



Nation Media
Foundation

NEXUS

SUMMIT 2025

**Grounded in Legacy,
Designed for Impact**

Building The Future
The Next 30

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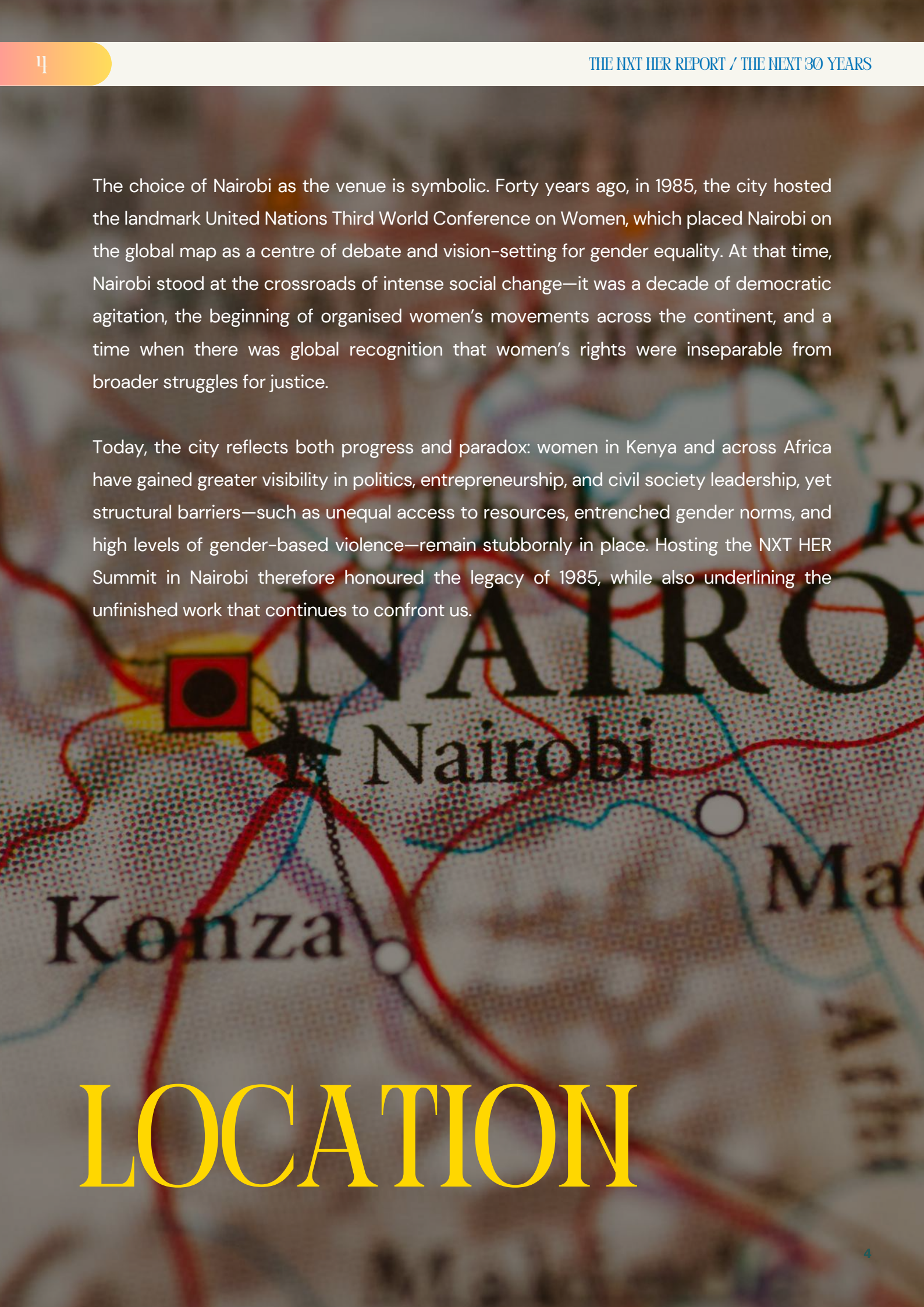
INTRODUCTION

The NXT HER Summit was convened to advance women's rights and gender equality across Africa and beyond, building on decades of activism and progress while recognising the urgent work that still lies ahead. Drawing its inspiration from the landmark 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—one of the most transformative global commitments to women's empowerment—the summit re-examined its 12 critical areas of concern through the lens of today's realities. These priorities were distilled into four thematic pillars: Education and Literacy, Health, Power and Decision Making, and the Creative Economy.

Across these themes, the message is clear – structural change cannot be achieved without also transforming how stories are told: equipping women to narrate their own experiences, challenging dominant narratives, and ensuring visibility for diverse voices. A strong call for intergenerational solidarity ran through the conversations, affirming that the progress made must be safeguarded, expanded, and passed forward so that the next 30 years deliver even greater gains for women and girls.

The choice of Nairobi as the venue is symbolic. Forty years ago, in 1985, the city hosted the landmark United Nations Third World Conference on Women, which placed Nairobi on the global map as a centre of debate and vision-setting for gender equality. At that time, Nairobi stood at the crossroads of intense social change—it was a decade of democratic agitation, the beginning of organised women’s movements across the continent, and a time when there was global recognition that women’s rights were inseparable from broader struggles for justice.

Today, the city reflects both progress and paradox: women in Kenya and across Africa have gained greater visibility in politics, entrepreneurship, and civil society leadership, yet structural barriers—such as unequal access to resources, entrenched gender norms, and high levels of gender-based violence—remain stubbornly in place. Hosting the NXT HER Summit in Nairobi therefore honoured the legacy of 1985, while also underlining the unfinished work that continues to confront us.



LOCATION



In his opening address, Odundo highlighted the significant progress that has been achieved, with more women rising into leadership, greater access to education and healthcare, and stronger constitutional and legal protections in Kenya. He spotlighted the role of media in shaping narratives noting that Nation Media Group has invested in training journalists to capture gender nuances in ways that reflect both men's and women's realities.

Key takeaways:

- Despite these gains, major challenges remain, including persistent gender-based violence, health disparities, exclusion from economic opportunities, and a global democratic backsliding that has slowed progress toward equality.
- The World Economic Forum projects that, at the current pace, it will take 134 years to close the global gender gap, highlighting the urgency of renewed collaboration and deliberate action.
- The media is a powerful driver of change, with Nation Media Group shifting from storytelling to “story-shaping” and establishing Africa’s first fully-fledged gender desk in 2019, which has produced over 5,000 stories centred on women’s experiences.
- Gender-sensitive reporting has amplified women’s voices, influenced national debate, and even prompted government interventions, such as securing citizenship rights for marginalised women in Taita Taveta.
- Kenya has made remarkable strides in corporate leadership, with women’s representation rising from 15% in 2015 to 33% today, surpassing the global average and breaking beyond traditional roles of secretary/ HR into CEO and CFO positions.
- Intergenerational dialogue and partnerships are essential to accelerate progress for the next 30 years.

GEOFFREY ODUNDO
GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR & CEO, NATION MEDIA GROUP PLC



Amb. Prof. Maria Nzomo highlighted Nairobi's role in advancing women's rights that predates the 1995 Beijing Conference, recalling the 1985 UN Women's Decade conference in Nairobi which produced the Forward-Looking Strategies that laid the groundwork for Beijing. She was emphatic that progress is not just about occupying seats at decision-making tables, but about rewriting the rules of engagement, shifting strategies from lamentation to implementation, and delivering bold, concrete actions.

Key takeaways:

- Women's rights are a "contract between generations,"; progress is not simply about honouring past struggles but about fulfilling obligations to those yet to be born.
- A sober assessment is needed of why progress has been so painfully slow despite centuries of activism, and deep soul-searching on what must be done differently to decisively dismantle patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and misogyny.
- The media is a critical actor in shaping public opinion and sustaining women's voices, yet its record remains mixed, often amplifying women as novelties or controversies rather than as substantive leaders.
- Examples such as the Justice for Liz campaign in 2013 and the Gen Z-led protests against femicide in 2024 demonstrated the positive power of media and digital platforms when they amplify public outrage and demand accountability.
- On health, there has been progress in maternal care and family planning in countries such as Rwanda and Kenya. Glaring gaps remain, with too many women still dying in childbirth and too many girls subjected to harmful practices like FGM.
- The next 30 years must prioritise universal, gender-responsive health systems that protect reproductive rights, address mental health, and guarantee that no woman's life or wellbeing is sacrificed.
- On power and decision-making, Rwanda's world-leading representation of women in parliament must be lauded, as well as trailblazers like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and the visionary Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai.
- Yet numbers alone are not enough: women must become transformational leaders with the capacity to set agendas, reshape institutions, and dismantle structural and cultural barriers that sustain exclusion.
- The future will not arrive by chance but by choice—the deliberate choices leaders, citizens, institutions, and communities make to honour past struggles and secure a transformative legacy for the next 30 years.

