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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

CONSTANCIA MANGUE DE OBIANG

"I WANT WOMEN
TO OWN THEIR
OWN FACTORIES"

H.E. MARIA
FERNANDA
ESPINOSA

CANDIDATE FOR THE
POSITION OF SECRETARY-
GENERAL OF THE UN



DR. MARIE-
MADELEINE
MBORANTSUO

AFRICA'S SOVEREIGNTY
THROUGH INSTITUTIONS
AND KNOWLEDGE



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Women in Africa: From Marginality to the Heart of Continental Sovereignty

At a time when the global geopolitical landscape is undergoing profound and unpredictable transformations, Africa faces an unprecedented imperative for self-determination. Long relegated to the role of passive recipient of development policies or a priority for humanitarian aid, the continent's women's leadership - and particularly its rural component - is now emerging as the irreplaceable pillar and keystone of our nations' economic, industrial, and food sovereignty.

The in-depth analyses, case studies, and field investigations featured in this new edition of *Femmes d'Afrique* magazine highlight an essential strategic trajectory: the imperative transition from assertive leadership to structural impact leadership. Whether it is the pioneering initiatives carried out on the ground by the African Network of Rural Women's Federations (RAFER), the high-level diplomatic advocacy deployed within the Organization of African First Ladies for Development (OAFLED) by exceptional figures such as H.E. Mrs. Constancia Mangué de Obiang, or the remarkable performances of our leaders within multilateral financial institutions and UN agencies, the demonstration is clear: African women are no longer seeking marginal adjustments or mere protocol concessions; they are directly shaping the key levers of continental transformation.

However, despite these remarkable advances and inspiring successes, a systemic gap persists between the international normative framework and the daily realities of grassroots populations. More than two decades after the historic adoption of the Maputo Protocol, the persistence of outdated legal barriers, cumbersome administrative hurdles, and a chronic lack of targeted investment continue to stifle the tremendous potential of African women farmers and entrepreneurs.

How can the continent seriously aspire to economic emergence when nearly 70% of the agricultural workforce, which alone accounts for 80% of rural food production, remains excluded from formal credit channels, deprived of guaranteed access to land ownership, and largely excluded

from modern, high-value-added processing technologies?

To make the necessary qualitative leap and convert this potential into genuine geostrategic power, Africa must immediately undertake a series of major and inseparable structural transformations.

On the one hand, the pursuit of genuine agro-industrial sovereignty requires a definitive break with the traditional extractive model based on the raw export of our natural resources. This means methodically organizing the transition of rural women from the vulnerable status of mere producers of raw materials to that of elite processors and key shareholders within local agro-industrial units, backed by dedicated sovereign wealth funds and long-term guaranteed financing.

On the other hand, the preservation and sustainable development of human capital necessitates uncompromising harmonization of regional and national regulatory frameworks. Guaranteeing the full effectiveness of reproductive rights, universal access to primary healthcare, and fundamental legal protection is not a societal luxury or a mere afterthought, but an absolute economic prerequisite. Our national legislation must urgently remove the procedural and customary barriers that penalize the vulnerability of young girls and stifle the productive potential of mothers.

Finally, this ambitious roadmap must be underpinned by a renewed and operational multilateralism. Major continental and international bodies - whether the African Union, the ECCAS, or specialized UN agencies - must move beyond mere symbolic consultation to elevate women's civil society networks to the status of genuine, fully-fledged decision-making partners, endowed with direct, autonomous, and auditable intervention budgets.

In short, no lasting prosperity or continental sovereignty can be built by marginalizing the majority of our populations. The emancipation of African women is neither a social nicety nor a mere protocol concession, but the most powerful and urgent geostrategic lever of our century.



RAFER

THE SILENT REVOLUTION OF THE AFRICAN COUNTRYSIDE

By placing rural women at the heart of development, the African Network of Rural Women's Federations (RAFER) is transforming local economies from within. Supported by Constan-
cia Mangue de Obiang, First Lady of Equatorial Guinea and an active member of the Organization of African First Ladies for Development (OAFLAD), the network embodies a new era of women's empowerment.

The African Network of Rural Women's Federations (RAFER) has established itself as an essential strategic platform for the empowerment of rural women across the continent. Born from a desire to address systemic challenges - economic marginalization, limited access to productive resources, and exclusion from decision-making spheres - RA-
FER places rural women at the core of sustainable development

and food security. Inaugurated under the patronage of Mrs. Constan-
cia Mangue de Obiang, First Lady of Equatorial Guinea, the network benefits from leading political and institutional support, with its continental headquarters located in Malabo. RA-
FER's vision is to "pave the way to genuine empowerment" by viewing rural women not as passive beneficiaries, but as strategic actors in development. Its





mission is to build an ecosystem of opportunities: training, access to resources, confidence, and leadership. The goal is to enable these women to become successful entrepreneurs, respected community leaders, and influential voices in public policy.

RAFER's strategy is based on four main pillars: training and skills development through sustainable agriculture, business management, financial literacy, and leadership; agriculture and agri-food through the promotion of agroecological practices and the creation of local processing units to reduce post-harvest losses; income diversification through the processing of non-timber forest products, sustainable artisanal fishing, aquaculture and livestock farming, and even cosmetics and handicrafts: modernizing local

know-how and creating products made from natural ingredients that meet international standards. These pillars reflect a desire to move from a subsistence economy to a competitive and inclusive economy.

FROM MALABO TO THE VILLAGES, THE RAFER OPENS SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS FOR WOMEN FARMERS.

Challenges to Overcome

RAFER is tackling crucial issues: climate change and adaptation of agricultural systems; digital transformation to bridge the digital divide in rural areas; access to finance through microloans and appropriate guarantee funds; access to national and international markets; and regulatory advocacy for policies that support women's entrepreneurship.

To address these challenges, the network is planning ambitious projects: pan-African digital platforms, an innovation observatory, business incubators, forums, and strategic partnerships.

Constancia Mangué de Obiang: Women's Empowerment

First Lady of Equatorial Guinea and active member of OAFLAD, Mrs. Constancia Mangué de

Obiang embodies a concrete commitment to rural women. Beyond her patronage of RA-FER, she is involved in numerous field initiatives. Health and education programs for women and children in rural areas, direct support for women's co-operatives in agriculture and crafts, and international advocacy within OAFLAD for the inclusion of women in development policies are among her priorities. Her work illustrates a strong conviction: the empowerment of rural women is a prerequisite for African prosperity. RA-FER, driven by a pan-African vision and supported by committed figures like Mrs. Constanca Mangué de Obiang (see her interview opposite), is positioning itself as a key player in the transformation of African rural economies. By empowe-



ring women to reach their full potential, it helps build a more resilient, inclusive, and prosperous continent. Far from being just a network, RA-FER is a force

for change, where every rural woman becomes an agent of sustainable development.

Huberson Digbeu



HER EXCELLENCY MRS. CONSTANCIA MANGUE DE OBIANG, FIRST LADY OF EQUATORIAL GUINEA, ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN FIRST LADIES FOR DEVELOPMENT (OAFLAD)

"Women's Leadership in the Service of Human Development in Africa"

You have been the patron and permanent honorary president of RAFER for several years. How did this connection develop between you, the First Lady of Equatorial Guinea, and a network dedicated to rural women on the continent?

For many years, I have been committed to empowering women and their access to economic and financial independence in Equatorial Guinea, my country, by offering them loans for their income-generating activities. Three years ago, I formalized this work through a project called AIMUGE (Support for Women's Initiatives in Equatorial Guinea). Over the past three years, we have financed approximately 370 projects for women, for a total of 5.8 billion CFA francs, directly benefiting some 5,235 women organized into cooperatives. In addition, we have trained nearly 600 women in project management and business administration.

The connection with RAFER arose precisely from this national activity, and the women who founded RAFER felt that we were best positioned to extend, across the continent, the actions we were carrying out in Equatorial Guinea.



torial Guinea. They asked me to assume the role of godmother and honorary president of this organization.

We accepted this responsibility not as a title, but as a commitment, guided by the conviction that rural African women make an essential contribution to Africa's development: they are the backbone of agricultural production and food security; they represent 70% of the continent's agricultural workforce and produce approximately 80% of the food consumed in rural areas. Yet, 60% of them live below the poverty line; they lack access to credit, markets, and land ownership; they lack training and skills, and so on.

Considering that it is neither fair, nor viable, nor economically defensible to marginalize those who, every day, carry the weight of Africa on their shoulders.

During your last meeting with the President of RAFER in March 2026, the processing of agricultural products emerged as a central theme. What specific strategy do you envision for RAFER to become not only a network of "producers," but also a network of "processors" and "value chain leaders"?

Our work aims to make RAFER a true catalyst for the empowerment of rural African women and a strategic operational arm for the production and processing of goods in rural areas. To this end, RAFER aims to strengthen capacities, create synergies, structure actions, mobilize resources, and ensure the full inclusion of rural women in the sustainable transformation of Africa.

Therefore, we no longer want our women to continue selling raw cassava, peanuts, or yams, for



example. We want them to own their own processing plants. RAFTER's strategy rests on three pillars: 1. Training. 2. Financing. 3. Marketing under the "RAFTER" brand.

The objective is clear: to transform women from simple producers into true entrepreneurs, from workers to shareholders. This is how complete empowerment is achieved.

You simultaneously hold three demanding positions: Honorary President of RAFTER, founder of CANIGE for vulnerable children, and member of the steering committee of the Organization of African First Ladies for Development (OAFLAD). How do you reconcile these three commitments? Do you consider RAFTER a tool for prevention? In other words, if we empower rural women economically today, won't the child they raise tomorrow be a person with a disability or a delinquent whom CANIGE will have to care for?

These three commitments are part of a single struggle: human dignity. With RAFTER, we empower mothers today. With CANIGE, we protect vulnerable children by guaranteeing them the best tool for their future: education.

That is why we created the CANIGE network of schools in every city in Equatorial Guinea, where quality education is provided at virtually no cost.

With OAFLAD, I am taking this commitment to the highest level, to Heads of State and within the African Union.

I want to emphasize that health is not neglected in our fight for human dignity. In addition to

funding medical evacuations of impoverished patients to specialized centers abroad, we have created the "Virgin of Guadalupe" hospital chain, which provides healthcare to the population, and we have also established a dedicated psychiatric hospital, recognized by the African Union. Yes, RAFTER is a tool for prevention. This is why we attach great importance to Sustainable Deve-

"We have funded 370 projects for 5,235 women, representing 5.8 billion FCFA, for the empowerment of rural women..."

lopment Goal number 5 (Empowerment of Women).

Indeed, an empowered woman finances her own education and that of her children (SDG 4); ensures the health and well-being of her family (SDG 3); guarantees food security (SDG 2); and, consequently, contributes to the eradication of poverty (SDG 1).

Thus, when a rural woman has a stable income, she can feed, educate, and take care of her children's health.

RAFTER brings together some thirty countries, but many national federations of rural women survive thanks to ad hoc projects and external funding. As Honorary President, what is your vision for these federations

to achieve economic autonomy? Do you envision an African working capital mechanism, a bank for rural women, or another model of financial sovereignty?

We must be realistic and recognize that the autonomy to which rural women aspire is a process that is built step by step.

We hope that RAFTER will indeed have a RAFTER Solidarity and Sovereignty Fund. In the future, I would also like to see the creation of a Bank for African Rural Women: a bank by women, for women.

It is important to emphasize that, faced with the multidimensional challenges confronting African rural women, RAFTER distinguishes itself through a collective, strategic, and supportive response.

By federating national rural women's organizations, it constitutes a strong and structured pan-African voice. RAFTER is a driving force for social, economic, and generational transformation, rooted in local realities, open to innovation, and focused on a prosperous future for Africa. RAFTER embodies the conviction that no sustainable development is possible without the full and effective participation of rural women.

Given its strategic importance to our continent, we have advocated to the Heads of State of the African Union and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), requesting in both cases the recognition of RAFTER as an associated civil society organization.

This recognition should not be considered a mere formality, but rather a firm and irrevocable commitment from African lea-

ders to provide RAFTER with the financial, material, and human resources necessary for the full realization of its objectives.

We are convinced that, beyond the actions undertaken by RAFTER to finance its activities, the effective implementation of this commitment by African leaders - a key indicator of their dedication to empowerment policies - will allow RAFTER to occupy its rightful place.

It is worth noting that the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the ECCAS formalized this recognition in 2025.

When rural women control their finances, they control their destiny. And a continent where women are financially sovereign is a continent that is no longer dependent on anyone.

OAFLAD has integrated climate change as a cross-cutting theme in its 2025-2030 Strategic Framework. Does RAFTER now have its own climate policy, or are we still at the stage of good intentions? What does it expect from the next COP, and what specific contribution can an African First Lady make to this fight?

Climate change primarily affects rural women. That is why, at RAFTER, we are committed to agroecology, resistant seeds, and solar energy.

At OAFLAD, climate is now a cross-cutting theme in our 2025-2030 Strategic Framework.

For the next COP, we hope that speeches will give way to action and that direct funding for local adaptation will actually be released.

The role of a First Lady, in this context, is fundamentally to bridge the gap between the field

and governing bodies.

You received the RAFTER Award in March 2025 and have made your country a testing ground for the network's initiatives. How do you reconcile your role as Honorary President of a pan-African network with the national realities of your

"When rural women control their finances, they control their destiny."

country? Does RAFTER exert internal pressure?

Equatorial Guinea is my homeland. Africa is my family. I make my country a laboratory. What works here, we share with the RAFTER national offices and with OAFLAD. And what we decide at OAFLAD with my sisters, the First Ladies, we implement here. RAFTER is a lever. OAFLAD is a platform. Together, they give me the strength to speak on behalf of more than 30 rural women from different nations.

As we approach the next United Nations General Assembly, what message would you like to send to the young rural African women who follow us? And on a more personal note: which rural African woman - farmer, agriculturalist, change agent - has most impressed you during these years of commitment to serving others?

It's important to remember that RAFTER is a strategic, federated,

and pan-African instrument, designed by women for rural women across the continent.

Thus, they understand that land is not a constraint, but an opportunity; they know they must modernize their production methods and persevere to become the architects of their own destiny.

It is worth emphasizing that RAFTER is fully aligned with the priority objectives of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, particularly Goal 5, which promotes the empowerment of all women and girls.

