

Mobilising, and shifting norms and behaviours for gender
equality: The African Women's Decade: 2010-2020

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Abstract

This study examines the mobilisation and shifting of norms and behaviours for gender equality in the African Union (AU). By focusing on mobilising and implementing the AU Women's Decade 2010-2020, this thesis surfaces African women's ideas, voices and actions in the defining of gender equality for African women across multiple arenas – AU Member States and transnational women-focused civil society organisations. Using liberal feminist and social constructivist theories, the study surfaces how multilateral institutions, like the African Union, can be socialised for gender equality. The findings of this study show that transnational women-focused civil society is important in placing gender into the agenda, providing the AU with grassroots perspectives of the challenges that face African women, and to monitor the implementation of gender equality programmes. The study finds that African women have succeeded in mobilising within their states, across states and across multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, to ensure that gender equality is a principle by which the AU defines itself in the context of a liberal international order. While the norm of gender equality has been codified, there remains a wide gap between codification and implementation. This study finds that the absence of concrete measurements of implementation to assess the performance of member-states and the lack of funding for the Women's Decade 2010-2020, shows the lack of political will to achieve gender equality. Thus, failure to deliver the objectives of the Women's Decade shows the “add and stir” approach to gender mainstreaming, where gender is added into the agenda of the AU without significant shifts in the behaviour to transform heteropatriarchal institutional cultures and practices. Therefore, the study shows African women have socialised the AU to codified gender equality, while substantive gender equality and feminist multilateralism remains elusive.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
ACHPR	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
AU	African Union
BPfA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGE	Commission of Gender Equality
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CSO	civil society-based organisation
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
FAS	Femmes Africa Solidarite
FEMNET	African Women's Development and Communication Network
FEMWISE	Network of African Women and Conflict Prevention Measures
FFP	feminist foreign policy
FGM	female genital mutilation
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
IGO	Intergovernmental Organisation
IJR	Institute for Justice and Reconciliation
IO	International organisations
IR	International Relations
JAES	Joint African Union European Union Strategy

LGBTQIA	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual
LIO	Liberal International Order
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MEWC	Make Every Women Count
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OAU	Organisation for African Unity
PAWO	Pan African Women's Organisation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAWID	South African Women in Dialogue
SDGEA	Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa
SOAWR	Solidarity for African Women's Rights
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1: Introduction: An African Union Towards Gender Equality?

1.1 Introduction

Issues that concern men and gender equality have been a topic of discussion for many decades. Several international legal frameworks and policies have been adopted for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality at different levels. The aim behind such strides is to ensure that women are included as key players in all spheres of society, especially in decision making, where they have been historically excluded in the running of state institutions. Even though a certain amount of progress has been made, the inclusion of women in the economic and political arena remains limited. The United Nations (UN) adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and the African Union enacted a regional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) relating to the Rights of Women in 2003. The Protocol concerns specific problems faced by women in Africa. Subsequently, in 2010, the African Union launched the African Women's Decade. The Decade seeks to achieve the advancement of women's rights in Africa using a grassroots level approach. Specifically, the Decade aimed to promote women's role in decision-making processes, inclusivity in the economy, health and reproductive rights, and combat violence against women. In addressing all the fundamental issues that affect women in the African continent, some can ask whether the African Union can be an audience for African women's voices and a vehicle for the achievement of gender equality in Africa. By focusing on the conceptualisation, mobilisation and implementation of the AU's Women's Decade 2010-2020, this thesis examines the African Union's role in advancing gender equality amongst African women.

Since its formation in 2002, the African Union (AU) has ensured that women's rights are a priority, compared to its predecessor the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Article Four of the Constitutive Act of the African Union (11 July 2000, Lome, Togo), which outlines the principles that will guide the AU, commits itself to the "promotion of gender equality". Multiple actors played a role in this, with women's organisations at the forefront in ensuring that the AU had a focus on gender equality and women's empowerment. These organisations rallied for gender equality and equity policies within the institution. The African Union succeeded the OAU in 2002, after 40 years of the OAU's existence. When it was established in 1963, the OAU was an institution that was highly focused on uniting African states in the

fight against colonisation. In fighting for the rights to self-determination of African states, the OAU ended up prioritising non-intervention (Olowu, 2011:5). This led to the further neglect of women's rights by the OAU and Member States. It is only with the African Union that there has been more intervention to curb violation of human rights and to get rid of discrimination. The AU established different legal frameworks to show its commitment towards this; the Charter for Social Action, 1999; the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, 2003 (the African Women's Protocol) (Olowu, 2011:5-6). To show more determination towards gender mainstreaming in the African continent, the African Union established a Women, Gender and Development Directorate to oversee all programmes and policies that are in correlation with gender mainstreaming and women's issues in the African Union (Gawanas, 2009).

