



Women Leaders Network for Development

Women Human Rights Report in Sub-Saharan Africa

Analysis, Advocacy and Action for Human Rights

#HumanRights

#WomenLeadership

#SubSaharanAfrica

 October 2025

 www.rflgd.org

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Women Human Rights Report in Sub-Saharan Africa

#WomensRights

#HumanRightsDefenders

#SubSaharanAfrica

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RFLD OVERVIEW

Connecting Women Leaders Across Africa

The central force that connects, supports and protects feminist
movements across Sub-Saharan Africa

#WomenLeaders

#AfricanFeminism

#HumanRights

Who We Are

The **RFLD (Women Leaders Network for Development)** is a pan-African feminist organization committed to advancing gender equality, democratic freedoms, and sustainable development across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Founded in **2012**, we are **registered in Ghana, Benin, and Gambia** but operate throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, connecting grassroots activism to policy advocacy at national and international levels.

Our Fundamental Identity



Pan-African Feminist Network

Working across cultural, linguistic, and geographical boundaries to build solidarity



Intersectional Justice Approach

Addressing intersecting forms of discrimination affecting women, youth, and marginalized groups



Rights-Based Organization

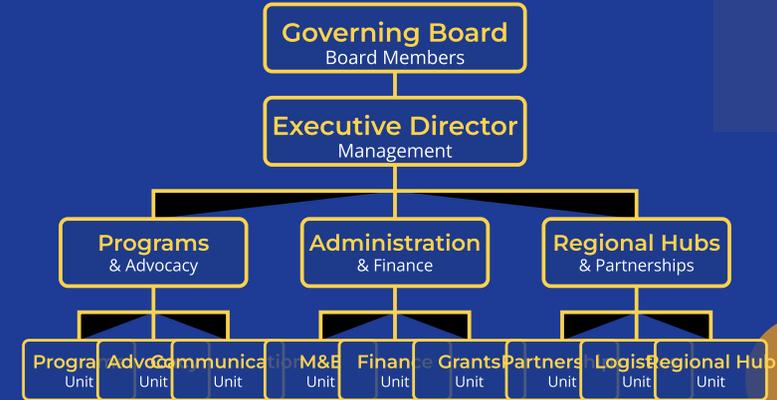
Anchoring our work in international human rights frameworks and African regional instruments

#FeministLeadership

#PanAfrican

#WomensRights

Our Organizational Structure



Geographic Presence



Ghana

Regional Hub
West Africa



Benin

Regional Hub
West Africa



Gambia

Regional Hub
West Africa



Our Team

21 staff members, 7 volunteers, and 2 interns working across our regional hubs to advance our mission throughout Sub-Saharan Africa

Our Mission

"RFLD is a global African hub, anchored in advocacy, organization, and gender justice. We support communities and defend human rights and civic space across Sub-Saharan Africa."

— Rebecca DEGBOGBAHOUN, Administrative Secretary

Our central mission is to empower communities and amplify marginalized voices to create sustainable and systemic change.

Through collaborative partnerships and innovative approaches, RFLD works to dismantle barriers to equality and justice across the African continent.

Priority Action Areas

- Grant-making and financial support through the WAFF fund
- Evidence-based advocacy for policy reforms
- Capacity building for civil society organizations
- Protection mechanisms for women human rights defenders
- Strategic litigation and legal support against rights violations

#FeministFunding

#CivicSpace

#SystemicJustice

#GenderEquality

Our Areas of Intervention



Funding

Strategic resource distribution



Advocacy

Influence on public policies



Capacity Building

Skills development



Protection

Security for rights defenders



Legal Support

Strategic litigation initiatives



Research

Production of evidence-based knowledge

Our Regional Reach



Countries with institutional presence



Countries with active projects



Partner CSOs supported



Pan-African Impact

Building regional solidarity and collective action across borders



International Partnerships

Collaborative networks with global human rights mechanisms

Our Multi-Level Approach

Systemic transformation requires an integrated approach at all levels of society. RFLD works simultaneously at individual, organizational, community, and policy levels to create sustainable and structural change.

Guiding Principles

- ✓ Synchronized multi-level interventions for maximum impact
- ✓ Holistic approach integrating all aspects of social life
- ✓ Adaptability to specific local and cultural contexts
- ✓ Sustainability of actions beyond direct interventions

RFLD Strategic Implementation

Our interventions are strategically designed to create maximum synergy between different levels, ensuring that change at one level reinforces transformation across the entire ecosystem.

#SystemicChange

#MultiLevelImpact

#IntegratedApproach

Four Levels of Transformation



Policy Advocacy

Influencing legal frameworks and public policies, integrating women's voices in decision-making



Community Mobilization

Engaging members in dialogue to transform harmful social norms and promote local action



Organizational Transformation

Adoption of gender-sensitive policies, promotion of female leadership and inclusion



Individual Empowerment

Education, awareness, leadership development and digital literacy for change agents

Impact Indicators

 Improved participation rates

 Strengthened partnerships

 Policy goals achieved

Our approach ensures that interventions at each level reinforce and amplify changes at other levels, creating sustainable systemic transformation.

Our Feminist Values

"Our movement is anchored by powerful principles that promote intersectional justice, resilience, and transformation throughout our network."

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, RFLD Grants Manager

RFLD's feminist values form the ethical and operational foundation of our work. They reflect our commitment to a transformative approach that recognizes multiple forms of oppression and values the diversity of experiences and perspectives.

How We Apply Our Values:

- ✓ Strategic grant-making that prioritizes feminist organizations
- ✓ Centering the expertise of women, girls, and marginalized groups
- ✓ Practicing inclusive decision-making in our governance
- ✓ Building interregional solidarity networks across Africa

#FeministValues

#Intersectionality

#AfricanFeminism



Six Guiding Principles



Centered Expertise

Valuing local knowledge



Radical Imagination

Bold transformative vision



Strength in Diversity

Celebrating plurality



Solidarity

Collective action



Joy as Resistance

Well-being as a political act



Civic Space

Defending freedoms

Values in the Regional Context:

These principles shape our vision of a Sub-Saharan Africa where human rights are respected and defended for all people. Through these values, we create sustainable and transformative change in communities across the region.

With registered offices in Ghana, Benin, and Gambia, our regional hubs serve as anchor points for our pan-African approach that respects local contexts while building cross-border feminist solidarity.

Our Team's Commitment:

Our 21 staff members, 7 volunteers, and 2 interns are deeply committed to embodying these feminist values in both our internal operations and our external partnerships across Sub-Saharan Africa.

History and Regional Hubs

Our History of Change

Since its foundation, RFLD has been driven by a vision of systemic justice across Sub-Saharan Africa. Our journey is defined by strategic evolution, building a powerful regional footprint through our three central hubs.



Legal Advocacy & Human Rights Defense

Anchored by regional expertise, our advocacy focuses on legal battles, treaty monitoring (ACHPR), and protection of Women Human Rights Defenders facing threats.



Evidence-Based Programmatic Impact

Our programmatic backbone coordinates evidence-based interventions through the Dònuèsè Data Center, SRHR projects, and robust financial administration.



Global Partnerships & Strategic Outreach

Hub growth leverages international platforms, global advocacy, and new partnerships amplifying both Anglophone and Francophone voices.

Our Regional Footprint



Chronological Evolution

- **Foundation (2015)**
Establishment of the first hub focused on legal defense and protection of women's rights
- **Regional Expansion (2019)**
Opening of offices in two additional countries to strengthen pan-African presence
- **Today (2025)**
Pan-African network with 21 staff, 7 volunteers, 2 interns operating throughout Sub-Saharan Africa

Digital Advocacy Reach



Our mobile advocacy platforms now reach communities across Sub-Saharan Africa, with regional hubs in Ghana, Benin and Gambia serving as registration centers

#PanAfrican

#FeministLeadership

#RegionalHubs

RFLD Action Structure

RFLD deploys a structured and multidimensional approach to address human rights challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa. Our eight key intervention areas form an integrated ecosystem for sustainable impact.

Holistic Methodology

- Institutional strengthening and direct intervention
- Knowledge production and evidence-based advocacy
- Community mobilization and political engagement
- Technological innovation and traditional approaches

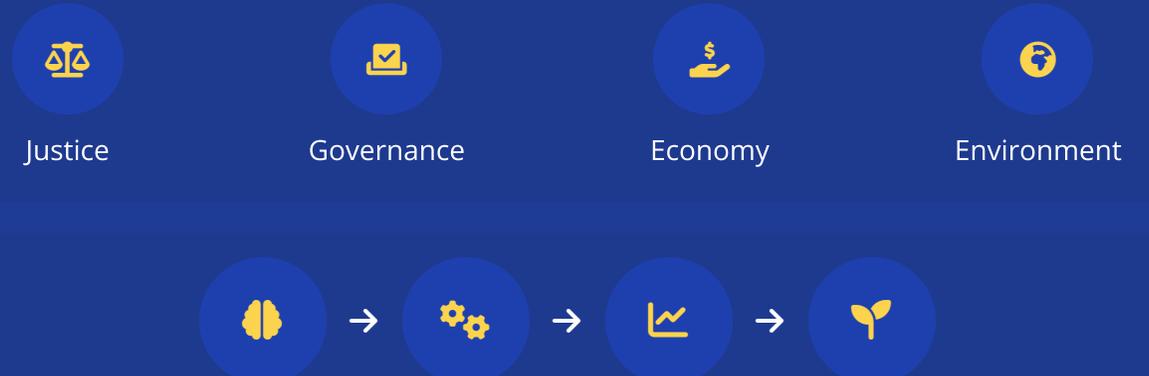
Our Strategic Implementation

- ✓ Regional coordination through hubs in Ghana, Benin and Gambia
- ✓ Sub-Saharan Africa-wide programming with local context adaptation
- ✓ Multi-year strategic plans with adaptable implementation

8 Key Intervention Areas

-  **Capacity Building**
Training, awareness and education
-  **Effective Advocacy**
Legislative influence and rights promotion
-  **Data Management**
Dònuèsè Center, research and analysis
-  **Sexual and Reproductive Health**
Access to care and SRHR rights
-  **Fighting Harmful Norms**
Campaigns against discriminatory practices
-  **Female Leadership**
Political participation and decision-making
-  **Humanitarian Response**
Support in fragile contexts and crises
-  **Inclusive Collaborative Approach**
Multi-stakeholder partnerships

Cross-sectoral Impact Areas



#HolisticApproach

#IntegratedAction

#SystemicChange



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RFLD Report October 2025

Target Audience & Intervention Areas

Who We Serve & Where We Work

Our Target Audience



Women & Girls

Particularly vulnerable and marginalized women and girls across Sub-Saharan Africa, including rural communities with limited access to resources and services.



Civil Society Organizations

Community organizations, women's rights groups, and local associations working on human rights issues and gender equality.



Policy Makers & Institutions

Government agencies, regional bodies, and international institutions with decision-making power affecting women's rights and democratic freedoms.



Media & Journalists

Independent journalists, media outlets, and digital content creators working on human rights issues and democratic accountability.

Intervention Areas

Geographic Focus

- **West Africa:** Ghana, Benin, Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria
- **East Africa:** Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania
- **Central Africa:** Cameroon, DRC, Rwanda
- **Southern Africa:** South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique

Thematic Areas of Intervention

Women's Rights

Gender equality, SRHR, GBV prevention

Democracy

Civil liberties, voting rights, accountability

Economic Justice

Resource equality, inclusive development

Climate Action

Environmental protection, adaptation

Media Freedom

Press freedom, access to information

Digital Rights

Online safety, technological accessibility

Key Impact Indicators (2012-Present)

35,000+

Women directly supported

120+

Partner organizations

18

Countries reached

250+

Advocacy campaigns



Critical Issues in Sub-Saharan Africa

This section examines seven major challenges identified by RFLD that threaten human rights and civic space, particularly affecting women and marginalized communities

1 Shrinking Democratic Freedoms

Weakening of democratic institutions and rise of authoritarian practices in the region

2 Civic Space Restrictions

Legal barriers, intimidation, and censorship limiting civil society organizations

3 Human Rights Violations

Systemic abuses including arbitrary detention and excessive use of force against civilians

4 Gender Discrimination

Persistent patriarchal norms limiting women's rights and political participation

5 Digital Space Threats

Online surveillance, internet shutdowns, and digital repression of activists

6 Disinformation & Hate

Propaganda undermining truth, increasing polarization and fueling conflicts

7 Resource Gaps for CSOs

Insufficient funding and resources for local organizations and media

Key Statistics

73% decline in civic freedoms across the region since 2015 with significant impact

Regional Impact Analysis

- West Africa: Rise of authoritarianism and electoral violence
- East Africa: Media restrictions and internet shutdowns
- Central Africa: Armed conflicts and population displacement
- Southern Africa: Economic inequality and protest suppression

Most Vulnerable Groups

- 👤 Women activists
- 👤 Human rights defenders
- 📰 Independent journalists
- 👥 Ethnic minorities

"These challenges represent the most significant obstacles to advancing human rights in the region today. They are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, requiring multidimensional solutions and sustained engagement from all stakeholders."

— RFLD Human Rights Research Unit

#HumanRights

#CivicSpace

#GenderJustice

#RFLD

#AdvocacyMatters

Shrinking Democratic Freedoms

Authoritarian Facades of Legitimacy

Sub-Saharan African countries exhibit strong heterogeneity in political regimes, impacted by democratic recession. Regional fragility stems from both extrinsic and intrinsic factors, limiting civil and political rights.

Pandemic Impact and Democratic Regression

- Sub-Saharan Africa heavily affected by the pandemic's impact on democracy and civil liberties
- V-Dem's PanDem index shows significant democratic regression throughout the region
- Governments exploited the pandemic to postpone elections and impose restrictive measures
- Military coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso characterizing recent democratic struggles
- Corruption and state capture weaken democratic institutions in several countries

Threats to Regional Stability

⚠️ **Political Instability:** 27% increase in political violence

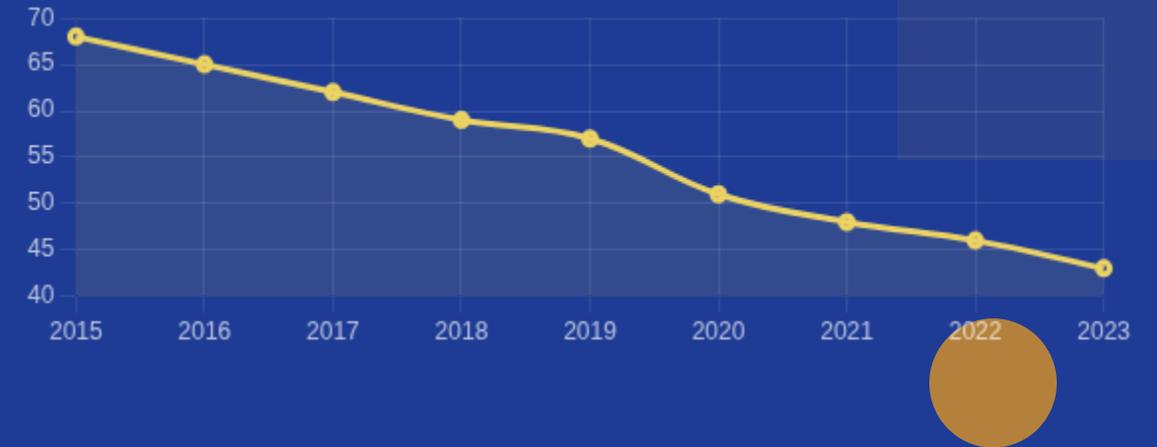
👤 **Civil Unrest:** 32% increase in protests and demonstrations

#DemocraticFreedoms

#AuthoritarianTrends

#CivicSpace

Democratic Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa



Mechanisms of Legitimacy Facades



Electoral Manipulation

Biased electoral processes and voter suppression



Weakened Institutions

Control of judicial systems and checks and balances



Media Control

State-dominated narratives and censorship



Civic Repression

Restrictions on freedoms and civil society

📌 **Key Finding:** The 2023 Afrobarometer shows that despite growing dissatisfaction with governments, young Africans remain committed to democratic principles, with 76% supporting democratic governance.

Recommendations & Future Perspectives

Policy Recommendations

- Strengthen legal frameworks protecting human rights defenders
- Reform digital security laws to counter surveillance
- Increase funding to grassroots organizations
- Establish regional accountability mechanisms

Future Strategies

- Develop gender-sensitive approaches to climate resilience
- Build stronger regional coalitions across Africa
- Expand digital advocacy tools for remote communities
- Create sustainable funding through diverse partnerships

RFLD Strategic Roadmap 2025-2030



Strategic Focus Areas



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Sub-Saharan Africa

RFLD Report
October 2025



Dossi Sekonnou Gloria

Executive Director of RFLD

 Expert in Democratic Governance

 Civil Liberties Defender

 Human Rights Academic



Democracy Quotes

“

Even though people are increasingly dissatisfied with democratic backsliding, they remain deeply attached to the idea of democracy. This aspiration is the foundation of our work for inclusive and accountable institutions.

”

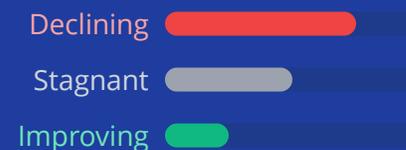
Key Points on Democracy in Africa

- Facades of legitimacy masking authoritarianism in many countries
- Use of the pandemic to strengthen authoritarian restrictions on civil society
- Recurring military coups and political crises threatening democratic stability
- Continued youth engagement and activism for democratic values and accountability
- Growing need for international solidarity in defense of democratic institutions

Current Trends in the Democracy Index

Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced a 12% decline in democratic indicators over the past five years, with only 8 countries showing improvement in civil liberties and electoral integrity.

RFLD's research indicates that targeted interventions in media literacy and civic education can help reverse these trends.



[#DemocraticValues](#)

[#CitizenParticipation](#)

[#HumanRights](#)

[#AccountableGovernance](#)



Restrictions on Civic Space & Freedoms

2. Increasing restrictions on civic space

Sub-Saharan Africa presents some of the worst civic space conditions in the world, meaning that the majority of people are denied the rights to organize toward common goals and participate in democratic dissent.

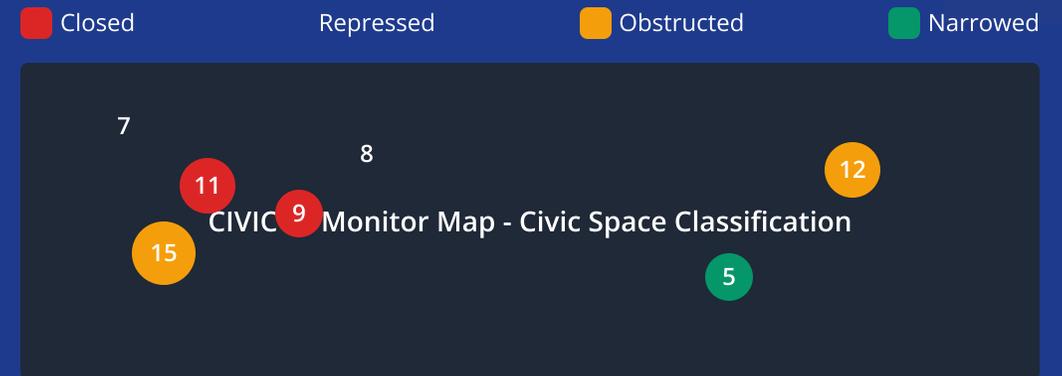
The deterioration of civic space conditions in Africa is alarming:

- In 2022, South Africa, Botswana, Mali and Mozambique all saw their assessments decline without any Sub-Saharan African country improving
- Freedom of expression and belief has declined by 16% over the past 16 years across the continent
- New legislation criminalizes the online publication of government-critical content
- Increased surveillance and threats toward journalists and human rights defenders

These challenges have led to a decline in trust toward media and civil society and have compromised the sustainability and resilience of journalists, human rights defenders, CSOs and activists across the African continent.

[#CivicSpace](#) [#MediaFreedom](#) [#HumanRights](#) [#FreedomOfExpression](#)

State of Civic Space in Sub-Saharan Africa



Impact of Restrictions



Independent Media
Censorship & self-censorship



Right to Protest
Violent repression & arrests



Internet Shutdowns
19 shutdowns in 2021



Restrictive Laws
Increasing criminalization

"Coalitions between civil society and media contribute to creating sustainable, scalable and lasting impact in Africa by promoting honesty and accuracy in public debate despite their need to sometimes self-censor to protect themselves."