Therefore, this message should be addressed to the UN, urging it to collaborate directly and as a priority with RAFTER, the ideal instrument for uniting rural women across Africa around the issues of women's empowerment.

I wish to express my admiration for the women of the RAFTER Executive Council, who have left their families—husbands and children—and their livelihoods for a single cause: the empowerment of rural women in Africa.

They travel the continent and work tirelessly; they embody sacrifice and leadership. They are the flame that reminds us every day why RAFTER must succeed.

Throughout your career, you have been recognized as a "godmother to the most disadvantaged social classes," in reference to your social and humanitarian work with the most vulnerable populations. What does this recognition mean to you?

For me, being recognized as a "godmother of the most disadvantaged social classes" represents above all a great responsibility and a profound commitment

to those who most need our support. I don't see it simply as a title or a distinction, but as a constant call to work for the well-being of individuals and families, especially those in the most precarious situations.

Since 1984, we have dedicated ourselves to the education and training of new generations, gradually building a network of educational centers throughout the country. These include:

- *CANIGE – Malabo
- *CANIGE – Moka
- *CANIGE – Nsok Nsomo
- *CANIGE – Akurenam
- *CANIGE – Evinayong
- * Nana Mangue Training Center – Malabo
- * María Mbasogo Ngüi School – Riaba
- * María Mbasogo Ngüi School – Niefang
- * María Mbasogo Ngüi School – Mongomo
- * General Santiago Mauro Nguema Center – Riaba
- * Mama Okomo School – Finca Alegre, Malabo
- * Jesús Oyaregui School – Bata
- * Sacred Heart of Jesus School – Malabo
- * Gregorio Edjilo Center – Corisco

These centers are registered with the Association of Catholic Educational Centers of Equatorial Guinea.

For us, investing in education is investing in the future of the country. Every school represents an opportunity for our children and young people to learn, develop their skills, and aspire to a better future.

Health is also a key pillar of our work. Since CANIGE's inception, we have implemented initiatives to locate children with health problems in different commu-

nities, facilitate their diagnosis and treatment, and, if necessary, arrange their medical evacuation abroad.

Over the years, we have also provided support to people who, due to their economic circumstances, could not afford medical care, surgery, or hospitalization.

Within this commitment, mental health has always held a special place in my heart. We work to ensure that people with mental health conditions receive dignified, specialized, and compas-

“RAFER no longer wants women producers who sell raw materials: we want women who own factories, shares and value chains.”

nate care, and that their families are not left alone to face a situation often marked by misunderstanding and stigma.

Our commitment in this area has grown over the years, from the former Sampaka psychiatric center to the current Jean Pierre Olié Psychiatric Hospital in Sampaka, a facility with a national and international focus, aiming to become a leading center in Central Africa.

For me, mental health cannot be relegated to the back burner. A person with a mental health condition needs medical care, but also understanding, dignity, and support. This is why we wanted our country to have an infrastructure capable of providing specialized care to these

patients and their families.

Today, we are pleased to see that this project continues to grow and is taking on an international dimension. In 2026, a collaboration agreement was signed between the Jean Pierre Olié Psychiatric Hospital in Sampaka and the African Union, thus facilitating access to specialized mental health services for its staff and patients.

For us, this also represents recognition of the work accomplished and an opportunity to further strengthen this sector.

This commitment to health has also resulted in the creation and development of a network of clinics under the "Virgen de Guadalupe" banner, with the aim of contributing to the strengthening of the health system in our country and bringing specialized medical services closer to the population.

We have developed this network with centers such as the Virgen de Guadalupe Polyclinic in Mongomo and the one in Malabo, equipped with various specialties and resources for diagnosis and treatment. Our commitment also extends to people with disabilities and the organizations working for their inclusion and well-being.

We have supported associations such as the National Association of People with Disabilities of Equatorial Guinea and the National Organization of the Blind of Equatorial Guinea (ONCIGE), as well as other organizations related to people with disabilities.

This support has taken the form of donations of wheelchairs, crutches, tricycles, vehicles, and various orthopedic devices, as well as financial assistance, medication, healthcare, and other resources aimed at improving the



living conditions of people with disabilities.

We have also addressed the specific needs of visually impaired people by supporting ONCIGE and its members, particularly visually impaired students.

We believe it is essential to listen directly to these organizations, understand their needs, and support their initiatives, as they are the ones who experience firsthand the difficulties and challenges faced by these groups.

For me, supporting people with disabilities means defending their dignity, their autonomy, and their right to full participa-

tion in society.

We do not want to exclude anyone because of their physical or visual disability, nor do we want it to become a barrier to accessing opportunities.

That is why, when we talk about our social commitment, we refer to a range of actions encompassing education, health, mental health, humanitarian aid, support for people with disabilities, and assistance to families and the most vulnerable populations.

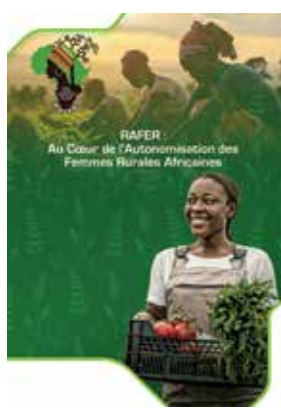
These are different areas, but they all share the same vision: to serve people and contribute, within our means, to improving their

living conditions.

For all these reasons, I accept with great humility, but also with a profound sense of responsibility, the recognition bestowed upon me as "godmother of the most disadvantaged social groups."

If society perceives me in this way, I see it as a commitment to remain close to those who need support the most, to continue listening to their needs, and to pursue initiatives that can offer them opportunities, hope, and a more dignified life.

Interview with Samirat Ntiازه







H.E. MARIA FERNANDA ESPINOSA

CANDIDATE FOR THE POSTING OF UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

"If Elected, I Will be an Honest, Predictable, and Fair Mediator"

Your vision includes five ambitious pillars, but it ignores Security Council reform.

While the Secretary-General lacks voting rights, he does have a voice. How will you use your mandate to break this structural paralysis despite intergovernmental inertia?

Security Council reform is essential, but its authority rests exclusively with the member states. The Secretary-General cannot override this authority, as he has no control over the veto.

However, he is not powerless. My approach relies on the moral authority, political credibility, and unifying power of this office to strengthen trust, facilitate dialogue, and bring the parties closer together. I will use this voice to advocate for a more representative and legitimate Council, better adapted to current geopolitical realities. The historical underrepresentation of Africa and developing regions is particularly inexcusable.

However, reform is not limited to the composition of the Council. Improving working methods can optimize decision-making and its implementation even before amending the Charter. For Africa, the African Union must be consulted from the outset.

My role will be to keep this issue at the heart of the political debate,

to build bridges between member states, and to refuse to mistake institutional inertia for an acceptable status quo.

You are proposing a "Prevention and Early Action Hub" attached to your office, with a "local first" approach. States are massively funding the response

"Preventing conflicts costs far less than repairing the damage caused by war."

but neglecting prevention. How do you intend to reverse this pattern and ensure funding and visibility?

Investing in crisis prevention rather than reaction is essential. Instead of seeking new funding, my proposed Prevention and Early Action Hub aims to optimize existing capacities, such as the United Nations Operation in Crisis Centre (UNOCC), by bridging the gap between early war-

ning and political action.

This Hub connects political analysis, development, human rights, and regional partnerships. Applying a locally focused approach, it strengthens the capacities of national governments, civil society, women, youth, and regional organizations.

Financially, prevention must become an operational norm, supported by predictable budgetary resources and the Peacebuilding Fund. Ultimately, preventing conflict is far less costly than peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, reconstruction, and the devastating human and economic losses of a protracted war.

You emphasize that you have "never served in the Secretariat," which makes you independent. Yet the reform you are proposing requires an intimate knowledge of bureaucratic intricacies and internal resistance. Are you concerned that this lack of integration will be a handicap?

Viewing this as an asset is based on more than 30 years of diplomatic experience at the UN. This in-depth knowledge of the institution's strengths, weaknesses, and political realities is combined with the independence essential for challenging bureaucratic habits and implementing meaningful reforms. Leadership requires



asking the right questions, building a competent team, and prioritizing effectiveness over form. Institutional knowledge and independence are not incompatible; they are inseparable for a Secretary-General.

You describe debt as a “structural constraint” and call for a reform of the international financial architecture. What concrete diplomatic tools, beyond the “power to convene,” do you intend to use to compel creditors and ensure tangible results?

The UN does not replace international financial institutions, but it benefits from universal legitimacy, analytical capacity, and the power to convene. These strengths enable it to bring together debtors, creditors, and banks to accelerate debt restructuring

and financial reform. The debt crisis jeopardizes the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 3.5 billion people live in countries that devote more resources to debt repayment than to health and

education. Addressing this situation requires political coalitions and strengthened international coordination.

Are you proposing a “Secretary-General’s Dialogue on Emerging Technologies” and a coordination mechanism on energy security? How will you avoid bureaucracy? What concrete indicators will measure success over two years?

I agree: the UN does not need additional bureaucracy. The proposed Dialogue on Emerging Technologies (AI, biotechnology, robotics, energy) is not a sterile debate, but a targeted platform bringing together governments, scientists, civil society, and the private sector to harmonize their approaches. It aims for coordination without institutional expansion. Its success will depend on

“Personal integrity is the key to the authority of the Secretary-General.”

concrete results: improved internal coordination, increased participation of developing countries, and the creation of practical partnerships.

How can you leverage your experience leading the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs in Ecuador—gained during a period of national and regional crisis—to effectively lead a global organization that demands integrity and stability?

As the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defense of Ecuador, leading 50,000 people and managing a budget comparable to that of the UN, I have learned to navigate uncertainty through institutional rigor, accountability, and the ability to make tough decisions.

While the UN operates globally, effective leadership rests on universal principles: integrity, transparency, sound judgment, and consensus-building. For the Secretary-General, personal integrity is paramount; the authority of the office is based on trust. Member States must know that the leader will act with honesty, respect confidentiality, consistently uphold the Charter, and treat all nations equally, regardless of their power. This is the standard I apply to this role.

You come from Latin America, chaired the G77, and champion the priorities of the Global South. You say you want to be an “impartial broker” between North and South. How will you reassure net contributors to the UN budget of your neutrality without betraying the legitimate expectations of developing countries?

My experience as a minister and



“I refuse to confuse institutional inertia with an acceptable status quo.”

president of the UN General Assembly proves that there is no contradiction between convictions and impartiality. Being impartial means consistently applying the UN Charter and refusing to serve any geopolitical camp, while engaging in dialogue with all 193 member states. Understanding the realities of developing countries is not an ideological stance. If elected, I will be an honest, reliable, and fair mediator.

Interview with Sylvestre Tetchiada, in Addis Ababa



L'ambassadrice Balbina Malheiros Dias Da Silva

BALBINA MALHEIROS DIAS DA SILVA, AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND
PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ANGOLA TO THE KINGDOM OF SPAIN

A Diplomat Dedicated to Promoting Angola's International Standing

A seasoned figure in Angolan diplomacy, Balbina Malheiros Dias da Silva embodies a career built on more than four decades of experience in international relations. Since 2025, she has served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Angola to the Kingdom of Spain, with accreditation to Andorra. She presented her credentials to King Felipe VI at the Royal Palace of Madrid on September 12, 2025.

Her career reflects a vision of diplomacy grounded in representing the State, political dialogue, economic cooperation, and the defense of national interests. Her extensive experience allows her to approach diplomacy as an instrument for political rapprochement, as well as for mobilizing investment and leveraging Angola's economic potential.

A Diplomatic Career Built on Experience

Born on February 27, 1959, in Lobito, Benguela Province, Balbina Malheiros Dias da Silva began her education at a young age, focusing on public and international affairs. From 1981 to 1982, she attended a course in Foreign Relations at the National Party School, before studying at the Faculty of Law of Agostinho Neto University between 1982 and 1984. She then completed her studies at the prestigious Rio Branco Institute in Brazil, where she earned a postgraduate degree in diplomacy between 1988 and 1990. Her academic background was further enriched by training in international humanitarian law, provided in partnership with the

International Committee of the Red Cross and the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as in public administration and management in Portugal. Joining the Angolan diplomatic service in 1983, she began as a diplomatic attaché in the Directorate for Latin America and the Caribbean. She subsequently rose through the ranks at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, notably assuming responsibility for the departments dedicated to North Africa and the Middle East, the Organization of African Unity, and then Central and East Africa.

After a posting at the Angolan Embassy in Harare, she successively headed the departments for Southern Africa, Central America, and North America, before being appointed Director of the Americas Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a position she held from 2003 to 2011.

In 2012, she was appointed Ambassador to Zambia. In 2019, she became Angola's Ambassador to Germany and, from 2022, also to the Czech Republic. Her mission in Berlin officially began in October 2019.

Responsibilities that Extend Beyond Diplomatic Representation

Her experience also includes significant coordination roles. From 2001 to 2007, she served as the national coordinator for institutional capacity building within a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project.

Concurrently, from 2001 to 2011, she coordinated projects and programs for the National Intersectoral Commission for Mine Action and Humanitarian Assistance (CNIDAH).

In Zambia, she became Dean of the

Diplomatic Corps and Chair of the African Group of Ambassadors and High Commissioners. In Germany, she chaired the group of SADC ambassadors accredited to the country from 2021 to 2024.

Among her most significant achievements is her contribution to the transfer to Angola of Angolan nationals sentenced to death in Zambia, an action that earned her the 2022 Lusophone Award in the Diplomacy category.

A diplomacy focused on investment and cooperation

In Berlin, she notably worked to foster closer economic ties between Angola and the German business community, facilitating dialogue around investment projects in sports, information technology, film, and tourism. In Madrid, this economic focus continues. In 2026, she is supporting Angolan initiatives with Spanish stakeholders in the areas of social security, tourism, and mining.

A polyglot - fluent in Portuguese, French, English, and Spanish - Balbina Malheiros Dias da Silva possesses a profile particularly well-suited to contemporary diplomacy, where political representation must be intertwined with economic cooperation, attractiveness, and multilateral dialogue.

In Madrid, her ambition is consistent with this approach: to use diplomacy as a lever for rapprochement between Angola, Spain, and the Ibero-African region, while simultaneously strengthening her country's economic and strategic visibility.