AMBASSADOR PROF. MARIA NZOMO, PHD, EBS, MBS
PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, DIPLOMACY & GOVERNANCE,
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP CENTRE



In her remarks, Dr. Dube argued that rights-based family planning is fundamentally about sex and power—who has it, who doesn't, and who controls choice. She stressed that real choice, including access to contraception, is foundational to women's autonomy and life trajectories, and invites the audience to reflect on how personal milestones hinge on that choice.

Key takeaways:

- There's a global crisis of unmet need: 259 million women want to avoid pregnancy but are not using modern contraception due to barriers in power, information, policy, and supply.
- Sub-Saharan Africa faces the highest rates of teenage pregnancy and maternal mortality while overall modern contraceptive use remains below 20%, with many deaths attributable to preventable systems failures.
- Fully meeting the global need for contraception would avert 21 million unplanned births, 8 million miscarriages, and 46 million abortions each year, many in unsafe conditions.
- Every \$1 invested in contraception yields about \$8 in social and economic benefits. Closing the gender gap—requiring equitable access to contraception—could raise global per-capita GDP by roughly 20%.
- Evidence from Kenya shows that contraceptive access increases women's paid work by over 10% and boosts control over their wages by more than 14%, linking reproductive autonomy to tangible economic empowerment.
- Universal, gender-responsive health systems must protect reproductive rights, prioritise adolescent and mental health, and guarantee equitable access regardless of culture, religion, or geography.
- We must caution against “restorative” cultural nostalgia used to block rights; instead, we must adopt a reflective stance that learns from the past rather than re-imposing it.
- Funding shortfalls, regressive policies cloaked in “family values,” and rampant misinformation are undermining reproductive rights and must be countered by normalised, stigma-free conversations about family planning.
- Cross-sector action—especially from media partners—is essential to break taboos, correct disinformation, and keep women's voices central, highlighting FP2030's “Made Possible” campaign to mobilise commitments and resources.

DR. SAMUKELISO DUBE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FP2030



THE MOVEMENT THAT SHAPED US



From Left: Isabel, Ninabina, Nerima, Prof. Winnie

Speakers:

- ▶ Prof. Winnie V. Mitullah
- ▶ Nerima Wako-Ojiwa
- ▶ Ninabina Davie
- ▶ Isabel Anani
- ▶ Janet Mbugua (moderator)

FUTURE frontiers



WHAT IF..
HORIZONTAL
POWER WAS THE
NEW NORMAL?

Patriarchy is confused by leaderless movements. What if the future of activism was rooted in horizontal, care-based leadership—where thousands of voices, not a single figurehead, redefine how power is built and sustained?

Thirty years after the Beijing Declaration, this fireside chat brought together four women from different generations to reflect on progress, persistent gaps, and the future of gender equality. Moderated by Janet Mbugua, the discussion revealed both the frustrations and the possibilities that mark this moment in the struggle for women's rights.

Looking back, moving forward

Professor Winnie V. Mitullah began with a reminder that the struggle for equality predates Beijing '95. "I am pre-Beijing. During the [1985] Nairobi summit, we were young master's students helping senior women prepare the groundwork. That made me proud to be part of Beijing, because of my contribution." Yet her optimism was tempered by realism: "We need to accelerate. I'm praying for the time we will make at least a 1% movement toward equality."

For Nerima Wako-Ojiwa, who leads the youth organisation Siasa Place, the link between generations is clear. "It is because of your efforts that we are here today. I can run a youth organisation working in 17 counties, reaching thousands of young people... confident and brave." She highlighted how the sacrifices of older women created space for her generation to lead with courage.

For Ninabina Davie, the personal and political timelines intersect. "I am 30, which means I was born the year Beijing happened. I am here because the mothers and women who raised me, the women of 1995 and after, made sure we could sit at tables like this."

But she also cautioned that the gap between talk and action remains wide: “Too often, what we say in rooms like this stays in the room. A few continue the work, but many do not. That’s the gap we must bridge.”

The youngest panellist, Isabel Anani, reminded the audience that the old struggles are not yet past. “I first realised things needed to change when I was 12. I grew up in northern Nigeria, where so many girls couldn’t go to school and were threatened with early marriage. Even in my own school, when I said I wanted to study engineering, people laughed and told me to do something else.” Her resistance began through spoken word poetry, shaped by the conviction that “girls can, girls will, and girls are doing.”

Balancing wins and setbacks

When the conversation turned to whether the struggle had failed or progressed, Davie insisted on calling it a gap rather than failure, while Wako-Ojiwa acknowledged the gray area between wins and losses. “There’s been development, even in our Constitution, and small gains in political leadership,” said Wako-Ojiwa. “But sometimes I feel let down. During last year’s protests on femicide and the Finance Bill, we saw [some women’s] caucuses stay silent. Still, it’s not a complete failure. We’re seeing many young women step up.”

Prof. Mitullah stressed the importance of looking at statistics more closely. “Globally, we say we’ve closed 69% of the [gender] gap, but when you break it down by regions or households, it may be only 22%. She called for deliberate affirmative action: “Countries like Rwanda, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa have met or surpassed 33% representation. Kenya is still lagging, even after court battles.” For her, digital activism offers hope: “In 2024, when people were in the streets, we saw men, women, and children, almost equally represented. I hope that energy will carry into 2027 and beyond.”

Facing backlash and reinventing power

The panellists also confronted the resurgence of anti-gender rhetoric and patriarchal backlash. For Davie, the answer comes back to agency: “One word for me is choice. I had the choice to decide when and how to have children, and that made all the difference. Too many women still cannot choose.

That’s why we need campaigns like Made Possible for family planning. Choice is how we keep ahead of the dragon of patriarchy.”

For 17-year-old Anani, the word was opportunity. “In October 2024, I was Speaker of Parliament for a day. It was historic, but I didn’t want it to be a one-off stunt. What mattered to me was opportunity. Women are change-makers. Give a girl the opportunity to lead, and you won’t regret it.”



Too often, what we say in rooms like this stays in the room. A few continue the work, but many do not. That’s the gap we must bridge.

~ Ninabina Davie

Wako-Ojiwa pointed to new forms of organising as the way forward. “The protests of the last two years were led by young feminists. Patriarchy is used to one clear leader it can attack. But this is horizontal leadership—several leaders, harder to dismantle. Young men were quickly taken out, but the young women remained. We even ran a bail campaign—fundraising nearly three million shillings online to free protestors we had never met. That is care-based organising.”

From the wisdom of the elders to those born into Beijing’s legacy, and finally to the youngest advocates confronting today’s barriers, the fireside chat captured the continuum of struggle. Three words—choice, opportunity, and care-based organising—emerged as guiding strategies for the next chapter. Together, they reflect the resilience required not just to resist patriarchy’s shifting forms, but to reimagine power itself.

POWER AND PROGRESS



30 YEARS ON



From Left: Carol, Dr. Joachim, Faiza

Speakers:

- ▶ Faiza Jama Mohamed
- ▶ Carol Warui
- ▶ Dr. Joachim Chijide
- ▶ Dr. Sheila Macharia (moderator)

This panel explored how far the struggle for gender equality has come in the three decades since Beijing, and what remains to be done to secure power and progress for women. Moderated by Dr. Sheila Macharia, the conversation highlighted the transformative potential of women in corporate leadership, the role of law and policy, and the translation of global commitments into lived realities for girls and women.

Building a pipeline for women in corporate leadership

Carol Warui, co-chair of 50/50 Women on Boards, began by situating her perspective as a millennial in the intergenerational spectrum. She noted the stark gap between women's representation in corporate leadership and their presence on boards, highlighting that women accounted for only 7% of board membership in listed firms.

For Warui, the work is about demystifying what boards are and building readiness across generations. "We've grown up thinking of [a] board as this mythical creature. But most of us already have the skills—from running businesses, homes, even estate committees. We need to make board service accessible through training, mentorship, and building social capital." She emphasised that breaking barriers means creating a pipeline of younger women ready to serve, rather than recycling the same few faces across multiple boards.

WOMEN HOLD
BOARD SEATS IN
NSE-LISTED FIRMS IN
KENYA

7%

DATA DIVE

Women hold only 7% of board seats in NSE-listed firms in Kenya — a sharp contrast to the 33% of women in corporate leadership roles. This underscores the persistence of the "glass boardroom" even as progress is made elsewhere.

Out of 55 African Union member states, 46 have ratified the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. While this shows significant continental buy-in, nine countries remain outside the framework.



The law as the foundation of equality

Faiza Jama Mohamed, Africa Regional Director of Equality Now, reminded the audience that laws remain the backbone of women's rights. "The law governs all of us. Without it, discriminatory practices persist unchecked. That's why internationally agreed laws and protocols matter—they commit governments to shared standards."

Mohamed shared the example of the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted in 2003: "Out of 55 African Union member states, 46 have ratified. But ratification is only the first step—countries must align their national laws and implement them."