— RFLD Media Resilience Study, 2024

WHRD OVERVIEW

Barriers, Opportunities, and Transformative Impact

Women Human Rights Defenders in Sub-Saharan Africa navigate complex challenges while creating remarkable pathways for justice, equality, and systemic change

#WomenDefenders

#SubSaharanActivism

#HumanRights



Human Rights Violations

Consequences of Shrinking Civic Space and Discriminatory Discourse

Key Factors

Conflicts, authoritarianism, and inequitable socio-economic development remain the primary drivers of shrinking civic space, which are the primary catalysts for human rights violations across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Documentation of Violations

In Burundi, CSOs have documented human rights violations, including:

- Arbitrary detentions
- Torture and mistreatment
- Forced disappearances
- Killings by security forces
- Violence by Imbonerakure

Gender Dimension

Patriarchal societies with restricted civic space promote values that justify sexualized violence as a weapon to silence female activists and women-led organizations.

Regional Impact

Systematic human rights violations have led to mass displacement, economic instability, and deteriorating health outcomes in several countries, with women and children being disproportionately affected.

Forms of Harassment Against Human Rights Defenders



Online Harassment

Digital defamation campaigns



Criminalization

Abusive legal proceedings



Sexual Violence

Targeting female activists



Social Ostracism

Community exclusion

The Cycle of Human Rights Violations



"Strong feminist movements are the most important factor in advancing legislation against violence against women. Our research shows that countries with the most robust feminist movements tend to have more comprehensive policies on violence against women."

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, RFLD Grants Manager

#HumanRights

#CivicSpace

#WomensRights



Human Rights Report in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Historical Background of WHRDs

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Sub-Saharan Africa have a rich history of resistance and advocacy spanning the pre-colonial era to the present day. Their activism has been pivotal in challenging patriarchal structures, colonial impositions, and post-independence authoritarian regimes.

Despite facing multiple layers of discrimination, African women have been at the forefront of human rights movements, constitutional reforms, and peace processes across the continent.

Evolution of Women's Rights Activism



Pre-Independence Era (1940s-1960s)

Women activists played crucial roles in independence movements, often leading grassroots mobilizations while demanding recognition of women's rights alongside national liberation.



Post-Colonial Period (1960s-1980s)

Disappointment with gender equality post-independence led to the formation of autonomous women's organizations challenging new patriarchal governments and advancing legislative reforms.



Contemporary Movement (1990s-Present)

Rise of professionalized NGOs, transnational networks, and digital activism focusing on intersectional issues including LGBTQ+ rights, environmental justice, and economic inequality.

Timeline of Key Moments

1951

Women's March in South Africa

20,000 women protested against apartheid pass laws, marking one of the largest women-led political demonstrations in African history.

1975

UN International Women's Year

First African regional women's conference held in Rwanda, leading to formation of numerous national women's organizations across the continent.

1995

Beijing Conference

Strong African women's presence at the Fourth World Conference on Women, resulting in the African Platform for Action.

2003

Maputo Protocol

Adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, a landmark achievement for WHRDs.

2016

African Feminist Forum

Consolidation of regional feminist networks dedicated to supporting WHRDs and advancing gender equality across the continent.

Landmark Achievements



Constitutional Reforms

Gender equality provisions in 42 African constitutions, directly resulting from WHRD advocacy.



Political Representation

Rwanda (61%), South Africa (46%), and Senegal (43%) achieving world-leading female parliamentary representation.



SGBV Legislation

38 countries have enacted specific laws against gender-based violence following WHRD campaigns.



Education Access

Near gender parity in primary education across 24 Sub-Saharan countries, up from just 4 countries in 1990.

“

“Women's rights are human rights. African WHRDs haven't just fought for women—they've transformed entire societies through their courage and persistence.”

— Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Kenya

Profiles of WHRDs: Diversity and Intersectionality

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Sub-Saharan Africa represent remarkable diversity across ethnic, religious, generational, and professional backgrounds. Their varied identities shape both their advocacy approaches and the unique challenges they face.

Diversity Dimensions



Ethnic Diversity

WHRDs represent over 2,000 ethnic groups across Sub-Saharan Africa. Our network includes activists from 67 distinct ethnic communities speaking 43 different languages. Rural WHRDs often face additional marginalization based on their ethnicity.



Religious Backgrounds

Survey of 2,500 WHRDs shows 52% Christian, 38% Muslim, 7% traditional African faiths, and 3% other religious identities. Faith-based WHRDs often bridge secular human rights frameworks with religious values to reach broader communities.



Generational Perspectives

Growing youth leadership with 43% of WHRDs under 35, 37% between 35-50, and 20% over 50. Intergenerational knowledge transfer is crucial with 76% of young WHRDs reporting mentorship from established defenders.

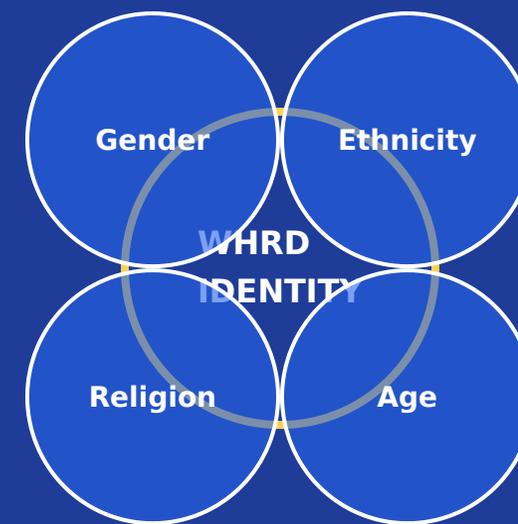


Professional Background

WHRDs enter activism through diverse paths: 28% legal professionals, 23% educators, 18% healthcare workers, 14% community organizers, 9% journalists, and 8% from business sectors. This diversity brings multidisciplinary approaches to human rights work.

Understanding Intersectionality

WHRDs experience overlapping forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, and other aspects of identity. This intersectionality shapes both the violations they face and their advocacy approaches.



Diversity Statistics



Spotlight on Diverse WHRDs



Amina Mohammed

Nigeria, Legal Professional

Muslim WHRD leading efforts to end child marriage in Northern Nigeria by connecting Islamic teachings with human rights frameworks.



Grace Mumbua

Kenya, Community Elder

Indigenous elder mobilizing rural women against extractive industries threatening community lands and traditional livelihoods.



Fatou Samba

Senegal, Journalist

Young digital activist documenting women's rights violations across Francophone West Africa through innovative media platforms.



Sophia Adwoa

Ghana, Healthcare Worker

Nurse and disability rights advocate fighting for accessible healthcare and inclusion for women with disabilities in urban Ghana.

#WHRDDiversity

#Intersectionality

#WomensRights

Risks and Threats

Violence, Harassment, and Stigmatization

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Sub-Saharan Africa face **unique and intensified risks** compared to their male counterparts, often targeted for both their activism and their gender identity.

Primary Threats

- Physical Violence**
Targeted assaults, sexual violence, abduction, and assassination attempts. 76% of WHRDs report receiving threats of physical violence.
- Digital Harassment**
Online death threats, doxxing, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and coordinated smear campaigns. 83% have experienced online attacks.
- Legal Persecution**
Arbitrary arrests, false charges, and criminalization of legitimate activities. 42% have faced judicial harassment.

Compounded Vulnerabilities

Risks increase for WHRDs who work on LGBTQ+ rights (3.6x higher risk), land rights (2.8x), or in rural areas (2.3x). 91% of WHRDs report that threats extend to their families.

#WomenDefenders

#EndViolence

#WHRDsafety

#DigitalProtection

Statistical Evidence of Threats (2020-2025)

76%

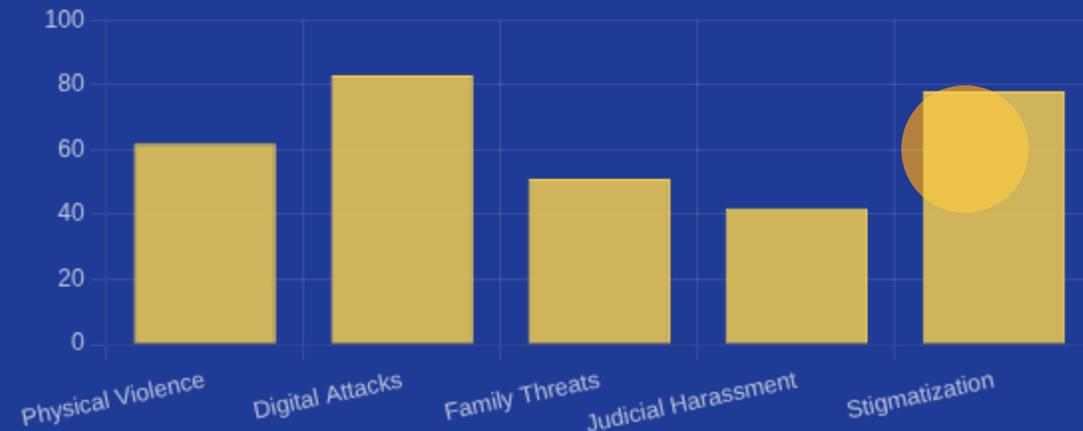
WHRDs report receiving death threats

83%

Experience online gender-based attacks

42%

Face judicial harassment



Regional Risk Assessment (2023-2025)

Highest Risk Countries

DRC	████████████████████
South Sudan	████████████████████
Somalia	████████████████████

Major Consequences

- 67% of WHRDs report psychological trauma
- 58% have been forced to relocate
- 41% have temporarily suspended activities
- 32% lost economic opportunities

“

As a woman defending rights, I face a double punishment: first for challenging power structures, then again for being a woman who dares to speak out.”

— WHRD from Nigeria, 2024 Regional Conference

Legal and Policy Challenges

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Sub-Saharan Africa face a complex web of **repressive legal frameworks** designed to restrict their activism and silence their voices.

An analysis of **42 countries** across the region reveals that **76%** have enacted laws since 2015 that specifically restrict civic space and disproportionately impact women activists.

Key Legal Barriers



NGO Registration Laws

Restrictive registration requirements, excessive reporting obligations, and prohibitive fees that particularly affect women-led organizations which often operate with limited resources



Foreign Funding Restrictions

Laws requiring government approval for foreign funding (implemented in 14 countries) severely restrict resources for women's rights organizations



Public Order Acts

Broadly defined prohibitions on gatherings and protests, with WHRDs facing 30% higher rates of arrest under these laws than male counterparts

Criminalization of WHRD Activism

Common Laws Used Against WHRDs

Cybercrime/Digital Security

Used to prosecute online activism and silence critical voices (19 countries)

Anti-Terrorism Laws

Broadly interpreted to label rights defenders as "extremists" (14 countries)

Criminal Defamation

Used against whistleblowers and corruption monitors (23 countries)

Morality/Public Decency Laws

Disproportionately applied to women activists (17 countries)

WHRD Criminalization Statistics (2020-2025)



Number of WHRDs facing criminal charges for their activism

Country Spotlights

Uganda

NGO Act 2016 requires government approval for all advocacy activities, resulting in closure of 54 women's rights organizations

Tanzania

Cybercrimes Act used to prosecute 27 women defenders for "spreading false information" about gender-based violence

Nigeria

Social media bill threatens 7-year imprisonment for posts "diminishing public confidence in government"

Legal Protection Gap



Only 4 of 49 Sub-Saharan countries have enacted specific legislation protecting human rights defenders, with none containing explicit provisions addressing the unique challenges faced by women defenders

#LegalBarriers

#WHRDProtection

#LawReform

Political Instability and its Impact on WHRDs

Women Human Rights Defenders in Sub-Saharan Africa face **heightened and gender-specific risks** during periods of political instability, including coups d'état, contentious transitions, and in fragile states.

Since 2020, **8 military coups** have occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa, creating environments where WHRDs face both intensified threats and reduced protection mechanisms.

Impact on WHRDs' Work



Suspension of Legal Protections

Constitutional protections suspended during coups, leaving WHRDs without legal recourse (73% of post-coup governments suspend NGO operations)



Surveillance and Internet Shutdowns

WHRDs face increased digital surveillance with 82% reporting compromised communications during transitions; 15 internet shutdowns recorded since 2021



Gender-Specific Targeting

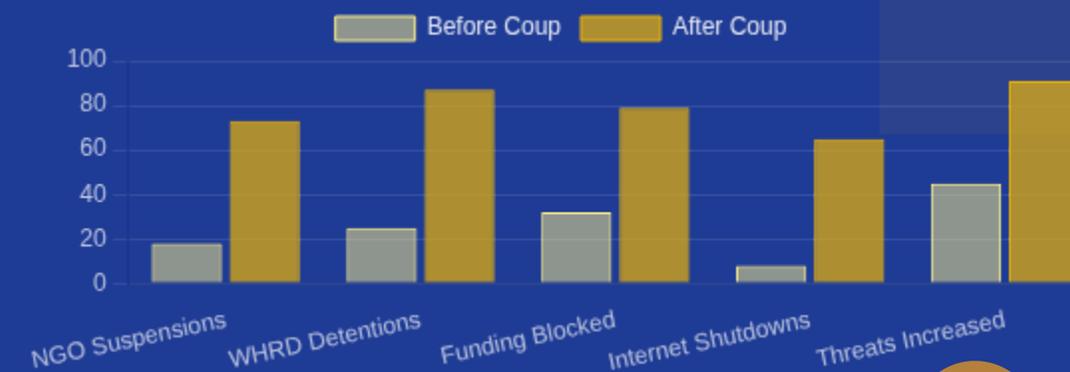
91% of WHRDs report gender-based intimidation tactics (sexual harassment, family threats) during periods of political instability

#PoliticalInstability

#WHRDProtection

#ResilientDefenders

Coup Impact Analysis (2020-2025)



Case Studies: Regional Impact

SUDAN (2021-2023)

Context: Military coup and subsequent political crisis

Impact: 67% of women's rights organizations suspended operations
42 WHRDs detained, 28 reported torture or ill-treatment

BURKINA FASO (2022)

Context: Two military coups in single year

Impact: 79% of WHRDs reported increased threats
31 women's organizations had funding frozen

NIGER (2023)

Context: Military takeover and suspension of constitution

Impact: 84% of WHRDs lost international support
18 women's rights advocates fled the country

MALI (2020-2022)

Context: Double coup and transitional government

Impact: 62% of women-led CSOs reported harassment
37 documented cases of reprisals against WHRDs

WHRD Resilience Strategies



Underground networks (62%)



Strategic pivoting (58%)



Digital protection (76%)

Protection Mechanisms and Support Systems for WHRDs

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Sub-Saharan Africa face unique risks requiring specialized protection frameworks. **Only 27% of WHRDs** report having access to adequate protection mechanisms despite the escalating threats they face.

Regional protection systems have evolved significantly since 2010, yet implementation gaps remain substantial across Sub-Saharan Africa, with **country-level disparities ranging from 12% to 65%** in effectiveness ratings.

Regional Protection Mechanisms



African Commission Special Mechanisms

Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders established in 2004, with specific focus on WHRDs since 2017. Conducts country visits and issues urgent appeals.



ECOWAS Court of Justice

Provides direct access without exhausting domestic remedies - critical for WHRDs in urgent danger. Handled 42 WHRD-related cases since 2018.



Maputo Protocol Implementation

Article 9 provides specific protections for women's political participation and public engagement. Ratified by 46 African states as of 2025.

#WHRDProtection

#SupportSystems

#RegionalMechanisms

National Protection Mechanisms

Protection Mechanisms Implementation by Region



Support Systems Availability



Safe Houses
23 shelters across
14 countries



Legal Aid
Accessible in
19 countries



Psychosocial
Support networks in
12 countries

Implementation Challenges

- ⚠️ Limited resources - average of \$0.14 per capita spent on protection
- ⚠️ Lack of political will - 68% of reported threats unaddressed
- ⚠️ Poor coordination between stakeholders
- ⚠️ Inadequate gender-sensitive protocols

WHRD Toolkit for Protection

The Pan-African WHRD Network developed a comprehensive toolkit in 2023, now implemented across 17 countries with 73% reported improvement in safety outcomes when fully utilized.

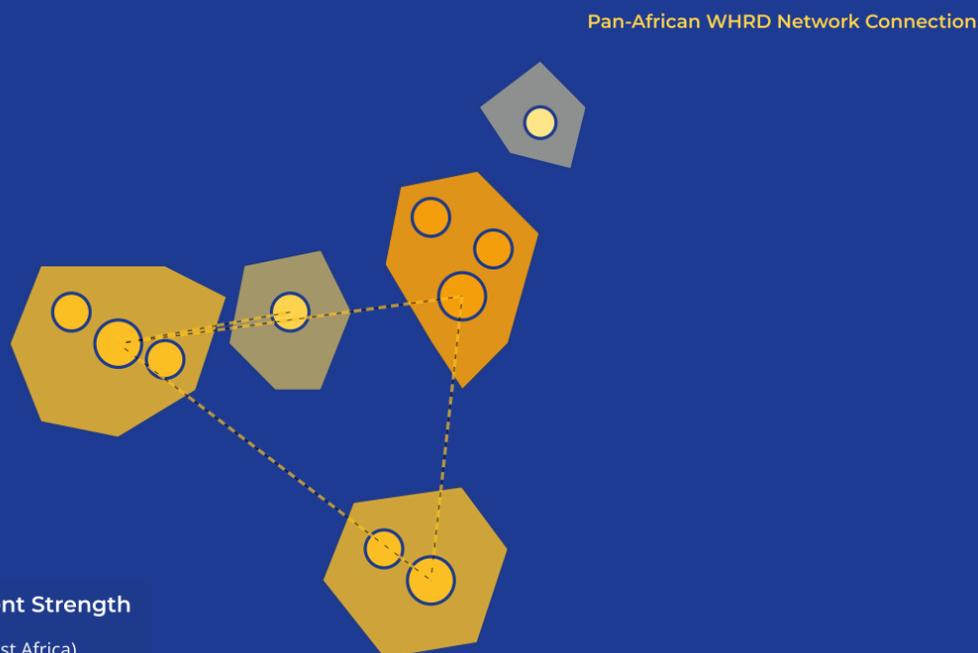
Map: Sub-Saharan Countries with Active WHRD Movements

Geographic analysis of Women Human Rights Defenders' presence, networks, and impact across Sub-Saharan Africa

Regional WHRD Movement Strength

WHRD Movement Strength

- Very Strong (East Africa)
- Strong (West & Southern)
- Moderate (Central Africa)
- Limited (Horn of Africa)



Key Regional Networks

- West African WHRD Network**
Based in Ghana with 32 member organizations across 15 countries. Focus on digital security and physical protection.
- East African Feminist Alliance**
Headquartered in Kenya with 45 member organizations. Specializes in strategic litigation and advocacy.
- Southern Africa WHRD Coalition**
Based in South Africa with 28 member organizations. Focus on legal frameworks and policy reform.

WHRD Statistics by Region

East Africa WHRDs	1,250+ registered
West Africa WHRDs	980+ registered
Southern Africa WHRDs	850+ registered
Central Africa WHRDs	420+ registered

Key Impact Metrics

67%
of WHRDs report threats

3,500+
documented cases (2023)

42
protection networks

23%
funding gap increase

Notable Country Initiatives

Kenya: Digital Defenders Program - Trained 450+ WHRDs in digital security

Ghana: WHRD Emergency Response System - 24/7 hotline with legal support

South Africa: Feminist Legal Clinic - Strategic litigation for WHRDs

Nigeria: Women's Rights Advocacy Hub - Legislative reform campaign

Core Barriers: Patriarchal Systems & Gender Stereotypes

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Sub-Saharan Africa face **unique challenges** stemming from deeply entrenched patriarchal systems that manifest through cultural norms, legal frameworks, and social expectations.

These barriers create **double jeopardy** for WHRDs who are targeted both for their activism and for transgressing prescribed gender roles.

Systemic Barriers & Exclusion



Legal Systems & Discriminatory Laws

In 15 Sub-Saharan countries, women still need male authorization for legal proceedings, critically hindering WHRDs' legal advocacy



Exclusion from Decision-Making

WHRDs are systemically excluded from peace processes and transitional justice mechanisms despite UNSCR 1325, with just 14% female representation in negotiation teams



Religious & Traditional Authorities

65% of WHRDs report facing direct opposition from religious leaders when addressing gender-based violence or sexual and reproductive rights

#BreakPatriarchy

#WHRDRights

#GenderJustice

Gender Stereotypes & Their Impact

WHRDs Facing Stereotype-Based Threats



Common Stereotypes Weaponized Against WHRDs



Family Abandonment

"Neglecting domestic duties" as common accusation used to delegitimize WHRDs' work



Western Influence

Labeled as "foreign agents" or "culturally corrupted" when advocating for gender equality



Moral Accusations

Character assassination through accusations of "immoral behavior" or sexual slander



Emotional Instability

Labeled as "hysterical," "emotional," or "irrational" to discredit advocacy (63% of surveyed WHRDs)

Regional Perspective



"The patriarchal system doesn't just limit our work—it transforms our activism itself into an act of transgression. When a woman speaks publicly about rights, she is already breaking a societal norm." — Koubra Mahamat, WHRD from Chad

WHRDs' Networks and Solidarity Models

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, **Women Human Rights Defenders** have created powerful formal and informal networks that provide critical support, protection, and amplification of advocacy efforts in challenging environments.

