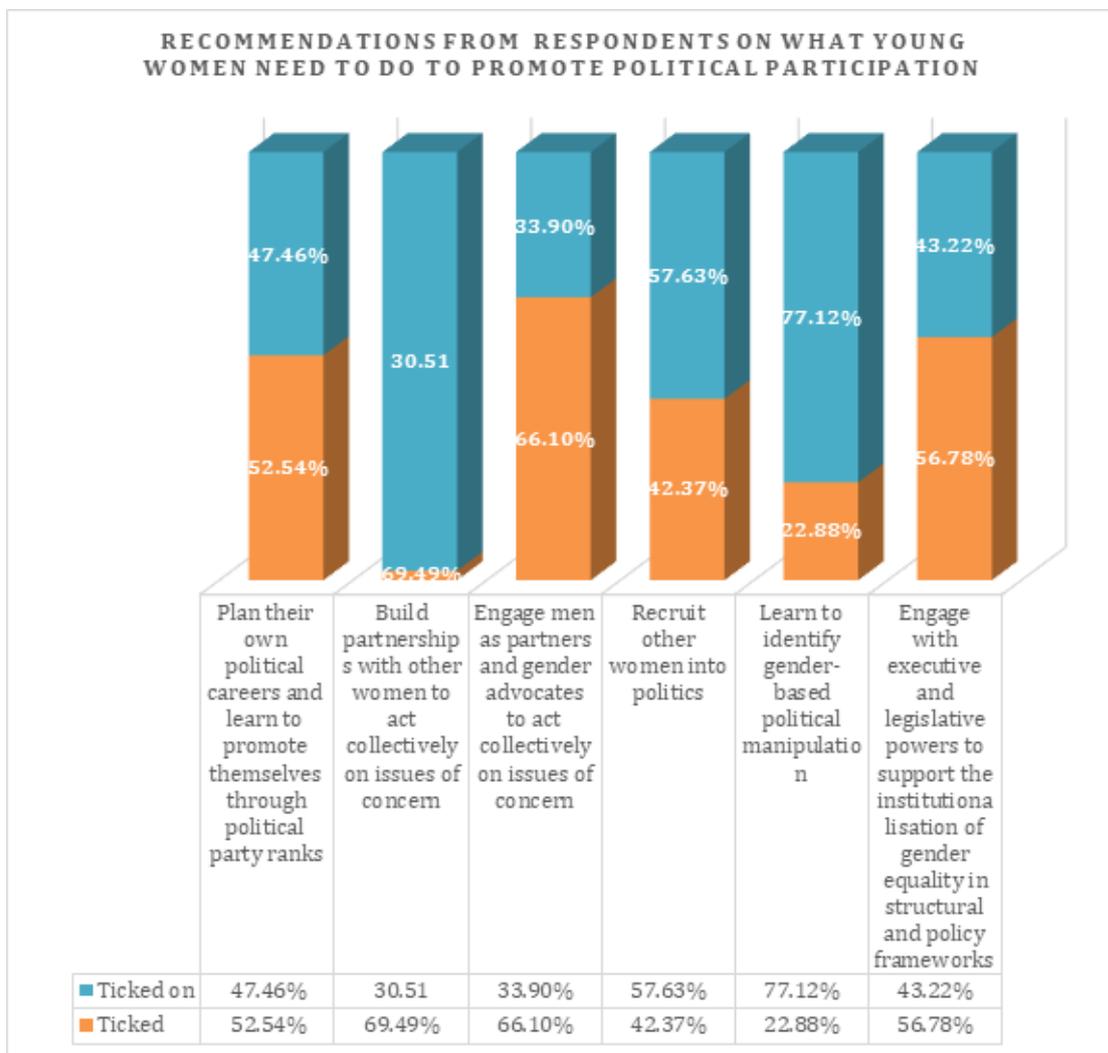
In addition to the support that governments and civil society provide, young women need to take initiatives of their own in order to effectively participate in politics and governance, notwithstanding challenges posed by the context. In terms of overcoming barriers due to lack of solidarity, one participant from Senegal recommended “women leaders to create innovative alliances with young people organizations, progressive religious groups to advocate and put pressure on decision makers for further women participation and recognition in public and private life”.