She highlighted the role of the judiciary in defending rights, pointing to a Kenyan case where the constitutionality of the Anti-FGM Act was challenged. "FGM is torture. Without the law, thousands of girls would be cut. Courts upholding the Act show why legal protection is critical." She also recounted cases where girls themselves, with the help of civil society, went to court to prevent being cut—demonstrating how legal frameworks, once enacted, can directly save lives.



For the first time globally, women now outnumber men in tertiary education. And not only are they more numerous, they are often outperforming men

~ Dr. Joaquim Chijide



Dr. Joaquim Chijide of UNFPA reflected on how progress can be measured in ways that move beyond symbolism to tangible, lived impact. First is the importance of measurement. "What's not measured is really not done. Women must be able to tell their stories with the data available." While data often highlights what's going wrong, he emphasised the need to also celebrate clear gains.

Maternal health remains a sensitive measure of progress. "Maternal mortality ratio is responsive to so many things: social determinants, access to healthcare, quality of services. It worsens in humanitarian crises, so progress here is significant. As of 2024, we've seen a 40% decline in maternal mortality globally," noted Dr. Chijide. One persistent challenge is decision-making power: women often cannot choose when to seek care, despite pregnancy being a shared responsibility.

FUTURE frontiers



WHAT IF.. WE
HAD EQUAL
REPRESENTATION
ON BOARDS?

Imagine a future where women hold at least 50% of board positions across Africa's corporate landscape. This would normalize female leadership in decision-making spaces and end the recycling of a small elite of women leaders.

78% WOMEN HAVE BANK ACCOUNTS

DATA DIVE

As of 2024, 78% of women have bank accounts—up from much lower levels just a few years ago. This signals growing financial independence, though still slightly behind men at 83%.

90% LIVING ABOVE THE EXTREME POVERTY LINE

For the first time, more than 90% of women are living above the extreme poverty line of \$2.15 a day, marking a historic step forward in economic empowerment.



In education, the story is encouraging. “For the first time globally, women now outnumber men in tertiary education. And not only are they more numerous, they are often outperforming men,” he explained, adding that women see higher returns on investment in education.

Normalising women's successes

The panel also explored the role of media in shaping narratives about women's power and progress. Panellists reflected on how coverage can either reinforce stereotypes or open new possibilities.

For Mohamed, the key was shifting focus from women only as victims to women as leaders, innovators, and change-makers. “It's important for the media to cover the positive stories of women making change, not only when they are victimised. Women are diverse: they are caregivers, but also leaders, engineers, doctors. Showing this range normalises women's presence in every sphere.” The media, she argued, must tell women's stories daily, through their own voices and realities, to build confidence and inspire younger generations.

Warui, drawing from her background in public relations and as co-chair of 50/50 Women on Boards, returned to the question of representation: “Women are 51% of the population, yet underrepresented on boards, in politics, in leadership. If we are not at the decision-making table, then who is making decisions for us?”

Ultimately, power and progress for women will only be sustained if media, policy, and leadership work in concert to normalise women's presence in every sphere of life and accelerate the unfinished journey toward equality.



Out of 55 African Union member states, 46 have ratified. But ratification is only the first step—countries must align their national laws and implement them.

~Faiza Jama Mohamed

PAN-AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY, PROGRESS, AND PATRIARCHY





From Left: Justine, Kavutha, Zaina, Margaret, Emma

Speakers:

- ▶ Hon. Prof. Margaret Kobia, PhD, EGH
- ▶ Emma Kaliya
- ▶ Justine Wanda
- ▶ Zaina W. Kombo
- ▶ Kavutha Mutua
- ▶ Zaha Indimuli (moderator)

This panel sought to outline the unfinished struggle to dismantle patriarchy, the uneven alignment between national laws and international commitments, and the lessons that Africa can learn across regions. Moderator Zaha Indimuli connected experiences across borders and around the continent, underscoring that progress can only be achieved when we see our struggles as linked.

A mixed record of progress and pushback

Speaking from Malawi, Emma Kaliya offered a sobering perspective on how far the continent has come since Beijing — and how much remains contested. “Thirty years after Beijing and more than twenty years after the Maputo Protocol... there is progress in laws on gender equality and more women in politics, but implementation remains weak. Too often, governments sign international instruments, only to return home and use sovereignty as an excuse not to act.”

She pointed to concrete areas where commitments have stalled. “Child marriage is still on the rise. On Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), even mentioning comprehensive sexuality education or safe abortion is treated as taboo, despite the fact that these were already agreed upon in the Maputo Protocol Article 14.” For Kaliya, the contradiction is stark: states present progressive language at the UN, but roll back at home.



We are making gains, but too often they are rolled back. That is why civil society must remain present at every step...

~ Emma Kaliya

Civil society as watchdog

Kaliya emphasised that Southern Africa’s advances on gender rights have been driven as much by civil society as by governments. “We worked alongside our member states to push not only for the adoption but also ratification of the SADC Gender Protocol. In 2017, civil society successfully pushed to add SRHR and climate change to the protocol, because these issues are central to women’s lives.”

To keep governments accountable, advocates developed the SADC Gender Barometer, an independent monitoring tool that tracks how far states are delivering on commitments. “Countries that fall behind feel the pressure when others are celebrated. Namibia, for example, is a success story with three women at the top of political leadership. But one country doing well is not enough. We need consistency across the region.”

It is a reminder that progress is fragile without vigilance. “We are making gains, but too often they are rolled back. That is why civil society must remain present at every step — to remind governments of their obligations and to ensure commitments are not left on paper.”

Reshaping governance

Professor Margaret Kobia brought the conversation closer to home, drawing on her experience as Cabinet Secretary and Chair of the Public Service Commission. She began by acknowledging the trailblazers who paved the way but noted that progress has been incremental and often hard-won. “When I joined the public service in the early 1980s, women were not even entitled to a house allowance because it was assumed their husbands would provide for them. Women fought to change that policy. This is how far we have come.”

For Prof. Kobia, participation in governance structures is essential. “Decisions are made in boardrooms, in parliaments, in organisational structures. If you are not at the table, policies that affect women will not reflect women’s realities. People don’t come from nowhere; they rise through deliberate structures. That is why representation matters.”

She also reflected on her own career in leadership. “When I first served on a board in 2007, there were only two women and seven men. You constantly felt your voice wasn’t being heard. But thanks to constitutional provisions requiring 30% representation, the situation has improved, at least at the county level where women are nominated if not elected. At the national level, we are still struggling with the two-thirds gender rule.”

Her analysis of patriarchy was both nuanced and pragmatic. “Patriarchy is a social construction, and it varies by community. But at its core, it assumes men as a group are superior and women as a group are inferior—even a small boy is often valued above a grown woman. Unless structures are gender-responsive, decisions will always tilt in that direction.”

Prof. Kobia urged women to bring not only their presence but also their expertise into these spaces. “Power is not given. You must use your soft power, your technical expertise, your diversity of strengths. Some women will lead through a powerful speech, others through quiet but deliberate influence. All of it matters. What counts is making structures responsive, so they deliver policies and regulations that advance gender equality.”



From Left: Kavutha, Dr. Dube

DATA DIVE

15 RWANDA’S LOWERED AGE OF CONTRACEPTIVE ACCESS

Rwanda lowered the age of contraceptive access from 18 to 15 — a bold new step in expanding reproductive health rights in the region.

14% PREGNANCIES ENDED IN UNSAFE ABORTION IN KENYA

Up to 14% of all pregnancies ended in unsafe abortion in Kenya, according to the 2014 Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS), despite constitutional protections, highlighting the dangerous contradictions between law and practice.

FUTURE frontiers



WHAT IF... WE COULD TURN COMMITMENTS INTO ACCOUNTABILITY?

Regional barometers like SADC’s gender scorecard could become continental tools for naming, shaming, and incentivizing governments to move from signing protocols to fully implementing them.

“

Decisions are made in boardrooms, in parliaments, in organisational structures. If you are not at the table, policies that affect women will not reflect women's realities. People don't come from nowhere; they rise through deliberate structures. That is why representation matters

~ Hon. Prof. Margaret Kobia,
PhD, EGH

Naming and disrupting patriarchy

Zaina Kombo of Amnesty International offered a sharp analysis of how patriarchy continues to shape legal and policy frameworks. For her, the first site of struggle is language, stressing that patriarchy is not only about men; women, too, can reproduce patriarchal systems. “We were trained to believe that men are superior. You grow up being told to learn how to peel potatoes properly, so you don't embarrass your family in your husband's home. That conditioning means women sometimes carry patriarchal attitudes into boardrooms and policy spaces. You can see patriarchy manifest even where women are present.”

The strategy to counter this, Kombo argued, is consistency. “We would not be here without continuously talking about Maputo, about Beijing, about Nairobi and Mexico. Gender equality is a journey we may never see fully realised in our lifetime, which is why passing the baton matters. We must mentor, we must prepare the next generation, and we must plan [even for] 100 years in the future.”