Samirat Ntiازه



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Bons

The United Nations Population Award
*an affirmation by the international community
 is presented to*
Fondation Bonne Action Umugiraneza

*"In recognition of your contributions to expanding access to critical healthcare services;
 your work through the "Sole du Soleil" school which focuses on providing quality
 education; promoting nutrition and raising awareness among young girls about the risks
 associated with early pregnancies; your support for the empowerment of women and
 survivors of gender-based violence through the provision of refuge and vital support
 services; and your support for the establishment of a medical centre in Nyoni
 dedicated to mental health and gynaecological support."*

Secretary-General
Secretary-General of the United Nations
Secretary-General of the United Nations

BURUNDI

Angeline Ndayishimiye, First Lady of Education

The First Lady of Burundi didn't need many years to establish herself as a champion of girls' education. Following her election in 2023, she has now been recognized for her work.

According to the head of the Merck Foundation, which partners with the Burundian First Lady's foundation, Angeline Ndayishimiye has played a significant role in supporting advocacy and local coordination, including collaboration with the relevant Ministries of Health, Education, Communication, and Gender to identify appropriate beneficiaries.

She has also facilitated local processes, supported the return and integration of trained healthcare professionals into their countries and public health systems, and raised awareness and fostered a cultural shift around critical and sensitive social and health issues such as girls' education. Her role also included ending child marriage and combating the stigma surrounding infertility, ending gender-based violence, empowering women, and promoting the prevention and early detection of critical health conditions, including diabetes and hypertension.

Through this coordination and advocacy partnership, the First Lady has helped transform the patient care landscape, amplify important

messages at the national and community levels, and mobilize stakeholders around these critical issues.

The Bonne Action Umugiraneza Foundation, as a separate institutional partner, has collaborated with the Merck Foundation on implementing initiatives, including the "Educate Linda" program, which annually supports the education of 40 high-achieving but disadvantaged schoolgirls in Burundi until they complete their schooling.

"I firmly believe that girls' education is one of the most powerful ways to empower women and transform communities." "Thanks to our 'Educating Linda' program and with the invaluable coordination of the Bonne Action Umugiraneza Foundation, we support the education of 40 deserving Burundian girls each year," said the head of the Merck Foundation.

"Through our partnership with the Office of the First Lady and the Ministry of Health, the Merck Foundation Scholarship Program, and in coordination with Burundian health authorities and partners, the Merck Foundation has provided 55 scholarships to Burundian doctors in critical and underserved medical specialties, thus contributing to building sustainable local healthcare capacity in the public sector," the Merck Foundation concluded.

Valery FOUNGBE

WOMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT





NETUMBO NANDI-NDAITWAH
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

Transforming Rent into Development

Some paths seem like shortcuts. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah's is not one of them. It took 57 years of uninterrupted commitment to the same movement, SWAPO, six months in prison at age 21, 14 years of exile between Angola, Zambia, and Tanzania, and seven ministerial portfolios for a woman born in an Anglican parsonage in northern Namibia to accede to the highest office in her country on March 21, 2025.

On that day, in Windhoek, before seven sitting heads of state and nine former African presidents, the woman her compatriots call "NNN" became the first female president of the Republic of Namibia. The date is no coincidence: it coincides with the thirty-fifth anniversary of Namibian independence, as if this former combatant's personal story were finally intertwined with that of the nation.

A Life Shaped by Struggle

The ninth of thirteen children, the daughter of an Anglican pastor from the Oshana region, Netumbo Ndemupelila Nandi-Ndaitwah was born on October 29, 1952, in Onamutai, a stone's throw from the Angolan border. She joined SWAPO in 1966, at the age of fourteen, while attending the Catholic mission in Odibo where she was studying.

Her commitment came at a high price under South African administration: arrested in 1973 for her activities within the movement's Youth League, she spent six months in detention before being sentenced to three years' imprisonment, suspended. She then chose exile, crossing Angola in 1974 before reaching Lusaka. From deputy representative of SWAPO in Zambia to head of the movement's representation for East Africa, based in Dar es Salaam from 1980 to 1986, she patiently climbed the diplomatic ladder of

the liberation struggle - eventually, at a very young age, bringing her movement's voice to the United Nations to plead for decolonization.

This background as a grassroots activist largely explains her current style of governance: not given to grandstanding, but committed to party loyalty and institutional continuity. A member of the Namibian National Assembly continuously since 1990, she successively held the portfolios of Women's Affairs and Child Protection, Information, Environment, and Tourism, before taking over as Minister of International Relations and Cooperation in 2012, a position she held for over a decade. Deputy Prime Minister in 2015, then Vice President of the Republic in February 2024 following the death of President Hage Geingob, she finally emerged as the SWAPO candidate in the presidential election and won on December 3, 2024, with 58.7% of the vote, defeating her main rival, Panduleni Itula, who contested the election but was unsuccessful before the Supreme Court.

"This is not going to be business as usual."

These words, spoken the day after her election and reported by Jeune Afrique, set the tone for her term. This was a way of signaling to a party that had been in power since independence in 1990 and was sometimes mired in its old habits that a cycle was coming to an end.

During the inauguration ceremony, she made a point of cutting short the ovations to pay tribute to her African predecessors, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Samia Suluhu Hassan, before clarifying, in a phrase echoed by several pan-African media outlets including *Afrique sur7*, that she had not been brought to power solely because she was a woman, but rather "because [she is] capable." The nuance is significant: she refused from the outset to be reduced to a mere symbol and asserted her full political legitimacy—that of a seasoned party official who had pro-



ven herself rather than that of a radical newcomer.

Substantively, her inaugural address set out concrete priorities. She announced her intention to "increase

investment in the agricultural sector," according to Reuters, to address the food security challenges of a country regularly plagued by drought.

The stakes are high: Namibia boasts one of the most dynamic growth rates in Southern Africa, driven by oil and gas discoveries in the Orange Basin and by green hydrogen projects, but it remains, according to World Bank data, one of the most unequal countries in the world – a paradox that the president constantly reminds her interlocutors of.

Neither a mere symbol, nor a candidate of rupture by chance: the trajectory of a stateswoman shaped by 57 years of struggle, now at the helm of Namibian energy sovereignty.

Oil Under Presidential Oversight

From the moment she took office, Nandi-Ndaitwah placed the management of the oil and gas sector directly under the authority of the presidency, a strategic choice in a country that aspires to become a crude oil producer by the end of the decade. In April 2026, at the Namibian Inter-

national Energy Conference (NIEC) in Windhoek, she announced the acceleration of a bill aimed at reforming the oil framework, presented as a signal to investors as the first barrel of oil was about to be produced.

"I am doing this in the interest of the people," she told Africa24 TV a few months earlier, during a tour of the Kavango-East region focused on irrigated agriculture and green hydrogen projects—acknowledging that "there is still much to be done" regarding access to water and energy in rural areas.

This displayed rigor translated, in October 2025, into a strong political gesture: the dismissal of her Minister of Mines and Energy, Natangwe Ithete, for alleged misconduct, a portfolio she herself assumed—a sign that she intends to maintain control over a matter deemed vital for the country's economic future.

On the international stage, she is forging numerous partnerships, culminating in the signing, in Beijing in early August 2026, of a package of nine agreements covering, in particular, uranium, lithium, and rare earth elements, while maintaining a strategic partnership with the European Union on green hydrogen and critical raw materials—a balanced diplomacy readily embraced by her close advisors.

A Presidency Under the Watchful Eyes of the Continent

Received in September 2025 at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, she stated that Namibia and the African continent were "on the threshold of new opportunities," in remarks translated and reported by the American institution. The formula aptly summarizes her stated ambition: to make Namibia, a small country of three million inhabitants, a serious player in the major global energy and diplomatic balances.

One challenge remains that neither hydrocarbons nor hydrogen alone will solve: a youth unemployment rate estimated at 44% among 18-34 year olds, and income inequa-



In April 2026, during the Namibian conference on energy (NIEC), Windhoek, she announces accelerating a project of law aimed at reforming the oil framework, presented as a signal sent to investors approaching of the first barrel.

lity among the highest on the planet. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah knows this better than anyone, having spent her life combining ideological loyalty with pragmatic governance. Observing her style of governance—firm on principles, prudent in execution—one understands that her legacy will depend less on the symbol she embodies than on her ability to transform resource wealth into shared development. It is precisely on this point that the presidency of "NNN" will be measured.

S.T.

WOMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT



ENTREPRENEURS AND ARTISANS

Key Takeaways from Minister Mboukou-Kimbatsa's First 100 Days

Between the initial "zero-day" phase, the reorganization of affiliated agencies, and a strong focus on promoting "Made in Congo," the Minister is laying the foundations for a more transparent and effective entrepreneurial ecosystem.

"100 days is both a lot and a little." It was with this pragmatic summary that Irène Marie Cécile Mboukou-Kimbatsa, née Goma, Minister of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Crafts, characterized her first three months at the head of the department. Entrusted by the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister with the strategic mission of revitalizing a key sector for national economic diversification, the Minister used these first three months to complete the initial "zero-day" phase: a comprehensive and uncompromising assessment, directly grounded in reality.

Restoring Institutional Synergy and Ensuring State Continuity

Focusing her actions on the principle of republican continuity, the Minister, from her very first weeks, made a point of visiting all the structures under her supervision. Far from adopting a stance of rupture, she commended the work accomplished by her predecessors while lucidly assessing the scale of the structural challenges to be addressed.

This introductory tour allowed her to map a dense institutional ecosystem, structured around two directorates general (SMEs and Crafts) and five key agencies within the state apparatus: ADPME: National Agency for SME Development, the linchpin of project development; ACPCE: Agency for Business Creation, responsible for administrative formalization; FIGA: Investment, Guarantee, and Support Fund, the sector's financial arm; BSTPE: SME Subcontracting and Partnership Exchange; and ANA: National Crafts Agency.

Recognizing that silos sometimes hindered overall efficiency, Irène Mboukou-

Kimbatsa made cross-functionality her managerial imperative: "Our goal is to make the ministry a fully integrated unit. What happens at FIGA must be known and shared by all other stakeholders." The joint validation of FIGA's Annual Work Plan and Budget (PTAB) is the first step toward a unified working method that will now be implemented across all entities.

The Entrepreneur's Journey: From Idea to Funding

1. Development at ADPME: Welcoming the project leader, structuring the idea, and consolidating the business plan.
2. Formalization at ACPCE: Guaranteed administrative and legal registration within 72 hours.
3. Funding via FIGA: Banking support, granting of guarantees, or access to specialized loans.

Clarification on Funding: Empowering for Sustainability

On the crucial issue of financial support for economic actors, the Minister provided a key clarification to dispel any ambiguity in the public's mind: the aid distributed is not a donation, but rather a repayable loan.

In this regard, she reiterated the importance of the Colissa program, a tool specifically designed to inject liquidity into small businesses and young people in the informal economy. For SMEs with higher ambitions, the Minister reaffirmed the role of FIGA, which acts as a strategic guarantor and surety for the private banking sector to unlock investment loans.

"The President of the Republic expects us to accelerate development. After these 100 days of familiarizing ourselves with the sector, our role is now to boost our entrepreneurs. I encourage all Congolese to buy local and purchase our handcrafted products with pride." — Irène Marie Cécile Mboukou-Kimbatsa, Minister of SMEs and Handicrafts.

Handicrafts: Focusing on modernization and excellence of "Made in Congo"

Essential for local employment, Congolese handicrafts received sustained attention during ministerial field visits. While the minister openly acknowledged the precarious working conditions of artisans and the dilapidated state of some infrastructure—calling for rapid modernization—she welcomed Congo's diplomatic influence, highlighted by the successful handover of the CODEPA (Organization for the Development and Promotion of African Handicrafts) presidency to Mali at its 12th conference.

On a practical level, the focus is on skills transfer and upgrading local production. Building on bilateral cooperation with Morocco, the ministry is implementing a rigorous training program for trainers—targeting around ten experts per year per sector—primarily in leather goods and shoemaking.

To give local artisans lasting visibility, the ministry is actively preparing the 3rd edition of the Congo International Handicrafts Fair and plans to develop the Handicrafts Village near the Massamba-Débat Stadium in Brazzaville, finally providing artisans with a permanent exhibition space.

150-Day Deadline: Moving to the Acceleration Phase

Rejecting premature announcements, Irène Mboukou-Kimbatsa has already set the next evaluation meeting for the 150-day management phase. As the finalization of the National Policy for SMEs and Crafts and its operational action plan is nearing completion, the Ministry is preparing to move from the observation phase to the intensive implementation phase.

By calling on the entire population to demonstrate economic patriotism through the consumption of local products, the Minister reaffirms her commitment to making "Made in Congo" the true engine of national economic sovereignty.

Wilfrid DIANKABAKANA

WOMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT



DRC

Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner: The Imprint of a Field Diplomat at the Head of the DRC's Foreign Affairs Ministry

Since her appointment in June 2024 as Minister of State, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, and Francophonie of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner has embodied the new face of Congolese diplomacy.

The second woman to hold this prestigious position in the country's history, she was entrusted by President Félix Tshisekedi and Prime Minister Judith Suminwa with the weighty task of defending national sovereignty in an extremely complex geopolitical context.

From the Field to Global Networks: A Path of Excellence

Born in Kinshasa to a Congolese mother and a German father, Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner carries within her a dual cultural heritage, which she has nurtured throughout her international career. Having grown up between Germany, Togo, and Ghana, she honed her intellectual skills at the prestigious Harvard Kennedy School in the United States, where she earned a Master of Public Administration.

This high-level education quickly led to concrete commitments in the field. A seasoned political scientist, she has dedicated a significant portion of her career to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Her expertise was further refined in eastern DRC, at the heart of MONUSCO operations, as well as in various peacekeeping and security missions across sub-Saharan Africa.

But Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner's ambition extends beyond traditional institutions. Recognizing the crucial

role of new technologies in contemporary political dynamics, she joined the digital giant Meta as Regional Program Manager for sub-Saharan Africa. In this strategic position, she leads crisis management and oversees integrity mechanisms designed to protect electoral processes in the region. A rare blend of institutional and technological expertise in the African diplomatic landscape.

His mastery of multilateral intricacies and his intimate knowledge of international levers of influence make him one of the major pillars of the government...