Indeed, they must learn from their positive role models. They must enroll in training programs such as the ones offered by the African Women Leaders Forum, UN Women, UDP, Mandela Washington Fellowship Program, Generation ABCD (Anybody Can Dream), MILEAD Program, African Young Women Leaders Fellowship Programme,

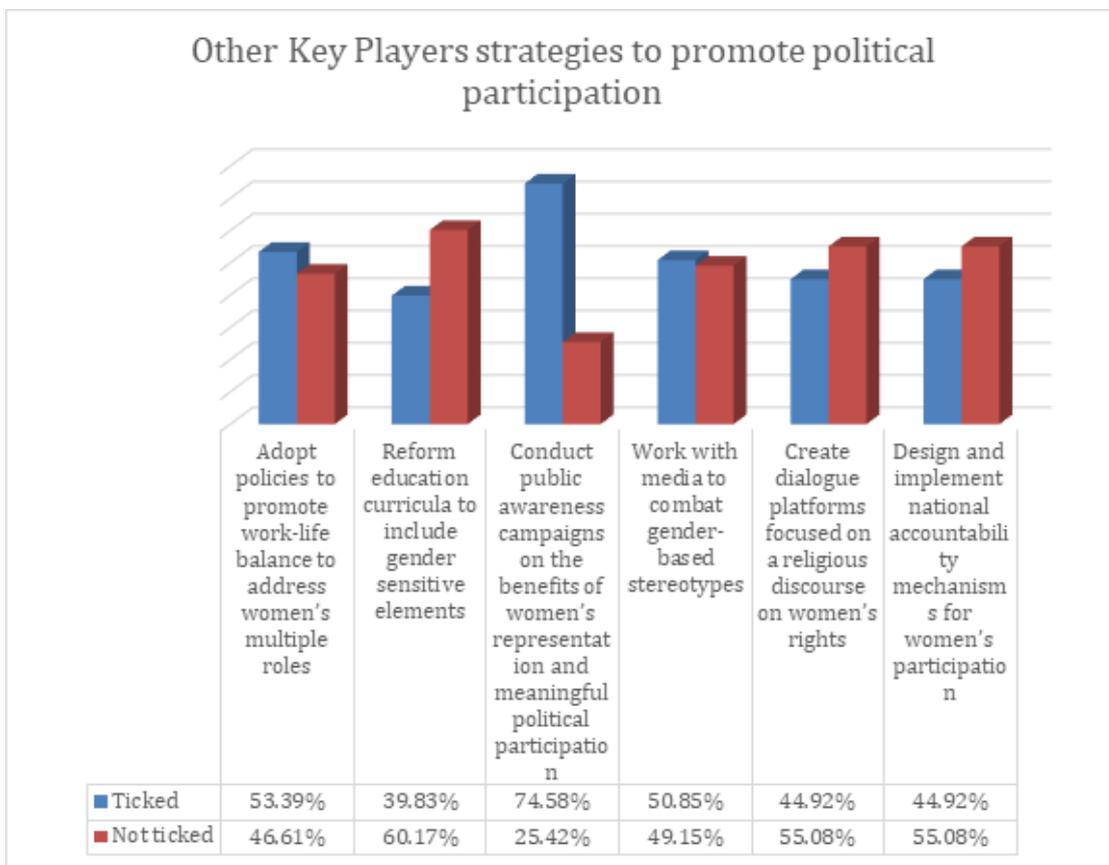
Institute of Young Women’s Development (IYWD- Zimbabwe), Mentorship and Empowerment Programme for young Women(MEMPROW- Uganda) Gender Centre for Empowering Development (GenCED) in Ghana and other such fellowships.

Young women need to establish local, regional, and international synergies to advance the cause of gender equality.

OTHER KEY ACTORS



TOOLS AND RESOURCES



TOOLS AND RESOURCES

There is a need to develop a compendium or database of existing resources and tools on women's political participation in Africa that can be accessed by young women.