She also challenged the notion that resilience must mean endless struggle. “Rest is part of success. We cannot achieve gender equality when we are all burnt out. Women are fighting battles on many fronts – from unsafe food and toxic cosmetics to harassment in transport and the workplace. To sustain the fight, we must make room for rest and self-care, while ensuring others learn from us and carry the work forward.”



Bridging commitments and reality

Kavutha Mutua, founder of the Legal Caravan, pointed to examples of progress, particularly in Rwanda. “Rwanda [has] passed a health bill lowering the age of access to contraceptives from 18 to 15, and the country has successfully lifted its reservations on the Maputo Protocol. These are lessons to learn from.” She also highlighted South Africa’s 1996 Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Act as a landmark example of progress on reproductive rights in the region.

Yet the story is not one of progress alone. Kenya, she noted, is a country with “no shortage of laws but a shortage of implementation.” Contradictory provisions around reproductive health remain a major challenge, particularly around access to safe abortion services. “We cannot deny reality. Teenagers are having sex, and unless we embrace comprehensive sexuality education and protect reproductive rights, young women and girls will continue to pay the price.”

On top of this, she highlighted the problem of governments withdrawing declarations before the African Court of Justice, blocking NGOs from using it as a channel to seek redress.



Kombo



Indimuli

Satire, language, and accessibility

Closing the panel with a younger and satirical lens, comedian and writer Justine Wanda spoke about the barriers young people face in engaging with governance and rights.

She highlighted the disconnect between how laws and policies are written and how ordinary people can understand them. For Wanda, language is one of the biggest challenges. Governance is often framed in elitist or exclusionary terms, leaving many feeling they do not care about their rights or lack the capacity to participate. “Many people are excluded simply because of class, low levels of education, or even illiteracy. Policies have failed them. They can’t access the information they need, or don’t know how to approach something that could be as easy as a phone call.”

She added that this exclusion is compounded by classism in public discourse. “People talk at poor people. Leaders who interact with everyday Kenyans talk at them. They never hand them the microphone. They don’t listen. And even if they listen, they’ll just go ahead and implement their own things, because they feel like [those people] are not important.” Through satire, she works to puncture this elitism, creating new ways for young people to understand and engage with political processes that otherwise feel out of reach.

Wanda’s perspective underscored a vital truth: that dismantling patriarchy and advancing gender equality requires not only laws and policies, but also the ability to translate them into the everyday language of the people most affected.



RADICAL IDEAS BY AFRICAN WOMEN CHALLENGING SYSTEMS



Most of our laws were not constructed from a point of serving Africans — they were constructed to protect colonies

~ Dorothy Amuron

Speakers:

- ▶ Dr. Stellah Bosire
- ▶ Amanda Joan Julian Mary Banura
- ▶ Dorothy Amuron
- ▶ Dr. Jacqueline W. Kitulu
- ▶ Victoria Rubadiri (moderator)

This panel set out to spotlight radical, disruptive thinking by African women who are not only breaking barriers in their fields but also challenging the systems that perpetuate inequality. Moderator Victoria Rubadiri framed the discussion as one about “radical ideas” — ideas that are born from lived experiences and shaped by bold leadership across health, law, human rights, and youth advocacy.

From Kibra to systemic change

Dr. Stellah Bosire began by recalling her childhood in Kibra during the height of the HIV crisis in the 1990s, witnessing women shoulder the burden of care despite crushing poverty. That became her earliest model of radical leadership.

Her path into medicine, aided by scholarships, quickly revealed the limits of clinical work when divorced from social context. She recalled her first HIV patient who explained why she often missed appointments: “The patient told me, ‘The problem is transport. I have to stop my kibarua [casual work] to come.’” That moment crystallised for Dr. Bosire that medicine could not be separated from social determinants of health.

As both a doctor and lawyer, she now works at the intersection of health and justice. She stressed that the right to health is enshrined in the Constitution as a fundamental right — yet remains fragile in practice. The recent Ksh11 billion cut to Kenya’s health budget, coupled with dwindling external support from USAID and PEPFAR, jeopardizes treatment for 3 million Kenyans living with HIV and undermines funding for contraceptives and chronic illnesses.





From Left: Kitulu, Amuron, Bosire, Rubadiri

FUTURE frontiers



**WHAT IF... DOCTORS
USED NOT JUST A
STETHOSCOPE BUT A
SOCIAL JUSTICE
LENS?**

Imagine a world where healthcare was oriented towards tackling social determinants of health (poverty, GBV, access to water, menstrual health). That would reframe healthcare as inseparable from justice and governance.

Advocacy as a calling

For Dorothy Amuron, the path to becoming a lawyer and human rights advocate was shaped by her upbringing in Uganda. Raised by a single mother who defied societal expectations and raised five children alone, Amuron witnessed firsthand the economic and social injustices faced by women. Her mother had once dreamt of becoming a lawyer but sacrificed that ambition to provide for her children. Amuron carried that dream forward, eventually making it to law school.

There, an elective on Gender and the Law, taught by Professor Sylvia Tamale, became a turning point. It opened her eyes to how legal frameworks intersect with lived realities — from property rights violations to widow inheritance struggles she had already seen in her community. A mentorship session with FIDA-Uganda solidified her calling. As Amuron explained, “to be an advocate is not taught, it’s a calling. You have to feel it in your core.” Volunteering with FIDA after law school exposed her to violations no textbook could prepare her for and pushed her to become not just a lawyer, but also a counsellor and activist for women’s rights.



Radical means intentional

Dr. Jacqueline Kitulu's radical journey began in medical school, where she was one of only 10 women in a class of 100. That disparity carried into her career: "You're always the minority voice, and how we think as women, the things we are concerned about, are always the minority." Rather than complain, she chose to act. When invited into the Kenya Medical Women's Association, she quickly rose into leadership, later becoming the first female president of the Kenya Medical Association.

Her experiences sitting on Kenya's National Economic and Social Council highlighted how easily women's concerns were dismissed. While colleagues focused on infrastructure projects, she insisted health be put on the agenda — only to be labelled "Madam Social Issues." Instead of backing down, she pursued an MBA in healthcare management to ensure health and social issues were taken seriously in policy spaces.

Mentorship has been central to her approach. She created the Young Doctors Network to build a pipeline for women in medicine, bringing in voices like Dr. Stellah Bosire and ensuring younger women had role models she herself lacked. For her, radicalism is about deliberate disruption: "Radical is not reckless. Radical is intentional. It's about changing the system. It is about being serious in the spaces and being unapologetically who you are." Today, as president-elect of the World Medical Association, she insists on bringing that authenticity into global spaces, making visible what African leadership looks like and using her position to push for equity and inclusivity.

DATA DIVE

64% of borrowers from microfinance institutions in sub-Saharan Africa are women as of 2023, according to World Bank and Global Findex data. Less than a third (31%) of borrowers from formal financial institutions in sub-Saharan Africa are women.



You're always the minority voice, and how we think as women, the things we are concerned about, are always the minority

~ Dr. Jacqueline





Radical ideas born of necessity

Joining virtually from Uganda, Amanda Banura traced her path to activism back to her childhood. “I grew up in a violent family where home was always a battlefield. Being the first girl, I was the referee. I saw how my mother was treated, struggling to feed and clothe us, even as she left her own education and dreams behind.” Her mother was denied property rights and told her worth was only in bearing sons. These experiences lit a fire in Banura from a young age: she started working at six to support her mother, and when her father refused to fund her schooling, she paid her own way through high school, a diploma, and eventually a degree in public health.

Her turning point came when she realised women could organise and win. With support from a neighbour and FIDA, her mother eventually won a legal case against her father — a pivotal moment: “That showed me women can fight, we can stand up for one another, we can change the narrative. Women are not only meant for the kitchen. Women can go to school, make decisions, and lead.” Determined never to take no for an answer, she went on to found the Uganda Youth Alliance for Family Planning and Adolescent Health, breaking into a space often silenced by taboo and religious opposition. Her focus is equipping girls with information, access, and confidence to make informed decisions about their bodies and futures.

For Banura, necessity fuels radicalism: “Radical ideas are born out of necessity. I grew up in a battlefield, and I decided I would fight — not just for myself, but for every girl who deserves to be heard.”



Financing justice

The conversation shifted from personal journeys into the deeper question of systems change: how to disrupt the funding and legal frameworks that shape women's lives.

Dr. Bosire insisted that health financing must start where women are. "Nobody ever thinks about venture funds and thinks about mama mboga," she said, describing her work in creating the first Mama Mboga Venture Fund. Unlike traditional financing models that imagine millions of dollars, this fund begins with what women in informal settlements actually need: a few thousand shillings to buy stock or set up a stall.

"Just investing in one woman can have a ripple effect," said Dr. Bosire, linking women's economic empowerment directly to health access and agency. She also pointed to digital tools as another frontier: supporting women to market products online and access e-commerce spaces that had previously excluded them.