These networks connect **over 780 organizations** and thousands of individual defenders across 42 countries, creating vital solidarity mechanisms that transcend language, borders, and specific issue areas.

Major Regional Networks



Women Human Rights Defenders Network-Africa

Pan-African network connecting 253 organizations across 38 countries, providing emergency response, security training, and advocacy coordination



Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)

Network of 14 organizations in 11 countries advocating for LBTQI+ women's rights, combining legal advocacy with protection mechanisms



FEMNET (African Women's Development Network)

Regional network mobilizing African women for gender equality with members in 43 countries, linking grassroots with continental policy influence

#SisterhoodIsPower

#WHRDSolidarity

#DefendingTheDefenders

Solidarity Mechanisms That Save Lives



Protection & Response

Rapid response mechanisms activated within hours

76%

of WHRDs in danger receive emergency support

42

safe houses across 18 countries

94%

effectiveness in urgent action campaigns

Strategic Coalition Building

- ✓ Issue-based coalitions
- ✓ Country-specific alliances
- ✓ Cross-movement solidarity
- ✓ Tactical collaborations

Resource Sharing

- ✓ Knowledge databases
- ✓ Security protocols
- ✓ Legal assistance
- ✓ Funding opportunities

Regional Success Story: Digital Justice Network

In 2023, the East African Digital Rights Network mobilized 127 WHRDs across Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda to challenge surveillance laws. Their coordinated campaign led to:

4

Legal challenges

2

Policy changes

18

Released activists

\$3.2M

Mobilized funding

36

"Our strength is not just in numbers, but in how we deliberately create systems of mutual support that transcend borders. When one sister is attacked, her sisters across the continent stand with her."

— Sylvia Mbataru, Kenyan WHRD & Regional Network Coordinator

Mentorship and Capacity Building for WHRDs

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, strategic capacity building and mentorship programs are vital for equipping Women Human Rights Defenders with the skills needed to navigate complex socio-political environments while ensuring their safety.

A 2024 regional assessment found that WHRDs with formal training were **3.2 times more likely** to sustain their advocacy work beyond 5 years and **78% reported improved resilience** against threats and intimidation.

Strategic Training Approaches

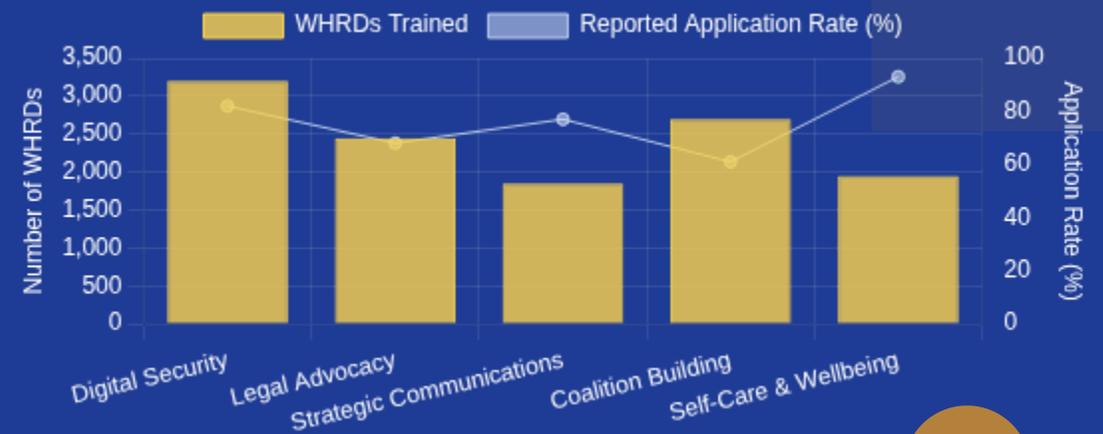
- Contextual Security Training**
Country-specific security protocols addressing unique threats in conflict zones, authoritarian states, and rural settings where WHRDs face heightened risk
- Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer**
Structured mentorship pairing veteran WHRDs with emerging advocates, preserving institutional memory and traditional protection strategies
- Hybrid Learning Models**
Combining online and in-person training to reach remote defenders, with offline modules for areas with limited connectivity across the region

#WHRDMentorship

#CapacityBuilding

#FeministSolidarity

Training Impact by Focus Area (2022-2025)



Regional Flagship Initiatives

- Umoja Security Collective**
12 countries, East Africa
1,750+ WHRDs trained
- Francophone Legal Fellows**
West & Central Africa
215 paralegals deployed
- Southern Africa Media Lab**
8 countries network
620 WHRDs in journalism
- Horn of Africa Wellbeing**
4 trauma recovery centers
940 WHRDs supported

66 Case Study: Nigerian WHRD Resilience Network

After implementing a specialized capacity building program across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, WHRDs documented a 64% decrease in security incidents while successfully challenging three restrictive NGO bills. Their mentorship model has been adopted by WHRD networks in Ghana, Cameroon, and Sierra Leone, creating a West African corridor of protection.

Environmental and Land Rights Defenders

Women Environmental and Land Rights Defenders

in Sub-Saharan Africa face unique risks as they protect natural resources, oppose extractive industries, and defend community land rights against powerful corporate and state interests.

These defenders represent **13% of all WHRDs killed globally**, with the highest regional concentration in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in resource-rich areas with mining, logging, and agribusiness operations.

Key Challenges



Extractive Industries Expansion

Mining, logging, and oil exploration increasingly encroach on indigenous and community lands, particularly in DRC, Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa



Legal Harassment and Criminalization

78% of environmental WHRDs report facing intimidation through legal channels, with charges including trespassing, obstruction, and "economic sabotage"



Gender-Specific Attacks

Female environmental defenders face gender-based violence, family intimidation, and community ostracism not experienced by male counterparts

#LandRights

#EnvironmentalDefenders

#WomenInResistance

Key Statistics & Regional Focus

68%

of environmental WHRDs in Sub-Saharan Africa report receiving threats in 2024

32

female environmental defenders killed in Sub-Saharan Africa (2020-2024)

17%

increase in attacks against women land defenders since 2020

84%

of attacked defenders had previously reported threats to authorities without response

Regional Hotspots



DRC & Congo Basin

Mining concessions and deforestation affecting indigenous women defenders



Southern Africa

Industrial agriculture expansion displacing communities and threatening food sovereignty



Kenya & Tanzania

Women defenders opposing development projects threatening water resources



Nigeria & Niger Delta

Women defenders challenging oil pollution and environmental degradation



West African Coast

Women opposing extractive industries and illegal fishing operations



Ethiopia & East Africa

Large-scale energy projects displacing communities without consultation

Case Study: Survival International Report (2023)

"Women defenders of indigenous lands in Kenya, Tanzania, and DRC are particularly vulnerable to threats, with 73% reporting physical attacks, digital surveillance, and community ostracism when opposing extractive projects. Legal protection mechanisms remain severely underfunded, with just 8% of cases receiving adequate response from authorities."

Landmark Cases: Advocacy and Victories

Women Human Rights Defenders across Sub-Saharan Africa have achieved remarkable legal and policy victories that have transformed the landscape of rights protection across the continent.

From groundbreaking constitutional challenges to strategic litigation, WHRDs have established critical legal precedents that protect millions of women and marginalized communities.

Impact at Scale

43

Major legal precedents established by WHRD-led litigation (2015-2025)

27M+

Women and girls directly impacted by WHRD legal victories

18

Countries with reformed laws protecting women's rights due to WHRD advocacy

68%

Increase in successful legal cases challenging gender-based discrimination



#LegalPrecedents

#WHRDVictories

#RightsDefense

Landmark Case Studies



EIPR v. Egypt (2019) | East Africa

Led by: Coalition of WHRDs from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda
Strategic litigation establishing that discriminatory inheritance laws violated constitutional equality provisions. This case directly benefited 4.2 million women and led to legal reforms in 3 neighboring countries.



Dorothy Njemanze v. Nigeria (2017) | West Africa

Led by: Women's Rights Action Group
ECOWAS Court ruling against arbitrary arrest of women, establishing that gender-based harassment by security forces constitutes discrimination. Led to police reforms in Nigeria and influenced policy in 6 West African nations.



CEHRD v. South Africa (2021) | Southern Africa

Led by: South African WHRD Collective
Constitutional Court victory establishing government accountability for gender-based violence in public spaces. Created a legal framework requiring state protection that has been cited in 28 subsequent court cases.



WAVES Network v. Mali (2022) | Sahel Region

Led by: Women Advocates for Victim Empowerment
Groundbreaking case establishing reparations for conflict-related sexual violence survivors. Created legal precedent for victim compensation and support services, benefiting over 11,000 women and girls.

Legal Precedent Impact

57%

Increased access to justice for women

12

Constitutional amendments

76%

WHRDs reporting higher effectiveness

34

National laws reformed

Working Under Threat: Digital Security Challenges

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Sub-Saharan Africa face increasingly sophisticated digital threats designed to silence their advocacy and compromise their safety. The digital landscape has become a battleground where their work is systematically undermined through targeted attacks.

Primary Digital Threats



Mass & Targeted Surveillance

State-sponsored monitoring of communications, location tracking, and device infiltration



Cyber Harassment & Doxxing

Online threats, publication of personal information, and coordinated attacks on social media



Spyware & Malware Attacks

Pegasus and other commercial spyware tools used to compromise devices and extract sensitive data



Internet Shutdowns & Censorship

Disruption of communications during key advocacy moments and filtering of content

#DigitalRights

#WHRDProtection

#TechSafety

Impact & Regional Data

Reported Digital Attacks Against WHRDs



Regional Digital Security Landscape

East Africa

- ⚠️ High surveillance infrastructure
- ⚠️ Growing spyware deployment
- 📶 Frequent internet disruptions

West Africa

- ⚠️ Rising online gender-based harassment
- ⚠️ Limited digital security resources
- 📶 Strategic communication blocks

Southern Africa

- ⚠️ Social media monitoring
- ⚠️ Legal harassment for online speech
- 📶 Growing surveillance tech adoption

Central Africa

- ⚠️ Limited connectivity infrastructure
- ⚠️ Cross-border surveillance cooperation
- 📶 Prolonged internet shutdowns

Key Statistics

76%

of WHRDs reported online harassment specifically targeting their gender identity

42

internet shutdowns across Sub-Saharan Africa during key human rights events (2021-2024)

38%

decrease in public advocacy after experiencing severe digital threats

Intersectional Approaches to WHRD Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa

Analyzing how overlapping identities create unique vulnerabilities and require tailored protection strategies for Women Human Rights Defenders across diverse Sub-Saharan African contexts

Regional Intersectionality Challenges

In Sub-Saharan Africa, WHRDs experience compounded vulnerabilities due to colonial legacies, customary laws, language barriers, and geographic isolation that intersect with gender discrimination.



Colonial Legal Systems vs. Customary Law

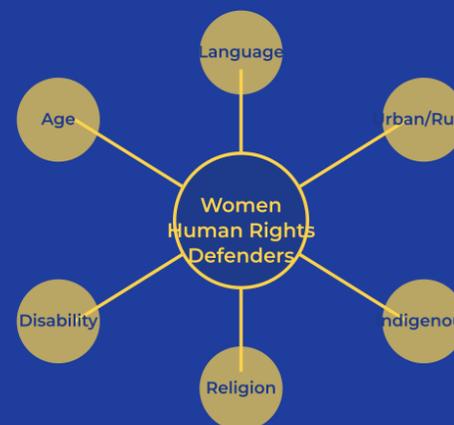
WHRDs navigating dual legal systems face additional barriers when advocating for rights that challenge both frameworks



Linguistic Exclusion

Francophone, Lusophone and indigenous language speakers face additional barriers to accessing protection mechanisms predominantly available in English

Sub-Saharan Africa Contextual Dimensions



Sub-Saharan Africa Statistical Realities

78%

of rural WHRDs in the Sahel region report no access to regional protection mechanisms

4.5x

higher risk of threats for indigenous WHRDs defending land rights in East Africa

91%

of LGBTQ+ WHRDs in Southern Africa reported violence within their communities when advocating

86%

of WHRDs with disabilities in West Africa unable to access emergency relocation services

Regional Best Practices: Intersectional Protection



East African WHRD Network

Established regional protection desks with specialized focal points for indigenous, disabled, and LGBTQ+ defenders in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda



Digital Inclusion in Southern Africa

Malawi and Zimbabwe initiatives created multilingual, offline-accessible security apps for rural WHRDs with limited connectivity and different literacy levels



West African Legal Pluralism Initiative

Mali, Ghana, and Niger coalitions working with both customary authorities and formal legal systems to create integrated protection for WHRDs

Addressing Regional Intersectional Challenges



Conflict Zones

Specialized protection for WHRDs in Sahel, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes regions, accounting for displacement status



Colonial Language Barriers

Cross-linguistic solidarity between Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone networks to ensure equitable protection access



Geographic Isolation

Specialized responses for WHRDs in remote areas of Madagascar, DRC, and Mozambique with limited connectivity

Young WHRDs: Emerging Voices and Future Leaders

Youth-Led Activism Reshaping Human Rights Landscape

Young WHRDs under 35 represent **47%** of all human rights defenders in Sub-Saharan Africa, bringing fresh perspectives, digital strategies, and creative mobilization techniques to address longstanding human rights challenges.

These emerging voices are increasingly driving movements for climate justice, digital rights, LGBTIQ+ inclusion, and democratic renewal across the continent.

Key Characteristics of Young WHRDs

- Digital Native Strategies**
Leveraging social media platforms and encrypted communication tools to mobilize support, document violations, and foster transnational solidarity networks.
- Intersectional Approaches**
Embracing multiple identities and highlighting how age, gender, sexuality, disability, and ethnicity create unique patterns of discrimination and opportunity.
- Horizontal Leadership**
Challenging traditional hierarchical structures by developing collaborative, consensus-based organizational models that distribute power and decision-making.

Success Stories

Digital Rights Network

Youth-led coalition across 8 countries securing court victories against internet shutdowns during protests.

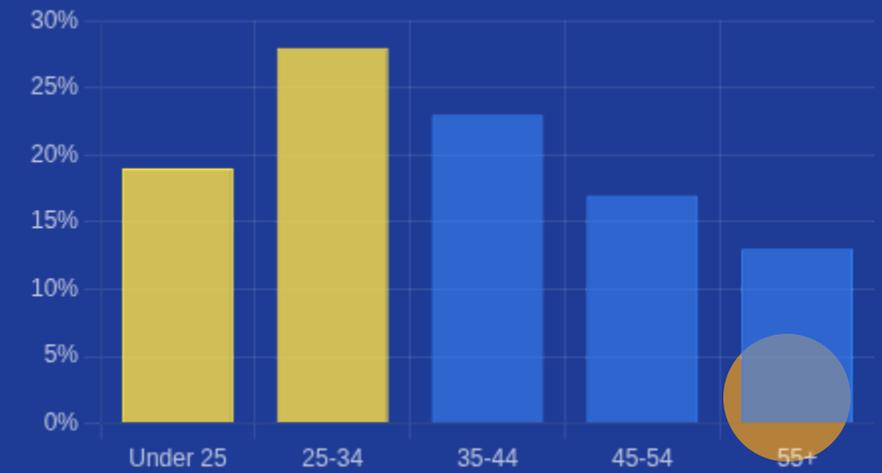
Climate Justice Movement

Young women leading grassroots campaigns successfully blocking 3 major extraction projects threatening indigenous lands.

Girls Not Brides

Youth advocates securing policy reforms in 12 countries to end child marriage and promote girls' education.

Age Distribution of WHRDs



Source: RFLD Survey of 2,500 WHRDs across 15 Sub-Saharan African countries (2024)

Unique Challenges Facing Young WHRDs

- Age-based marginalization:** 76% report not being taken seriously in policy discussions
- Economic precarity:** 68% lack sustainable funding for their activism
- Digital attacks:** 83% experienced online harassment, with young women facing sexualized attacks
- Educational barriers:** 54% must balance activism with school/university requirements

Support Mechanisms for Young WHRDs

Leadership Academies
12 programs across region

Youth-Focused Grants
\$2.3M distributed (2023-2024)

Digital Security Training
3,500+ youth defenders trained

Peer Mentorship
25 networks across 14 countries

#YouthLeadership

#EmergingWHRDs

#DigitalActivism

#NextGenRights

Technology and Innovation in WHRD Protection

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, Women Human Rights Defenders are leveraging **technological innovations** to enhance their protection, amplify their voices, and strengthen their advocacy despite digital divides and security concerns.

From **encrypted messaging** to **community alert systems**, these tools are transforming how WHRDs operate in high-risk environments while creating new avenues for solidarity and support.

Key Technology Solutions



Secure Communications

End-to-end encrypted messaging platforms and offline sharing tools adapted for low-bandwidth environments and limited connectivity



Emergency Response Systems

Rapid alert networks with geolocation tracking, panic buttons, and community response mechanisms integrated with local support structures



Secure Documentation Tools

Encrypted evidence collection platforms allowing for safe documentation of human rights violations with metadata scrubbing capabilities

#DigitalSecurity

#TechForProtection

#WHRDIInnovation

Innovation Landscape & Impact

Technology Adoption by WHRDs

76%

Use encrypted messaging for sensitive communications

43%

Utilize digital security tools regularly

28%

Have access to emergency alert systems

Regional Innovation Highlights



Ushahidi Platform (East Africa)

Crowdsourced mapping technology adapted for WHRD threat monitoring and response, now implemented in 9 countries



HerVoice SMS Network (West Africa)

Low-tech SMS alert system working without internet access for rural WHRDs, connecting 540+ defenders across 6 countries



SecureWitness App (Southern Africa)

Court-admissible digital evidence collection tool with automatic cloud backup, used in 43 successful legal cases

Challenges & Opportunities



Connectivity Barriers
62% of rural WHRDs face limited internet access



Digital Skills Gap
57% need additional technical training



Surveillance Risks
68% report concerns about digital surveillance

Regional Mechanisms and AU Instruments

The **African Union** and regional bodies have established several mechanisms to protect Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) across Sub-Saharan Africa, creating frameworks that recognize their specific challenges and needs.

Key AU Instruments

- 
Maputo Protocol (2003)
 Ratified by 46 African states as of 2025, establishes comprehensive framework for women's rights, including protections for women activists
- 
ACHPR Resolution 336 (2016)
 Specific to human rights defenders, acknowledges particular risks facing WHRDs and calls for states to adopt laws protecting them
- 
Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality (2004)
 Commits African leaders to support women's participation in governance and peace processes, strengthening WHRD protection
- 
Addis Ababa Declaration (2023)
 Newest framework specifically addressing digital security of WHRDs and commits to creating rapid response mechanisms for WHRDs at risk

Implementation Challenges



Regional Implementation Variations

West Africa

Strongest regional court precedents but weak enforcement

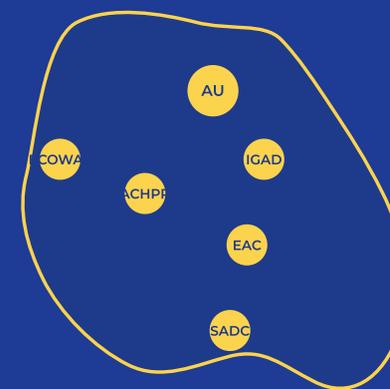
East Africa

Strong domestication but shrinking civic space

Southern Africa

Higher compliance rates with AU decisions

Regional Protection Bodies



ACHPR Special Mechanisms

-  Special Rapporteur on HRDs (est. 2004)
-  Special Rapporteur on Women's Rights
-  Working Group on Communications
-  WHRD Focal Point (est. 2022)

Regional Courts

-  African Court on Human Rights
-  ECOWAS Court of Justice
-  EACJ Court of Justice
-  SADC Tribunal (Revived 2024)

Success Stories

ECOWAS Court

Landmark ruling in Dorothy Njemanze v. Nigeria (2017) addressing violations against WHRDs

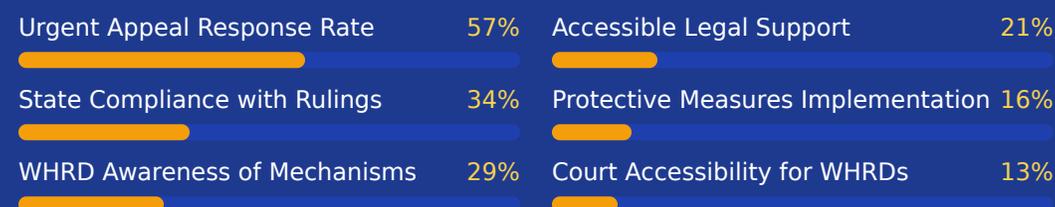
ACHPR Resolution

Resolution 454 (2021) urged states to protect digital rights of WHRDs during COVID-19

SADC Model Law

Model Law on Gender-Based Violence (2023) with specific WHRD protections adopted by 5 states

Protection Mechanisms Effectiveness



"Regional mechanisms offer vital protection for WHRDs when national frameworks fail, but accessing them remains challenging. Only 23% of WHRDs report successful engagement with these instruments."