The Three Pillars of Kayikwamba's Mandate

At the helm of the Ministry of State, the Minister is implementing a clear roadmap, structured around three fundamental pillars:

Security and Sovereignty in the East
Faced with the deteriorating security situation in North Kivu and Ituri, Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner is intensifying her diplomatic efforts. Her central objective is to amplify Kinshasa's voice in international forums, to firmly condemn territorial aggression and violations of Congolese sovereignty, while simul-

taneously negotiating a structural overhaul of security partnerships.

Economic Diplomacy and the Ecological Transition

Beyond security issues, the Minister intends to position the DRC as a key player in the global energy transition. Leveraging the country's immense mineral potential and the carbon reservoir of the Congo Basin, she advocates for renewed strategic partnerships, based on a balanced power dynamic with the world's major powers.

Regional Influence and Leadership

Kinshasa intends to reaffirm its role as a geopolitical driving force in Central Africa and within the Francophone world. The diplomat is working to revitalize Congolese influence within the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF).

A Results-Oriented Style

With her pragmatic and direct approach, free from the constraints of traditional protocol, Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner is bringing a new energy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Her mastery of multilateral processes and her intimate knowledge of international influence mechanisms make her a key pillar of the Suminwa government. In a highly tense regional environment, the head of Congolese diplomacy intends to prove that technocratic efficiency can become the DRC's most formidable weapon for its international influence.

Wilfrid DIANKABAKANA

WOMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Aminata Kane Ndiaye Among the Most Powerful Women in Africa

In Senegal and across Africa, she has established herself as a woman of action. Always ready to step in and resolve complex situations and unlock the potential of developing businesses, Aminata Kane Ndiaye is naturally among the 82 most influential women in Africa.

She is sure to be a prominent figure this December at the African Women Leaders Forum in Abidjan. Aminata Kane Ndiaye continues to make her mark on African companies, where she is consistently recruited. This HEC Paris graduate, who also holds an MBA from MIT Sloan School of Management in the United States, is reaping accolades.

For her technical expertise and proven leadership, Aminata Kane Ndiaye is highly regarded on the continent. Ranked among the most influential women in Africa by the specialized website Africa.com and Harvard University, she will be one of the highlights of the upcoming forum bringing together nearly 100 women in Abidjan. Currently Senior Vice President and General Manager of VISA Inc. for West and Central Africa, Aminata Kane Ndiaye is a prime example of how talent knows no age. Since entering the professional world, she has held high-level positions that demonstrate her market value in a competitive environment.

In 2013, she joined Orange Senegal as Head of

Loyalty. In this role, she developed the loyalty program for the general public, as well as for high-value clients. Her work was highly regarded, and two years later, she was promoted to Head of Marketing Performance. At Orange, she doubled down on her efforts and fostered the growth of mobile money in Senegal as Marketing Director. Her track record was such that the company decided to send her to Sierra Leone to establish a presence there. In 2018, at the age of 33, she became the new CEO of Orange Sierra Leone. She increased the company's revenue in that country by 20 percent. Recognized for her dedication, she was named a Young Leader by the Franco-African Foundation in 2017 and then a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum in 2019. And that's not all. She also won the prestigious Best CEO in Africa award at the AfricaCom 2020 Awards.

But Aminata Kane Ndiaye's involvement isn't limited to multinational corporations. She is also involved in fashion. Fula&Style, a ready-to-wear brand made in Senegal, is one of her creations.

Africa.com meticulously analyzed 1,500 companies listed on all African stock exchanges to uncover the rising stars. Aminata Kane Ndiaye was ranked 72nd out of 82 influential female leaders in Africa.

Irène Djipohi

WOMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT



DR. ROSE MWEBAZA, DIRECTOR AND REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNEP AFRICA OFFICE

From Makerere to the UN Summit: The Journey of the Voice of African Climate

From the lecture halls of Makerere to UN summits, Dr. Rose Mwebaza traces a rare trajectory: that of a lawyer turned architect of African climate resilience. Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Africa since 2023, this Ugandan native with experience spanning three continents is transforming the continent's environmental vulnerability into a leverage point for green growth, innovation, and job creation.

Between institutional diplomacy, sustainable finance, and youth empowerment, she embodies the new generation of African leaders who no longer choose between economic prosperity and protecting the planet—but demand both.

Dr. Rose Mwebaza possesses a solid, international academic background. She holds a Ph.D. in Environment and Natural Resources Governance from Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. She also earned a Master's degree in Comparative International Law, awarded with a Certificate of Academic Excellence, from the University of Florida in the United States. Her undergraduate studies concluded with a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B, Hons.) from Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, her native country. Furthermore, she was a Carl Duisberg Scholar at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), consolidating her foundation in conservation and sustainable development issues.

A Rich Professional Background

Dr. Mwebaza's career has been built over more than 20 years of engagement in climate policy, environment, and sustainable development. From 1997 to 2008, she taught commercial law at Makerere University, where she served as Head of the Commercial Law Department and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Law. She later served as Senior Legal Advisor

in environmental security at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Her journey within the United Nations system began at UNDP, where she served sequentially as Regional Advisor for Eastern and Southern Africa on climate change in Johannesburg, and then as Program Manager at the UNDP Africa Regional Center in Addis Ababa, covering 47 countries. In this capacity, she was appointed Advisor to the Chair-

Throughout her career, Dr. Mwebaza has demonstrated a remarkable ability to foster multilateral partnerships and lead continental-scale programs.

person of the African Union, providing expertise on development issues related to the AU's Development Agenda.

In 2019, Dr. Mwebaza joined the financial development sector as Chief of Natural Resources at the African Development Bank (AfDB) in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. From 2019 to 2023, she directed the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), the operational arm of the UNFCCC Technology Mechanism, succeeding Mr. Jukka Uosukainen. In 2023, she was appointed Head of the UNEP Regional Office for Africa, cementing her role as a key figure in African environmental diplomacy.

Major Achievements

Throughout her career, Dr. Mwebaza has demonstrated a remarkable ability to

foster multilateral partnerships and lead continental-scale programs. At the helm of the CTCN, she supervised a global network of over 500 institutions across civil society, the private sector, finance, and research, delivering tailored technological solutions in agriculture, energy, waste management, and sustainable urban planning to 93 developing nations. She was listed among the 100 Most Influential African Women in 2021, recognizing her impact on the international stage. She is also a founding member of the "Network for African Women Environmentalists" and a member of the "UN Master Minds," two networks that reflect her commitment to inclusion and innovation in environmental governance.

Impact and Vision

Dr. Mwebaza's strategy for Africa's future rests on three pillars: climate resilience, the green energy transition, and youth empowerment. She advocates for sustainable industrialization integrating renewable energy, the circular economy, and resource efficiency, enabling the continent to bypass carbon-intensive development pathways. She emphasizes mobilizing climate finance—with Africa's annual adaptation needs estimated at between \$310 billion and \$365 billion—and strengthening public-private partnerships. Convinced that African youth represent one of the continent's greatest assets, she actively promotes youth innovation and green entrepreneurship, notably through platforms such as UNEP's "Young Champions of the Earth" program and the Youth Environment Assembly. Her ambition: to make Africa a global leader in sustainable development, where economic growth and ecosystem protection advance hand in hand.

Irène Djipohi

WOMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT



TACKONDIAYE, SENIOR GENDER OFFICER AT THE INCLUSIVE RURAL TRANSFORMATION AND GENDER EQUALITY DIVISION, FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS (FAO)

The woman who wants to feed Africa by unleashing the potential of female farmers

At a time when Africa seeks to tackle the triple challenge of food security, climate change, and youth employment, a voice is progressively establishing itself in major international forums: that of Tacko Ndiaye, one of the most influential African experts at the United Nations on gender, agriculture, and rural development. As the head of the Gender Team at the FAO's Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division, she has worked for nearly three decades to foster recognition of a truth that is still too often ignored: it will be impossible to eradicate hunger without empowering women to fully realize their potential.

Originally from Senegal, Tacko Ndiaye belongs to that generation of African executives who chose international organizations as their arena of action in order to lastingly influence public policy. Her professional trajectory reflects remarkable consistency: placing gender equality at the core of economic development strategies. Early on, she understood that rural poverty, malnutrition, and gender inequality stem from the exact same structural reality. Her career began at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), where she served for four years as an economist in charge of economic affairs. There, she notably contributed to the development of the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI), a tool that has become a continental benchmark for measuring the progress of African states regarding gender equality. This first experience enabled her to combine economic analysis, statistical data production, and public policy design.

She then joined UN Women, spending a decade as a policy advisor on women's economic empowerment and sustainable development. During this period, she supported numerous governments in integrating gender into agricultural, trade, and environmental policies. Her expertise gradually expanded to encompass international trade, climate resilience, women's

access to productive resources, and inclusive finance.

In 2014, Tacko Ndiaye joined the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). First serving as a Senior Gender Officer, she subsequently became Head of the Gender Team within the Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division. Today, she coordinates a multidisciplinary team responsible for integrating gender considerations into agricultural policies, natural resource management, climate action, and agrifood systems. Her work involves developing international standards as much as suppor-

With nearly thirty years of experience within international institutions, Tacko Ndiaye belongs to the inner circle of African women experts whose analyses shape United Nations strategies on food systems.

ting their implementation on the ground. Over the years, she has established herself as one of the leading global advocates for a now well-documented approach: women represent an essential portion of the agricultural workforce, yet they continue to be denied equal access to land, credit, technology, markets, and decision-making roles. In her view, these inequalities do not merely represent a social injustice; they directly hinder economic growth and exacerbate food insecurity.

This conviction takes on a special dimension in 2026 as the United Nations proclaims the International Year of the Woman Farmer. The FAO is tasked with coordinating this initiative globally, and Tacko Ndiaye has become one of the central figures of this international mobilization. Under her leadership, the effort goes beyond a mere communications campaign

to become an advocacy push for concrete reforms: securing women's land rights, improving their access to finance, insurance, technological innovations, and markets, as well as strengthening their participation in decision-making bodies.

Her methodology relies on constant alignment between research, scientific data, and public action. She has coordinated or contributed to several benchmark publications on gender-responsive agrifood systems, inclusive agricultural investments, and rural transformation in Africa. She regularly participates in major international forums dedicated to family farming, food security, climate change, and women's economic empowerment.

Beyond statistics, however, Tacko Ndiaye remains deeply affected by ground realities. In several interviews, she recalls field missions conducted in African villages early in her career - particularly in Niger - where she encountered very young girls married off early, deprived of education, and lacking access to healthcare services. These experiences lastingly fuel her conviction that the fight against hunger also requires defending women's fundamental rights.

Today, with nearly thirty years of experience within international institutions, Tacko Ndiaye belongs to the inner circle of African women experts whose analyses shape United Nations strategies on food systems. Her advocacy is straightforward yet powerful: investing in rural women is not a social policy; it is a major economic investment. In her eyes, every secured plot of land, every loan granted to a female farmer, and every young woman trained in agricultural technologies brings Africa one step closer to food sovereignty. On a continent where agriculture remains the primary employer, she embodies a generation of decision-makers convinced that the future of African food systems will be built as much in the fields as in public policies, with women as central actors of this transformation.

Huberson Digbeu

WOMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT



FLORENCE LOAN MESSAN, PRESIDENT OF THE BAR ASSOCIATION OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The woman who is revolutionizing the Ivorian Bar

Commander of the Order of Judicial Merit. This is the latest distinction that the President of the Bar Association, Me Florence Loan-Messan, has just received from the Ministry of Justice. The ceremony took place in the main hall (salle des Pas perdus) of the Abidjan Court of First Instance, presided over by the Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals, who praised the intrinsic qualities of the illustrious recipient—a woman who has been profoundly transforming the Ivorian Bar for over two years.

Proudly wearing her medal of Commander of the Order of Judicial Merit, Me Florence Loan-Messan, President of the Bar Association of Côte d'Ivoire, made a point of expressing her heartfelt thanks primarily to Minister Sansan Kambilé. According to her, the latter honored her greatly by organizing her decoration ceremony on the premises of the Plateau Court of First Instance. The ceremony was attended by several dignitaries, including Mabri Toakeusse, Minister-Advisor to the Head of State. For Me Florence Messan, the hosting of her decoration ceremony is tangible proof of the Minister of Justice's deep commitment to the Ivorian Bar. In passing, she thanked the Minister for driving the legal aid project - a revolutionary initiative, in her view.

Me Florence Loan-Messan also thanked all the lawyers who came in large numbers, as well as representatives of the judicial and legal professions. "I will never be able to repay everything I have received; I simply want to say thank you," she concluded. Before her address, Minister Sansan Kambilé paid tribute to a woman of conviction who possesses the necessary qualities to lead the Ivorian Bar. He noted that if Me Florence Loan-Messan has reached this level, it is because she embodies restraint, attentiveness, and discernment. In celebra-

ting her, Sansan Kambilé believes it serves as an extension of the recognition shown to former Presidents of the Bar. Beyond that, it is the Ivorian Bar as a whole that is being honored.

On this topic, the Minister of Justice highlighted the remarkable work of the Ivorian Bar, which contributes to the quality of judicial decisions delivered to the public. He called on the recipient to pursue her mission with the same standards of rigor and integrity that she has displayed since taking office as President of the Bar.

A woman of action...

When she took her oath in September 1996, Maître Florence LOAN, wife MES-

The first woman to preside over the Ivory Coast Bar Association since 1959, Florence Loan-Messan embodies an exceptional career path...

SAN, had no idea she would lead such an inspiring career. But one thing was certain: she set clear goals for herself. Indeed, she knew what she wanted and intended to make an impact. She began her legal career at the law firm SCPA Ahoussou Konan & Associés, where she completed her internship before becoming a partner in 2000. She then continued her journey at SCPA Konan Kakou Loan, and subsequently, since 2017, at SCPA Konan Loan & Associés, where she is a partner.

Alongside her legal practice, she became involved in the governance of the Bar early on. Starting in 2005, she successively served as Treasurer, Deputy Secretary, Main Secretary, and Member of the Bar Council, before being elected President-elect (Dauphin) in 2023, in accordance with the operating rules of the Bar of Côte d'Ivoire.

On October 2, 2024, she officially assumed the role of President of the Bar Association of Côte d'Ivoire (Bâtonnier) for a three-year term, succeeding Maître Claude Mentenon.

This election marked an important date in the history of the Bar of Côte d'Ivoire, as she became the first woman called to lead the institution since its creation in 1959.