Turning to the legal arena, Amuron said that progressive constitutions and lofty commitments mean little if they remain static on paper. "Most of our laws were not constructed from a point of serving Africans — they were constructed to protect colonies," she said, pointing to outdated penal codes still shaping justice in 2025. Uganda, for instance, delayed reporting on the Maputo Protocol for a decade, a striking example of how women's rights often become box-ticking exercises rather than lived change.

For Amuron, the problem is not just weak enforcement but weak financing. Without intentional budgets, even the best-written laws cannot change daily realities. She called for laws to be treated as living documents, constantly adapted to changing contexts, and backed by clear roadmaps with funding attached.



Radical ideas are born out of necessity. I grew up in a battlefield, and I decided I would fight — not just for myself, but for every girl who deserves to be heard.

~ Amanda Joan
Julian Mary Banura



50%

HIGHER

In Kenya, secondary school enrolment in science subjects is about 50% higher for boys than for girls, meaning roughly 60-65% of science students are male, while 35-40% are female.

18.3%

SECOND-YEAR CALCULUS STUDENTS

In Kenya, secondary school enrolment in science subjects is about 50% higher for boys than for girls, meaning roughly 60-65% of science students are male, while 35-40% are female.

70%

WOMEN IN HEALTH WORKFORCE

70% of the health workforce in East Africa are women, but only 25% hold leadership positions.

Beyond tokenism

Dr. Jacqueline Kitulu highlighted the all-too-familiar pattern of placing a woman in the room to “tick the box,” while meaningful parity and influence remain elusive. For her, tokenism is not true representation but “a containment measure” designed to mute women’s voices. To shift this, she argued, women must not only take their seats at existing tables but redesign them — setting agendas and owning decisions.

Dr. Kitulu also emphasised intergenerational power-sharing: refusing to hold leadership hostage to one generation or recycle the same names on boards. Young women are not leaders of tomorrow, she stressed, but leaders of today. She cited the example of the Junior Doctors Network at the World Medical Association, where early-career doctors sit directly in global policy spaces.

On her part, Amuron grounded her reflections in the realities of access to justice for women whose sexual and reproductive health rights are violated. She pointed to how survivors of rape, defilement, or harassment are routinely stigmatised while perpetrators are shielded by a system that prioritises their protection over survivors’ dignity.

Her call was for judicial activism — to move beyond narrow interpretations of the law and confront the deeper societal dynamics that perpetuate injustice. “Most times, I feel like systems actually protect perpetrators more than they protect the women and girls who have been sinned against,” she said.

Breaking cultural barriers

Amanda Banura’s work challenges girls’ low expectations, like shying away from sciences because mathematics and biology are seen as ‘male’ subjects. She also reminds them of the power already present in their families: “When girls want something from their fathers, they go through [the mother]. That is power — and girls need to realise they hold it too.”

Banura has pressed Uganda’s government to act on taboo issues, including adolescent access to family planning. “We want the last-mile adolescent girl...to access services without fear, without shame, and without being pointed out in her community.” For her, shifting mindsets must go hand in hand with policy. And she stressed that family planning is not just a women’s issue: “When a young woman is not ready to give birth, men have a role to play in empowering and supporting her decisions.”

FUTURE frontiers



WHAT IF...WE HAD COMMUNITY-CENTRED HEALTH FINANCING?

Reimagining venture capital for the grassroots — building micro-scale funds like the Mama Mboga Venture Fund that meet women where they are, with small loans and skills training that expand purchasing power, create jobs, and directly improve access to health care.

THE
NEXT 30

Feminist
Futures



From Left: Mazaba, Ndung'u, Dube

FUTURE frontiers



WHAT IF WE
MOVED FROM
AMPLIFICATION
TO AUTHORSHIP?

Media must evolve from giving women microphones to enabling them to shape, author, and own their narratives.



Not only do we want to give microphones or pens or cameras for women's stories to be heard, but we also want the women themselves to create the stories and the realities that they want told.

~Monicah Ndung'u

Speakers:

- ▶ Dr Mazyanga Lucy Mazaba
- ▶ Monicah Ndung'u
- ▶ Dr. Samukeliso Dube
- ▶ Victoria Rubadiri (moderator)

Taking stock of the last three decades, African feminism has achieved much, but there's a lot more that needs to be done. In the last 30 years, it was about cleaning space. This panel explored the work that remains – defining what that space is and transforming that space.

Amplification is not enough

Ndung'u reminded the audience that “women in Media” was one of the original twelve areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action. She emphasised that while amplification remains important, it is no longer enough. “Not only do we want to give microphones or pens or cameras for women's stories to be heard, but we also want the women themselves to create the stories and the realities that they want told.” This shift, she explained, moves the narrative from outsiders reporting on women's struggles to women defining their own lived experiences and demands.

She drew a distinction between optics and transformation: “Amplification looks like having a woman on a panel. But it's not about the number of women on a panel — it's about ensuring that at every single moment the woman on the panel, in and by themselves, is able to curate with us what it is they talk about.” Progress, she said, is visible, but true change requires women's agency at the centre of the media conversation.



It's a journey no one person or one organisation can take alone. Our responsibility is to make sure decisions discussed are translated into action.

~ Dr. Dube

Dr. Dube noted progress on reproductive health, saying it was integral to a feminist future. Universal access to reproductive health remains the goal: "People should know they are able to choose. They should have access. They should know where to get these products and commodities. That's the vision."

But the challenges are real. "We have seen backlash on rights. Now we are fighting against...the so-called 'family values' and denied access to care." Funding cuts, she added, have also reduced access: "Many countries are still not buying their own family planning commodities because donors have been financing them. We are struggling, especially in public facilities."

For the Africa CDC, Dr. Lucy Mazaba explained, the central task is ensuring universal health coverage becomes a reality, not just a pledge. "Many countries subscribe to [the idea of universal health care]. They talk about it in all their speeches. But in terms of the systems in place, in terms of accessibility to health care and products for women, it still remains a strain."

She described how the CDC is re-aligning its divisions to focus on primary health care, including sexual and reproductive health, and working with member states to strengthen systems. Beyond ministries of health, she added, Africa CDC is engaging parliamentarians, civil society, and women's health advocates. "It's a journey no one person or one organisation can take alone. Our responsibility is to make sure decisions discussed are translated into action."

Imagining a feminist newsroom

Ndung'u then imagined what a feminist newsroom could look like. She reflected on her own entry into media 23 years ago, when she was a young producer at KTN. Looking forward, she said her hope is simple: that by 2055, the conversation around how women are covered should no longer exist. "Having a gender desk in itself says there's a problem. That shouldn't be happening in 2055."

For her, the newsroom of the future must be both inclusive and impactful. "We as the media must learn how to close the loop—not just tell the story but shape it." She emphasised the role of young people in reshaping media culture: "We foolishly remain shocked by how well educated and connected they are. They understand collaboration...[and] they are already shaping the future."



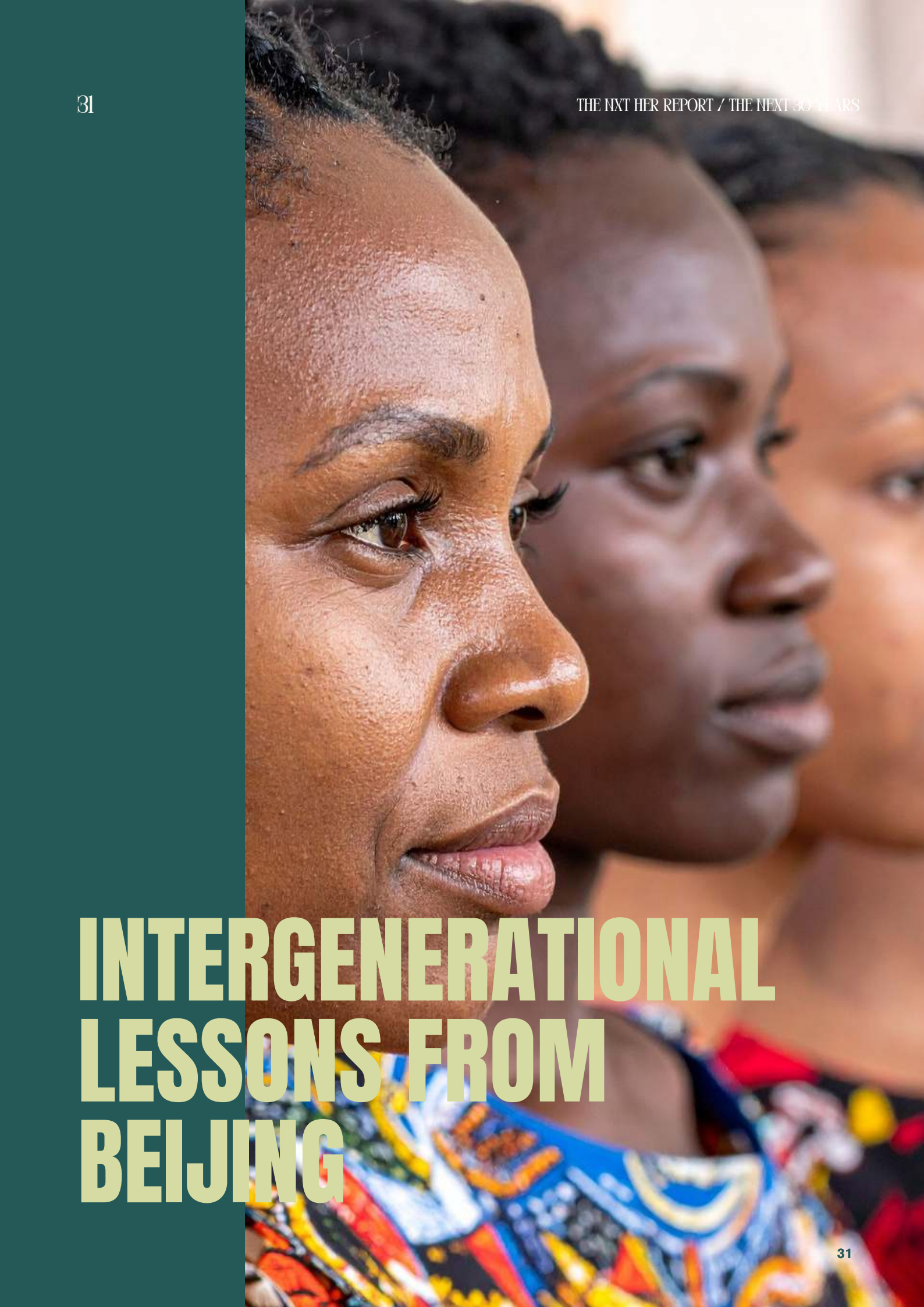
Ultimately, the era of incremental, gradual change is over. "The groundwork—understanding systems, coalitions, partnerships—is done," said Ndung'u. "The next 30 is about acting daily so that for the next woman, power feels like a norm, not a fight."