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) addresses women empowerment, gender equality and the elimination of harmful traditions and cultural practices that strip away the dignity of women and young girls (Kabaseke, 2018:85). It provides for a wide range of women's rights (political, social, cultural, economic and environmental) and places women on the same footing as men when it comes to the development of their communities. The effectiveness of the Maputo Protocol has been shown through African states enacting laws and policies that are there to enhance women's rights (Kabaseke, 2018: 85). Countries like Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa and Zimbabwe have established Gender Equality and Equal Opportunity Commissions. To further show its commitment to gender equality, the African Union in 2004 adopted the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA, 2004). This reiterated the African Union's commitment to pursue and accelerate efforts to promote and achieve gender equality at all levels. The approach adopted by the AU in its quest to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment is informed by the UN frameworks and juridical instruments. The UN committed itself to achieve gender equality from the late 1940s, with the formation of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1946 (Martin, 2013: 14)

African women have shown presence in global political conferences on women advocating for the rights of women through ratification of international and regional treaties and instruments (Ramtohul, 2021:1). African women have been proactive at the United Nations World Conferences on Women in Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). The outcomes of these global conferences and brought forward an international focus to women's rights issues and led to an

increased pressure on African governments to respond to the demands of the local women's organisations. At the 1985 UN World Conference in Nairobi, African women were the driving force in directing greater attention towards issues regarding national liberation and apartheid, which were previously sidelined (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga and Mungwa, 2009). African women's advocacy can also be seen at the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, where they raised welfare issues pertaining to the girl child.

Even though strides have been made towards women's empowerment and gender equality, not all states have taken actions to ratify their gender policies, thus meaning that many African women continue to be marginalised since some states have not implemented the provisions of the Maputo protocol. Even with such obstacles, the African Union continues to work towards the achievement of gender equality through its international obligations. It is through the SDGEA that the years 2010 to 2020 were declared the Women's Decade (Haastrup, 2013). According to the African Union (2009; 9), the AU gender policy aims to establish a clear vision and substantial plan to make commitments that guide the process of gender mainstreaming and women empowerment to influence policies, procedures and practices which will accelerate the realisation of gender equality processes in Africa.

As it is the focus of this thesis, the AU Women's Decade provides an opportunity to assess the intersection of policy and implementation in the AU's form of gender mainstreaming. The section below investigates this further.

1.2 African Union Gender Mainstreaming

The African Union's gender mainstreaming projects have mainly consisted of a top-down approach, unlike the African Union Women's Decade that works using a grassroots level approach. In achieving the objectives of gender mainstreaming, the African Union relies on getting advice from the African Union Women's Committee (Murithi, 2010:154). The African Union established an African Trust Fund for Women, the aim of which is to ensure the development of ways of creating initiatives that promote gender equality (Murithi, 2010: 154). In the hope of a successful gender mainstreaming objective, the AU has prioritised working with non-governmental institutions.

In the year 2008, Graca Machel was appointed as a member of the mediation team after the occurrence of violence during the elections in Kenya (Ogeto, 2015). During This process, there

was an emphasis on the importance of working with women groups and networks that ensured that Kenyan women played an impactful role in achieving peace in post-electoral Kenya (Murithi, 2010:155). There has been a rise of attention on the importance of civil society, and civil society organisations have played a role in ensuring the implementation of gender mainstreaming initiatives within and by the African Union. This has been seen through the Gender is my Agenda campaign that was facilitated by a network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Murithi, 2010:155). The campaign mainly focused on advocating for gender mainstreaming in peace initiatives in the AU.

The election of Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma as the Chairperson of the African Union in 2012 can be categorised as one of the most monumental events of the African Union. In an article written by the ISS (Cilliers and Okeke, 2012), the election of Dlamini-Zuma is highlighted as an “ostensible commitment of African states to gender equality”¹. Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma advocated for women’s rights on the African continent before and during her tenure, clearly stating that “women’s rights are not a privilege but an entitlement”, Dlamini Zuma highlighted the importance of women’s political participation in achieving gender parity (African Union, 2016).