In her capacity as President of the Bar, Maître Florence LOAN, wife MESSAN, represents the Bar Association before public authorities, courts, government officials, and third parties. She chairs the Bar Council, ensures compliance with the professional code of ethics, and contributes to settling professional disputes as well as protecting the interests of the Association and its members.

Beyond her administrative responsibilities within the Bar, Maître Florence LOAN, wife MESSAN, is active in the profession's organizational life. She serves notably as Vice-President of the International Network of Women Lawyers of Côte d'Ivoire (RIFAV-Côte d'Ivoire) and is a member of the Bar's Sports and Cultural Association.

As her three-year term draws to a close, her record is commendable. Nearly all of her projects are completed, and the energy she infuses into the Ivorian Bar - making it more visible than ever - is widely praised by her peers. In a few months, she will present the Ivorian Bar with a brand-new headquarters - a first since 1965.

Valéry FOUNGBE

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Twenty years after Maputo, what West African women are still waiting for

More than twenty years after the adoption of the Maputo Protocol, legal progress in favor of African women's sexual and reproductive rights remains largely incomplete. In West Africa, restrictive laws, administrative burdens, social stigma, and deficiencies in healthcare systems continue to hinder access to rights that are nonetheless recognized. An investigation into the persistent gap between state commitments and the tragic reality experienced by millions of women.

Her name is Ramata (the name has been changed to protect the victim's identity). She is 16 years old. She lives in the Adjamé neighborhood of Abidjan, where narrow alleyways and bustling markets also conceal violence that no one speaks of. Last October, a neighbor she had known since childhood raped her. She said nothing - neither to her mother, a widow already exhausted by domestic work, nor to her aunt, who would have accused her of provocation, nor to the police, whom she fears as much as she distrusts.

In January, panic set in. Her period stopped coming. She confided in a classmate, who

directed her to volunteers at the NGO Association Ivoirienne pour le Bien-Être Familial (AIBEF). There, a counselor explained: Law No. 2024-358 of June 6, 2024, passed by the National Assembly, authorizes the termination of pregnancy in cases of rape. However, Article 427 of the Penal Code specifies that "proof of the opening of a judicial investigation" is required.

Aminata has nothing - no formal complaint, no case number, no police officer she has spoken to. Only silence, shame, and the fear of her name circulating in the neighborhood. The AIBEF counselor, herself left helpless by this requirement, referred her to the Collectif des activistes de Côte d'Ivoire (CACI), which has been advocating for months to abolish this procedural barrier. In the meantime, however, weeks are passing. The pregnancy is progressing. And Aminata's future is shrinking, just like that of thousands of other teenage girls caught in the same vice between a law that promises and a procedure that condemns.

Aminata's story is not an isolated case. It illustrates a structural phenomenon spanning West Africa: the gaping disconnects between rights recognized on paper - notably through the Maputo Protocol - and



their practical implementation on the ground. "This gap is not inevitable," asserts a researcher at the Institut des Sciences anthropologiques de Développement (ISAD) at Félix Houphouët-Boigny University in Abidjan. "It is the result of political choices, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and persistent socio-cultural norms that continue to trap millions of women and girls."

Adopted in 2003, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa - known as the Maputo Protocol - stands as the continent's most advanced legal instrument regarding sexual and reproductive rights. Article 14 specifically guarantees a woman's right to "decide freely whether to have children, the number of children and the spacing of children." It also recognizes the need to "protect the reproductive rights of women by authorizing medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the fetus."

"Yet, more than 20 years later, this promise is struggling to translate into reality," notes Djenebou Diallo, advocacy officer at the Coordination Unit of the Ouagadougou Partnership. "In some countries today, there are not even reproductive health laws."

Senegal: When Criminal Law Contradicts the Maputo Protocol

Senegal offers a textbook example of this contradiction between international commitments and legislative reality. The country ratified the Maputo Protocol on December 27, 2004; however, its

Penal Code - Article 305 - continues to criminalize abortion under all circumstances. The only exception, provided for by the code of medical ethics, concerns saving the life of the pregnant woman, and this requires the agreement of three medical colleagues who must certify the absolute necessity of the procedure. This is a formality that is virtually impossible to fulfill in an emergency.

The Maputo Protocol constitutes the most advanced legal instrument on the continent regarding sexual and reproductive rights.

The result is relentless. Unsafe abortions represent the fifth leading cause of maternal mortality in Senegal and account for 50% of emergency admissions to maternity wards. Every year, approximately 51,500 women and girls turn to dangerous practices. And when they are discovered, prison awaits them: six months to two years of imprisonment, plus a fine of 20,000 to 100,000 CFA francs. Article 305 of the Penal Code makes no distinction between the woman undergoing the abortion and the person assisting her - the penalty for the provider climbs up to five years.

"Safe, medicalized abortion is forbidden in our country only for poor women. Rich women have access to medicalized abortion," sharply points out Fatou Kiné Camara, former president of the Association of Senegalese Women Lawyers (AJS) and holder of a doctorate in law from Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar.

"Young girls are paying the price of secrecy," Dr. Astou Coly Niassy, a Senegalese gynecologist-obstetrician and university lecturer practicing in Dakar at the Aristide Le Dantec University Hospital Center and Cheikh Anta Diop University, tells Femmes d'Afrique. "Gynecology departments regularly treat adolescents and young women suffering from severe complications following unsafe abortions. Hemorrhages, generalized infections, uterine perforations, and infertility are among the most frequent consequences," she shares sorrowfully.

According to her, the fear of legal prosecution leads many patients to consult doctors too late, worsening their condition and increasing the risk of death. She advocates for better access to contraception, sex education, and post-abortion care, maintaining that prevention remains the most effective way to reduce maternal mortality linked to unsafe abortions.

In Senegal, abortion is prohibited by law, except when strictly necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman. The legal framework relies primarily on the Penal Code of 1965, supplemented by Law No. 80-49 of December 24, 1980, which stiffens penalties against the incitement to abortion and clandestine practices.

Faced with this deadlock, a coalition of NGOs - the Association



of Senegalese Women Lawyers, the Association of Women Doctors (Afemes), and the Siggil Jigéen Network (RSJ) - formed a task force to move the debate forward. The RSJ, a consortium of 17 organizations, has coordinated family planning advocacy efforts in Senegal for years. However, the counter-movement is powerful: conservative coalitions, backed by foreign funding, block any attempt at reform by invoking "cultural sovereignty" and religious values. "Senegal needs an abortion law," insists a representative of the women's rights defense network. Yet, more than 20 years after the ratification of the Maputo Protocol, the Senegalese Penal Code

remains unchanged. The law is still restrictive. But women continue to resort to unsafe, illegal abortions. And they continue to die in silence.

Côte d'Ivoire: A 2024 Reform with Truncated Promises

In June 2024, Côte d'Ivoire adopted Law No. 2024-358 of June 11, 2024, amending the Penal Code. For the first time, abortion is permitted not only in cases of rape and danger to the mother's life, but also in cases of incest and threats to mental or physical health. This is a symbolic step forward, welcomed by the international community. However, the devil is in the procedural details. Article 427 of this

same law requires the doctor to possess "proof of the opening of a judicial investigation for rape" before performing the procedure. For a victim who has not filed a complaint - and there are countless numbers of them - this requirement constitutes an insurmountable wall.

According to Sylvia Apata, an Ivorian feminist activist: "Rape, and everything concerning violence against women and sexual violence, is subject to a lot of sociocultural pressures. In practice, these are cases where families like to force victims to settle amicably. So, if access to abortion is conditioned on a judicial investigation, I think that is going to be a major obstacle for victims."

This requirement for judicial proof contrasts with the recommendations of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), which advocates in its "General Comments No. 2" for allowing access to safe abortion "without imposing additional proof or procedural requirements." It also contrasts with best practices in countries like Ghana, where a declaration by the individual concerned to a healthcare professional is sufficient to access a safe service.

Benin: A Liberal Law Confronted by On-the-Ground Resistance

Benin served as a pioneer in West Africa by adopting Law No. 2021-12 in October 2021, which significantly expands access to safe abortion. The text authorizes pregnancy termination not only in traditional cases (rape, incest, danger to life), but also when continuing the pregnancy would cause "considerable distress" to the woman or girl. Benin's law is thus unprecedented in the region, as it goes beyond the circumstances outlined in the Maputo Protocol to include a general clause regarding socio-economic distress.

Yet, four years later, the gap between law and practice persists. "The stigma associated with abortion remains a major obstacle. Many women hesitate to seek care due to fear of judgment or social disapproval," notes the Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD) in a recent advocacy document. "Another major challenge is the unequal access to abortion services. Women living in rural or remote areas often have limited access to health infrastructure."

A qualitative study conducted in the Atlantique Department

reveals the complexity of the social norms weighing on young girls: "This work highlights the triple normative burden that simultaneously stigmatizes out-of-wedlock pregnancies, restricts adequate sex education, and exacerbates the stigma around abortion." The conclusion is clear: "A legislative change, such as the one introduced in Benin in 2021, will not instantly transform these deeply rooted social norms."

Millions of women continue to resort to dangerous abortion methods, risking their lives and health.

In both Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, over 60% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence, according to UN Women. Few file complaints due to fear of stigmatization, family pressure, and distrust of the justice system. Worse still, when rape leads to pregnancy, police, judicial, and medical delays stall access to abortion, even though its safety depends on early intervention. A overly restrictive framework turns this delay into a true sentence for victims.

DRC, Ethiopia, Rwanda: when other choices are possible

In the face of these blockages, alternative models are emerging across the continent. Several countries are explicitly aligning their national guidelines with the

recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) offers one of the most developed examples. In 2018, the country published the Maputo Protocol in the Official Gazette, granting it superior authority over national law. In 2020, the Ministry of Public Health adopted standards and guidelines for woman-centered comprehensive abortion care, aligned with the Protocol.

"Women needing abortion care in the DRC do not need to provide proof of rape, incest, or spousal consent," notes the Population Reference Bureau. "Minors in need of abortion care are automatically eligible even if they have not yet reached legal age. They simply need to be accompanied by an adult, who can be a trusted person of their choice."

In Ethiopia, a pregnant woman's oral testimony is considered sufficient proof: "Women requesting pregnancy termination following rape or incest are not required to present evidence of rape and incest and/or identify the perpetrator of the offense to receive abortion services." Healthcare professionals are even forbidden from requiring police reports, court orders, or criminal prosecutions as a prerequisite for providing care.

Rwanda, for its part, has reached a historic milestone. In August 2025, Parliament lowered the legal age to access reproductive health care from 18 to 15. "This is important because it removes a major barrier to care for young people. It respects their right to make informed decisions," stated the organization Medical Doctors for Choice. This reform is accompanied by an opening toward telemedicine, creating "a space to promote and implement online

interventions" for safe abortion.

Turning the law into a leverage for change

Faced with these challenges, women leaders and civil society organizations are mobilizing. In Benin, the RFLD conducts awareness campaigns, trains health-care professionals, and provides psychological support to women. "RFLD's actions are starting to bear fruit. More and more women have access to reliable information about abortion and dare to talk about it," the organization reports.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the Collectif des activistes de Côte d'Ivoire (CACI) organizes discussion workshops on the "requirement of proof prior to abortion," bringing together health experts, activists, and women's rights organizations. Participants recommend "simplifying procedures, training professionals, and strengthening public awareness to ensure more equitable access to safe abortion." These initiatives are part of a broader trend. The World Health Organization supports Ethiopia in promoting self-care, an approach that "aims to equip individuals with the knowledge and tools necessary to manage their own sexual and reproductive health." At the Kolfe Health Center in Addis Ababa, more than 800 women were able to obtain contraceptives freely in 2024, compared to 280 in 2022.

The urgent need to act

"Every nine seconds, an unsafe abortion puts a woman's life at risk in West and Central Africa" (Rutgers, *The Maze Women Face: Stuck Between Rights and Reality*, 2025). Africa is at a turning point.

The Maputo Protocol sets ambitious standards, but judicial bar-



riers, procedural overregulation, stigma, and access inequalities force millions of women to continue resorting to unsafe abortion methods, endangering their lives and health.

Action must be taken to bridge this gap. First, simplify procedures: the burden of proof must be reversed, and the victim's word should suffice, in accordance with ACHPR recommendations. Second, train healthcare professionals, many of whom are unaware of the law or fear prosecution - Values Clarification and Attitude Transformation (VCAT) programs, already tested in the DRC, have proven effective. Third, guarantee geographical and financial

access through mobile clinics, telemedicine, and task-shifting to community health workers. Finally, and above all, transform social norms within families, religious communities, and traditional leaders; otherwise, the law will remain a dead letter.

As the Population Reference Bureau recalls regarding the DRC, legal change is not an end in itself: it requires sustained political will, multidisciplinary coalitions, and adequate funding. The future of millions of African women depends on these choices. A law that does not protect remains a promise - and in human rights, unkept promises cost lives.

Sylvestre Tetchiada

JANET RAMATOULIE SALLAH-NJIE

COMMISSIONER – AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA

“Only strong political leadership will bring about tangible improvements in the situation of women”

More than twenty years after the Maputo Protocol, how do you assess its implementation in Africa? What have been its main achievements and the greatest missed opportunities?

The Maputo Protocol has made significant normative progress and remains the benchmark instrument for the protection of women in Africa, with 46 ratifications out of 55 Member States. It has strengthened efforts to combat gender-based violence, encouraged women's political participation, and guaranteed rights relating to sexual and reproductive health.

However, its practical implementation remains uneven. Many States have been slow to incorporate the Protocol into their domestic legislation, harmonise customary law, or allocate the necessary resources. In addition, several national reservations limit the scope of its obligations.

The impact of the Protocol continues to be hampered by patriarchy, stereotypes, and emerging threats such as cyberviolence and anti-women movements. The priority now is to bridge the gap between legal commitments and the everyday realities of African women.

Despite ratification of the Protocol and various reforms, millions of women remain deprived of sexual and reproductive rights. Where does the main weakness lie: political will, legislation, public resources, or implementation?

The main weakness lies in the lack of sustained political commitment to implementing the Maputo Protocol, particularly with regard to sexual and reproductive rights. Despite legislative progress, implementation on the ground



remains slow. The human cost is high: in 2025, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for approximately 70% of global maternal deaths, with unsafe abortion being a major contributing factor. Cultural or religious resistance cannot justify such obstacles.