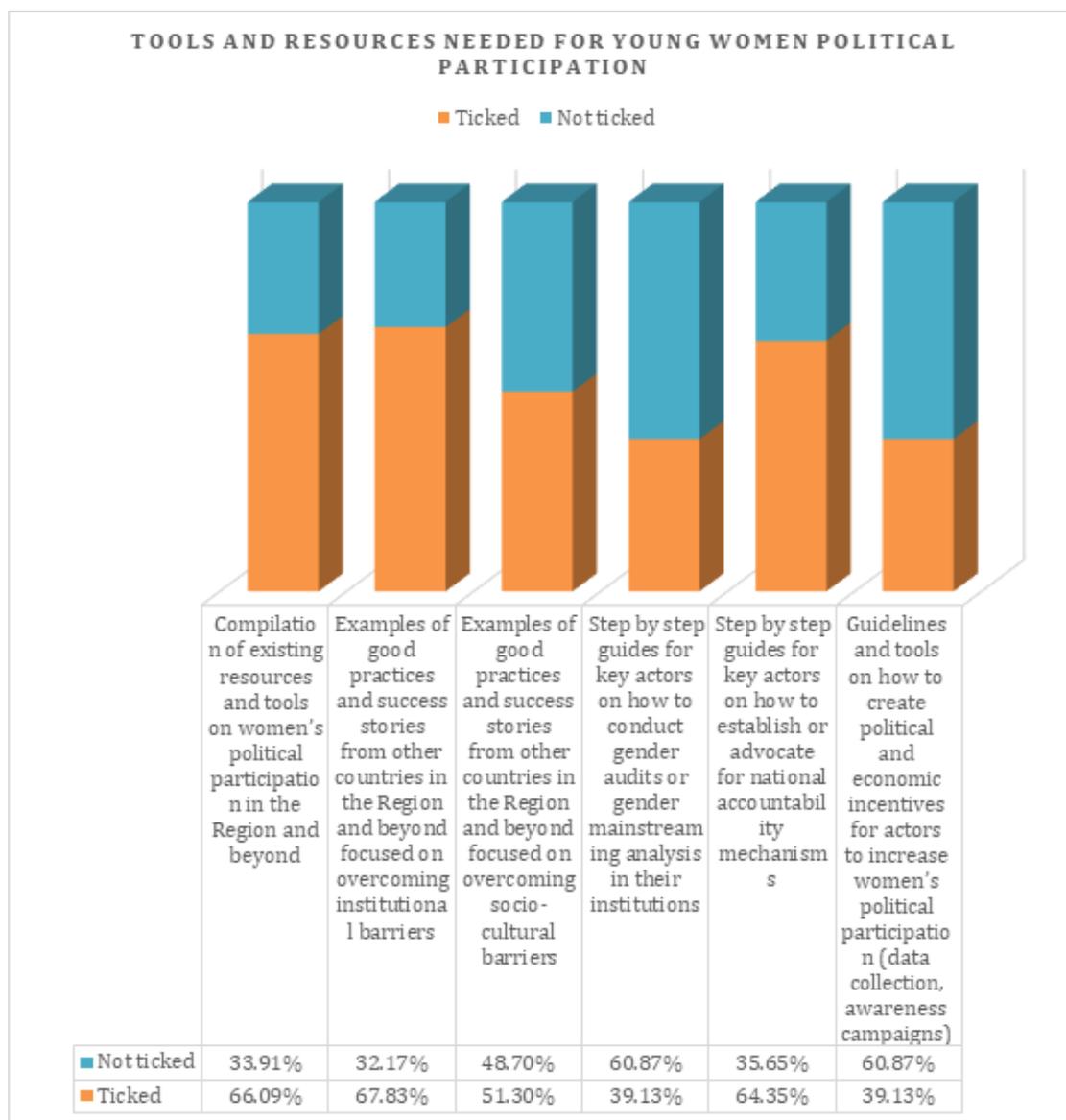
The database can contain information such as existing leadership fellowships and scholarships for women, organizations working on gender equality in Africa and beyond, funding opportunities for women leaders and women organizations, training opportunities, and many other resources. Examples of best

practices and success stories from other countries need to be well documented and accessible to young women in schools, colleges, online in books, and several other platforms. For example, what has Rwanda done to have so many women in parliament in parliament and Ministerial Positions? What are the lessons learned?

Success stories need to be collected from the women leaders themselves so that young women can also be inspired. Mentorship programmes and cross generational learning spaces should be created for younger and older women in politics to promote exchange of tactics and strategies .

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Figure 11: Tools and Resources Needed for Young Women Political Participation



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