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BEYOND THE MDGS: INCLUSION, PARTICIPATION AND THE REALITY OF GENDER DEVELOPMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (SSA)

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ABSTRACT

Theoretical advancements in gender-related literature has witnessed discursive shifts. Chronologically on a global level, gender theorising has advanced from the welfare approach (WA), women in development (WID), gender and development (GAD), women and development (WAD), the efficiency approach, empowerment approach, the gender and environment (GED) approach and subsequently Gender Mainstreaming. These theoretical advancements have been further strengthened by the recently concluded Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework and the soon to start Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although, there has been some progress in the implementation of the MDGs and the global gender gap index (GGGI) across various Nation-States has improved, a lot still needs to be done towards improving the state of women's livelihoods in Africa by challenging some variations in women's subordinations, reproduced through patriarchal domination, a gender stereotypical culture, ethnicity, issues such as early girl marriage and domestic violence. These critical vectors for gender inequality and exclusion, undermines efforts for economic empowerment and improved political representativeness of women in Africa. This paper critically examines the reality of women's inclusion, participation, and empowerment in SSA, by drawing on methodologies (through women-specific indices) that captures the reality of women's inclusion, participation and eventual empowerment, in order to bridge the gaps and advance the mainstreaming of women in the SGDs framework.

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INTRODUCTION

The historical advancements in gender theorising has witnessed paradigmatic establishments of women-specific philosophies, frameworks, approaches and methodologies that have critically challenged mainstream development discourse on issues of exclusion, inequality and disempowerment. They have challenged traditional beliefs, stereotypical social norms, and discriminatory practices in order to ensure increased inclusion, participation and 'empowerment of women' on global, regional and national levels. However, Ester Boserup's thesis critiqued the welfare approach for its assumption that macroeconomic strategies for growth will automatically 'trickle-down' to women due to the economic position of their husbands in society.

Boserup's equity-based argument stressed that despite women's 'presence' to lead the agrarian economy in developing countries context, traditional norms and subaltern cultures persistently misrepresented them and undermined their voice and capabilities to engage in development (Rathgeber, 1990; Kabeer, 2003). The conclusion of Boserup's thesis was a call for 'women to be positioned in economic development'. With gender precedents set by the 1975 UN International Year for Women, the International Women's Decade (1976-1985) and the adoption of The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the women in development (WID) approach which was later reinforced by the WAD approach, emerged with the dual mandate to ensure global commitment towards increased 'women inclusion' and 'participation' in the economic, socio-cultural, political and legal spaces in society (Cornwall, 2003; Momsen, 2010).

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However with the 1980s global recession, stagnating food production, exacerbating poverty and unemployment, a major criticism of the WID approach was that, despite programmatic efforts aimed at ensuring increased women's inclusion as well as participation, power relations between genders was ignored, and at best the WID approach was 'contractual' rather than 'confrontational' (UN, 1992; Tripathy, 2010). Advancing further the theoretical gender epistemological landscape, several scholars (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1989, 1998) when presenting the rationale for a discursive shift from women to gender and development (GAD) planning in the developing world (Razavi and Miller, 1995), suggested that it must be based on interests – which was defined as a 'prioritized concern' that translates into women's needs. In this regard, the understanding of both practical gender needs – needs women identify due to their socially accepted roles, and strategic gender needs – needs women identify as a result of their subordinate position to men in their society, went a long way to explain women's triple roles, as mothers, wives and economic producers (Moser, 1989; Momsen, 2001; AfDB, 2015).

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach therefore emerged as a critique to the WID approach in order to understand how the concept of gender¹ and gender relations² (Fraser, 2009; Momsen, 2010) were impacted upon by issues of power relations and empowerment. These nuanced theoretical precedent set by the welfare, WID (women inclusion), WAD (women participation) GAD (gender-balanced inclusion, participation and empowerment) further strengthened claims for the gender efficiency model and the mainstreaming of gender equality. With the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) efficiency approach recognized the importance of gender roles and women's responsibilities in development planning processes (Momsen, 2010).