— Pan-African WHRD Network Survey, 2024

Grassroots Advocacy and Community Impact

Women Human Rights Defenders across Sub-Saharan Africa have pioneered **transformative grassroots approaches** that bridge local knowledge with international advocacy frameworks, creating sustainable change despite severely restricted civic spaces.

In 2023-2024, WHRD-led community initiatives secured **47 policy reforms** across 18 Sub-Saharan African countries, with particular impact in rural and marginalized communities.

Innovative Advocacy Methodologies



Community Mobilization Circles

Structured dialogue forums reaching 120,000+ women in 27 countries, creating locally-driven advocacy agendas that reflect diverse community priorities



Testimonial Advocacy

Amplifying lived experiences through structured storytelling campaigns that have influenced 31 legislative processes across Sub-Saharan Africa



Male Ally Engagement

Strategic partnership programs with 7,800+ male community leaders who become accountability champions for women's rights implementation

#WHRDsInAction

#CommunityVoices

#TransformativeAdvocacy

Documented Community Transformation

83%

Increase in community reporting of rights violations after WHRD sensitization campaigns

54%

Growth in women's participation in local governance bodies in targeted regions

712

Community-led accountability mechanisms established across 14 Sub-Saharan countries

43

Traditional practices reformed through WHRD-facilitated community dialogues

Case Study: Community Transformation

Rural Women's Land Rights Coalition

8 countries

4-year initiative

19,500+ beneficiaries

WHRDs from Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa created an integrated advocacy model combining participatory research, customary law engagement, and strategic litigation. The initiative secured formal land titles for 6,700+ rural women, reformed 17 discriminatory inheritance practices, and established 32 women's land governance committees with formal recognition from authorities.

66

*"Our greatest innovation has been transforming communities from **beneficiaries** to **co-strategists** in human rights work. When rural women lead the design of advocacy initiatives, we achieve systemic change that outside experts rarely accomplish alone."*

— Nala Memela, Coordinator, East African WHRD Coalition

Economic Empowerment and Sustainability

Women Human Rights Defenders across Sub-Saharan Africa face profound economic challenges that directly impact their ability to conduct sustained advocacy work while maintaining personal financial security.

According to research across **18 countries** in Sub-Saharan Africa, **86% of WHRDs** report experiencing financial insecurity as a direct result of their human rights work.

Key Economic Challenges

- Unsustainable Funding Models**
73% of WHRD organizations rely on short-term project funding with gaps between grants that force suspension of critical activities
- Personal Financial Insecurity**
64% of WHRDs report having lost employment or income opportunities due to their activism, with 47% facing family pressure to abandon their work
- Restricted Financial Access**
Banking restrictions, frozen accounts, and restrictive NGO laws that limit access to international funding affect 52% of WHRDs in the region

#EconomicJustice

#WHRDsustainability

#FinancialSecurity

Sustainability Models for WHRDs

Funding Reality for WHRDs



Successful Empowerment Strategies

- Cooperative Enterprises**
WHRDs in Rwanda, Kenya, and Uganda have established cooperatives generating \$450K annually while funding rights work
- Skills Development**
Business training programs in Ghana and Nigeria have increased WHRD income stability by 43% over 24 months
- Micro-financing**
WHRD-specific loan programs in Tanzania and Malawi show 92% repayment rates and sustainable income increases
- Solidarity Networks**
Community savings groups across 9 countries provide emergency funds for 2,400+ WHRDs during periods of crisis

Economic Impact of WHRD Empowerment



Documentation and Evidence Collection

WHRDs in Sub-Saharan Africa play a crucial role in documenting human rights violations, preserving evidence, and creating accountability mechanisms in environments where institutional documentation often fails or is compromised.

According to the **2024 Pan-African WHRD Documentation Network** report, 62% of recorded human rights violations in the region were first documented by women human rights defenders working at community levels.

Documentation Methods & Tools

- Audiovisual Documentation**
72% of WHRDs use mobile phones to capture photos and videos of rights violations, despite risks of device confiscation
- Witness Testimonies**
Trauma-informed interview techniques developed by Ugandan and Kenyan WHRDs have been adopted in 14 Sub-Saharan countries
- Secure Data Storage**
Encrypted cloud storage and offline backup systems protect vulnerable witnesses and sensitive information

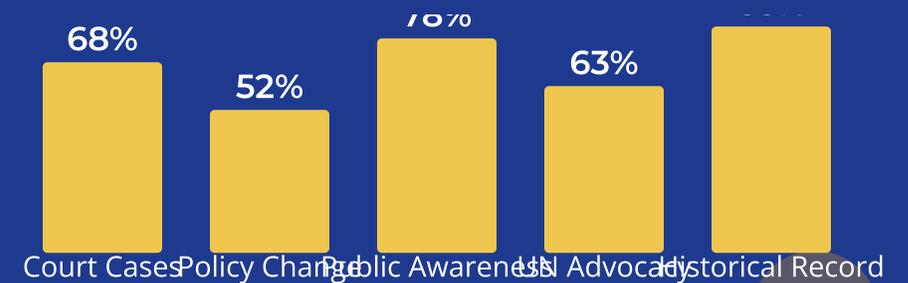
#DocumentationForJustice

#EvidenceMattersSA

#WHRDTruthTellers

Impact & Challenges of WHRD Documentation

Documentation Impact (2021-2024)



Percentage of WHRD documentation successfully utilized for various purposes

Regional Documentation Initiatives



EyeWitness Africa

Mobile app for legally admissible evidence collection
9,800+ verified incidents documented



WHRD Memory Project

Digital archive of women's rights violations
15 countries, 12,000+ testimonies



Secure Sisters Network

Protection protocols for at-risk documenters
850+ WHRDs trained since 2022



Justice Hub Collective

Legal frameworks for documentation
58 court cases supported with evidence

Key Challenges



87% of WHRDs report security threats related to documentation work; 64% face digital surveillance; 53% struggle with limited resources and equipment; 41% encounter witness reluctance due to fear of reprisals

Future Sustainability and Legacy Building

Building sustainable WHRD movements in Sub-Saharan Africa requires **strategic long-term planning** that ensures continuity across generations while adapting to evolving challenges.

With **74%** of WHRD organizations reporting sustainability concerns, creating resilient structures is essential for lasting impact across the region.

Core Sustainability Pillars



Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Structured mentorship programs bridging pioneer WHRDs with emerging leaders - 38 formal programs established across 12 countries



Institutional Memory & Documentation

Digital archives, oral history projects, and knowledge repositories capturing the legacy of women's rights movements across Sub-Saharan Africa



Financial Resilience Models

Diversified funding strategies, social enterprise development, and community-supported financing reducing donor dependence by 27%

#WHRDLegacy

#Sustainability

#NextGenWHRDs

Legacy Building Framework



Succession Planning Impact Metrics

62%

Leadership
Organizations with succession plans

43%

Documentation
With institutional memory systems

3.4

Funding
Years of financial sustainability

"Legacy Planning is a Responsibility"



Our work must outlive us. As WHRDs, we aren't building movements for ourselves, but for the generations to come. This is why we must document, mentor, and create sustainable institutions.

— Aminata Touré, Pioneer WHRD, Senegal

International Partnerships and Cross-Border WHRD Collaboration

Women Human Rights Defenders across Sub-Saharan Africa are strengthening their impact through strategic international partnerships and cross-border collaborations, creating powerful solidarity networks that transcend national boundaries.

These partnerships have proven crucial for emergency response, collective advocacy, and resource sharing, especially in contexts where national governments are hostile to WHRD work.

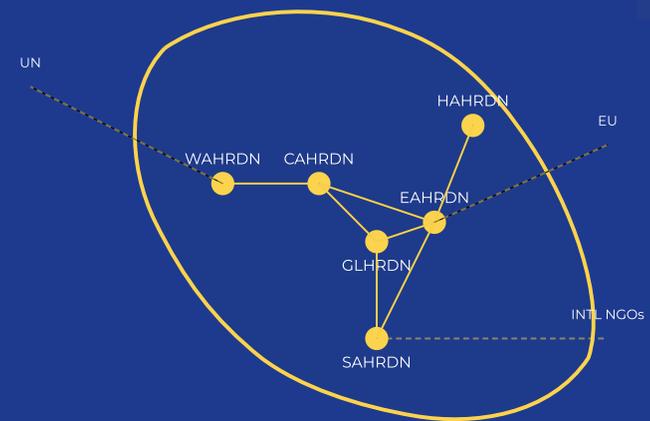
Key Partnership Models

- UN-WHRD Engagement Mechanisms**
67% of Sub-Saharan WHRDs report improved protection after engaging with UN Special Rapporteurs and Treaty Bodies
- Regional WHRD Networks**
21 cross-border WHRD networks operating across different linguistic regions (Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone)
- International Donor Partnerships**
Collective funding mechanisms have increased WHRD resources by 35% since 2020, with multi-country initiatives receiving priority

Challenges in Cross-Border Collaboration

- Language barriers
- Visa restrictions
- Digital surveillance
- Resource inequalities

Cross-Border WHRD Networks in Sub-Saharan Africa



Cross-Border Impact Metrics

Emergency Response

78%

Faster emergency response and protection for WHRDs under immediate threat due to rapid cross-border mobilization systems

Policy Influence

62%

Increased policy impact when WHRDs collaborate across borders on regional advocacy initiatives

Case Study: Great Lakes Regional Initiative

A partnership of WHRDs across Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, DRC, and Tanzania implemented cross-border protection mechanisms that successfully:

- Relocated 42 defenders at high risk within partner countries
- Secured temporary refuge for families of 17 imprisoned WHRDs
- Established encrypted communication channels during internet shutdowns
- Mobilized international pressure that led to the release of 8 detained WHRDs

Future Partnership Strategies

Digital Security Collectives

Shared Legal Defense

Resource Pooling

Cross-Regional Learning

Digital Space Threats and Instability

The rise of digital technologies has opened new spaces for democratic debate in Sub-Saharan Africa, but has also generated new forms of repression.

4. Growth of threats and instability in the digital civic space

Digital activism grew exponentially during the pandemic, demonstrating its potential to empower a new generation of activists.

- Nearly three-quarters of youth in Africa believe social media can change narratives
- Connecting civic spaces from local to global levels
- Massive mobilization of social movements
- Creation of more inclusive civic spaces

RFLD Response Strategy

Our organization implements a comprehensive digital security training program for journalists, activists, and human rights defenders throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

Digital Security Training  85%

#DigitalRights

#CyberSecurity

#DigitalActivism

Main Threats in the Digital Space



Restrictive Laws

Legislation allowing the interception of communications, censorship and imposing high costs for digital platforms



Internet Shutdowns

19 internet shutdowns in 12 Sub-Saharan African countries in 2021, particularly during elections



Digital Attacks

Account hacking, targeted attacks against journalists and CSOs, exploitation of personal data



Risks for Women Journalists

Increased risks of online harassment as a means of silencing women's voices

In 2021, more internet users than ever were arrested for non-violent political, social, or religious speech



Growing threats



Need for protection



Community response

Spread of Disinformation and Hate Speech

The spread of disinformation and hate speech by state media, the censorship of private media, and the increasing use of 'bots' and 'trolls' on social networks significantly impact public discourse, distort accountability mechanisms, and discredit non-state narratives.

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, RFLD Grants Manager

Media polarization is now one of the biggest obstacles to peace and security in Africa, particularly in conflict-affected regions:

- V-Dem has measured an increase in polarization over the past decade
- Clear links exist between political polarization and democratic regression
- Citizens in highly polarized contexts are more likely to abandon democratic principles
- Hate speech disproportionately targets women and marginalized communities

#Disinformation

#HateSpeech

#MediaFreedom

#DigitalRights

27x

More online harassment for women vs. men

-13

Places lost by Ethiopia in press freedom rankings

62%

Of Africans report having seen false information online

+45%

Increase in hate speech during election periods

Impact of Polarization



Increase in Political Polarization in Sub-Saharan Africa

Source: V-Dem Indices (2023)

Disinformation Mechanisms



State Media

Government Narrative Control



Private Censorship

Reduction of Alternative Voices



Bots & Trolls

Artificial Amplification



Algorithms

Creation of Echo Chambers

Regional Case Studies

Mali

Social media campaigns undermining the legitimacy of the transitional government

45% increase in polarized content

Ethiopia

Media polarization intensified ethnic tensions in the Tigray conflict

78% of news articles showed political bias

Burkina Faso

Military coup supported by coordinated social media campaigns

32% of trending hashtags came from bot networks

Senegal

Electoral interference through targeted disinformation campaigns

63% increase in false information during elections

Case Study: Media and Polarization in the Tigray Conflict

The Media Crisis in Ethiopia

Press freedom has been significantly affected by the conflict in the Tigray region. Media has become deeply divided along ethnic lines, severely compromising objective reporting and exacerbating tensions.

Ethiopia has dropped 13 places in just one year in the global press freedom ranking due to this media polarization.

Impact on Peace and Security

Media polarization has become one of the biggest obstacles to peace and security in Africa, particularly in conflict-affected regions.

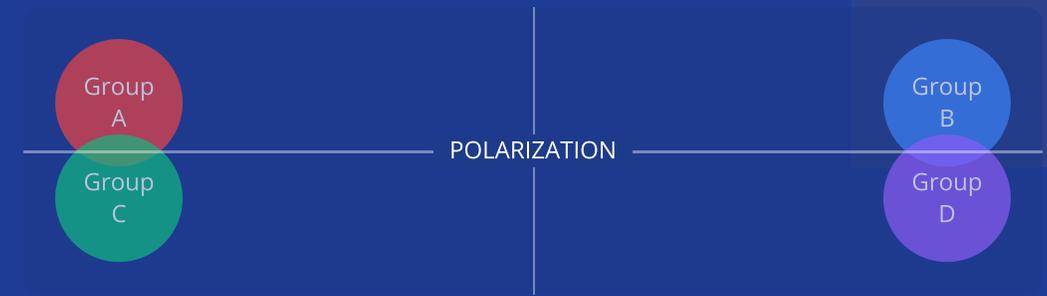
- Information fragmentation along ethnic lines
- Restricted access to independent media
- Government censorship and journalist self-censorship
- Arbitrary arrests of media professionals

RFLD's Response

Our organization works to counter this polarization through:

- Supporting independent journalism training
- Developing media literacy programs in communities
- Advocating for legal protection of journalists

Algorithms and Digital Polarization



Algorithms contribute to creating echo chambers by filtering and targeting content based on digital behaviors, thus reinforcing polarized debates.

Consequences for Media



Radicalization of Public Discourse

Amplification of extremes, hate speech



Social Fragmentation

Absence of common ground for dialogue



Democratic Regression

V-Dem indicates increasing polarization over 10 years

Impact on Media Freedom in East Africa

-42%

Decline in press freedom in Ethiopia

78%

Increase in media polarization

116

Journalists detained (2022-2024)

CHALLENGES AND RESISTANCE

New Challenges for Francophone Feminist Movements

Feminist movements in Francophone Africa continue to face increasing political instability, the rise of anti-rights and anti-gender ideologies, and the severe effects of climate change, all with limited financial support.

[#FrancophoneFeministMovements](#)

[#FundingEquity](#)

[#FeministResistance](#)

Funding Access Barriers for Francophone Organizations

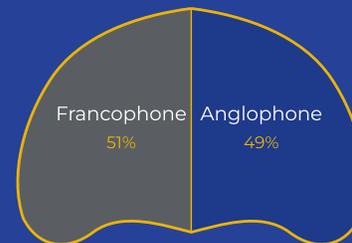
"More than half of African countries are francophone, but funding, movement organization, and advocacy spaces remain centered around English. This language barrier leaves francophone feminist movements structurally underfunded."

— **Women Leaders Network for Development**

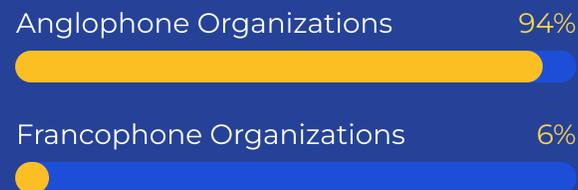
Consequences of underfunding francophone movements:

- Limited capacity to develop programs adapted to local contexts
- Difficulty maintaining sustainable operations and planning for the long term
- Reduced access to international advocacy spaces
- Lack of resources for documentation and research
- Dependence on international donors without core funding

Linguistic Disparity in Africa



Funding Distribution by Language



Structural Barriers



Documentation
Primarily in English



Networks
English-dominated



Funding
Biased eligibility criteria



Advocacy
International forums in English



Exclusion of Francophone Feminist Movements

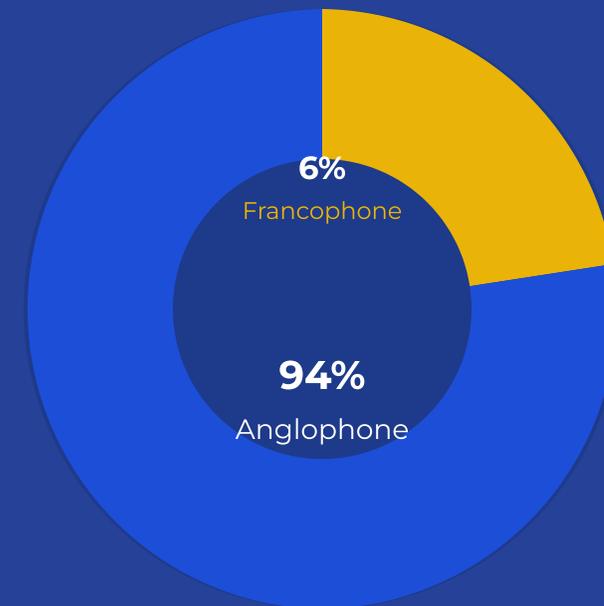
Of the 2,450 NGOs funded by Ms. MacKenzie Scott's Yield Giving initiative, more than 94% were Anglophone! This significant imbalance reveals a deeply rooted structural disparity in the funding of feminist movements in Africa.

— RFLD Study, 2024

This systemic exclusion of Francophone organizations has serious consequences:

- Marginalization of Francophone feminist voices
- Limited impact of Francophone local initiatives
- Reduction in the diversity of approaches and perspectives
- Reinforcement of existing structural inequalities
- Underrepresentation in international forums

Yield Giving Funding Distribution



2450

Total organizations funded



< 0.003%

Global funding reaching women-led CSOs

Critical Consequence

This imbalance marginalizes Francophone organizations, forcing them to operate with limited resources, unable to plan long-term or develop programs tailored to the specific needs of their communities.

Barriers to Organization and Advocacy

"The spaces for organization and advocacy are designed for English speakers, creating a structural disadvantage for Francophone feminist movements. This systemic exclusion perpetuates the power imbalance in the region."