To address this, in accordance with Ge-

neral Comment No. 2, the response must go beyond legislation. It is essential to allocate adequate resources, train judges and healthcare professionals, ensure access to healthcare, and establish dialogue with community stakeholders. Only strong political leadership will make it possible to combine legislation and re-

sources in order to bring about tangible improvements in the situation of African women and girls.

How can the Maputo Protocol be reformed when some States invoke culture, religion, or custom to delay or restrict reforms, while ensuring the universality of human rights?

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights helps States reconcile the universality of rights with local traditions along three main lines:

- Priority to fundamental rights: In accordance with the Maputo Protocol, women's rights take precedence over any custom or religion. This requires the elimination of harmful practices, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health.
- Positive cultural evolution: The institution does not reject culture, but ensures the right of individuals to participate in cultural life while protecting women from violence, thereby safeguarding their dignity and equality.
- Institutional support: Through dialogue, the review of national reports, and the work of the Special Rapporteur, the Commission assists countries in harmonising their legislation and raising public awareness.

Thus, the Commission ensures that no tradition is used as a pretext to justify violations of women's rights.

Based on your experience of incorporating the Maputo Protocol into Gambian legislation, what practical lessons do you draw for countries struggling to transform their international commitments into rights enforceable before their courts?

My experience in The Gambia taught me that an international treaty does not end with its ratification. The domestication of the Women's Act 2010 demonstrated to me that translating international standards into domestic law requires in-depth analysis and a compromise between global norms, social realities, and local practices.

This legal transformation is gradual. Initiated in 2010 and strengthened in 2015, it continued with the review of discriminatory laws in 2020. Such a process requires a multisectoral approach: legislation alone is insufficient; it requires the

mobilisation of government ministries, the judiciary, civil society, and traditional and religious leaders.

For these rights to become effective and enforceable, access to an independent judiciary is essential, in accordance with the guidelines of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The domestication of treaties into national law is not a one-off event, but an ongoing process, from commitment to implementation. My objective as a Commissioner remains unchanged: to ensure that laws actually change lives.

“No woman or girl in Africa should have fewer rights in 2035 than they do today.”

If you were speaking to African Heads of State today, what priority decision would you ask them to take to ensure that, by 2035, the Maputo Protocol fully delivers on its promises to women and girls?

Over its 23 years of existence, the Maputo Protocol has seen its impact constrained by a lack of political will, the persistence of patriarchy, and weak institutions. To unlock its full potential by 2035, African Heads of State must make the principle of non-regression a priority.

Against the backdrop of the rise of anti-rights movements, progress in gender equality and sexual and reproductive health is under threat. Regression takes many forms: the repeal of laws, restrictions on sexuality education, reduced access to healthcare, and the shrinking of civic space.

States must collectively commit to ensuring that no woman or girl in Africa has fewer rights in 2035 than she has today. The next decade must be synonymous with progress, not regression.

To what extent do the thousands of deaths and complications caused by unsafe abortions in Africa reveal gaps in the implementation of the Maputo Protocol on health and reproductive rights?

The persistence of unsafe abortion and maternal mortality in Africa is primarily due to the failure to implement the Maputo Protocol, rather than shortcomings in the text itself. Although Article 14 guarantees access to safe abortion services - particularly in cases of rape, incest, or where the health or life of the mother or foetus is at risk - many States have yet to incorporate these commitments into their national legislation.

As the African Commission emphasises in its General Comment No. 2, the realisation of this right is not limited to mere legalisation. It requires ensuring effective access to quality healthcare services, qualified personnel, and comprehensive information. Women and healthcare professionals must be protected from prosecution, stigma, and degrading treatment.

How is Africa addressing the non-implementation of Article 14(2)(c) of the Maputo Protocol - abortion in cases of rape, incest, assault, or a risk to the life or health of the mother - and what priority measures does it recommend?

The African Commission stresses that the prevalence of unsafe abortions is evidence of the inadequate implementation of Article 14(2)(c) of the Maputo Protocol. In the face of the legal, sociocultural, and economic barriers encountered by women, it calls for effective access to safe abortion services.

To this end, it calls on States to decriminalise abortion, repeal discriminatory laws, and guarantee accessible, high-quality reproductive healthcare services. Building on the Maputo Plan of Action 2016–2030, this approach advocates strengthening health systems, financing post-abortion care, and reducing maternal mortality. In short, beyond legislation, States must combine legal reforms, public health initiatives, and community mobilisation to fully guarantee women's rights.

Interview by Sylvestre Tetchiada



H.E. ILZA MARIA DOS SANTOS AMADO VAZ

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, COOPERATION AND COMMUNITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

The architect of the institutional renewal of São Tomé and Príncipe

Ilza Maria dos Santos Amado Vaz: trajectory of a Santomean businesswoman and statesman

A lawyer by training, teacher, administrator, and politician, Ilza Maria dos Santos Amado Vaz has charted one of the most remarkable public career paths in São Tomé and Príncipe. Born on August 28, 1971, in São Tomé, she relied on a solid international education - a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Law in Toulouse, a specialization in public security at the Toulouse Institute of Political Studies, a higher diploma for customs inspectors at the National Customs School in Paris, and a PhD in Public Administration in Portugal - to build a multifaceted career in the service of the State.

Her professional commitment bridges administration, higher education, and political life. As a professor of fundamental law, commercial law, and corporate law, she contributed to training the future lawyers and executives of the Santomean administration. In parallel, she entered politics in 1999 with the Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe (MLSTP), holding leadership positions within the Political Commission, the National Council, and the Jurisdictional Council before being elected as a Member of Parliament. In 2015, believing that certain party directions no longer aligned with her convictions, she stepped back. Three years later, she joined the Independent Democratic Action (ADI), actively participating in its governing bodies.

Her administrative career is highlighted by seventeen years at the head of the Customs authority, a strategic posi-

tion she assumed in 1999. As Director General of Customs, she spearheaded the legal and technical reform of the service, supervised the implementation of the ASYCUDA++ IT system, strengthened revenue collection mechanisms, and chaired the commission responsible for introducing import VAT. Her role extended to continental integration

"Placing institutions at the service of citizens"

issues: she headed the national commission for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area, demonstrating her commitment to the economic integration of São Tomé and Príncipe into African dynamics.

At the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Human Rights, her actions took on a notable reformist dimension. Serving in the 16th and 18th Constitutional Governments, she led the Strategic Plan for Justice Reform 2017-2021, modernized registries and notary services, reformed the Judicial Police, and coordinated the review of major legislative texts. She also established the Human Rights Office and the Justice Information and Support Office to bring

citizens closer to judicial institutions and strengthen the protection of rights. Her focus on governance and women's participation was reflected in publications, including the book *Participation of Santomean Women in Politics*, alongside several scientific articles. Bilingual in Portuguese and French and fluent in English, she embodies strong female leadership, placing inclusion and the rule of law at the center of national development.

In January 2025, after a brief tenure as interim Prime Minister from January 9 to 12, she became Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Communities. Leading Santomean diplomacy, she promotes the strengthening of international partnerships, African integration, and the defense of the country's interests on the international stage. Her background combines administrative experience, legal expertise, and political engagement, giving her a deep understanding of both national and external challenges.

Over the decades, Ilza Maria dos Santos Amado Vaz has maintained a consistent principle: placing institutions at the service of citizens. Whether leading technical services, reforming justice, or guiding diplomacy, her dedication remains anchored in principles and the national interest. More than a succession of roles, her journey tells the story of a statesman for whom state modernization, democratic consolidation, and the promotion of civic participation - particularly that of women - remain fundamental priorities.

S.N.

H.E. ILZA MARIA DOS SANTOS AMADO VAZ, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, COOPERATION AND COMMUNITIES OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

“Transforming our Insular nature and vulnerabilities into strategic development assets”

What common thread connects your successive positions - Director General of Customs, Minister of Justice, Prime Minister, and today Minister of Foreign Affairs - and how does your customs experience inform your approach to economic diplomacy?

All of my roles stem from the same vision of public service, rooted in rigor, integrity, and the defense of the national interest. During my sixteen years leading Customs, I modernized a strategic institution while learning that every reform requires discipline and a culture of accountability. My time at the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration subsequently reinforced my conviction that development relies on a solid rule of law and effective institutions. Today, this trajectory feeds my vision of economic diplomacy. For São Tomé and Príncipe, it must extend beyond political representation to attract investment and open up markets. From customs to diplomacy, my responsibilities have evolved, but my guiding line remains unchanged: placing public action and our external relations at the service of our nation's sustainable development.

As Prime Minister, upon your appointment, you perceived the country's challenges. What main structural problems had you identified, and what priority reforms do you propose to consolidate the rule of law in São Tomé and Príncipe?

My appointment as Prime Minister calls on me to carry a global vision for São Tomé and Príncipe. Our main challenge lies in building a national consensus to realize our collective vision. To leverage our assets, we must modernize our infrastructure and invest in health,



education, and energy.

This ambition requires rethinking our international cooperation toward partnerships founded on investment and results. Finally, to sustain this transformation, a shift in mindsets and the strengthening of the rule of law are essential. Every citizen must actively engage to prioritize a pragmatism capable of sustainably improving daily life for all.

You spearheaded the Strategic Plan for Justice Reform (2017–2021) and created the Human Rights Office. What strategy do you advocate to guarantee the independence of the judiciary while ensuring its

accessibility to the most vulnerable citizens?

An effective strategy relies on an independent, accessible, and accountable justice system. To guarantee its autonomy, it is necessary to consolidate the institutional framework, ensure an adequate budget, and prevent all political interference. However, this independence entails rigorous oversight focused on ethics and service quality, without compromising judicial rulings. Furthermore, access to justice requires simplifying procedures, increasing support for vulnerable populations, and introducing tailored digitalization. Complemented by continuous training and the protection of human rights,

this vision aims to establish a lasting balance among transparency, proximity, and accountability to restore public trust.

You are a leading figure in women's leadership in Central Africa and a member of the AWPL 2026 Steering Committee. How do you assess the status of women in African political governance?

Although the presence of women in African political governance is progressing, it remains insufficient. The issue requires moving beyond quantitative representation to ensure real decision-making power in the face of stereotypes and financial barriers. Achieving this demands targeted parity policies, as well as early education and empowerment for young girls. This movement should not pit genders against each other, but rather bring men and women together around inclusive governance, because Africa cannot build its future without the full engagement of half its population.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents a major opportunity for São Tomé and Príncipe. What is your roadmap to position your country within this regional integration dynamic?

For São Tomé and Príncipe, the AfCFTA represents a key lever for economic transformation in the face of insular constraints. Following the ratification of the agreement, the country must consolidate its national implementation framework. Capitalizing on the continental market requires harmonizing the legal framework, streamlining customs, and advancing digitalization. It is also essential to boost productive capacity through high-value local processing in key sectors such as cocoa or tourism. Additionally, modernizing strategic infrastructure in the Gulf of Guinea and actively supporting the private sector remain indispensable.

Concretely, how do you integrate the gender dimension into all public policies to fight gender-based violence and structural inequalities?

Gender equality must permeate public



action, from policy design to budgetary choices. True transformation requires combating violence, shifting mindsets, and ensuring effective access to justice. At its core lies economic empowerment through guaranteed access to financing, training, and land ownership. The State must also guide women from an early age toward active citizenship and decision-making bodies. Driven by supportive leadership and male in-

volvement, these dynamic conditions public efficiency, democratic progress, and sustainable development.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, what is your vision for the next five years regarding international cooperation, strategic partnerships, and São Tomé and Príncipe's diplomatic outreach?

For the next five years, my vision for São Tomé and Príncipe is to transition from a reactive diplomacy to strategic, proactive action.

Grounded in our democratic values, African roots, and Lusophone identity, this diplomacy aims to make the voice of small island states heard on climate issues and global governance. We must turn our vulnerabilities into opportunities by promoting our biodiversity, our oceans, and our sustainable tourism.

Through structural partnerships, enhanced economic diplomacy, and the full mobilization of our diaspora, we will drive concrete transformations for the country's sustainable development and prosperity.

Interview by Samirat Ntiazé

“We must move from one diplomacy reactive to an action strategic and proactive”



DR. MARIE-MADELEINE MBORANTSUO

Africa's Sovereignty through Institutions and Knowledge

From the structuring of the Republic's highest courts to the creation of centres of academic excellence, Dr Marie-Madeleine MBORANTSUO's career charts a distinctive trajectory. Recently honoured in Abidjan with the Grand African Builder Award at the 16th edition of the African Economic Builders Forum, this eminent Gabonese jurist and academic has seen a lifetime of dedication to a single ambition recognised: building a strong Africa, master of its institutions and its knowledge.

The Architect of the Rule of Law and the Higher Courts

Long before turning to the field of private higher education, Dr Marie-Madeleine MBORANTSUO established herself as a leading figure in institutional engineering in Gabon and French-speaking Africa. A Doctor of Public Law from the University of Aix-en-Provence, she made judicial history in 1983 when she became the first woman to preside over the Audit Chamber of the Supreme Court. There, she helped structure public financial oversight and trained the first generation of magistrates specialising in this field. A key participant in the 1990 National Conference and an architect of the 1991 Constitution, she played an active role in the establishment of the Gabonese Constitutional Court, of which she was elected President by her peers, thereby becoming the first woman to head a Constituted Body in the country. During her tenure, she did more than establish the legal authority of the High Court: she oversaw the construction of one of the world's most majestic Constitutional Court buildings, giving tangible expres-

sion, in stone, to the dignity of the institutions of the Republic.

Her influence quickly extended internationally, notably through the co-founding, alongside Roland Dumas, of the Association of Constitutional Courts and Councils Using French as a Common Language (ACCPUF), an organisation of which she currently serves as Honorary President. Her work as an Arbitrator and Conciliator at the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), as First Vice-President of the UNESCO International Bioethics Committee, as co-founder of the Conference of African Constitutional Jurisdictions, and as Agent of the Gabonese Republic before the International Court of Justice in The Hague, confirms the exceptional trajectory of a leader whose service extends well beyond national borders.