Debatably while the efficiency approach focused on increasing the economic returns on women's contributions in terms of time, labour and assets in 'policy making processes' (Moser, 1993, Murthy et al, 2008), gender mainstreaming focused more on affirmative and planned action, including engendering legislation, creating women specific ministries, policies or programmes for increased women empowerment and representation in the economic, political and social spheres of society (Moser and Moser, 2005). With the advancement in gender theorising, today in Africa, women are not only seen in their 'traditional marital and maternal roles' as wives and mothers, but as: producers – who have access to land, credit and greater infrastructural connections; agents of human development – driven by health and reproductive

rights, educational skills and personal safety, and; leaders and active citizens (AfDB, 2015). Since then, whilst two major Women's Conferences, Mexico 1975 and Beijing 1995, according to the AfDB (2014), established the consensus and commitment towards promoting gender equality, the Millennium Summit in 2000 which institutionalized the MDGs as a global development goal reinforced the need for women empowerment in Africa (AfDB, 2014). Since the MDGs planning era in particular, theoretical advancements which have further strengthened the global policy consensus on how gender equality should be mainstreamed in developing countries context, has witnessed the emergence of global gender-specific indicators like the Gender Development Index (GDI), the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) and other indicators and targets enshrined in the MDGs and even SDGs framework (Lopez-Carlos and Zahidi, 2005; Moser, 2007) as well as African gender-specific indices like the African Gender Equality Index (AGEI) (AfDB, 2014, 2015).

With specific focus on Africa, gender methodological indices thematically focus on issues of equality in economic participation and opportunity, equality in human development, equality in laws and institutions, improvement in health and wellbeing, as well as political empowerment (AfDB, 2014; WEF, 2015). Although the MDGs framework and methodologies associated with measuring 'human' and 'gender development' are often been critiqued for: having missing dimensions; its donor-led agenda – in which it paid little attention to the local context, and; its neglect of the poorest and most-vulnerable – in which women make up a huge part of (Melamed and Scott, 2011; Fukuda-Parr et al, 2014), the SDGs have forged ahead with more 'robust' 17 goals. As opposed to the MDGs which primarily had two primary gender goals in MDGs 3 and MDGs 5, the SDGs gender specific goals as highlighted by the UNDP (2016) include the following:

- SDGs 1: No poverty – where the UNDP (2016) contends that Women are disproportionately more likely to live in poverty than men due to unequal access to paid work, education and property
- SDGs 3: Good health and well-being – Focus on improving Maternal health and other women health related challenges in which they might be more vulnerable in comparison to men. For example with HIV/AIDS
- SDGs 4: Quality Education
- SDGs 5: Gender Equality – with the aim to achieve gender equality and empower all girls by ensuring gender parity is attained at ALL levels of education.
- SDGs 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth – with the aim to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and Decent Work for all.
- SDGs 10 – Reduced Inequalities with specific focus on income inequality.

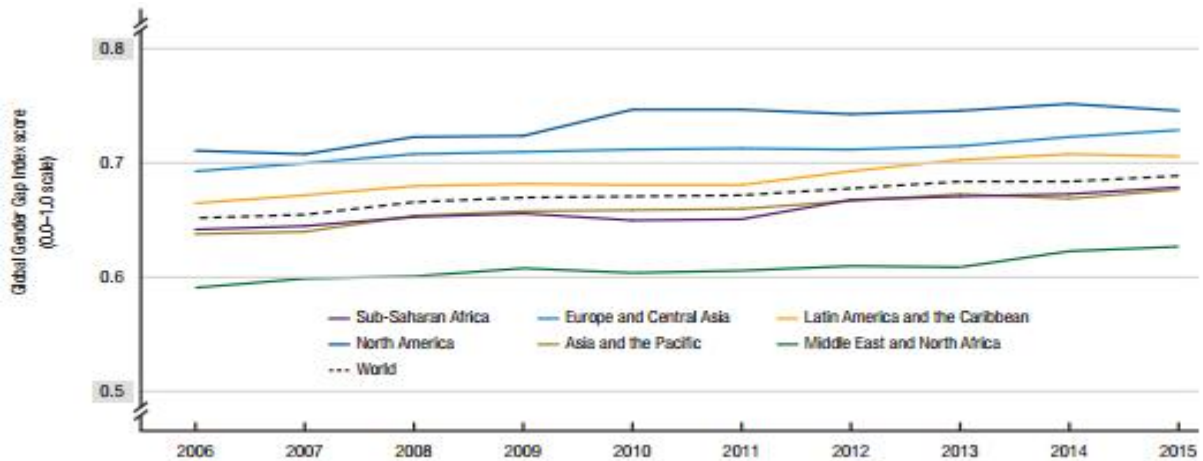
Despite the theoretical and methodological advancements in gender literature and global MDGs and now SDGs, policy practice remains entangled with a gender-blind ethos, reinforced by a strong patriarchal culture that has allowed

¹ Kabeer (2003) suggests that gender refers to those rules, norms, customs and practices by which biologically associated between the male and female of human species are translated into socially constructed differences between men and women, boys and girls which give them unequal value, opportunities and life chances. In order words, it refers to the asymmetrical social relationships between men and women based on perceived sex differences, perceptions of identity, and an ideology regarding economic and political roles, civil rights and social values as parents, workers, citizens and owners (Moser, 1989; 1998).