Dlamini Zuma leads a long history in political leadership. Hendricks (2015) argues that under Dlamini-Zuma’s tenure there was a more concerted effort for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in peace and security. This was shown through the appointment of Bineta Diop as the special envoy on Women, Peace and Security, and initiatives that were centred on women, peace and security in Africa. The presence of Dlamini Zuma in the AU as chair speaks to the importance of women’s representation in political participation.

1.3 Women’s Organisations and Gender Norm Creation in the AU

The emergence of gender equality regimes adopted by states and government institutions can be associated with women’s movements and non-governmental organisations. According to Kardam (2004:92), studies on international regimes have pointed to the critical role played by non-state actors in the spread of regimes across the world. Kardam (2004: 92) claims that the

¹ <https://issafrica.org/research/policy-brief/the-election-of-dr-dlamini-zuma-as-au-commission-chairperson>

rise of global gender equality regimes is an “outcome of the leadership of women’s movements and non-governmental organisations that exercised ‘structural’ and ‘intellectual’ leadership in the establishment of gender equality norms and fostered a culture of collaboration by working closely with organisations like the UN”. Norms are defined as ideas that are created by groups of people who insist on a specific way of doing things, and these ideas are subsequently spread (Jameson, 2018). In International Relations theory (IR), norms are understood as common values among states, which drive states towards development and a mutual agreement on a set of norms (Nyhamar, 2000). Finnemore and Sikkink (1998:891) define norms “as a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity”. I discuss this further in the next chapter.

The work of global women’s networks is argued to have shaped and advocated for gender equality regimes through policy advocacy (Kardam, 2020). In Africa, one of the most prominent women’s organisations in the early 1960’s was the Pan African Women’s Organisation (PAWO). The Pan African Women’s Organisation (PAWO) was formed in 1962 in Tanzania (Roy-Campbell, 1996:56). The founding members of PAWO include Aoua Ketai, who was president of the Women’s Party in Mali; Adelaide Tambo of South Africa, who represented the ANC Women’s League; Betty Kaunda of Zambia; Angie Brooks of Liberia; Maria Nyerere of Tanzania; Jeane Martin Cisse of Guinea; and many others.² The former chair of the African Union, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, praised the PAWO as an organisation that played a critical role in highlighting the participation of women in the liberation struggle and continued to raise the flag for gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa (African Union, 2017). In the fight for gender equality and women’s empowerment, in the year 1974, the PAWO was granted observer status by the OAU (Rabaka, 2020). The PAWO was given a platform by the OAU to assist the OAU on matters that concerned and related to gender equality and women. This recognition of the PAWO’s importance to the OAU and the representation of women within the institution took place during a critical time in global politics, because the 1970s marked a period of many revolutionary changes for different movements. Some examples of these movements are the civil rights movements in the USA, anti-colonial

²<https://oau60.au.int/en/foundingmothers#:~:text=Margaret%20Wambui%20Kenyatta%20of%20Kenya,the%20Pan%20African%20Women's%20Organisation>

struggles in the Global South, and feminist movements in the USA and Europe (Pielatjala, 2007:37-39).

Literature on international regimes and movements has pointed to the importance of non-state actors in the spreading of regimes and norms (Rosenau, 1992; de Nevers, 1999). According to Tickner (1999), international women's organisations and cooperation among these organisations has ensured that women are represented in broader society. Scholars like Haas (1980) have labelled this process an issue of linkage. Haas (1980) argues that a regime that links issues will only succeed if those that are on the out manage to persuade those that are in. This speaks to the idea of having shared goals. Non-state actors, particularly women's organisations, play an important role in shaping norms. As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) argue, norms are developed at the global level and then spread to regional and local context.

Nedziwe (2024) states that in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) women's organisations have played a crucial role in shaping gender norms in the region's social and historical development. In the early 2000s, non-state actors and gender-specific civil society organisations were invited to participate in the reviewing of SADC gender policies. This marked a significant shift towards engagement with women's organisations in regional and local norm settings for gender equality (Nedziwe, 2024:18). The organisational approaches of Southern African women-led NGOs led to SADC's key gender policies and their engagement in global policymaking, challenge prevailing assumptions that neglect the significance of non-state actors in both local and international roles. In 2003, the Alliance emerged as a regional confederation of gender and women's NGOs for the promotion of gender equality in the SADC region (Nedziwe, 2024).