Educating to Build for the Future: The Human Capital Imperative

For this nation-builder, the consolidation of institutions could not be achieved without educating the elites who would be called upon to sustain them and drive the continent's economy. This is the rationale behind the creation of the Berthe and Jean International Institution (IIBJ) for education, research, culture and sustainable development, comprising the International Private High School, the International University of Libreville (UIL-BJ) and Saint Berthe Parish. Through these institutions, Dr Marie-Madeleine MBORANTSUO seeks to provide Gabonese and African youth with educational pathways meeting international standards, with a strong focus on employability, research and innovation. This major educational un-

dertaking also carries a deeply personal and commemorative dimension: it gives concrete expression to a vision initiated by her late son, Dr Carles Luce Donald KAMBANGOYE. In paying an emotional tribute to him during the Abidjan summit, she recalled that the building of knowledge is as much about intellectual transmission as it is about a legacy of love and remembrance.

Exemplary Leadership for the Continent

The presentation of the Grand African Builder Award in Abidjan on 18 June 2026, under the theme "Excellence, Leadership and Impact," has given pan-African recognition to a career already honoured at the national level, notably through her elevation to the rank of Commander of the Order of National Education in April 2026 by the Gabonese Government.

By celebrating her role as a builder of the economy and of human capital, the international community is recognising a comprehensive vision: that of a woman of conviction who believes that Africa's true independence rests on the strength of its rule of law and the quality of its education. It is a lesson in sustainable leadership, engraved both in the texts of law and in university lecture halls.

"Africa's greatest resource is neither gold, nor oil, nor cobalt, nor timber. The greatest wealth Africa needs in order to build itself is its youth - its intellectual capital." These words from Dr Marie-Madeleine MBORANTSUO aptly encapsulate her vision of enlightened leadership in the building of a strong and prosperous Africa.

S.N.

AFRICAN ECONOMY BUILDERS FORUM

Berthe and Jean International University of Libreville (UIL-BJ) Honored in Abidjan for its Training Model



Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire - Berthe and Jean International University of Libreville (UIL-BJ) has just reached a major new milestone in its institutional history. On June 18, 2026, the Gabon-based higher education institution was honored on the continental stage by receiving the prestigious Academic Excellence Award at the 16th edition of the African Economy Builders Forum. Held this year under the evocative theme "Excellence, Leadership, and

Impact: Africa Builds Its Future," this major gathering of continental decision-makers highlighted UIL-BJ's decisive contribution to training Africa's future elite.

This international distinction recognizes the strategic vision and innovative learning model of an institution that has established itself as a pillar of higher education in Central Africa, firmly determined to equip continental youth to meet the challenges of the global job market.

From Founding Vision to a Major Academic Hub

Founded in 2014 under the visionary drive of the late Dr. Carles Luce Donald Kambangoye, Berthe and Jean International University of Libreville was developed with a clear ambition: to build a cutting-edge university environment capable of training highly qualified, competitive, and directly operational professionals.

More than ten years after its creation, the university now spans an impressive campus of over 40 hectares, designed to provide an immersive and modern study environment. The institution relies on exceptional academic and environmental infrastructure :

- A Diverse Academic Core: The institution brings together 8 specialized schools and faculties, welcoming several thousand students from various geographical and academic backgrounds.
- State-of-the-Art Technological Equipment: Curricula rely on latest-generation research laboratories, fostering scientific practice and applied research.
- High-Capacity Hosting Facilities: The campus features large modern amphitheatres—including a majes-

The University International of Libreville Berthe and Jean developed with a clear ambition: build an environment avant-garde academic, capable of train executives highly qualified, competitive and directly operational.

tic complex offering up to 2,000 seats—integrated university residences, and digitized classrooms.

- An Eco-Responsible and Sports Living Environment: UIL-BJ stands out with top-tier sports complexes featuring pitches that meet official FIFA standards, as well as water, animal, and botanical parks. The campus also encompasses a protected forest housing numerous rare species, offering a harmonious lear-

ning environment focused on sustainable development.

A Symbol of Success and Commitment for the Continent

The decision by the organizers of the African Economy Builders Forum to honor UIL-BJ carries profound symbolic weight. The university was praised not only as a concrete illustration of academic excellence, but also as a model to follow in skill structuring on a continental scale. This award ceremony also served to pay tribute to the continuity and sustainability of the project. Initiated by Dr. Carles Luce Donald Kambangoye, the institutional course is now being pursued with rigor and determination by Dr. Marie-Madeleine Mborantsuo, President and Co-Founder of the Berthe and Jean International Institution for Education, Research, Culture, and Sustainable Development.

By adding its name to the Abidjan honors list, UIL-BJ is not merely celebrating an institutional success: it confirms its role as a hub of ideas and talent for the Africa of today and tomorrow, energizing its future efforts in educational innovation, research, and international openness.



Aerial view of the Berthe and Jean International Institution located in Essassa PK23 - P.O. Box: 20411 Libreville (Gabon)
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SIMONE YANKEY-OUATTARA

COORDINATOR OF THE AFRICAN UNION INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR GIRLS' AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN AFRICA (AU/CIEFFA)

“Girls’ education is a societal responsibility, not merely a women’s issue”

AU-CIEFFA is celebrating more than 20 years of commitment to the education of girls and women. In your view, what are the three major advances achieved across the continent, and what are the main challenges that remain to be addressed?

Over the past two decades, Africa has made significant progress in girls’ education through improved access to schooling, strong political commitment, and the African Union’s action under Agenda 2063. The increase in primary school completion rates has been accompanied by legislative reforms aimed at combating child marriage and early pregnancy. However, poverty, conflicts and the digital divide continue to prevent millions of girls from accessing and completing their education. The major challenge now is to guarantee equitable, safe and quality education for every African girl.

How will AU-CIEFFA concretely support Member States in turning the Bujumbura Declaration into measurable results in classrooms and African communities?

The Bujumbura Declaration reflects a shared commitment to promoting girls’ and women’s education in Africa. As a specialised office of the African Union Commission, AU-CIEFFA supports Member States in translating these commitments into action by integrating the priorities of the Declaration into their national education policies, particularly through gender-responsive planning. The Centre also promotes collaboration and the sharing of experiences through



its Community of Practice on gender equality. Finally, it strengthens progress monitoring and resource mobilisation through the #AfricaEducatesHer fra-

mework, while playing a central role in rolling out the continental accountability mechanism envisaged under the Declaration.

In several regions of Africa, conflicts, displacement and climate-related crises are threatening girls' education. What innovative measures is AU-CIEFFA putting in place to ensure continuity of schooling in emergency situations?

Education in emergencies is a major challenge. For AU-CIEFFA, ensuring continuity of learning for girls during crises is both a humanitarian and development imperative and a key driver of its #AfricaEducatesHer campaign.

The second phase, launched in 2023, advocates innovative and resilient learning pathways. The Centre therefore promotes flexible, digital and blended learning models, while advocating for legal frameworks that guarantee girls' right to return to school.

In July 2026, during the 10th High-Level Dialogue, AU-CIEFFA reiterated the urgent need to integrate nutrition, safety and hygiene into education systems. In the face of school dropout caused by malnutrition and insecurity, systemic and cross-sectoral responses are essential.

How can we ensure that young African girls become engineers, researchers and tech entrepreneurs - not merely users - at a time when the institution is placing increasing emphasis on digital skills, AI, science and technology?

This transformation first requires a change in mindset so that girls see themselves as creators of innovation rather than simply consumers of technology. To break down stereotypes, AU-CIEFFA promotes early learning in digital technologies, AI and entrepreneurship.

To this end, we offer fully funded online training in partnership with ImpactHER, while the African Girls Can Code Initiative trains thousands of young African girls to design technological solutions.

Finally, access to mentors and inspiring female role models who are succeeding in science is essential to broadening their horizons and strengthening their ambitions.

How does AU-CIEFFA engage families, communities, religious authorities, the media and the private sector to

promote girls' education and ensure equal opportunities?

Girls' education requires a comprehensive societal approach, as no organization can achieve sustainable transformation on its own.

AU-CIEFFA co-leads the CESA Cluster on Gender, Inclusion and Equity, bringing together key stakeholders, strengthening collaboration and avoiding duplication of efforts. We work closely with ministries, parliamentarians, traditional leaders, civil society, the media and the private sector to promote shared responsibility.

Recognising teachers as essential agents of change, we support them through

“We want girls to see themselves as creators of innovations rather than simply consumers.”

our continental networks in transforming education policies into inclusive classroom practices that foster the success of every learner.

What new partnerships would you like to establish with governments, African businesses, foundations and international organisations to accelerate the transformation of girls' education in Africa?

AU-CIEFFA expresses its sincere appreciation to the Royal Norwegian Embassy and the World Bank Group for their support. To amplify its impact, the Centre aims to expand its strategic partnerships.

It seeks to work with Regional Economic Communities, African foundations and research centres to translate continental commitments into concrete action. Engagement from the private sector, parti-

cularly the technology and financial sectors, will help expand digital access and create employment opportunities, while stronger partnerships with the media can help transform mindsets through inspiring advocacy.

How do you see African girls today, and what message would you like to send to policymakers so that they can become fully-fledged architects of Africa's future in 2063?

African girls are the driving force behind the continent's future. As innovators and leaders, their potential is indispensable to achieving the objectives of Agenda 2063.

Investing in their education, protecting their rights and promoting their empowerment constitute the most transformative levers for peace and prosperity in Africa. However, policymakers must move beyond political declarations alone.

To achieve concrete and measurable results, these commitments must be backed by increased and sustainable financial resources. If we want to build an Africa driven by its citizens, we cannot afford to leave half of its population behind.

How does AU-CIEFFA intend to further mobilise men and boys - fathers, teachers, community leaders, policymakers and business leaders - as partners in ensuring the educational success of African girls?

At AU-CIEFFA, we are convinced that girls' education is a societal responsibility, not merely a women's issue. Men and boys have an essential role to play as allies.

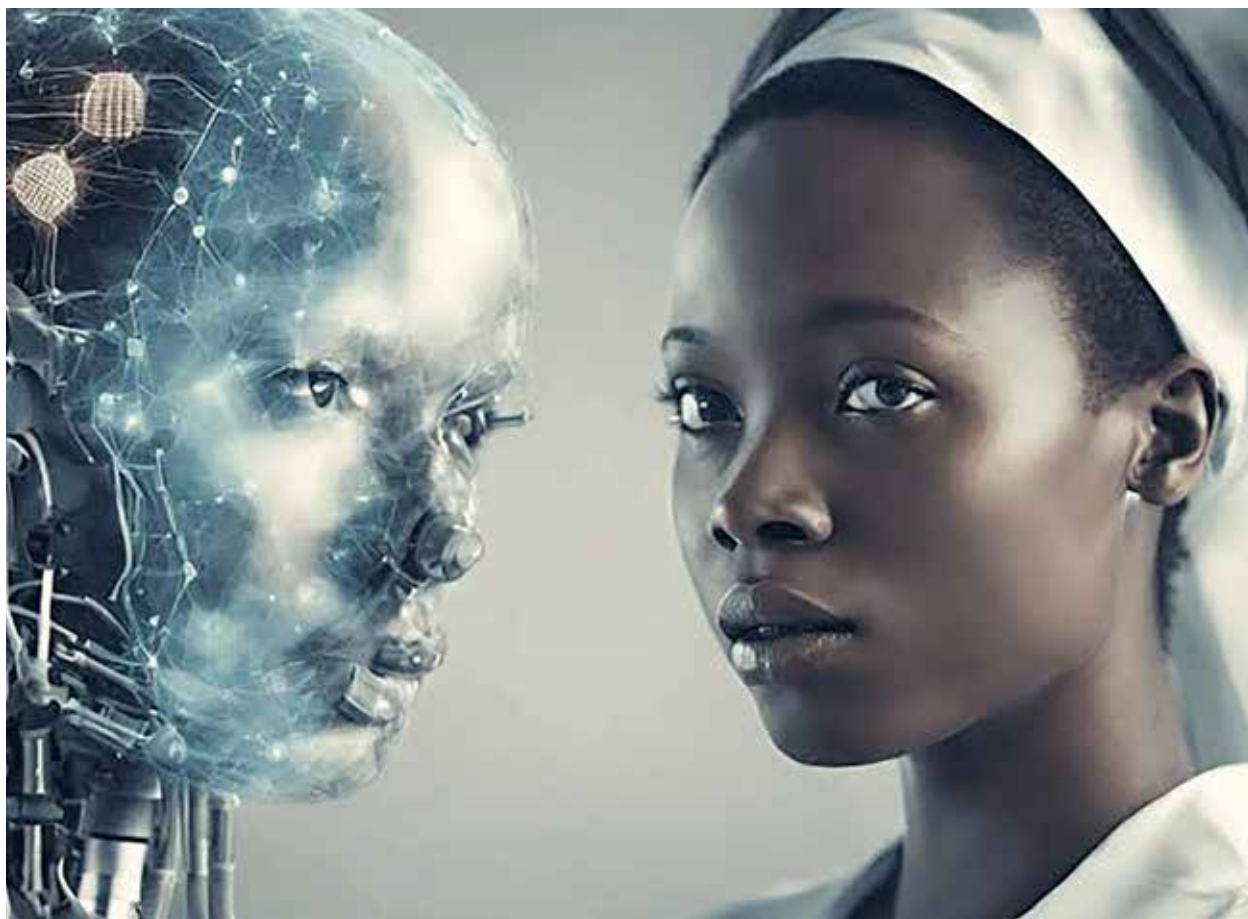
By working with traditional leaders, educators and policymakers, we are challenging and dismantling harmful social norms. The engagement of influential male figures in combating child marriage and gender-based violence can accelerate change.

AU-CIEFFA will strengthen its programmes to engage men as mentors and community leaders, because educating girls benefits society as a whole.

Interview by Sylvestre Tetchiada, in Bujumbura

AI IN AFRICA

The Future Cannot Be Written Without Women



At a time when Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming economies, healthcare systems, universities, businesses, and modes of communication, Africa faces a historic opportunity: to undergo a revolution designed elsewhere, or to become a fully-fledged actor in it.

However, this ambition would remain incomplete if half of the African population were to remain on the sidelines of this transformation. The continent's digital future cannot be written without women. AI has left the realm of science fiction. It is already everywhere: in our phones, banks, hospitals, public administrations,

businesses, and universities. It translates, diagnoses, anticipates, teaches, creates, and decides. In just a few years, it has become one of the most powerful drivers of change in our societies.