² Gender Relations refers to the socially constructed roles and patterns of representation between men and women, shapes and is shaped by power relations in the implementation of development (Momsen, 2010)

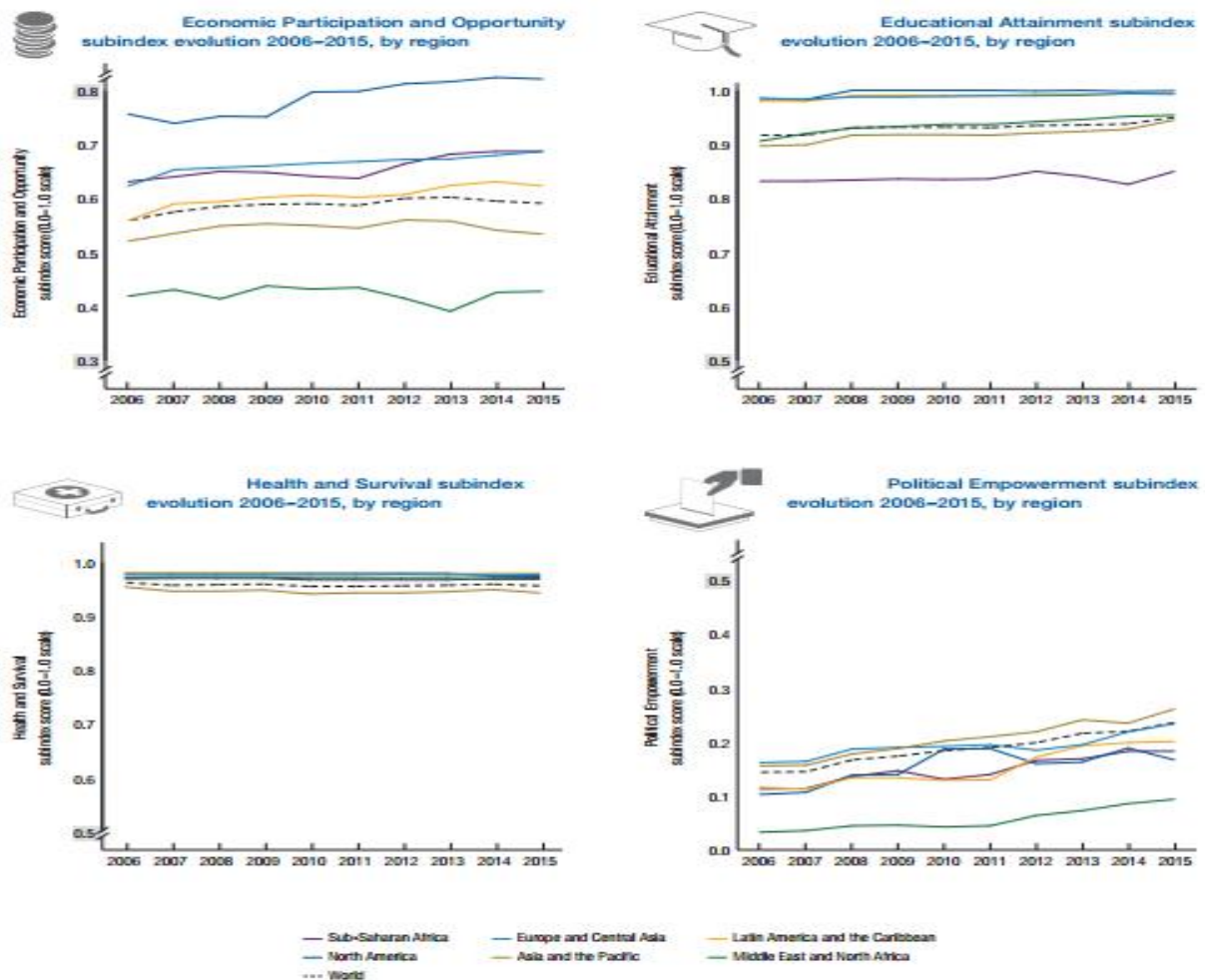
several gender-specific interventions to ‘evaporate’ (Longwe, 1994, 1997, 2000, Tripathy, 2010).

poverty, access to improved sources of water, primary school enrolment and Child mortality (UNDP MDGs Report, 2015).