— **Advocacy Officer, RFLD Benin**

Francophone feminist organizations face multiple obstacles in accessing regional and international advocacy spaces:

- Predominance of English in international forums
- Documentation and resources rarely translated into French
- Prohibitive translation costs for small organizations
- Less developed support networks for Francophone actors
- Structural isolation of Francophone feminist movements

Language Barriers in Advocacy Spaces



Impact of Language Barriers



Anglophone Organizations

Direct access to opportunities
Established international networks
Facilitated communication
Institutional recognition



Francophone Organizations

Costly translation needs
Exclusion from global networks
Extended communication delays
Institutional underrepresentation

Funding Challenges: Statistical Examples

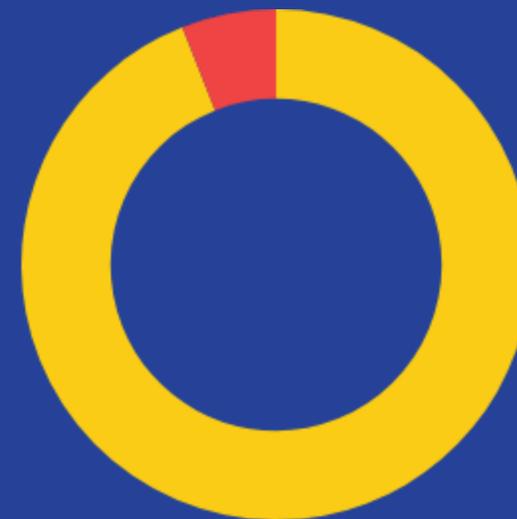
Data collected by our research team reveals an alarming structural imbalance: out of 2450 NGOs that received unrestricted funding from major philanthropic initiatives, more than **94% were anglophone organizations**.

This disparity highlights a systemic problem in funding feminist movements in Africa, where language barriers perpetuate inequalities in access to resources.

Impact of this disparity

- Limited project scope and sustainability
- Inability to plan long-term strategies
- Mismatch between community needs and available resources
- Excessive dependence on one-time funding
- Vulnerability to changes in donor priorities

Funding Distribution for Feminist Organizations in Africa



Regional Funding Distribution in Africa



Linguistic Distribution



Impact of Resource Scarcity

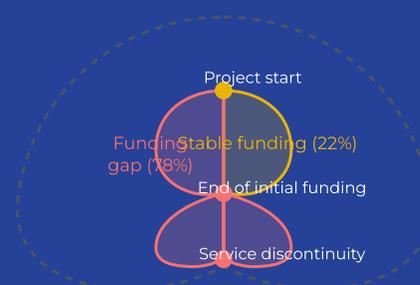
"The lack of funding for Francophone feminist organizations leads to the exclusion of local initiatives, while Anglophone movements often benefit from unrestricted funding and more substantial organizational support."

— Report on Funding Disparities

Consequences of limited resources:

- Inability to plan long-term and develop sustainable programs
- Impossibility to adequately respond to specific community needs
- Difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff
- Fragmented and discontinuous programs
- Vulnerability to changes in donor priorities

Precarious Funding Cycle



Impact on Service Delivery

Organization with adequate funding 85%



Francophone feminist organization 32%



Resource Allocation Challenges



Emergency
Projects
68%



Development
24%



Planning
8%



The Maputo Protocol: Landmarks and Dynamics

The Maputo Protocol, officially known as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, represents a major advancement in the pursuit of gender equality and women's rights on the African continent.

— Adopted in 2003, entered into force in 2005

Ratification status:

- **46 States** have ratified the Protocol, demonstrating a continental commitment
- **2 States** (Egypt, Morocco) have not signed the protocol
- **3 States** (Burundi, Chad, Sudan) have signed but not yet ratified

Key points of the Protocol:

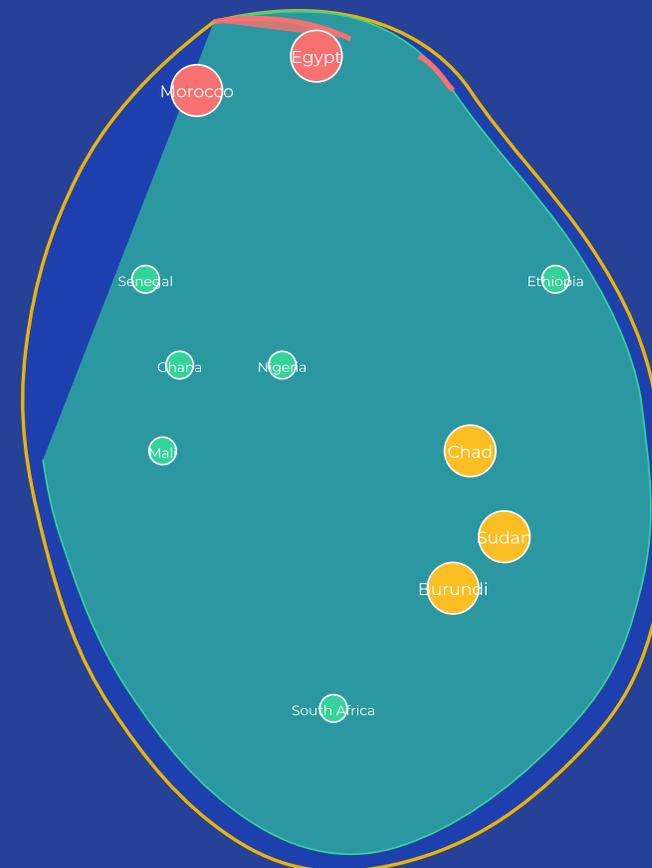
 Equality and non-discrimination

 Dignity and integrity

 Reproductive health

 Economic and social rights

Maputo Protocol Ratification Status in Africa



Legend

 Ratified (46)  Not signed (2)  Not ratified (3)

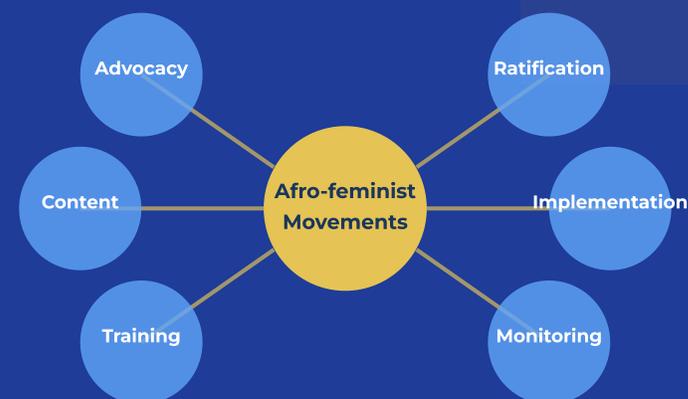
Protocol Impact:

The Maputo Protocol represents a major victory for Afro-feminist movements and provides a solid legal framework for defending the rights of African women. Its widespread ratification demonstrates a continental consensus on the importance of gender equality.

"The Maputo Protocol is the result of Afro-feminist activism: strategic mobilization, resilience, and constant advocacy to include intersectionality and the diversity of African contexts."

— Coalition of African Feminist Movements

Impact Areas of Afro-feminist Movements



Pillars of Afro-feminist Action



Mobilization

Strategic and inclusive



Advocacy

Based on human rights



Resilience

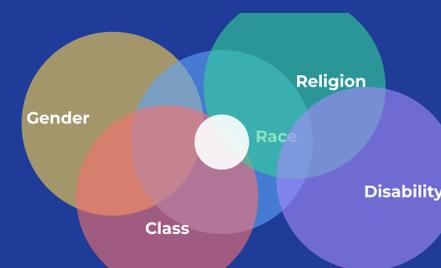
In the face of resistance



Intersectionality

Diversity of African experiences

Afro-feminist Intersectional Approach



80% Consultation of marginalized groups

Active participation of rural women, women with disabilities, and those from ethnic minorities

12+ Specific rights added

Protection against genital mutilation, reproductive rights, economic rights, etc.

350+ Organizations mobilized

Continental network of feminist groups for advocacy and monitoring

46 States committed

Direct result of persistent advocacy from afro-feminist movements

Evolution of the Maputo Protocol

1995

Beijing
African feminist mobilization

1999

Advocacy
Beginning of consultations

2003

Adoption
Maputo Protocol

2005

Entry
Into force

2025

46 States
Current ratifications

Intersectional Analysis and Advocacy Strategies

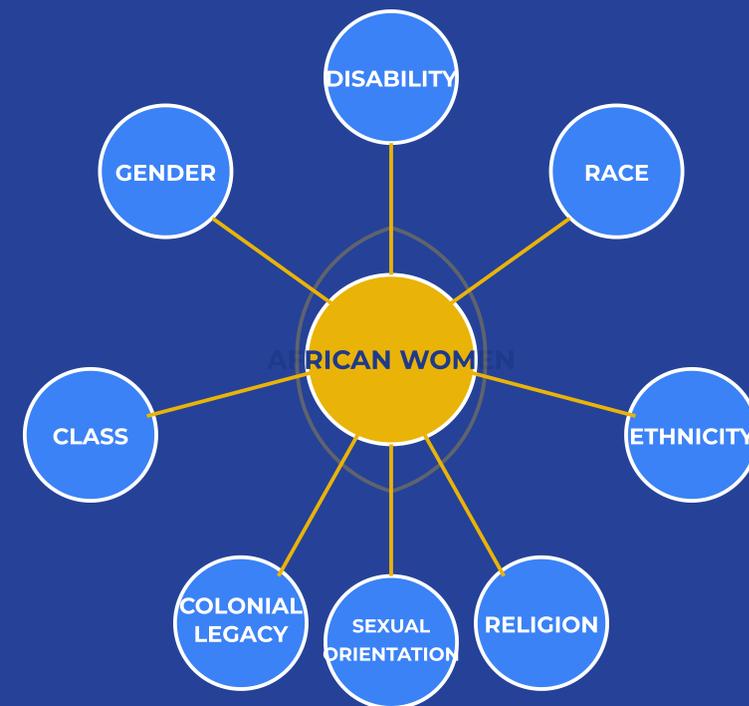
"The Afro-feminist approach recognizes that African women's experiences are shaped by multiple intersecting forms of oppression. Gender inequality cannot be separated from race, class, ethnicity, and colonial legacies."

— Afro-Feminist Movement

Advocacy strategies of Afro-feminist movements:

-  **Community Mobilization**
Engaging local communities and traditional leaders to transform social norms
-  **Legal Advocacy**
Challenging discriminatory laws and promoting gender-sensitive legislative reforms
-  **Media Campaigns**
Using various communication channels to raise awareness and mobilize public support
-  **Strategic Alliances**
Collaborating with other social movements to amplify impact and share resources
-  **Documentation and Research**
Producing evidence-based data to inform policies and practices

The Intersectional Prism of Afro-feminism



Impact of the Intersectional Approach

Inclusive Policies

Equitable Justice

Diverse Voices

Monitoring, Implementation and State Accountability

"Implementation of the Maputo Protocol requires both national obligations and regional judicial remedies. States must integrate the provisions into their national legal systems and participate in collective monitoring mechanisms."

— African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Obligations of Signatory States:

- Integration of provisions into national laws
- Development of policies for the implementation of rights
- Establishment or strengthening of national human rights institutions
- Submission of biennial implementation reports
- Provision of legal remedies to victims of violations

Regional Supervision Mechanisms:

- African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
- African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
- Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa
- Regional economic communities mechanisms

Supervision Mechanisms Framework



Accountability Process

National Level

PRIMARY PRIORITY



Integration into national laws
National courts, ombudspersons, human rights institutions

Regional Level

COMPLEMENTARY RECOURSE



African Commission & Court
Report reviews, state visits, individual communications

Action Sources



Individual complaints



NGOs and States

Challenges in Regional Implementation of the Maputo Protocol

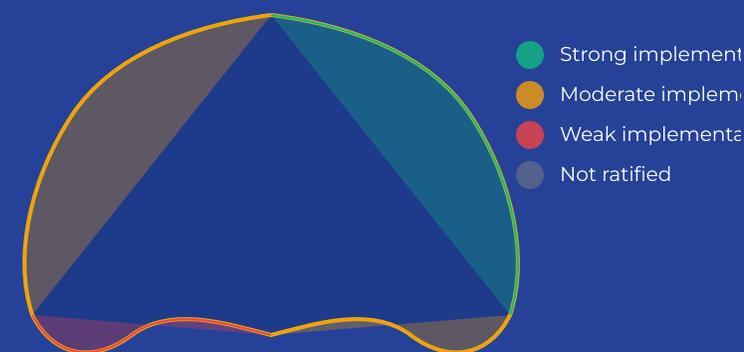
"Despite ratification by 46 African states, the implementation of the Maputo Protocol remains uneven and faces numerous structural, political and social challenges."

— African Commission on Human Rights

Main obstacles to effective implementation:

- **Partial ratification:** Several countries have expressed reservations about certain key provisions, particularly on reproductive rights
- **Unequal capacities:** Significant disparities between states in resources available for implementation
- **Low awareness:** Lack of knowledge about the Protocol among populations and even some judicial institutions
- **Contradictory legal frameworks:** National laws incompatible with Protocol provisions
- **Sociocultural resistance:** Traditional norms and religious interpretations limiting implementation

Implementation Levels of the Maputo Protocol



Solutions Promoted by Feminist Movements



Awareness

Community education



Legal advocacy

National law reform



Regional alliances

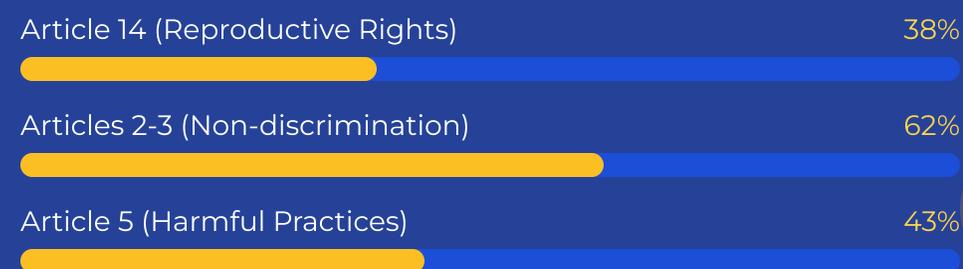
Network strengthening



Monitoring & Documentation

Compliance reports

Global Implementation Progress



DIGITAL THREATS

Digital Threats and Online Exploitation

Examining the evolving landscape of online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA) and its impact on women and girls across Sub-Saharan Africa

#DigitalSafety

#OnlineProtection

#CyberJustice

DIGITAL THREATS

Digital Age Paradox: Opportunity and Threat

In an interconnected world, the digital age provides vital platforms for feminist organizing and advocacy, but has also enabled sophisticated forms of violence targeting women human rights defenders in Sub-Saharan Africa

#DigitalRights

#OnlineSafety

#FeministSecurity

Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSEA): Weaponization of Digital Spaces

"OSEA targeting feminists and WHRDs is not random harassment; it's a calculated strategy to silence, discredit, and punish women who challenge power structures and patriarchal norms."

— RFLD Digital Rights Report

Key characteristics of strategic OSEA attacks:

- Deliberately targets women in public advocacy and leadership roles
- Seeks to inflict maximum psychological and reputational damage
- Often coordinated and simultaneously amplified by multiple actors
- Directly linked to offline intimidation and physical threats
- Intensifies when women challenge powerful political or social interests
- Creates a chilling effect to discourage other women's public participation

Strategic Targeting Process



Strategic Goals of OSEA Attacks



Common Weaponization Tactics



Scale and Manifestations of OSEA in Sub-Saharan Africa

"58% of girls surveyed in Benin experience online harassment and abuse, with specific targeting cases and ineffective reporting tools."

— Plan International, 2020

Key findings on online violence targeting women:

- 58% of African women parliamentarians faced online attacks directly impacting their political participation (IPU, 2021)
- State-sponsored online abuse frequently targets women journalists and activists (UNESCO, 2021)
- Low reporting rates for OSEA due to stigmatization and lack of accessible reporting mechanisms
- One in three women has experienced online gender-based violence, often explicitly linked to their advocacy work (Pollicy, 2020)
- Widespread documentation of sexual harassment, doxing, NCII sharing, and cyberstalking targeting women activists (Internet Without Borders, 2019)

Common Types of Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse



Non-Consensual Intimate Images (NCII)

Distribution of private images without consent to humiliate and destroy reputations



AI Deepfakes

Creation of manipulated sexual content using AI to discredit feminists and activists



Doxing

Publication of private information to facilitate offline harassment and violence



Cyberstalking

Relentless online pursuit creating a hostile digital environment to silence activists

OSEA Impact by Target Group



Systemic Foundations and Patriarchal Structures

"Online violence against feminists and women's rights defenders is not random—it reflects patriarchal systems rooted offline, amplified by digital tools and exacerbated by colonial legacies and economic inequalities."

— Afrofeminist Analysis

Key systemic factors amplifying online violence:

- **Cultural taboos:** Social stigma around gender and sexuality increases vulnerability to exploitation and blackmail
- **Colonial-era laws:** Obsolete legal frameworks criminalize victims rather than perpetrators
- **Digital inequality:** Limited access to secure devices and digital literacy increases risk of exploitation
- **State surveillance:** Government surveillance tools disproportionately target women activists
- **Impunity:** Weak law enforcement creates environments where digital predators operate without consequences

Offline-Online Patriarchal Continuum



Colonial Legacies in Digital Spaces

Language Barriers

Content moderation rarely available in African languages

Legal Frameworks

Colonial-era moral laws used against victims

Digital Infrastructure

Unequal distribution of secure internet access

Power Dynamics

Neglect of African contexts by technology platforms

The Gender Digital Divide Amplifies Risk



Statistical Evidence: Regional Data

"The alarming scale of online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA) targeting feminists and women human rights defenders across Sub-Saharan Africa is unquestionably supported by recent data and expert analysis."

— RFLD Research Unit, 2025

Key Research Findings:

Plan International (2020):

A survey of 14,000 girls in 22 countries, including Benin, revealed that 58% experienced online harassment or abuse, with specific targeting cases in Benin.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021):

58% of African women parliamentarians faced online attacks, directly impacting their political participation.

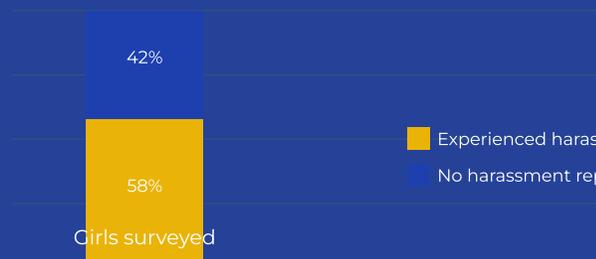
UNESCO Report (2023):

States struggle to effectively respond to online harms, with behaviors frequently sponsored or amplified by state-linked actors.

UN Women & UNFPA:

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is systemic and restricts women's rights to expression and safe digital engagement.

Plan International Study: Girls Facing Online Harassment



IPU Study: African Women Parliamentarians



Types of Reported Online Violence



Legal Frameworks and Implementation Challenges

"Despite the adoption by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) of Resolution 522 (LXXII) 2022 on the Protection of Women Against Digital Violence in Africa, its implementation remains severely underutilized across the continent."

— CIPESA, April 2025

Key implementation challenges:

- Lack of national legislation aligned with regional frameworks
- Limited expertise and resources for digital investigation
- Insufficient training of law enforcement on gender issues
- Vague legal definitions of online offenses
- Trivialization of online violence by authorities
- Cross-border nature complicating prosecutions

Gaps in Legal Protection



Enforcement Readiness in Sub-Saharan Africa



Critical Challenges



Malabo Convention
Inadequate on gender issues



Cybercrime Laws
Often used against WHRDs



Cross-Border Issues
Jurisdictional challenges



Victim Support
Severely limited resources



Digital Gender Divide and RFLD's Strategic Role

"Women in Sub-Saharan Africa have more limited access to affordable internet, lower digital literacy, and fewer secure devices, which significantly increases their vulnerability to online exploitation and abuse."

— **Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI)**

How the digital gender divide impacts vulnerability:

- Limited access to online security resources and reporting mechanisms
- Low digital literacy increasing vulnerability to sophisticated scams
- Economic constraints forcing the use of shared or public devices, compromising privacy
- High data costs limiting ability to update security features and patches
- Restricted access to online support communities and information

Gender Digital Divide in Sub-Saharan Africa



RFLD's Strategic Position in Advocacy

Observer Status with ACHPR
Provides direct access to Commission proceedings

Member of Special Rapporteur Working Group
On Human Rights Defenders and Reprisals in Africa

Strategic Regional Presence
Offices in Benin, Ghana, Togo and Gambia

RFLD's Digital Protection Activities

Digital Security Training

Shadow Reports to ACHPR

Digital Crisis Response

Policy Advocacy



OSEA Manifestations: From NCII to Deepfakes

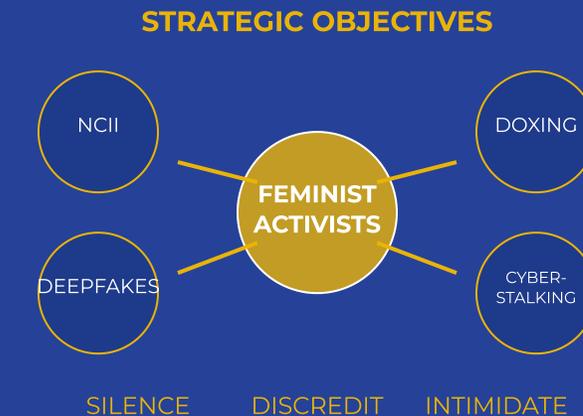
"OSEA is not simply a collection of individual harmful acts, but a calculated strategy to undermine feminist agency, stifle dissent, and roll back progress on gender equality."