AI: A Tremendous Promise for Africa

Africa has the opportunity to

leapfrog key development stages through digital technology and AI. Healthcare, education, agriculture, public services, and entrepreneurship: AI offers concrete perspectives to address the continent's structural challenges. However, this technology is not neutral. Designed using data and algorithms that carry choices and biases, these systems risk overlooking underrepresented populations. The fundamental question of who will shape this digital transformation puts the role of African women right back at the core of our priorities.

From Beneficiaries to Architects of Change

For a long time, the debate surrounding women and digital technology was limited to access: mobile phones, internet connection, training, and online services. While this objective remains essential, it is no longer enough. In the era of AI, the question is no longer merely whether women will have access to technology, but whether they will participate in its design, financing, regulation, and governance. Using a technology and shaping the world it generates are two distinct things. African women must be able to become engineers, researchers, entrepreneurs, doctors, legal experts, teachers, ethics experts, public officials, or tech leaders - and sit where the future of AI is decided. They are not simple beneficiaries of this revolution; they must be its architects.

Toward an Inclusive and Ethical Technology

AI oscillates between reducing and amplifying inequalities.

In healthcare, education, or recruitment, algorithms trained on biased data threaten to reproduce past discriminations, ignore African realities, and marginalize populations lacking infrastructure. The future divide will be digital, economic, cognitive, and algorithmic. To prevent disparities from calcifying, col-

“The future of digital Africa cannot be written without women...”

lective responsibility is essential. In healthcare, where AI provides decisive diagnostic support in the face of specialist shortages, fairness requires representative local data, rigorous evaluations, and transparent governance. AI must not aim solely for performance: it must establish itself as an ethical, inclusive, and socially responsible tool at the heart of public policies.

A Digital Revolution That Can Unleash Talent

AI stands out as a major lever of empowerment for African women, breaking down socioeconomic barriers in entrepreneurship, research, and healthcare. However, unlocking this potential requires targeted investments in girls' scientific education, funding for female-led projects, and their access to decision-making bodies. Faced with the challenges of technological

independence, Africa cannot settle for importing foreign solutions. It is imperative to build sovereign AI anchored in the continent's linguistic, cultural, and healthcare realities. In this digital frontier, African women must no longer be passive recipients, but the architects and leaders of an inclusive, sovereign, and forward-looking innovation.

The Choice of Our Generation

It is time for a paradigm shift: let us move beyond mere inclusion to demand genuine influence. Entering decision-making bodies is no longer enough; African women must now weigh in on strategic choices. From laboratories to tech start-ups, their presence in AI is a matter of collective strength, not a token gesture. As AI redefines our societies, Africa cannot settle for passive endurance; it must design. For the women of the continent, the stakes extend far beyond training: it is about creating, questioning, and governing these emerging technologies. Because tomorrow's equality will be decided at the core of algorithms and data. Writing Africa's future requires mobilizing all of its intelligence.



***Professor Itissar HADDIYA
Moroccan Nephrologist and
Author PhD in Social Responsibility in Healthcare**



Bishop Dr. Prophetess Gloria Pierre Ecclesiastes,
Fondatrice et présidente Ecclesia Global College

ECCLESIA GLOBAL COLLEGE

An Institution on the Rise, Bridging Faith and Governance

At a time when the world is struggling to find its bearings, one institution is steadily emerging as a distinctive player in the education and formation of future leaders: Ecclesia Global College.

Founded by Bishop Dr. Prophe-tess Gloria Pierre Ecclesiastes and based in London, the institution has set itself a clear ambition—to train a new generation of leaders guided by integrity, wisdom and the values of the Kingdom—and is pursuing an equally remarkable trajectory, with its expansion now spanning three continents.

From a Digital Platform to a Physical Presence

The past year has marked a turning point for the College. Originally conceived primarily as an online education platform, the institution has taken a significant structural step forward with the opening of its London campus. This physical presence does not replace its digital offering; rather, it complements it, bringing together the flexibility of distance learning and the rigour of face-to-face education.

This expansion is supported by a network of regional hubs, each backed by strong local leadership.

In West Africa, Nigeria serves as a distinctive gateway. Under the administrative coordination of Pastor Yemi'Jobi in Lagos, the College combines theological education with aviation governance through its partnership with Bengbis Business Jets, in Abuja - an alliance that reflects the institution's determination to connect spirituality with high-le-

From London to Africa, the emergence of a new elite: Ecclesia Global College reinvents global leadership at the intersection of faith, governance and the upper echelons of the economy.

vel economic and business circles. In Central Africa, the Franco-phone Division, led from Yaoundé by Apostle Tenguimdjie Patrice, recently celebrated the graduation of its "Kingdom Wisdom" cohort, while also commissioning new centre leaders - a clear indi-

cation of an organisational structure designed for long-term sustainability.

In Southern Africa, meanwhile, under the leadership of Apostle Dr. Mbulawo Tabitha Joseph, the region is emerging as a new hub for academic expansion and supply, further confirming the continental scope of the project.

An Ambition That Goes Beyond Academia

Ecclesia Global College does not see itself simply as a school among many others, but rather as a genuine ambassador for transformation. By bringing together theological studies, leadership, institutional governance and strategic partnerships - including its notable partnership with the business aviation sector - the institution seeks to prepare tomorrow's decision-makers to exercise structured influence across the public, economic and spiritual spheres, both in Africa and on the international stage.

With its London-based foundation and growing African reach, Ecclesia Global College is thus shaping the contours of a hybrid model in which faith and governance are increasingly conceived as complementary forces.

V.F.

MUSIC / NAJ

The Hybrid Voice Connecting Cultures

Spanning Casablanca, Paris, Miami, and Dakar, NAJ is carving out a unique trajectory, defying musical categorization. More than just an artist, she is a living bridge between cultures - a voice advocating for African unity while embracing global influences.

For NAJ, music goes beyond mere entertainment: it tells a story of a journey. Her signature, as she defines it, relies on an intentional fusion of pop, R&B, Afro influences, and Middle Eastern sounds - an alchemy that honors both her Moroccan roots and her open view of the world. Her artistic identity thrives on this fertile balance between grounded roots and exploration. "I don't choose between worlds, I unite them," she reveals. This philosophy shines through her creations, driven by a sensibility that is both instinctive and distinctly modern. Morocco brings warmth and soul, while her US-inspired influences infuse her music with an international dimension.

An Unconventional Path: Between Diaspora and Recognition

NAJ's path is anything but linear. As a diaspora artist, she has steadily established herself as a unique figure in Morocco, notably singing in Darija while staying connected to the global scene. Long before mixing languages and cultures became standard practice, she was already championing it. Her time in Miami marked a turning point. There, she honed her artistic standards and collaborated with international producers. It was a decisive experience endorsed by influential figures in the music industry who praised her rare talent as a melodist. More than just recognition, it served



as confirmation: NAJ had stepped into a whole new league.

Beyond the music, NAJ carries a message: one of togetherness, unity, and respect for differences.

Dakar: The Symbol of a Pan-African Commitment

Yet, it is in Africa that her project reaches its full scope. NAJ makes no secret of it: the continent lies at the heart of her artistic approach. She doesn't merely draw inspiration from it; she builds bridges within it. Her track "Oulala Ountala - La Vie En Rose" serves as a perfect example. A hymn to joy, freedom, and female power, the song carries a clear ambition: bringing North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa closer together. She turned this vision into reality on the ground by becoming the first female Moroccan artist to shoot a music video

in Dakar - a powerful statement in a still-segmented industry. Through her "Africa Tour" and collaborations with artists such as Malika la Slameuse and Faya D, NAJ embodies this emerging pan-African dynamic. It is a mission that borders on advocacy: uniting, connecting, and building.

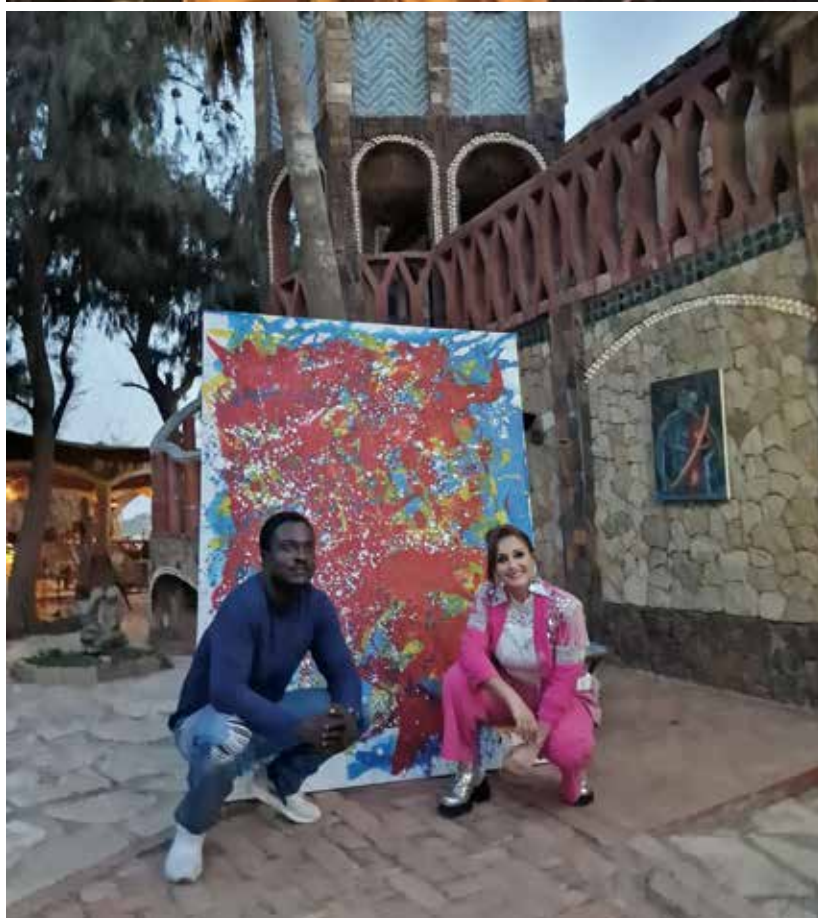
NAJ Is Not Nej: A Distinct Identity

Often compared to the artist Nej, NAJ is keen to set the record straight: their artistic worlds and paths are completely distinct. While some confusion arose - notably surrounding a high-profile featuring with Rohff in 2011 - she now asserts a fully defined artistic identity. "I respect her work, but it's not comparable," she states firmly. While others navigate similar emotional genres, NAJ stands out through her pan-African grounding and her determination to establish a lasting presence in Morocco while shining globally.

An Artist on a Mission Across the Globe

Beyond the music, NAJ carries a message: one of togetherness, unity, and respect for differences. Her approach is both personal and universal, one she views as an artistic responsibility. Her natural use of multiple languages - Darija, French, and English - reflects a desire to break down barriers. "Music is universal," she reminds us. And she proves it with every project. Today, NAJ is thinking bigger. The African scene, the Arab world, and international audiences are all interconnected in her vision. Her ambition is clear, as is her mindset: evolve, take risks, yet remain sincere. "Please fasten your seatbelts, we're ready for takeoff," she says with confidence - a promise of a journey that reflects her path. NAJ is not simply an emerging artist. In her own way, she is already a bridge between cultures - and perhaps one of the most authentic voices of a music scene in full pan-African transformation.

Cir-Raoul HOUNGBEDJI



WOMEN'S AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS 2026

The Lionesses at the Top

Cameroon finally has its appointment with history. After three lost finals and years of waiting, the Indomitable Lionesses won the 14th edition of the 2026 Women's Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco by dominating Malawi (3-0) in the final. A historic coronation that crowns one of the finest campaigns ever delivered by the Cameroonian national team and opens a new chapter in domestic women's football.

Reinstated before the tournament thanks to the expansion of the competition to sixteen teams, the Cameroonians were not listed among the main favorites. However, they progressively built their success through a solid defensive organization, high tactical discipline, and an ironclad mindset.

A Journey Forged in Determination

The Lionesses navigated the group stage with confidence before stepping up their game during the knockout matches. Their well-oiled team effort, led by captain Aboudi Onguéné, goalkeeper Michaely Bihina, and the attacking prowess of Marie Ngah and Ndjoah Eto, made all the difference at crucial moments. In the semifinals, Cameroon eliminated Algeria, one of the tournament's surprise teams. Facing an ambitious and well-organized side, Valentine Nguele's players used their experience to secure a spot in the final. This victory notably allowed them to erase the painful memories of the lost finals in 2004, 2014, and 2016.

A Final Mastered from Start to Finish

Facing Malawi, newcomers at this level who had nevertheless ousted



Ghana and Algeria, the Lionesses left no room for doubt. As early as the 20th minute, Marie Ngah opened the scoring with a header. Ten minutes later, Ndjoah Eto doubled the lead with a magnificent bicycle kick. Right before halftime, Marie Ngah netted her second goal to make it 3-0. Despite efforts from sisters Temwa and Tabitha Chawinga, the Malawians repeatedly ran into an uncompromising Cameroonian defense and an imperious Michaely Bihina in goal. Cameroon then managed its lead seamlessly until the final whistle, claiming the first continental title in its history.

Yaoundé Celebrates Its Heroines

The champions' return to Yaoundé sparked a massive display of popular enthusiasm. At Nsimalen Airport, thousands of supporters gave a triumphant welcome to the new

queens of Africa ahead of an impressive parade through the capital city. President Paul Biya praised an "exemplary journey" and thanked the players on behalf of the entire nation. Samuel Eto'o, president of FECAFOOT, spoke of an "extraordinary" victory that rewards years of sacrifice. The Minister of Sports emphasized that this title serves as a source of inspiration for all Cameroonian youth. The first continental title in their history, best player of the tournament honors for Monique Ngock, and best goalkeeper for Michaely Bihina: the Lionesses leave Morocco covered in glory. Now firmly established among the elite nations of African women's football, they are already looking ahead to the upcoming WAFCON and the World Cup with the ambition of extending their reign.

Cir-Raoul HOUNGBEDJI



Look Beauty

Africa Salon

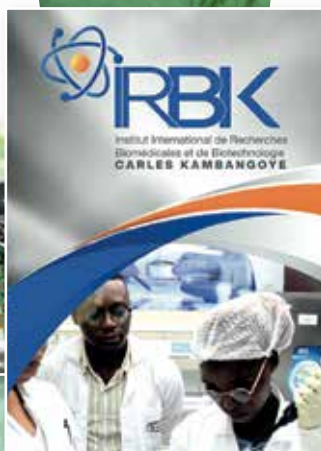


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