Source: WEF (2015: 32)

Figure 1. Global Gender Gap Index from 2006-2015 by regions



Source: WEF (2015: 33)

Figure 2. Sub-Indexes for the Global Gender Gap Index by regions from 2006 to 2015

This is by no means downplaying the progress made with the MDGs goals 3 and 5 and in addressing other areas like income

However, for policy mainstreaming and actual positioning of women at all levels of society especially in the SDGs era to be effectively implemented, there needs to be translation of

Africa’s economic growth potentials into inclusive employment opportunities, redistribution of dividends of economic growth, improvement in primary education completion rates and maternal health, as well as increased representation of women in national parliaments (Fraser, 2009; UNECA, 2015). It is against this backdrop that this paper critically examines how women’s subordinations, reproduced through patriarchal domination, domestic violence, gender stereotypical culture, and ethnicity-related issues like genital mutilation and early girl marriage, continue to undermine efforts of economic empowerment and improved political representativeness of women in Africa. This paper further explores the reality of women’s inclusion, participation, and empowerment in SSA, by drawing on methodologies (women-specific indices) that capture the state of women’s livelihoods and socio-economic and political opportunities and participation, in order to bridge the gaps and advance the mainstreaming of women in the SGDs framework.

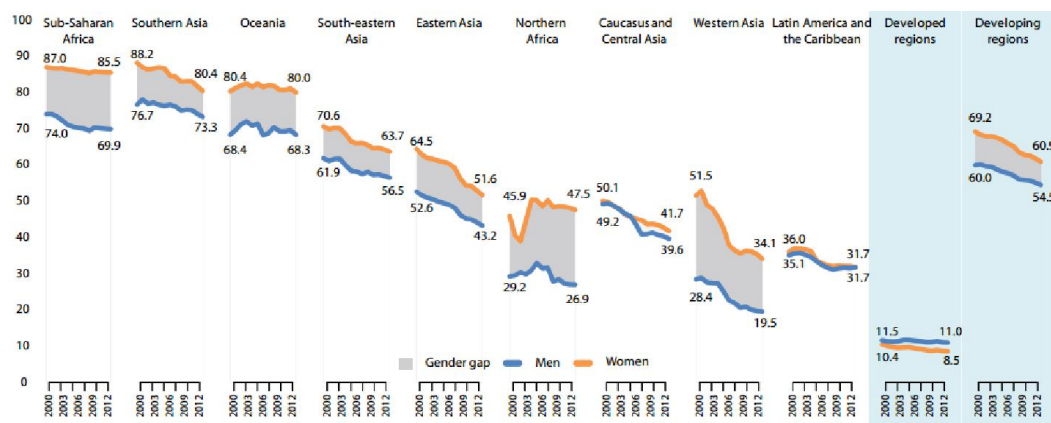
Gender Development Progress in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) Context

The history of gender formations in Africa – which is different and context-specific in interpretation, have been reproduced through communal customs and traditional practices that reinforce patriarchal dominance and preference for male gender as opposed to the female. As seen across Africa’s social history, the development of genders especially in Africa have always been selective and discriminatory against the women in society – subsuming their contributions in preference of the male gender (UNW, 2015). From a developing countries context, sons are often given preference in terms of education, inheritance and domestic power, while daughters are seen as ‘subjects’ for early-marriages and tools for domestic chores (Shah, 2005).

Table 1. Women’s Political Representation in Selected Sub-Saharan Africa Countries

Rank	Country	Lower or Single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats*	Women	%W	Elections	Seats*	Women	%W
1	Rwanda	2013	80	51	63.8	2011	26	10	38.5
2	South Africa	2014	400	168	42.0	2014	54	19	35.2
3	Namibia	2014	104	43	41.3	2010	26	6	23.1
4	Burundi	2015	121	44	36.4	2015	43	18	41.9
5	Zimbabwe	2013	270	85	31.5	2013	80	38	47.5
6	Cameroon	2013	180	56	31.1	2013	100	20	20
7	Lesotho	2015	120	30	25	2015	33	8	24.2
8	Equatorial Guinea	2013	100	24	24	2013	73	10	13.7
9	Kenya	2013	300	69	19.7	2013	68	18	26.5
10	Gabon	2011	120	17	14.2	2014	99	18	18.2
11	Liberia	2011	73	8	11.0	2014	30	3	10.0
12	DRC	2011	492	44	8.9	2007	108	5	4.6
13	Congo	2012	136	10	7.4	2014	72	14	19.4
14	Swaziland	2013	65	4	6.2	2013	30	10	33.3
15	Nigeria	2015	360	20	5.6	2015	108	7	6.5