DATA DIVE



70 VS. 400

Guatemala, which channels health taxes from alcohol and tobacco directly into family planning, has reduced its maternal mortality rate to below 70. By contrast, many African countries still face rates of 300–400, showing how innovative financing can dramatically shift health outcomes.



INTERGENERATIONAL LESSONS FROM BEIJING



Speakers:

- ▶ Senator Zipporah Kittony
- ▶ Michelle Namasaka (moderator)

Senator Zipporah Kittony is a towering figure in Kenya's women's movement, best known for her long service as chair of Maendeleo ya Wanawake, the country's largest grassroots women's organisation. Over decades of leadership, she helped build a powerful platform for women's rights, advancing education, economic empowerment, and political participation in communities across Kenya.

Her journey spans the global women's conferences from Mexico City in 1975 to Beijing in 1995, where she was part of shaping the landmark "12 Critical Areas of Concern." Today, she carries with her not just the memory of those milestones, but the lived history of what it meant to fight discrimination and to organise women at scale, offering a bridge of wisdom across generations.



I was part of those who wrote the blueprint report. There is still so much to be done—health issues, water, electricity, dignity for women. But the journey has moved forward. And I hope, before I go to heaven, that some of these promises will be fulfilled.

~ Zipporah Kittony

In this fireside chat, she reminded the audience that Beijing was not the first step but the fourth in a series of global women's conferences. Beijing, she explained, became historic because it produced "the 12 critical areas of concern. This is what governments are still working on. Not all of them have been implemented—like the two-thirds gender rule, which we are still fighting for. But discrimination, which was so real in my time, is now almost something of the past."

She spoke frankly about today's disconnect: "When I sat in this room, I felt completely out of place. The generational gap is so strong. There was no proper handing over between our generation and yours."

Her story carried personal weight and reflected on her upbringing: "Life was very hard. I wore my first shoes in Standard Eight—and they were borrowed shoes. We didn't have water, we didn't have many things. Education meant walking miles."

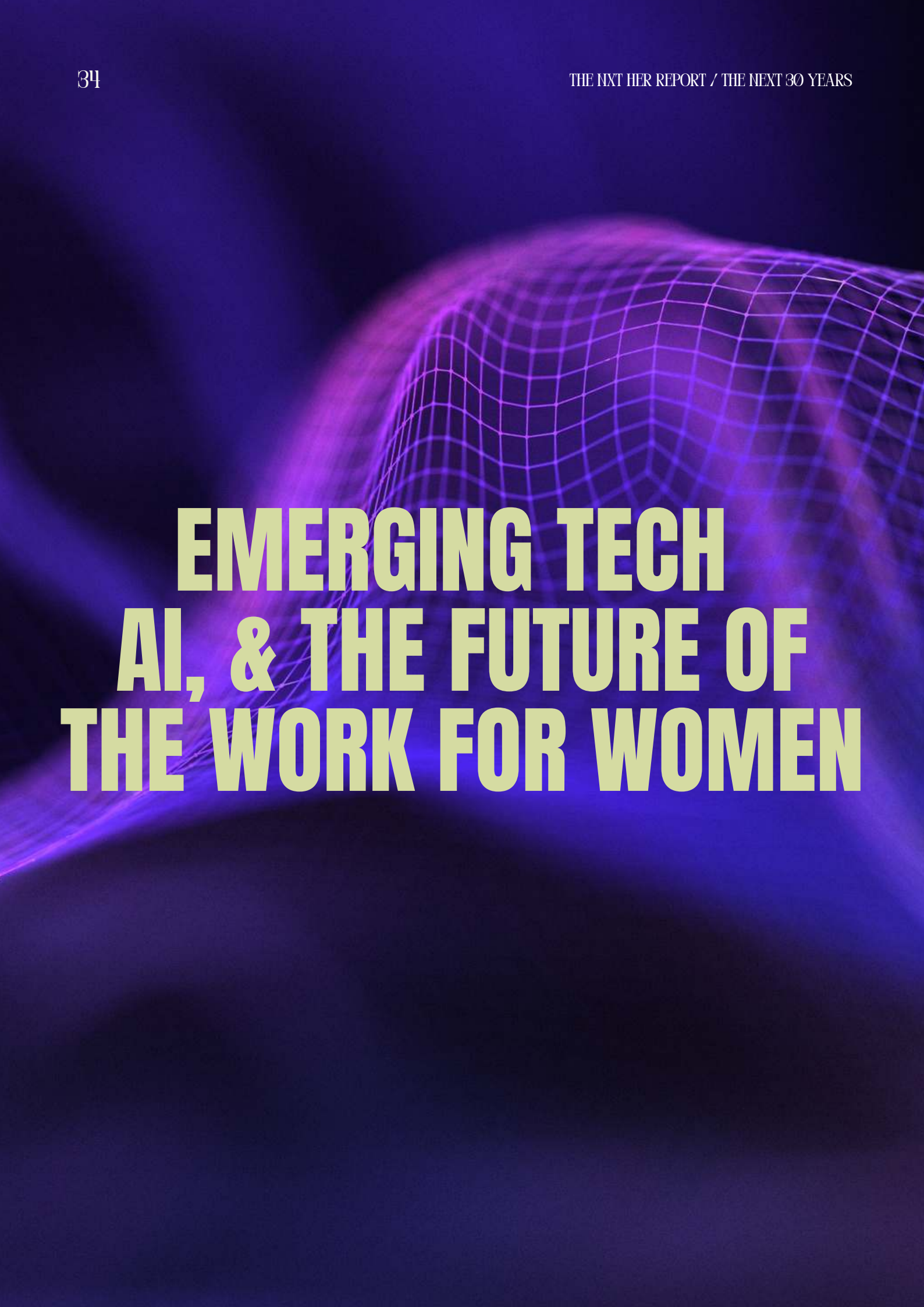
Hon. Kittony was brought up in a Christian home with nine sisters and three brothers. "I didn't see discrimination in my family because we were all treated equally. I came to learn about discrimination later in life." What shaped her journey, she said, was the "unity and hard work of our mothers," which drew her into Maendeleo ya Wanawake, where she rose to leadership. "I realised the goodness of working togetherness, for the betterment of humankind."

Asked about progress since Beijing, she was clear: "A lot has been done, but more still needs to be done. What is remaining is more women to be presidents. I am praying that one day I will see a woman president in Kenya." She saluted trailblazing leaders across Africa and warned the younger generation not to lose ground: "The 12 critical areas of concern must be nurtured. If you do not audit and protect them, they may not be fully implemented. Start caucusing now in a better manner, so that you do not lose what we fought for."





Closing, she returned to Beijing's legacy: "I was part of those who wrote the blueprint report. There is still so much to be done—health issues, water, electricity, dignity for women. But the journey has moved forward. And I hope, before I go to heaven, that some of these promises will be fulfilled."