— RFLD Digital Rights Report

Key manifestations targeting feminists and WHRDs:

- **Non-Consensual Intimate Images (NCII):** Distribution of private images to humiliate, shame, and destroy the reputation of feminist activists
- **Deepfake Abuse:** Hyperrealistic AI-generated manipulated images/videos depicting feminists in compromising situations that never occurred
- **Doxing:** Publication of personal information (addresses, family details) to incite offline harassment and physical violence
- **Online Manipulation & Sextortion:** Cultivating relationships under false pretenses to gather sensitive information for coercive purposes
- **Cyberstalking & Harassment:** Relentless pursuit and surveillance aimed at creating hostile digital environments

OSEA Strategic Targeting Framework



Impact Severity by OSEA Type



Afrofeminist Analysis and Multilevel Impacts of OSEA

"Afrofeminism recognizes that African women's experiences are shaped by intersecting oppressions rooted in gender, race, class, colonialism, traditional norms, and often political instability. These realities are reflected and amplified in the digital space."

— RFLD Research Note, 2025

Multilevel impacts of OSEA:

- **Individual:** Severe anxiety, depression, PTSD, reputation damage, career destruction, threats to physical safety
- **Movement:** Internal distrust, diversion of resources to crisis management, discouragement of new activists (especially young women)
- **Democratic:** Widening of the gender digital divide, undermining freedom of expression, normalization of violence, shrinking of civic space

Afrofeminist Perspective: Unique Vulnerabilities



Systemic Failures Amplifying OSEA Impact



Impact Cascade

- **Immediate:** Psychological trauma, withdrawal from digital spaces
- **Medium-term:** Silencing of feminist voices, self-censorship
- **Long-term:** Democratic erosion, regression of gender equality advances

A Comprehensive Afrofeminist Response

"The fight against Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSEA) targeting feminists and human rights defenders in Sub-Saharan Africa requires a multidimensional and intersectional approach, grounded in human rights principles and survivor empowerment."

— RFLD Policy Brief, 2025

Response Framework Pillars

Legal and Policy Reform

Adopt comprehensive laws criminalizing all forms of OSEA with clear definitions, gender-sensitive enforcement and accessible reporting mechanisms.

Platform Accountability

Technology platforms must invest in Africa-based content moderation, transparent algorithms, and user-centered safety features tailored to the African context.

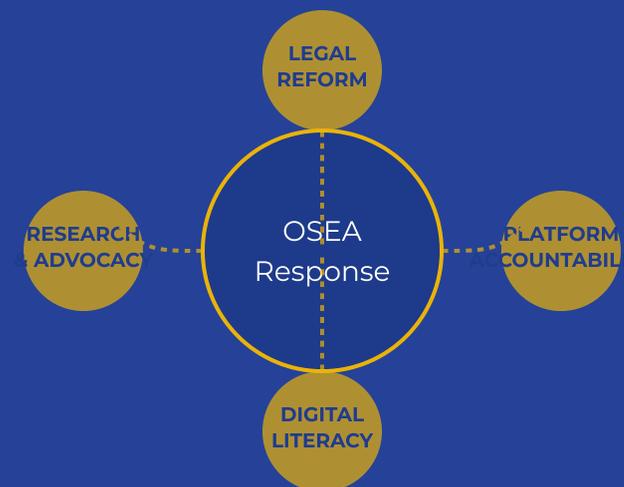
Digital Literacy & Empowerment

Widespread digital security training, accessible resources for survivors, and counter-narratives challenging online violence norms.

Research & Advocacy

Invest in African-led research and robust data collection on OSEA, fostering stronger pan-African feminist networks for digital justice.

Afrofeminist Digital Justice Framework



Implementation Priority Areas



SGBV and Human Trafficking in Sub-Saharan Africa

"The fight against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and Human Trafficking (HT) in Sub-Saharan Africa represents one of the most profound human rights challenges of our time, affecting millions of people each year."

— RFLD Human Rights Report, 2025

Key Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa:

- Nearly 1 in 3 women experience sexual or intimate partner violence during their lifetime
- SGBV costs up to 3.7% of GDP in some countries, diverting resources from vital services
- Children represent 40% of all identified trafficking victims worldwide
- West and Central Africa have the highest rate of child marriage globally (4 out of 10 girls)
- Humanitarian crises and displacement further exacerbate risks for women and girls

Systemic Obstacles to Protection

Despite AU frameworks like the Maputo Protocol, francophone feminist movements face significant challenges in fighting SGBV:

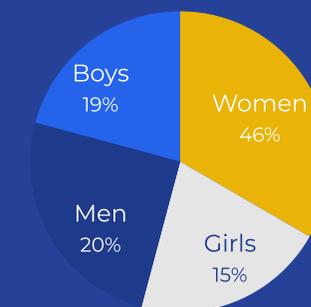
- Weak political will and implementation of ratified protocols
- Severe underfunding of gender equality initiatives
- Deeply rooted patriarchal resistance to change
- Limited enforcement mechanisms within national judicial systems

Prevalence of Child Marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa



Child Marriage Rates (% of girls married before age 18)

Human Trafficking Victims by Demographic Data (Global)



Economic Impact of SGBV

3.7%

of GDP lost

Due to violence against women in some African countries

Health
Costs

Reduced
Productivity

Legal
Expenses

AU Instruments Utilization and Vision for Digital Justice

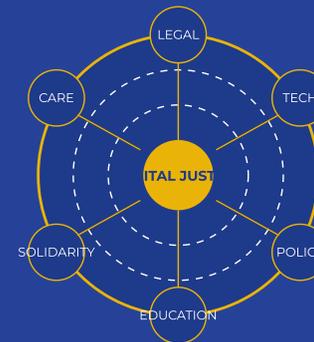
"Francophone feminist movements strategically use African Union human rights instruments to advocate for digital justice and hold governments accountable for protecting women against online violence."

— **Women Leaders Network for Development**

Key AU instruments used:

- **Maputo Protocol (2003):** Articles on dignity and protection against violence adapted to digital contexts
- **ACHPR Resolution 522 (2022):** Specific provisions on protecting women against digital violence
- **AU Convention on Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls (2025):** Includes provisions on cyberviolence
- **African Charter on Democracy:** Used to advocate for inclusive digital governance

Afrofeminist Vision for Digital Justice



Implementation Pathways



Legal Reform
Criminalization of OSEA



Tech Accountability
African moderation teams



Digital Literacy
Contextual security training



Support Networks
Pan-African feminist solidarity



Prevention Strategies and Response Mechanisms

"An effective response to OSEA and SGBV requires a comprehensive approach that addresses prevention, protection, and accountability while centering survivor autonomy and adopting an intersectional perspective."

— RFLD Strategic Framework

Key prevention strategies:

- Digital literacy programs adapted to various age groups and contexts
- Community awareness campaigns in local languages
- Engagement of traditional and religious leaders as agents of change
- Programs promoting positive masculinities and challenging harmful norms
- Training media on ethical reporting of SGBV and online violence

Response mechanisms:

- Specialized digital forensics units within law enforcement
- Trauma-informed psychosocial support for survivors
- Legal aid services with expertise in cyber law and gender justice
- Rapid content takedown protocols with technology platforms
- Safe houses and shelters with digital security resources

Comprehensive Response Framework



Key Implementation Pillars



Legal Reform

Comprehensive criminalization of OSEA and SGBV laws aligned with AU frameworks



Capacity Building

Training of law enforcement, judicial system, and service providers



Support Services

Integrated survivor support including psychosocial, legal, and security aspects



Multi-stakeholder

Collaboration between CSOs, technology platforms, governments, and communities

RFLD Impact 2024-2025



Digital Transformation and Women's Empowerment Against OSEA

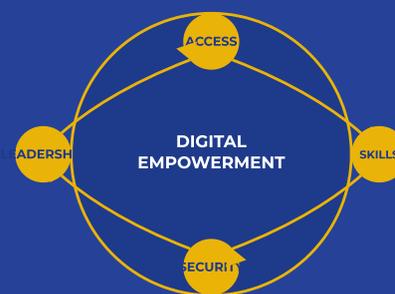
"Technology must be reclaimed as a tool for liberation rather than oppression. By building feminist digital infrastructures and equipping women with digital skills, we transform victims into agents of change."

— RFLD Digital Justice Initiative

Key digital transformation initiatives:

- Creation of secure digital platforms by and for WHRDs to document and report OSEA
- Development of customized digital security training programs in local languages
- Establishment of rapid response networks for content removal and crisis support
- Community digital literacy programs targeting rural and marginalized women
- Feminist technology collectives building safer alternative digital spaces

Women's Digital Empowerment Cycle



Impact of Women-Led Digital Initiatives

Digital Security Knowledge Improvement +78%



Content Removal Success Rate +65%



WHRDs Continuing Online Activism +82%



 **Technology Collectives**
21 established since 2023

 **Digital Defense**
Over 3,200 WHRDs trained



Conclusion: Vision for Digital and Gender Justice

"The fight against Online Sexual Exploitation and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa is a crucial front in the broader struggle for human rights, gender equality, and democratic integrity."

— RFLD Vision Statement 2025

Future Perspectives:

- Fundamental reassessment of how technology is developed, regulated, and used
- Pan-African feminist networks collectively advocating for digital justice
- Integration of Afrofeminist principles into national digital policies
- Strengthening the capacity of judicial systems to address OSEA and SGBV
- Complete ratification and implementation of the Maputo Protocol and the AU Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls

Key Recommendations for Action



Legal and Policy Reform

Adopt comprehensive laws criminalizing all forms of OSEA with gender-sensitive enforcement mechanisms



Tech Platform Accountability

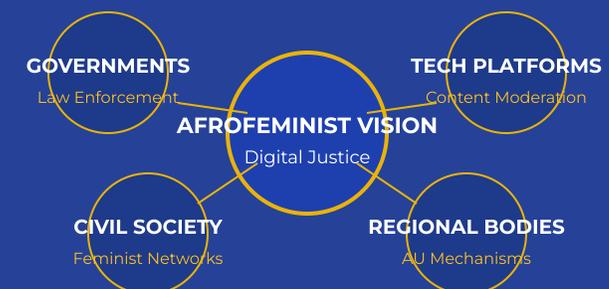
Require content moderation teams located in Africa with expertise in African languages and contexts



Survivor-Centered Support

Establish comprehensive services including legal aid, psychological support, and digital security resources

Multi-Stakeholder Implementation Framework



Disproportionate Discrimination Against Marginalized Groups

Factors leading to social exclusion are rooted in power relationships. According to the World Bank, identity (gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability) is the key factor in social exclusion.

Despite decades of global commitments to eliminate discrimination against women, they continue to face disproportionate discrimination:

- 286 years to close gender gaps in legal protection
- 140 years to achieve equal representation in positions of power
- 47 years to achieve equal representation in national parliaments

RFLD Perspective

Achieving gender equality requires addressing structural barriers and discriminatory social norms that perpetuate inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa. RFLD works to challenge these systems through advocacy, capacity building, and coalition-based approaches.

#GenderEquality

#HumanRights

#SocialJustice

RFLD Human Rights Report in Sub-Saharan Africa

Estimated Timeframes for Equality



Regional Context

Sub-Saharan Africa has made progress in some areas of gender equality, but structural barriers remain deeply rooted. The region has the highest rates of early marriage globally, with 35% of women married before age 18, limiting educational and economic opportunities.

Specific Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa



Patriarchy

Traditional exclusion from decision-making



Digital Divide

Limited access to technology



Political

Representation

Underrepresentation in governance



Media

Representation

Denigration and cyber-misogyny

RFLD Report October 2025

Persistence of Gender Inequalities in Sub-Saharan Africa

Despite decades of global commitments aimed at eliminating discrimination against women, women continue to experience disproportionate discrimination and violence, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, RFLD Grants Manager

At the current rate of progress, the estimated timeframes to achieve gender equality are alarming:

- **286 years** to close gender gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws
- **140 years** for equal representation of women in positions of power and leadership
- **47 years** to achieve equal representation in national parliaments

African women face specific challenges:

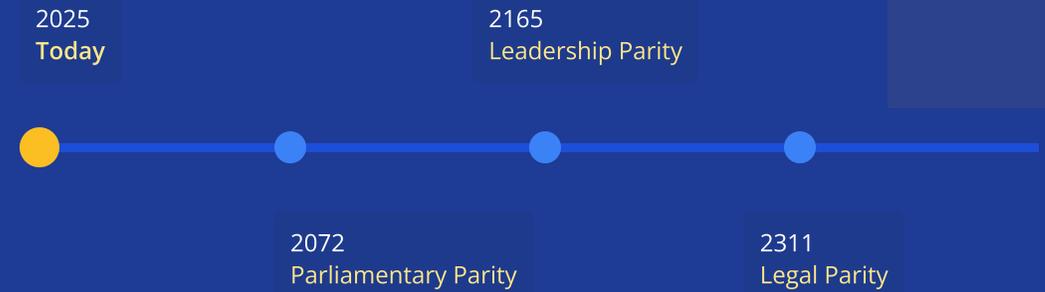
- Stereotypical representation in media
- Gender-based political defamation
- Racial discrimination and workplace sexism
- New forms of sexism through cyber-misogyny
- Career stagnation and wage inequalities
- Limited access to education in rural areas
- Restrictions on land ownership rights

#GenderEquality

#WomensRights

#FeministAction

Path to Gender Parity



Systemic Barriers in Sub-Saharan Africa



Patriarchal Norms
Discriminatory laws



Digital Divide
27× more harassment



Economic Inequality
Limited resources



Media Bias
Stereotypical representation



Resource Gaps for Grassroots CSOs and Media

The Funding Crisis

Progressive donors have begun exploring new funding strategies to support smaller and less formal groups working on the frontlines of human rights defense. However, these organizations still struggle to identify practical and innovative funding tools beyond the traditional development aid framework.

Critical Funding Challenges:

- In Sub-Saharan Africa, financial flows are insufficient and poorly distributed
- 99% of development aid does not directly reach women-led organizations
- Groups working on intersecting forms of marginalization are even less funded
- In shrinking civic spaces, funding becomes more difficult and dangerous
- Local organizations face strict donor compliance requirements
- Limited core funding affects organizational sustainability
- Small CSOs lack capacity for complex grant applications
- Donor priorities often don't match local needs

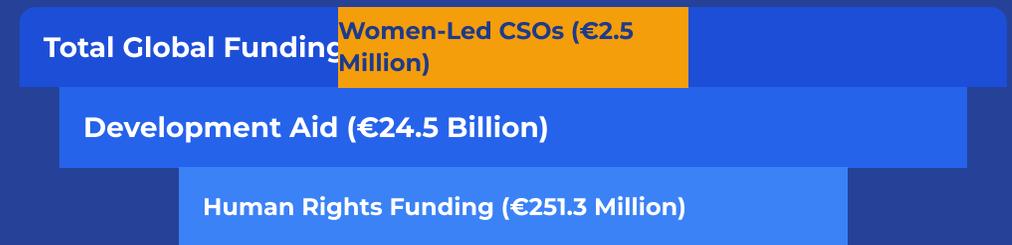
Funding Distribution by Region (% of Total Funding)



Funding by Linguistic Region



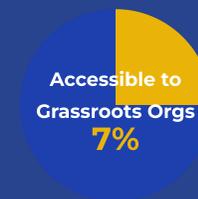
Global Funding Distribution Gap



RFLD research shows a massive funding funnel where only a fraction of global development funding reaches grassroots organizations.

Less than 0.003% of global funding reaches women-led CSOs in Sub-Saharan Africa

Funding Accessibility

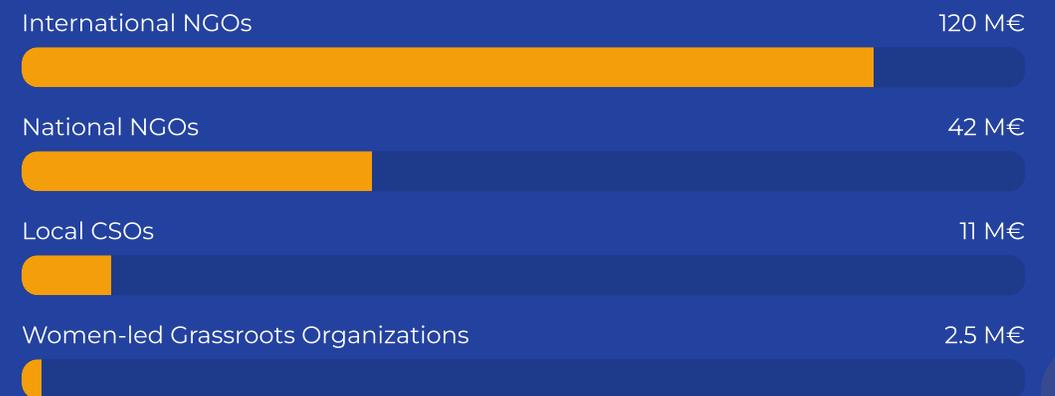


Core vs. Project Funding



Accessible Inaccessible Core Project

Funding Gap by Organization Type (in millions €)



⚠️ RFLD Call to Action:

URGENT

Donors must reform funding mechanisms to address funding inequalities for grassroots organizations and strengthen civil society resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Advocacy for Resource Redistribution

"Donors must actively participate in sharing the risks that activists take in their daily work, particularly in contexts where civic space is restricted."

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, RFLD Grants Manager

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women's rights organizations face constant threats. Donors can play a crucial role by adopting more inclusive and flexible funding strategies.

Recommendations for donors:

- ✔ Support networking and mutual exchange spaces between activists
- ✔ Fund personal and organizational security measures
- ✔ Raise international community awareness about WHRDs' work
- ✔ Relax eligibility criteria to reach the most marginalized groups
- ✔ Adopt long-term funding mechanisms rather than project-based funding

#ResourceJustice

#WomenFunding

#EquitableDonations

Distribution of Human Rights Funding



Distribution of Foundation Funds



Alarming Statistics

99%

of development aid and grants do not directly reach women-led organizations

6%

only of foundation funding is directed towards Sub-Saharan Africa (\$251.3 million)

Technological Growth and Inclusive Policy Frameworks

Despite the major challenges identified, significant progress has been made in Sub-Saharan Africa in the areas of technological development, communications, education, and environmental awareness.



Evolution of Digital Media

The African media landscape has profoundly evolved with the rise of digital media and widespread use of smartphones for live tweeting, blogging, and citizen journalism.



Growth of Advocacy Journalism

Exponential growth of advocacy journalism with content creators and citizen journalists mobilized for democracy, good governance, and environmental protection.



Multi-stakeholder Solutions

Emergence of collaborative approaches between governments, private sector, civil society, and media to address common challenges facing the continent.

"Technology adoption and policy reform are creating new opportunities for democratic engagement across Africa."

— RFLD Regional Technology Report, 2024

#TechnologicalProgress

#InclusivePolicy

#DigitalAdvocacy

#AfricanVoices



African Union Policy Frameworks



Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression

Creates an enabling environment for media freedom and expression rights across the continent



African Platform on Access to Information

Promotes transparency and equitable access to information for all citizens



Windhoek+30 Declaration

Information as a public good and support for independent media

Multi-stakeholder Collaboration



Governments

Policy reform & regulation



Media

Voice diversity & journalism



Private Sector

Innovation & funding



Civil Society

Community action & advocacy

Impact of Digital Transformation

65%

Mobile Penetration

42%

Internet Access

18

Tech Hub Growth

Emerging Opportunities and Trends

Future Directions in Human Rights Advocacy

#DigitalRights

#YouthLeadership

#RegionalCooperation



Digital Advocacy Revolution

- Social media campaigns reaching 5x the impact of traditional media
- Collaborative evidence collection via secure applications
- Virtual forums instantly connecting advocates worldwide
- Blockchain verification of human rights violation reports



Youth Democratic Engagement

- Youth-led movements generating 60% of new rights initiatives
- Democratic innovation hubs in 24 African universities
- Intergenerational mentorship programs in 15 countries
- Digital literacy training reaching over 12,000 young activists



Regional Cooperation Initiatives

- Cross-border human rights monitoring networks
- Harmonized legal frameworks for rights protection
- Unified rapid response protocols in 5 regional blocs
- Knowledge exchange portals with over 300 organizations



Innovative Funding Mechanisms

- Participatory grant-making involving community decisions
- Direct funding to grassroots organizations increased by 45%
- Transparent blockchain-based donation tracking
- Social impact bonds for sustainable human rights projects
- Multilingual grant application platforms reducing barriers



Technology for Rights Monitoring

- Satellite imagery for early conflict detection
- Encrypted documentation apps with offline capabilities
- AI pattern recognition for systemic violations
- Remote sensing technologies monitoring environmental rights
- Open-source investigation tools accessible in 32 languages

Success Metrics 2024-2025

78%

Increase in digital campaign effectiveness

32

New regional partnerships formed

140%

Growth in youth-led initiatives



Strategic Objective 1: Advocacy for Women's and Girls' Rights

"Advocating for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health rights while ensuring meaningful representation in decision-making bodies. We work to dismantle systemic barriers and promote gender equality at all levels of society."