Source: IPU (2015)



Source: UN (2014:6)

Figure 3. Showing a decrease in vulnerable Employment but large gender gaps (2000-2012)



Source: UNW (2015:10)

Figure 4. Unadjusted Global Pay Gaps, Percentage by Geographical Regions in 2015

This as Shah (2005) reiterates, is shaped by a number of factors including: socio-economic set-up of society; cultural beliefs that restrict women; literacy and; lesser opportunities for women jobs. Despite women's magnanimous contributions to economic growth through their participation in agricultural activities and their unspoken contributions through the informal sector in Africa, their position in domestic, economic, social and political life have remains subsumed. In reality, social and gender relations have been undermined by the politics of power relations as women often face challenges of income inequality, property and inheritance rights, and lack of access to prerequisite amenities in health, education and finance (Triki and Faye, 2013; EYGM, 2015). The WDR (2011:2) narrates that: The likelihood of women dying during childbirth in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia is still comparable to that in Northern Europe in the 19th century. A wealthy urban child in Nigeria—boy or girl—averages around 10 years of schooling, while poor rural Hausa girls average fewer than six months. The rate at which women die relative to men is higher in low- and middle-income countries compared with their high-income counterparts, especially in the critical years of infancy and early childhood and in the reproductive period. Divorce or widowhood causes many women to become landless and lose their assets. Women continue to cluster in sectors and occupations characterized as “female”—many of them lower paying. Women are also more likely to be the victims of violence at home and suffer more severe injuries. And almost everywhere women's representation in politics and in senior managerial positions in business remains far lower than men's.

The foregoing captures what Moghadam (2005) refers to as the ‘feminization of poverty’ that witnessed approximately 70 percent of the world's poor as women that has witnessed the oppression of women through discriminatory social norms, stereotypes, stigma and violence. The UN (2014: 6) contends that in 2012 for instance, women were more vulnerable to HIV/AIDs with more than 380,000 young women who were infected compared to 180,000 young men. Several practices like: gender mutilation and its negative impact on increased HIV transmission in SSA (Monjok et al., 2007; Olaniran, 2013); ‘corrective rape’ for correcting LGBTs behaviour in South Africa (UNW, 2015); and; early-child marriage (UNFPA, 2012), all violate human rights frameworks in Africa. The GirlsNotBrides (2015) report contends that in sub-Saharan Africa where 40 percent of women are married as children, the negative impact on women's lives can have life threatening consequences on girls denies girls right to education, exposes them to risk of sexual, physical and psychological violence, and undermines children's decisional power and right of choice.

However since the 1990s, progress has been made in advancing women's inclusion and participation through empowerment and mainstreaming gender equality into policy discourses and development practice and in challenging traditional African beliefs that have for a long time, subsumed women to the bottom of the pyramid. It has been revealed that the conversion factors associated with expanding education for girls/women and employment opportunity for women, arguably creates multiplier impacts on the health of children, family nutrition, immunisation rates and educational

attainment of their children (Handley et al., 2009). Further, since the MDGs planning era, the positioning of women in economic, social and political life has drastically improved. In this regard, recent data reveals that gender parity has been reached in 117 of 173 countries, and even in regions with the largest gender gaps—South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (particularly West Africa)—gains have been considerable (WDR, 2011). The WDR (2011) report further contends that in the last decade and a half, female enrolments have grown faster than male enrolments in the Sub-Saharan Africa because by 2008 there were about 91 girls for every 100 boys in primary school, up from 85 girls in 1999. Specifically, in terms of ensuring universal primary education (MDGs Goal 2), the UNDP MDGs (2015:4) concludes that: Sub-Saharan Africa has had the best record of improvement in primary education of any region since the MDGs were established. The region achieved a 20 percentage point increase in the net enrolment rate from 2000 to 2015, compared to a gain of 8 percentage points between 1990 and 2000....Between 1990 and 2012 the number of children enrolled in Primary Schools in Sub-Saharan Africa has more than doubled, from 62 million to 149 million. Despite this improvements in education, only Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland according data from the WEF (2015), have attained the goal of gender parity in Sub-Saharan Africa. Perhaps if the threshold of at least 97 percent is set, to benchmark enrolment rate in developing countries, then the reality according to the UNDP MDGs Report (2015) is that, this target will not be any close to getting reached in sub-Saharan Africa.