EMERGING TECH AI, & THE FUTURE OF THE WORK FOR WOMEN



Irene



Odera

Speakers:

- ▶ Angela Oduor Lungati
- ▶ Lucy Mbuthia
- ▶ Akinyi Odera
- ▶ Irene Githinji
- ▶ Zaha Indimuli (moderator)

The session was both an opportunity to demystify AI and a chance to reflect on how women can position themselves in a rapidly changing digital landscape. To underscore the importance of inclusivity in the conversation about the future of work, moderator Zaha Indimuli also invited a surprise panellist: Taima Sitati, a Gen Z student, to represent a demographic often left out of such discussions—children and young people, who will inherit the workplaces being reshaped by AI.

Opportunities and challenges in AI

Turning the discussion toward opportunities and challenges in AI, Angela Oduor Lungati reflected on how women can move beyond being consumers of technology to becoming its creators and shapers. “The tech is powerful, but it is not the thing that changes the world. It is how people use the technology that changes the world.” For her, AI is a tool – a powerful one – but ultimately a means to an end.

On talent, Lungati noted stark underrepresentation. “Across all AI professionals, women only represent 22% of the talent pool globally. The lack of good African statistics on this highlights an existing problem.” On data, she pointed to both geographic and gender imbalances. “In Africa, we have more than 2,000 languages, but that linguistic abundance isn’t reflected in many of the tools that you all use.”



How are we going to build truly women-centric solutions if we don't have the talent, if we don't have people who understand our lived realities doing the research and building the tools, if we do not have data that represents our lived experiences, and we don't have access to the resources?

~ Angela Oduor



Oduor

Finally, resourcing remains a structural barrier. Many African innovators lack access to computing power, funding, and supportive ecosystems. “How are we going to build truly women-centric solutions if we don’t have the talent, if we don’t have people who understand our lived realities doing the research and building the tools, if we do not have data that represents our lived experiences, and we don’t have access to the resources?”

In response to these challenges, Lungati outlined practical steps. “For those of us who are building solutions—build with the communities. Build with women, not just for them.” She urged companies to hire women into technical teams, invest in programs that build capacity and skills, and form partnerships that create pathways into tech.

DATA DIVE



22%

Women’s representation among AI professionals globally, underscoring the gender gap in AI talent and leadership.



~76%

Share of unpaid care and domestic work performed by women worldwide, highlighting how care burdens limit women’s time and economic participation.



2035

By 2035, more young Africans will be entering the workforce each year than the rest of the world combined — a demographic surge that could be a dividend if matched by investment in skills, infrastructure and gender-equitable policy.



Mbuthia

Patriarchy risks being replicated in AI

On the risk of patriarchy being replicated in AI and in future work structures, Odera underscored women’s exclusion from leadership. “Only 22% of AI professionals are women, and just 15% of those make it into boardrooms,” she noted. Beyond gender, other marginalised groups – youth, people with disabilities, minorities, migrants – are also sidelined.

She pointed to design bias as well: “Why do most voice assistants use women’s voices? It reinforces stereotypes—women as carers, helpers, nurturers—without fair pay or recognition.” She also criticised imported models. “Most solutions we use are designed in Silicon Valley, not here. They don’t reflect our realities. Our young people feed data into AI systems, yet we don’t see safeguards or fair compensation.”



From Left: Oduor, Muthia, Gitinji, Odera

There's a dire need for accountability, she stressed. "It's time for civil society to act as gatekeepers—not to block development, but to regulate it. We need policies to protect women, minority groups, the environment, and our intellectual property."

Facing Practical Barriers

On the practical barriers women face in emerging tech and what kinds of support are most critical to help them thrive. Muthia began by framing the urgency. "By 2035, Africa will have more people entering the workforce than the rest of the world combined. That means millions of Africans needing jobs. She warned that while Africans provide the labour—"ChatGPT was trained by Kenyans and Nigerians"—their languages and contexts remain excluded.

She outlined the barriers women face: underrepresentation in training, hiring, and career progression, compounded by cultural norms. "We had 1,000 scholarships for women in data and cybersecurity—jobs of the future—but still had to push women to apply. There's a mindset shift needed. Women must take up opportunities, even when they don't feel fully ready."

Muthia stressed that women must build solutions to problems that affect them directly. "There are some issues—healthcare, reproductive health, gender-based violence, safety—that only women will prioritise. If we don't build for them, no one else will."

Training opportunities exist, she said, but women must seize them. "Employers must hire and promote fairly. Women must build and get funded for their solutions. And we must be present in policy spaces—or we risk being written out of the future of work."

Together, these reflections envisioned futures where women are not only present in tech but shaping it, lifting others as they rise, and leaving behind a legacy of inclusion and leadership that redefines the future of work for generations to come.

FUTURE frontiers



**WHAT IF...WOMEN
BUILT AFRICA'S AI
ON THEIR OWN
TERMS?**

Reimagining technology from the ground up — shifting women from invisible labour to visible leadership by investing in skills, funding women-led innovation, and embedding gender equity into every layer of AI design. Imagine AI solutions created in local languages, guided by feminist ethics, and powered by African women who are not just participating in the future of work, but shaping it.



WHAT FUNDERS WISH FOUNDERS KNEW



From Left: Karuga, Mwangi, Gicheru, Chebet

FUTURE frontiers



WHAT IF... WOMEN FOUNDERS COULD CLAIM THEIR FULL, UNAPOLOGETIC PLACE IN VENTURE CAPITAL?

Instead of settling for only 2% of global venture funding, what if women-led ventures in Africa were positioned as investable powerhouses—backed by clarity, conviction, and sustainable models? Women founders will no longer be exceptions, but standard bearers of a more equitable, more profitable future.



You must articulate your business model and problem statement, so when an investor shows up, you can present your case convincingly.

~ Damaris Chebet

Speakers:

- ▶ Catherine Gicheru
- ▶ Vicky Karuga
- ▶ Damaris Chebet
- ▶ Jane Mwangi
- ▶ Janet Mbugua (moderator)

This fireside chat explored how women founders can better understand and engage with funders – not just about success stories but also about the challenges of building businesses while staying authentic.

Jane Mwangi, CEO and Managing Director of Apprentice Job Work Africa (AJW Africa) brought a 360-degree view of the funding ecosystem.

Her key message was that passion and ideas must be backed by structure. “Money follows good ideas, but only if those ideas are compliant, accountable, and results-driven,” she emphasised. From her perspective, funders—whether banks, private equity firms, or donors—consistently ask the same questions: Are you compliant? Are you relevant? Do you have evidence to back your idea?

For Jane, relevance and research are non-negotiables, urging founders to treat research as the backbone of their work. “It’s not enough to have a good idea,” she said. “Is it empirically grounded? Is your problem statement clearly defined? Have you aligned it to the needs of the moment?”

For Damaris Chebet, founder of Asali by Chebet, the journey illustrated just how costly and complex that readiness can be. Her three-year-old honey enterprise is still working toward full compliance. “As a startup, getting all the documentation in place hasn’t been easy—we’re not there yet, but we keep pushing to meet the standards,” she admitted. Yet she stressed that compliance alone isn’t enough; entrepreneurs also need to package their ideas clearly. “You must articulate your business model and problem statement, so when an investor shows up, you can present your case convincingly.”



2% CAPITAL FUNDING
RECEIVED BY WOMEN-
LED BUSINESSES

DATA DIVE

The share of global venture capital funding received by women-led businesses in 2025, despite research showing they consistently outperform male-led ventures.

\$4.5T UNTAPPED
ECONOMIC
POWER OF
WOMEN
FOUNDERS

Closing the gender gap in entrepreneurship could add up to \$4.5 trillion to global GDP by 2030, underscoring the untapped economic power of women founders.



Catherine Gicheru of the Africa Women Journalism Project (AWJP) stressed that funders don't expect perfection but clarity of vision. What resonates, she explained, is when a founder can say, "Here's what I've achieved, here's where I still struggle, and here's the difference I can make if supported."

For Gicheru, owning the narrative also means situating personal stories within a bigger ecosystem: "Even moving the needle a millimetre is impact. We don't need permission to be. Women must sit fully in these spaces, unapologetically, and claim their place."

On her part, Vicky Karuga explained that although she trained as an architect, she transitioned into building a company focused on psychometric assessments, emotional intelligence, and digital learning. What struck her most when she first entered the pitching arena was how unprepared she was to speak the language of business. "I had spent my early adult years raising children and did not master any business language. Coming to the business world, I realised phrases like, 'we'll gradually grow' or 'I love what I'm doing' don't work. Investors expect clarity."

One mentor, she recalled, helped her break down her business into revenue streams and translate her value into measurable growth. This clarity was not just about numbers but also confidence. "Too often, women underpitch. We present our businesses like charity—'this will help 100 farmers'—instead of saying, here's the market share, the revenue model, the growth potential. Purpose matters, yes, but business is about scale and returns."



Even moving the needle a millimetre is impact. We don't need permission to be. Women must sit fully in these spaces, unapologetically, and claim their place.

~ Catherine Gicheru

A woman's profile is shown in a dark setting, illuminated by vibrant, colorful lights. Her face and neck are covered in shimmering, multi-colored makeup that reflects light in shades of blue, orange, and yellow. A large, semi-transparent pink heart graphic is superimposed over her face, partially obscuring her features. The overall aesthetic is artistic and futuristic.