— Dossi Sekonnou Gloria, Executive Director of RFLD

Our advocacy for women's and girls' rights focuses on three fundamental pillars to advance gender equality across Sub-Saharan Africa:

- **Comprehensive SRHR access:** Promoting reproductive health services, maternal care, and family planning education
- **Political participation:** Increasing women's representation in governance structures and policy development
- **Gender-based violence prevention:** Creating safe environments through advocacy, education, and survivor support
- **Economic empowerment:** Removing barriers to financial inclusion, property rights, and entrepreneurship

#WomensRights

#GenderEquality

#SRHR

Progress of SRHR Initiatives



Gender Equality Programs

- Women's Leadership Initiative**
12 countries | +5,200 participants
- Girls' Education Program**
8 countries | +12,000 students
- Legal Rights Advocacy**
15 countries | 73 policies changed
- SRHR Access Initiative**
9 countries | 35 clinics supported

Impact Indicators 2025
62% increase in women's participation in local governance since 2023 **+62%**

Strategic Objective 2: Democratic Values & Civil Liberties

"Protect fundamental freedoms, particularly expression, assembly and association, while strengthening democratic institutions. Our advocacy ensures that human rights remain at the center of policy development and implementation."

— **Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU**, RFLD Grants Manager

In the face of democratic backsliding in Sub-Saharan Africa, this pillar aims to protect and expand civic space while strengthening citizen participation.

- Defense of freedom of expression and association
- Monitoring abuses and documenting violations
- Strengthening public accountability mechanisms
- Protection of human rights defenders

State of Civil Liberties in Sub-Saharan Africa



Priority Intervention Strategies



Legislative Advocacy
Reform of restrictive laws



Protection of Defenders
Early warning systems



Digital Security
Anti-censorship training



Electoral Observation
Democratic transparency

Strategic Objective 3: Economic & Climate Justice

"La justice climatique et la justice économique sont indissociables. Les femmes africaines sont en première ligne des crises climatiques tout en étant exclues des décisions économiques."

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, Responsable des Subventions au RFLD

Ce pilier stratégique aborde les défis intersectionnels de l'inégalité économique et du changement climatique, garantissant aux femmes un accès équitable aux ressources et un leadership dans l'action climatique.

- Promouvoir l'autonomisation économique des femmes et l'accès aux ressources
- Renforcer les capacités des femmes dans la prise de décision environnementale
- Soutenir les initiatives d'adaptation climatique dirigées par des femmes
- Plaider pour des politiques économiques sensibles au genre

Défis Majeurs



Rareté croissante de l'eau affectant les responsabilités quotidiennes des femmes



Accès limité au financement pour les entreprises vertes dirigées par des femmes

Impacts Disproportionnés du Changement Climatique



des personnes déplacées climatiques sont des femmes



de la main-d'œuvre agricole de subsistance



des propriétaires terriens sont des femmes

Initiatives de Justice Économique & Climatique



Agriculture Résiliente au Climat

Formation de 2 500 agricultrices aux pratiques adaptées au climat dans 12 communautés



Accès aux Énergies Renouvelables

Soutien aux initiatives solaires dirigées par des femmes fournissant de l'énergie à 35 communautés rurales



Inclusion Financière

Établissement de 18 groupes d'épargne pour femmes avec plus de 1 200 membres dans les régions cibles



Plaidoyer pour la Réforme Foncière

Campagne pour des droits fonciers équitables dans 3 pays avec 15 organisations partenaires

Indicateurs de Succès (2023-2024)

42%

d'augmentation de la propriété foncière des femmes dans les zones du projet

1 850+

femmes formées aux pratiques résilientes au climat

15

changements de politiques défendus avec succès

Strategic Objective 4: Participatory Governance & Media

"A free press and a dynamic civil society are the foundations of a healthy democracy. Our commitment is to strengthen these essential voices that allow citizens to be truly represented."

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, Grants Manager at RFLD

This strategic pillar aims to strengthen civil society capacity and media development to improve participatory governance, transparency, and active citizen engagement in democratic processes.

Investigative Journalism
Training in investigation skills, ethics, and security protocols

Protection of Journalists
Focus on women journalists facing increased risks

Freedom of Expression
Strengthening rights of access to information

Creation of Dialogue Spaces
Connecting media, civil society, and decision-makers

Long-Term Vision

Establish autonomous media networks that promote democratic values and human rights throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, with a particular focus on women's voices in media leadership positions.

#MediaFreedom

#CivicSpace

#Accountability

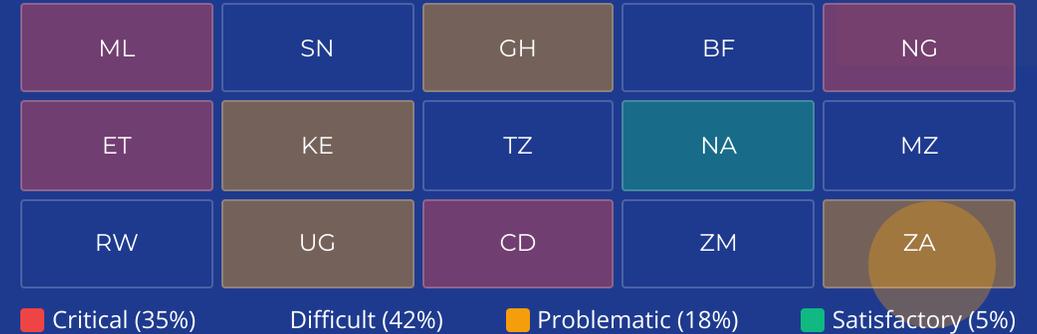
#Democracy



Human Rights Report in Sub-Saharan Africa

State of Media Freedom

Media Freedom Situation in Sub-Saharan Africa



Key Intervention Areas

Media Training
2,500+ journalists trained

Digital Media
15+ tech innovation hubs

Legal Support
230+ legal cases supported

Women in Media
40% increase in representation

2025-2028 Impact Targets

35%
Improvement in press freedom ranking

10,000+
Media professionals supported

24
Countries reached

RFLD Report October 2025

RFLD Strategic Plan 2 2023-2028

A transformative framework to strengthen civil liberties and promote democratic values in Sub-Saharan Africa in the face of contemporary challenges



Strategic Vision

RFLD envisions a Sub-Saharan Africa where women and marginalized communities have equal access to civil liberties and democratic freedoms, enabling them to fully participate in governance, economic development, and social justice initiatives.

- Grounded in feminist values and principles
- Rights-based approach to development
- Multi-stakeholder collaborative engagement

Key Objectives

- 1 Strengthen women's political participation and leadership in governance structures
- 2 Combat shrinking civic spaces and defend civil liberties across the region
- 3 Promote economic justice and climate resilience for marginalized communities
- 4 Promote media literacy and combat disinformation in digital spaces

2023

Foundation Phase

2025

Expansion Phase

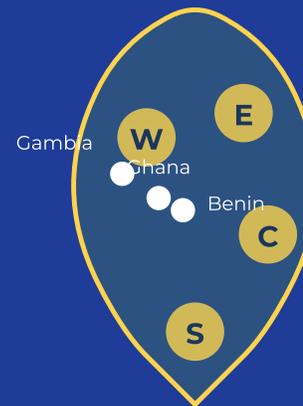
2028

Consolidation Phase

"RFLD's Strategic Plan 2 addresses increasingly sophisticated threats to human rights in Sub-Saharan Africa through adaptive and innovative approaches."

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, RFLD Grants Manager

Mapping Regional Challenges



W West Africa

Political instability, coups d'état, governance challenges

E East Africa

Ethnic conflicts, displacement, drought impacts

C Central Africa

Media restrictions, journalist persecution, armed conflicts

S Southern Africa

Economic inequalities, resource exploitation, climate impacts

Regional Context (2023-2028)



37%

Increase in restrictive laws since 2020



21

Countries with internet shutdowns



43%

Women facing rights setbacks



62%

Increase in attacks against CSOs

Democratic Space Trends (2015-2025)



Note: Lower values indicate poorer democratic conditions. The upward trend shows significant democratic erosion in Sub-Saharan Africa, which guides RFLD's strategic priorities.

Strategic Response Timeline

1

2023-2024
Assessment & Planning

2

2024-2026
Implementation & Growth

3

2026-2027
Expansion & Partnerships

4

2027-2028
Evaluation & Renewal

Strategic Plan 2 Objectives 2023-2028

"Our Strategic Plan 2023-2028 represents our commitment to strengthening the capacity of civil society actors across Sub-Saharan Africa to build more just and inclusive societies."

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, RFLD Grants Manager

RFLD's Strategic Plan 2 defines five priorities for transforming civic space in Sub-Saharan Africa:

- Capacity building for human rights defenders and civil society organizations
- Protection and expansion of digital and traditional civic spaces
- Promotion of legal and policy environments conducive to fundamental freedoms
- Strengthening protection mechanisms for women and youth activists
- Development of cross-sectoral coalitions for effective collective action

#StrategicPlan

#CivicSpace

#HumanRights



Women Human Rights Report in Sub-Saharan Africa

Strategic Framework 2023-2028



Measurable Objectives by 2028



250+ CSOs strengthened
Across 15 African countries



500+ defenders protected
Emergency mechanisms



20+ policy reforms
Supportive legislation



1000+ activists trained
Digital skills

RFLD Report October 2025

Strategic Plan 2 Intervention Strategies 2023-2028 - RFLD

"Our strategic approach integrates proven and innovative methods to create lasting impact in human rights advocacy across Sub-Saharan Africa."

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, RFLD Grants Manager

RFLD deploys holistic intervention methods to maximize impact and ensure sustainable systemic changes in the region.

- Capacity building for local CSOs and human rights defenders
- Multi-level advocacy: local, national, regional and international
- Evidence-based documentation and research to inform policies
- Strategic media engagement and use of digital technologies
- Resource mobilization and flexible funding for local initiatives
- Creating safe spaces for women's voices and participation
- Building networks between civil society organizations

Implementation Principles

- ✓ Feminist principles
- ✓ Sustainable approaches
- ✓ Inclusivity
- ✓ Locally-led solutions

Intervention Strategies Pyramid



Priority Action Methods 2023-2028



Expected Impact Results



Strategic Plan 2 Indicators and Monitoring 2023-2028 - RFLD

RFLD has developed a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the impact of its 2023-2028 Strategic Plan and ensure transparency and accountability to the communities served and partners.

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, RFLD Grants Manager

Monitoring Framework Principles

- Participatory approach including beneficiaries in design and evaluation
- Sensitivity to gender and intersectionality considerations
- Mixed methods combining quantitative and qualitative data
- Continuous learning and strategic adaptation
- Community-centered feedback mechanisms

Evaluation Mechanisms

- 📊 Quarterly performance indicator reviews
- 👤 Annual participatory evaluations with stakeholders
- 🔍 External mid-term (2025) and final (2028) evaluations
- 📄 Semi-annual impact assessment reports shared with stakeholders

Key Performance Indicators (2023-2028)

Capacity Building

300+ CSOs trained
35% completed

Legislative Advocacy

25 Reforms adopted
28% completed

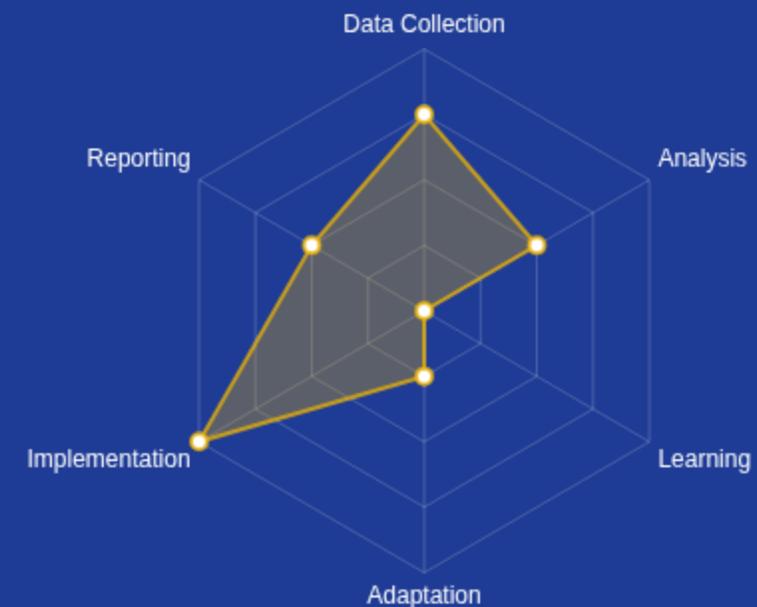
Women's Participation

40% Political representation
22% completed

Grants Distributed

€5M Direct funding
42% completed

Evaluation and Learning Cycle



Strategic Plan 2 Implementation Framework

The **RFLD Strategic Plan 2 (2023-2028)** is implemented through a multi-tiered approach that ensures accountability, efficiency, and impact at all levels of operation.

Implementation Mechanisms



Governance Structure

Board oversight through quarterly performance reviews and annual strategic reassessment to ensure alignment with mission and objectives



Operational Execution

Regional hubs develop localized annual work plans with monthly activity tracking and biweekly team coordination meetings



Partnership Approach

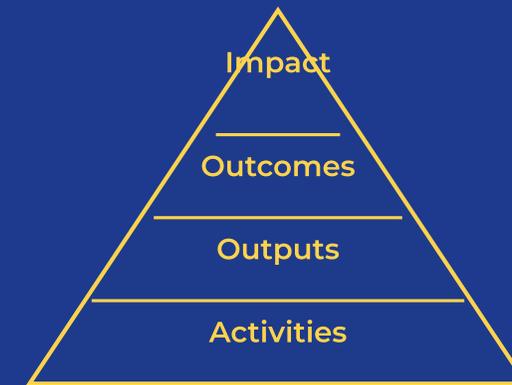
Collaborative implementation with 27 local partner organizations, 4 regional networks, and international allies through joint projects



Adaptive Management

Biannual review of implementation to enable course correction and responsiveness to emerging challenges and opportunities

Results Framework & Monitoring



Monitoring & Evaluation System



Impact Indicators

12 long-term indicators measuring systemic change in gender equality, democratic freedoms, and economic justice



Outcome Tracking

27 medium-term indicators across all strategic objectives with annual evaluation cycles



Output Monitoring

52 short-term indicators with quarterly data collection and analysis



Data Systems

Integrated M&E platform with gender-responsive and intersectional analysis frameworks



Value-for-Money Framework

Systematic assessment of economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity across all strategic interventions, with biannual value-for-money audits

Effective Advocacy Achievements - RFLD

"The RFLD has advocated for legislative advancements regarding gender-based violence in several countries, ensuring that laws and policies respect and protect women's rights. Our dedicated advocacy team has successfully influenced policy reform throughout the region."

— **Rebecca DEGBOGBAHOUN, Administrative Secretary of RFLD**

Through strategic lobbying and coalition building, RFLD has successfully advocated for progressive policy reforms that strengthen democratic governance and expand civic space. Our rights-based approach ensures inclusivity and sustainability.

- Leading collaborative advocacy campaigns with 32 partner organizations across Sub-Saharan Africa
- Contributing to 7 major legislative reforms impacting women's rights and civil liberties
- Training over 450 grassroots advocates in effective political engagement and legislative processes
- Securing 12 formal consultation roles in regional governance bodies and policy forums
- Organizing 28 public hearings on critical human rights issues affecting marginalized groups

Spotlight: Electoral Rights Campaign

RFLD's campaign for inclusive electoral participation resulted in policy changes in 4 countries, ensuring accessible polling stations and enhanced representation of women and marginalized communities in electoral processes.

Legislative Advocacy Progress 2023-2025



Regional Advocacy Impact



Advocacy Impact Indicators



18

Policy briefs submitted



24

Public consultations



125+

Media coverage instances



7

Legal framework reforms



Data & Research Achievements - RFLD

Dònuèsè Data Center

RFLD's primary research center has established itself as the leading source of gender-disaggregated human rights data in Sub-Saharan Africa, transforming how evidence informs policy.

"Data that drives change, research that transforms lives."

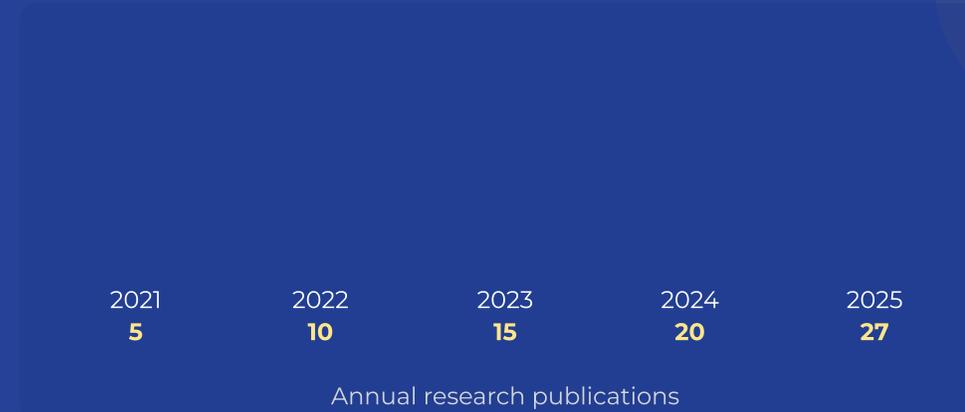
Since its inception, our Dònuèsè Data Center has:

-  Produced 27 comprehensive research reports on women's rights and democratic freedoms across 16 African countries
-  Trained over 350 field researchers in human rights evidence collection and documentation methodologies
-  Published 14 policy briefs that directly influenced legislative reforms in Benin, Nigeria, and Ghana
-  Established partnerships with 9 universities and 12 international research institutions for knowledge exchange

Research Impact Metrics



Research Publications Growth



Evidence-Based Intervention Types



Regional Research Focus



Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Achievements

RFLD has made significant progress in improving sexual and reproductive health rights across Sub-Saharan Africa through policy advocacy, education, and healthcare access initiatives.

— Dr. Sandrine CHIKOU, Grants Manager at RFLD

Our key SRHR achievements include:

- Expanded access to maternal healthcare in 14 rural communities, reaching over 25,000 women previously without services
- Trained 780 healthcare professionals on rights-based approaches to reproductive health services
- Successfully advocated for the adoption of comprehensive sexuality education policies in 3 countries
- Established 36 youth-friendly SRHR information centers throughout the region
- Reduced maternal mortality rates by 18% in target communities through improved emergency obstetric care
- Provided family planning services to over 42,000 women in underserved communities



Recognition

RFLD's SRHR program received the 2024 Regional Excellence Award for its innovative approaches to community reproductive health education.

Success Story: Maternal Health Initiative

In northern Ghana, RFLD's maternal health initiative established 8 community birthing centers, trained 45 traditional birth attendants, and created emergency transport systems, reducing childbirth complications by 32% in just 18 months.