In sub-Saharan Africa in particular, as studies (Borwankar et al., 2008; McFerson, 2010; Triki and Faye, 2013) have shown, challenges of women poverty, income inequality, gender based financial discrimination, gender-based violence, continue to negatively impact on women economically, politically, emotionally, physically and psychologically. These aforementioned challenges are further exacerbated by weak gender-neutral institutions that execute national plans without using data on women's discrimination in society. A snapshot of the progress made on the global level – including the SSA region in terms of economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival, and political empowerment between 2006 to 2015 is presented in Figure 1. Figure 1 confirms that there has indeed been progress in ensuring gender empowerment by regions and in the world at large. Despite this progress, Middle-East and North African (MENA) countries where it appears that gender discrimination is highest, together with Asia and the Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa regions, all fall below the World average in terms of the Global Gender Gap index (GGGI) from 2006 to 2015.

A further presentation of the sub-indexes of the GGGI is captured in Figure 2. Again, whilst educational attainment in SSA still lags behind other regions, there appears to be slight improvements from 2014 till date. Similarly, there appears to be marginal progress in the health and survival sub-index of women in sub-Saharan Africa (Figure 2). Despite these progresses, there is however a setback in terms of women's political representation in SSA because while other regions have been on a steady increase, since 2014, there appears to be a decline in the SSA region. Succinctly put, apart from Rwanda, South Africa, Burundi and Zimbabwe in which the

quota set at 30 percent at both the lower and upper house have been exceeded, most of the countries in SSA still fall behind this quota (Table 1). This is probably down to issues of corruption and dominant male presence in places of power and decision making. Another reason for marginal progress in economic participation and opportunity as the GGGI suggests, may due to the reality of women being the most vulnerable to employment – with SSA having approximately 15.5 percent – which is the 2nd widest gender gap, only behind North Africa at 20.6 percent (Figure 3). Further analysis of the global labour force participation rate (LFPR)³ by regions revealed that while there was an increase in LFPR of the SSA region from 51 percent in 1990 to 64 percent in 2013 – which is an increase of 13 percent points, this was actually the lowest of all regions (UNW, 2015). Whilst an increase in LFPR will plausibly expand the employment opportunities for women globally, the issue of gender pay gaps especially in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa perpetually remains low in comparison to all other regions (Figure 4). In a nutshell, regardless of the rhetoric of women's inclusion and participation, it is evident that in SSA in particular, the need for an African inspired woman's empowerment framework that can plausibly help challenge issues of gender gaps in terms of political representation, poor labour force participation, and pay is imperative.

Conclusion

The theoretical advances in gender theorising and policy practice have not only brought about women's inclusion and participation in the MDGs era, but has also, created pathways and scenarios for empowerment to occur with the new SDGs framework. There is indeed no gainsaying that the state of women in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa has drastically improved in comparison to historical times when women's voices were suppressed and their capabilities subsumed in domestic life – as mothers and wives, in the agricultural sector and in informal work. With reconstructions of gender formations in SSA, women, are not only seen as producers and agents for human development, they have also become active citizens and leaders in changing the political economy of different African Nation States. Despite progress made indices of educational attainment, and on health and survival, issues like lack of economic opportunities and poor political representation of women in development continues to undermine their agency to bring about functioning and immediate change that can transform the sustainable development agenda of Africa. Arguably, while more women are being recognized (included) and engaged (participating) in development planning and practice context, this paper revealed that challenges of lack of women's representation in the corridors of power exacerbated by gender stereotypes, patriarchal beliefs and persisting cultural practices continue to downplay the prospect of women's equality and empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is against this backdrop that this paper recommends the need for a timely gender empowerment framework in order to strengthen the implementation of the

SDGs framework in SSA. In all, there is a need to set a research agenda that further strengthens women's positions, roles and responsibilities in African development through institutional strengthening and capacity building, increased gender awareness campaigns and, ratification of global and regional African gender plans that further advances women's inclusion, participation and eventual empowerment on national levels in African societies.

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³ LFPR as UNW (2015) argues, captures people who are currently employed and those unemployed (i.e. people who are not employed but are available and actively looking for a job) as a percentage of the working-age population.

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