CREATIVE ECONOMY AND CULTURAL POWER: OWNERSHIP IP AND INFLUENCE



Muthoni



Hassan

Speakers:

- ▶ Muthoni Drummer Queen
- ▶ Sarah Hassan
- ▶ Nelly Tuikong
- ▶ Dr. Claire Kinuthia
- ▶ Mariam Bishar (moderator)

This panel explored how women in the creative industries navigate the fine line between artistic passion and the business of ownership. The conversation offered revealing lessons on copyright, contracts, and the urgent need to safeguard creativity in an era of AI and deepfakes.

For Muthoni Drummer Queen (also known by her moniker, MDQ), awareness came early. In studios and contracts, she quickly realized protection was non-negotiable. But the true “aha moment” arrived when she registered with a Swiss copyright association and began receiving royalties. “That experience showed me IP could translate into reliable, passive income,” she said.

When she later launched her festival – the renowned Blankets and Wine –MDQ registered the name and trademarks from the start. That groundwork proved essential when others tried to copy the brand. “Taking those steps [will] cost you something now, but it’ll cost you everything later,” she warned. Still, she was clear: “Overall, copyright protection works. When it’s in your name, and you can demonstrate it’s in your name, generally the law will support you.”

MDQ shared an experience where unscrupulous people in other markets have gone ahead and done a registration of her brand without her consent. Her team had to prove prior ownership and extend copyright coverage across territories—which is expensive, but necessary.

ESTIMATED
ANNUAL LOSS IN
AFRICA'S CREATIVE
INDUSTRIES

\$2.3B

DATA DIVE

The estimated annual loss in Africa's creative industries due to piracy, eroding trust from investors and limiting growth opportunities.

80%

of Kenyan musicians who report receiving little to no royalties from local collection agencies, underscoring systemic failures in monetization.



Tuikong



Kinuthia

In Sarah Hassan's experience, shifting from actor to producer brought new questions of ownership. Hassan admitted that early on, "I was more into the passion of storytelling...so I wasn't really focused on the contract, the ownership, or the use of my image." She feels lucky that at that time, AI and deepfakes weren't yet a threat.

Today, vigilance is key. "Read your contracts. Especially now, with deepfakes...you really have to look carefully," she said. When legal jargon confuses her, she pushes back and demands an explanation in simple, accessible English. Above all, she stressed the importance of collaborators who value protection. "It's good to work with people who respect ownership and IP."



Overall, copyright protection works. When it's in your name, and you can demonstrate it's in your name, generally the law will support you

~ Muthoni Drummer Queen

Privity of contracts

The discussion turned to the legal side of ownership. What happens when creators want to protect and monetise their work, but the legal and financial systems for IP protection are often too expensive or inaccessible, making it difficult for young founders to safeguard their ideas and content? Are online tools—or even AI like ChatGPT—enough?

Nelly Tuikong explained the principle of "privity of contracts": once signed, agreements bind both parties, and courts are reluctant to interfere. Yet she noted that unfair clauses—especially those about death or perpetuity—can be challenged, provided an advocate reviews the wording.

She also challenged the idea that IP is always inaccessible. Copyright registration through KECOBO is free and can be done online, though patents and trademarks remain costly.

From protection, the conversation shifted to monetisation. Dr. Claire Kinuthia emphasized that knowledge is the first step. "I used to think IP was just for music or film. But once you look it up, you realize it touches everyday life." Education closes gaps where exploitation thrives.

Still, many contracts remain predatory. Dr. Kinuthia recalled being asked to sign away her image, voice, and likeness "in perpetuity, in any possible universe"—for minimal pay. Such experiences, she noted, show why vigilance and empowerment are essential for creators seeking not just protection, but sustainable benefit from their intellectual property.

Vigilance is the only way

For Nelly Tuikong, ignorance is no longer an excuse. Exploitative clauses thrive because too many artists fail to read or understand what they sign. "You have to take responsibility and learn what you need to know to maximize the space you're in," she urged. Monetisation in Kenya lags, she argued, because businesses safeguard their own interests first while artists are only now awakening to the power of IP. Vigilance—pushing back, speaking up, and weighing opportunities—is the only way forward.

Yet even when artists do everything right, recognition often arrives abroad before it does at home.



From Left: Kinuthia, Tuikong, Muthoni, Hassan, Bishar

FUTURE frontiers



**WHAT IF...
CREATORS COULD
TRULY OWN THEIR
WORK IN THE AGE
OF AI?**

Instead of watching piracy, opaque contracts, and unregulated AI strip value from creative industries, what if deliberate action secured ownership, transparency, and fair returns for every artist? With collective advocacy and bold innovation, the next decade could transform Kenya's creative economy into a global powerhouse—one where talent, not exploitation, drives prosperity.

Tuikong called this frustrating but also liberating: "Don't get stuck thinking you can only succeed here. Stretch your arms—there are audiences and opportunities waiting elsewhere."

For Dr. Kinuthia, the lesson comes from both medicine and creativity. As an obstetrician-gynaecologist, she mastered laparoscopic techniques that older mentors dismissed. The same, she argued, applies to the creative economy: innovation keeps you relevant and visible. The systems exist to protect creative labour, but what matters is how artists use them.

Muthoni Drummer Queen explained that everything begins with recognizing that music itself carries inherent rights for everyone involved—the writer, singer, composer, and producer. "A song is not just art—it is a product," she said. One track alone can sustain a career, pointing to Mariah Carey's Christmas anthem as proof that songs can outlive their creators and resurface decades later.

The danger, she warned, is failing to secure those rights. "If a producer funds the studio session, then by default they own the master, not the artist." Without clarity on publishing and royalties, creators can lose out on their own work.

For MDQ, the lesson is to treat music as a commodity with endless uses. "Just as salt can be sold in countless ways, a single song can generate income through live performance, licensing, songwriting credits, teaching, or workshops."

When she switched agencies to allow her to collect royalties globally, the result was immediate, and she realised one can actually make money from music. Payments arrived multiple times a year, broken down by territory, and with co-ownership of masters, she began earning from syncs, ads, and publishing. "That's when I realized—this is the music business."



Asking the hard questions

Sarah Hassan described how her own perspective shifted when she moved into producing. “I started focusing a lot more on IP and ownership...with every script, every contract I read,” she said. For her, ownership is leverage, but piracy, she warned, undermines that entire system. “It’s very dangerous because it affects financial investment for the future.” Even when films are popular on the ground, illegal streaming hides their success. “The metrics show that it hasn’t performed well, yet it has. For investors, financiers, distributors, this is a risk.”

The stakes go beyond filmmakers alone. “Film is the one industry that hires everyone—from makeup to catering to musicians to lawyers to doctors. So when piracy makes it a risky investment, you’re taking away work from a lot of people.”

Nelly Tuikong emphasized that protection must start early. “The law works best when it’s pre-emptive. You need to protect yourself before you even start the creative process,” she said. That means scrutinising contracts and asking hard questions: “What risks am I taking? What rights am I giving away?” Employers often claim first rights over creativity, but a negotiated clause at the outset can safeguard ownership.

On AI, she noted the law is still evolving. “Currently...there are no solid laws. But it is globally agreed that creations of AI are not—AI cannot own intellectual property.” Generative tools may remix human work, but human beings remain the owners of intellectual property.

DATA DIVE

300,000+ AI-generated songs uploaded on streaming platforms in 2023 alone, blurring lines between authentic artistry and machine-made content.



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~ Nelly Tuikong



FINAL

THOUGHTS

Mary M'Mukindia's closing reflections emphasised the immense potential of women as creators, leaders, and changemakers. She highlighted the importance of planning, claiming value, and taking daily actions to advance personal and collective goals.

By combining courage, boldness, collaboration, and strategic use of technology, women can shape the next 30 years of leadership, community impact, and societal transformation.



UNLOCKING POTENTIAL, OWNING POWER

Women's creative and leadership potential spans business, politics, community, and the home; realising this potential requires boldness, courage, and deliberate daily action.



DESIGNING A LIFE OF AGENCY

Planning for personal life, health, finances, and career is critical to ensuring long-term security and agency. Women must ask for what they deserve, negotiate, and claim their value rather than waiting for permission.



VALUING THE INVISIBLE ECONOMY

Invisible work, such as caregiving and community organising, makes a substantial contribution to society and the economy; recognising and valuing this work is essential.



SISTERHOOD AS STRATEGY

Collaboration among women is a powerful driver of change; myths that women do not work well together are unfounded.



TECH AS A FEMINIST TOOL

Technology and AI can be leveraged to amplify voices, strategise and accelerate learning, but human creativity and discernment remain central.



EQUAL PARTNERS IN SHAPING THE FUTURE

Shaping the future requires seeing women not just as participants but as equal partners at all tables, actively influencing decisions and policies.