SRHR Program Impact (2023-2025)



Community Impact Data

36,500+

Women received maternal health services

18%

Reduction in maternal mortality

142

Community education workshops on SRHR

12,400

Youth reached with SRHR information

Future SRHR intervention areas (2025-2027)

- ✓ Adolescent SRHR services
- ✓ Digital health solutions
- ✓ SRHR policy advocacy
- ✓ Rural healthcare access
- ✓ Community health workers
- ✓ Gender-based violence

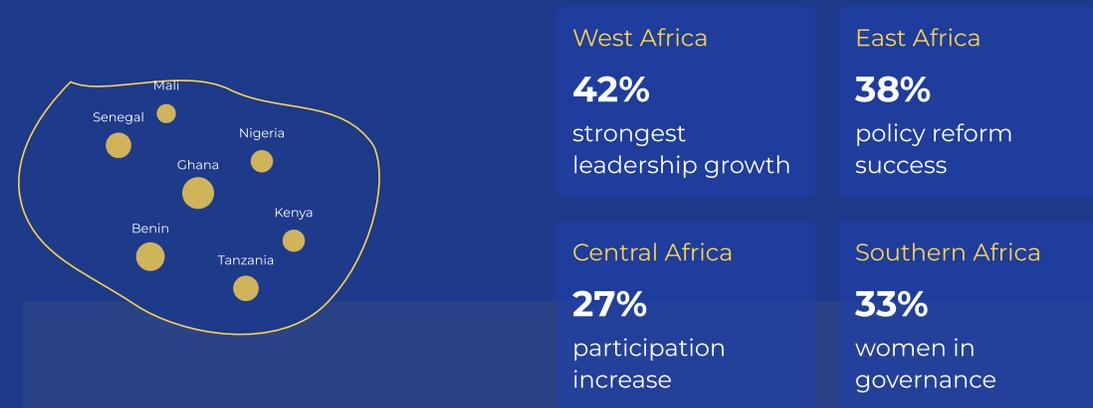
"Women's leadership is not just a goal —it's a necessity for democratic societies. Our work transforms communities by empowering women to become key decision-makers at all levels of governance."

RD **Rebecca DEGBOGBAHOUN**
Administrative Secretary, RFLD

Women's Leadership Impact



Regional Leadership Impact



Key Achievements

-  Established Women's Political Leadership Academy in 8 countries, training over 1,840 future leaders
-  Supported over 230 female candidates in elections through comprehensive campaign training
-  Created mentoring networks connecting over 1,200 emerging women leaders with established figures
-  Developed crisis resilience training for women human rights defenders in high-risk environments

42
Women Elected



1,840
Women Trained



14
Countries Reached



26
Policy Changes



Future Initiatives (2026-2028)

-  Expansion to 12 additional countries
-  Regional policy institutes
-  Digital platform for over 10,000 rural women

Leadership Development Pathway



Case Studies & Success Stories

Documentation of transformative impacts and concrete successes of RFLD interventions across Sub-Saharan Africa.



Democratic Advocacy

Successful implementation of a women's political participation initiative in West Africa that led to a 30% increase in women's representation in local governance bodies.

- 45 communities mobilized
- Over 500 women leaders trained
- Municipal-level policy reform

[Full case study →](#)



Women's Rights

Protection initiative in West Africa that strengthened legal frameworks against gender-based violence and improved access to support services.

- Revision of 3 local protection laws
- Creation of 12 safe spaces for women
- Training of 200 community advocates
- 45% increase in reporting

[Full case study →](#)



Climate Justice

Women-led climate adaptation initiative in Senegal that transformed agricultural practices while ensuring gender equity in resource management.

- Support for 35 women's cooperatives
- Water rights secured for 18 communities
- 350 women trained in sustainable agriculture
- 27% increase in household income

[Full case study →](#)

45+

Communities Engaged

3

Countries

1,050+

Women Trained

18

Policy Changes

27%

Income Increase

Case Study 1: Democratic Advocacy Success in West Africa - RFLD

Through targeted advocacy and coalition building, RFLD partnered with local civil society to strengthen democratic processes during political transition in West Africa, resulting in increased citizen participation and improved electoral transparency.

— West African Democracy Initiative, 2024

Key Achievements

- Facilitated dialogue between civil society, government stakeholders and electoral authorities through monthly forums with over 120 representatives participating
- Trained more than 2,500 election observers across 6 regions using RFLD's comprehensive democracy toolkit
- Established community monitoring networks in 34 districts, reaching rural populations
- Successfully advocated for inclusive electoral reforms that increased participation of women and youth
- Launched a digital democracy awareness campaign reaching 1.2 million West Africans via radio and social media

Long-Term Impact

This initiative created lasting frameworks for democratic participation extending beyond electoral periods, establishing ongoing civic education programs and accountability mechanisms that continue to function today. The success of this model has now been replicated in neighboring countries with RFLD support.

"RFLD's work in West Africa demonstrates how targeted interventions can transform democratic processes, even in challenging political environments."

— West African Democracy Network, 2025 Evaluation

Policy and Legislation Timeline

- 2022: Initial Assessment & Coalition Building**
Analysis of electoral framework vulnerabilities and establishment of cross-sector partnerships with 23 civil society organizations
- 2023: Policy Reform Campaign**
National advocacy for transparent voter registration processes, accessible polling stations, and independent electoral monitoring
- 2024: Legislative Amendment Success**
Parliament adopts 6 key electoral reforms recommended by RFLD-led coalition, establishing new transparency requirements
- 2025: Implementation & Monitoring**
New processes implemented in regional and national elections, with RFLD-trained observers documenting 94% compliance with reforms

Community Impact Metrics



+64%

Voter participation in targeted regions



12,000+

Citizens engaged in democratic processes



42%

Increase in female candidates registered



89%

Public confidence in electoral process integrity

Program Overview

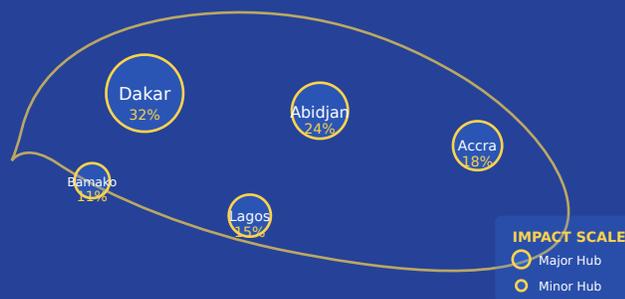
The RFLD Women's Rights Initiative in West Africa implemented comprehensive advocacy and protection mechanisms for women human rights defenders in 8 provinces, reaching over 1,200 direct beneficiaries.



Key Results



Regional Impact Distribution



Impact Metrics



Success Indicators



Sustainability & Long-term Impacts

- ✓ 8 community protection mechanisms now self-sustaining
- ✓ Regional coalition of 36 organizations established for ongoing advocacy
- ✓ Digital resource platform created with over 140 resources on WHRD protection
- ✓ 84% of trained WHRDs now train their peers in their communities

Long-term goal: 95% of WHRDs report increased capacity by 2026



Women-Led Resilience & Regional Development

"Our Climate Resilience Program across Anglophone West Africa has transformed agricultural practices while ensuring gender equity in resource management, enabling over 3,400 women to become environmental leaders while creating sustainable livelihoods in Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and The Gambia."

— Ms. Rebecca TCHANVOEDOU, RFLD Regional Climate Justice Lead

Key Results

- ✓ 42% increase in household income
- ✓ 18 women-led climate committees
- ✓ 28 water management systems installed
- ✓ 78% improvement in yields during drought

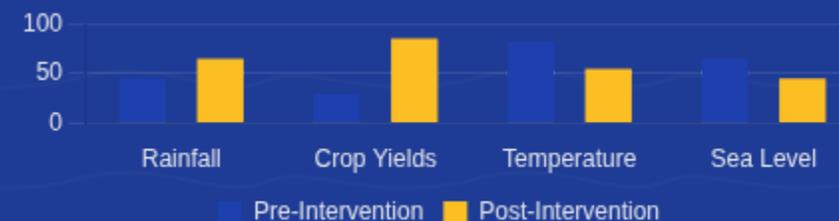
Community Impact

- ✓ 3,400+ women trained in climate resilience
- ✓ 68 green businesses launched by women
- ✓ 24 local policies influenced by defenders
- ✓ 12 renewable energy systems established

Implementation Timeline

- 1 2022: Regional Assessment**
Cross-country consultation & program design
- 2 2023: Training & Implementation**
Climate-resilient agricultural techniques
- 3 2024: Resource Management**
Water systems & sustainable practices
- 4 2025: Expansion & Policy Influence**
Extended to 12 additional communities

Climate Change Impacts & Resilience Solutions



Women's Leadership in Sustainable Development



RFLD Donuese Data Center Success

Regional Data Collection Transformation, Analysis and Digital Resource Center



Centralized Data Infrastructure

Successful establishment of the region's first comprehensive human rights data repository, with secure cloud infrastructure and multi-layered protection systems. Hosts over 15,000 documents and 5 years of human rights violation tracking data across Sub-Saharan Africa.

✔ 99.8% uptime since launch



Community Data Network

Creation of a network of 312 community data collectors across 18 countries, equipped with secure mobile reporting tools. This grassroots infrastructure enables real-time monitoring of rights violations in previously undocumented remote areas.

✔ 28% increase in rural area monitoring coverage



Advanced Analysis Platform

Deployment of AI-powered analysis tools that process indigenous language content in 27 African languages, enabling pattern recognition of rights violations. Generated 43 evidence-based reports that directly influenced regional policy discussions at the African Union.

✔ 87% accuracy in automated classification



Digital Capacity Building

Trained over 450 CSO representatives on data collection methodologies, digital security, and evidence preservation. Created an 8-language toolkit for standardized rights violation documentation, adopted by 73 organizations regionally.

✔ 94% of trainees actively contribute to the database

Data Center Impact Metrics

15,800+

Human rights cases documented and safely archived

42

Policy changes influenced by data-based evidence

27

African languages supported in the data analysis system

312

Community data collectors trained and equipped



Funding Challenges and Resource Mobilization

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Sub-Saharan Africa face **systemic funding disparities** that severely limit their capacity to operate effectively despite their critical frontline role.

A 2024 analysis reveals that women-led organizations receive **only 0.13%** of global development assistance, with even less reaching grassroots WHRDs in Sub-Saharan Africa. In countries like DRC, South Sudan, and Somalia, this percentage drops to under 0.05%.

Key Funding Barriers



Complex Application Requirements

Burdensome paperwork, technical language barriers, and extensive track record requirements exclude grassroots WHRDs, especially in rural and conflict-affected regions



Visibility & Accessibility Gaps

Limited access to donor networks, international forums, and digital platforms reduces funding opportunities, with language barriers further isolating francophone defenders



Security & Registration Constraints

Legal restrictions on foreign funding, banking limitations, and security risks for receiving support, particularly in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Burundi where new NGO laws restrict civil society

#FundWHRDs

#ResourceJustice

#FeministFunding

#CoreSupport

Funding Disparities & Resource Mobilization

Funding Gap by Organization Type in Sub-Saharan Africa

Effective Resource Mobilization Strategies



Collective Fundraising

Pooled funding mechanisms allow WHRDs to share resources and reduce administrative burdens



Solidarity Economics

Community-based income generation through sustainable initiatives and skill sharing



Digital Fundraising

Mobile money campaigns, crowdfunding platforms, and digital storytelling to access new donors



Coalition Building

Strategic alliances with international organizations for resource sharing and joint proposals



Donor Recommendations

- Provide flexible core funding instead of project-based grants
- Simplify application processes and accept proposals in multiple languages
- Establish emergency response funds for WHRDs at risk
- Fund capacity building for financial management and sustainability



Success Case: East African WHRD Network

Created a regional fundraising consortium that increased funding access by 240% for 23 grassroots WHRD organizations across 5 countries through unified proposal development, shared fiscal sponsorship, and collective advocacy with donors.

240% Increase

23 Organizations

5 Countries

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for WHRDs

The Hidden Crisis

Women Human Rights Defenders across Sub-Saharan Africa face unique and severe mental health challenges due to their work defending rights amid hostile environments:

- Trauma & Vicarious Trauma**
78% of WHRDs report symptoms of secondary trauma from documenting rights violations
- Burnout**
92% of WHRDs in Sub-Saharan Africa report experiencing burnout within the first 3 years of activism
- Security-Related Anxiety**
83% report persistent fear and anxiety about physical security, digital surveillance, and family safety

Effective Support Systems



Peer Support Networks

WHRD-led circles where defenders can share experiences in safe spaces



Trauma-Informed Therapy

Culturally relevant professional psychological services



Digital Wellness Apps

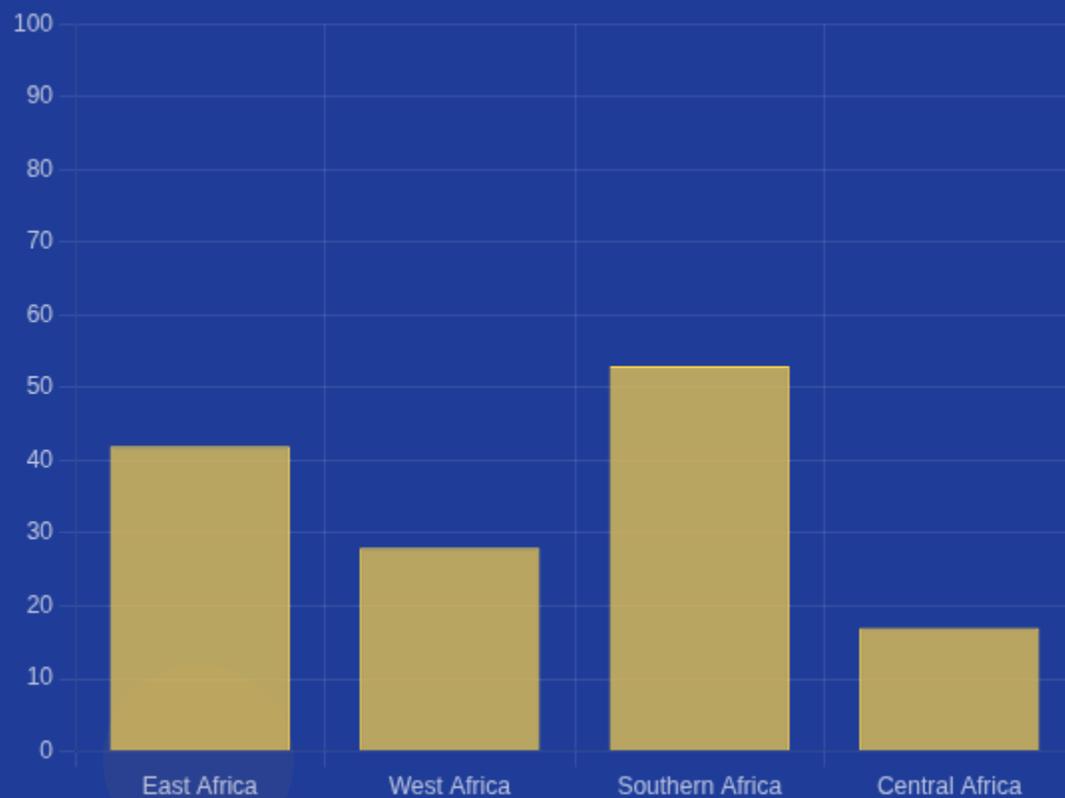
Secure mobile applications adapted for low connectivity regions



Temporary Respite

Safe houses and retreats for defenders needing to recharge

Regional Access to Support



Source: WHRD Coalition Survey, 2024. Data from 1,200+ WHRDs across 32 Sub-Saharan African countries

Success Stories: Sister Sanctuary Initiative

A network of 16 WHRD-led psychosocial support centers across Sub-Saharan Africa has shown remarkable impact since 2021:

1,450+

WHRDs supported

68%

Reduced burnout

12

Countries covered

"When we invest in the mental well-being of WHRDs, we're not just supporting individuals but sustaining entire movements for justice. Mental health support isn't a luxury—it's essential infrastructure for human rights work."

— Dr. Aminata Diallo, Director, Pan-African WHRD Wellness Network

Research and Evidence-Based Advocacy by WHRDs

Women Human Rights Defenders across Sub-Saharan Africa are increasingly employing **rigorous research methodologies and evidence-based approaches** to strengthen their advocacy for systemic change and policy reform.

Research-driven advocacy enables WHRDs to **counter misinformation, challenge discriminatory narratives**, and provide compelling evidence for the reforms they champion in challenging political environments.

Key Research Methodologies



Participatory Action Research

Involving affected communities directly in data collection and analysis to ensure research authenticity and representation



Mixed Methods Approaches

Combining qualitative testimonies with quantitative data to build compelling evidence that resonates with diverse stakeholders

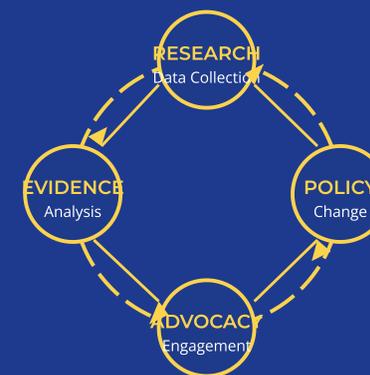


Documentation of Violations

Systematic tracking and verification of rights violations through established protocols adapted to regional contexts

Research Impact in Action

Research-to-Action Impact Cycle



73% of successful policy initiatives by WHRDs were backed by rigorous research

4.2x greater media coverage for evidence-based campaigns

Case Study Highlights



Kenya: Evidence-Based Law Reform

WHRDs conducted a 3-year evidence gathering project documenting 412 cases of sexual violence, resulting in the Sexual Offenses Act amendments in 2023.



South Africa: Budget Analysis Impact

Feminist researchers analyzed public budgets for gender responsiveness, leading to a 27% increase in funding for gender-based violence response services.



Regional: Strategic Litigation Support

Network of WHRDs from 6 countries developed an evidence database supporting 8 landmark cases at the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.



Key Challenge: Research Safety

WHRDs face unique security risks when conducting sensitive research. 62% report surveillance or intimidation, requiring specialized research security protocols and ethical safeguards to protect both researchers and participants.

#EvidenceBasedAdvocacy

#FeministResearch

#WHRDsInAction

Contact RFLD

Women Leaders Network for Development

Reach Out To Us



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www.rflgd.org



Regional Presence
Registered in Ghana, Benin, The Gambia
Operating across Sub-Saharan Africa

Connect With Us



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X



YouTube



Bluesky

Our Mission Areas



Women's Rights



Democratic Values



Climate Justice



Participatory Governance

Follow Our Work

#WomenRights

#HumanRights

#AfricaRising

#GenderEquality

#ClimateAction

Our Team



21
Staff



7
Volunteers



2
Interns



Human Rights Report in Sub-Saharan Africa

"Together we can create a Sub-Saharan Africa where women and youth live in safety, dignity, and freedom."

RFLD Report October 2025

Policy Recommendations and Systemic Changes for WHRD Support

Transformative approaches to protect and empower WHRDs across Sub-Saharan Africa

Multi-Level Policy Framework

Comprehensive policy changes required across multiple governance levels to create sustainable protection systems for WHRDs:

National Level Reforms

- Enact specific WHRD protection laws with implementation mechanisms
- Reform restrictive NGO, cybercrime, and anti-terrorism laws (73% of WHRDs report these as primary barriers)
- Create specialized units within National Human Rights Commissions
- Establish emergency response protocols for WHRDs at risk

Regional Mechanisms

- Strengthen African Commission Special Rapporteur on WHRDs mandate
- Develop Sub-Regional Court systems for WHRD protection cases
- Create cross-border protection protocols for emergency relocation
- Establish regional gender-responsive early warning systems

International Standards

- Promote adoption of UN Resolution on WHRDs across Sub-Saharan Africa
- Incorporate CEDAW provisions into national legal frameworks
- Reform international funding mechanisms (only 8% reaches WHRDs)
- Develop international accountability mechanisms for digital threats

Implementation Priorities

Evidence-Based Approach

Developing systems to track implementation progress across 34 Sub-Saharan countries with clear accountability metrics and transparent reporting mechanisms.

WHRD-Led Monitoring

Ensuring WHRDs lead assessment processes with 65% of monitoring positions reserved for women from affected communities. Currently only 12% of implementation bodies include WHRDs.

 Implementation of these policy recommendations could benefit 85,000+ WHRDs across Sub-Saharan Africa

Systemic Transformation



Key Systemic Interventions Needed:

Legal Reform

Gender-responsive legislative reforms in 78% of Sub-Saharan countries

Financial Access

Dedicated WHRD funding streams with 45% direct access target

Protection Systems

Integrated physical-digital security protocols in all 16 ECOWAS states

Norm Shifting

Media campaigns reaching 250+ million people across the region

Successful Policy Change Model

Case Study: Sierra Leone WHRD Protection Act (2023)

Coalition of 47 organizations successfully advocated for comprehensive WHRD protection legislation with dedicated funding and implementation mechanisms.

 86% reduction in threats against WHRDs within 12 months

42%

Increase in WHRD activity post-policy reforms

78%

Improved prosecution rates for WHRD attacks

3.8x

Increase in funding accessibility

#PolicyChange

#WHRDProtection

#SystemicReform