According to Landsberg (2006) civil society can be defined as a set of activities and actions by different actors outside of the state in relation to the state. He further argues that civil society plays a significant role as it holds the trust of the people in representing them and persuading the government to address the needs and concerns of the people. Civil society organisations are important in society because of the emancipatory functions they hold as the voice of the people.

Keane defines civil society as:

an aggregate of institutions whose members are engaged primarily in a complex of non-state activities – economic cultural production, voluntary associations, and household life – and who in this way preserve and transform their identity by exercising all sorts of pressures or controls upon state institutions. (Keane, 1988:18)

According to Chaney (2016), civil society-based organisations are important because they act as a social arena that is significant in understanding contemporary gender relations. capacity to challenge the predominantly male nature of state institutions and serve as a source of diversity and solidarity in promoting norms of equality (Alexander, 1998). The emergence of legal frameworks such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action underscores the importance of civil society participation in the execution process of gender mainstreaming. The relationship between civil society-based organisations and gender equality has been neglected as a study. According to Howell and Mulligan (2004), civil society theorists tend to overlook the gender perspective in their analysis, while feminist theorists have neglected the aspect of civil society in theoretical debates.

According to Cook (1994), one of the central goals to be achieved by the UN has been the definition of discrimination against women and identifying normative standards for the elimination of discrimination against women. International organisations play a huge role in shaping, defining and diffusing norms. There has been a rise of literature on the role of non-governmental organisations and international organisations in norm development (Barret and Finnemore, 1999). By focusing on mobilising and implementing the AU Women's Decade, this thesis surfaces African women's ideas, voices and actions in the defining of gender equality for African women across multiple arenas – AU Member States and transnational women's organisations.

In Chapter 2 of the study, I bring three prominent Global South scholars of norms, Amitav Acharya (2004), Cecilia Nedziwe (2017, 2020, 2024) and Peace Meddie (2020), into conversation on norm implementation, diffusion and localisation in an African context, with Acharya focusing on Southeast Asia, Nedziwe on Southern Africa, and Meddie on West Africa. These three scholars illuminate the importance of norm transformation according to context of each region and state.

1.4 Research Questions

The core questions guiding this study are the following:

- What role is the African Union playing in advancing gender equality amongst African women?
- How are African women using the AU to achieve gender equality?

- What are the aims of the African Women’s Decade?
- What structures were tasked with implementing the African Women’s Decade within Member States and in local, regional and continental civil society?
- Can Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) such as the AU be socialised into gender and/or feminist multilateralism?

1.5 Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research methodology through conducting semi-structured elite interviews. According to Liu (2018) the concept of elite interviews is defined as academic interviews that are conducted with individuals that hold senior positions and can exert influence through various platforms and institutions. The elite status attached to these individuals comes from the type of knowledge they possess, their prestige and their proximity to power (Hunter, 1993; Zuckerman, 1972). These elites are people who are difficult to get access to in comparison with participants from other social groups (Desmond, 2004). According to Richards (1996) when it comes to interviewing these elite individuals, there are challenges that a researcher might face. These elites are not always accessible in the manner the researcher would wish for.

This study uses semi-structured elite interviewing. These interviews were in-depth and gave a nuanced perspective and information on the launching and implementation of the African Union Women’s Decade and the role of civil society-based organisations in achieving gender equality and women advancement. According to Kezar (2003:399), “feminist research recognises the importance of in-depth interviews in locating individuals and collective subjectivity.” Elite interviews in this study are in-depth interviews with elite women, who are members of society with more access to power and resources compared to usual people. In this study, I categorise these women as elites because of the positions they hold in their organisations. The women interviewed in this study include a director, a chair on a board of trustees and a diplomat. People that form part of the elite include members of parliament, ambassadors and diplomats. These figures have access to political records of the state (Makhunga, 2015).

Makhunga (2015) argues that respondents are selected based on their proximity or involvement with a specific process, event or outcome. This study examines the role played by the African

Union in achieving gender equality and women's advancement through studying the African Union Women's Decade (2010-2020). My interviewees were selected based on their association with initiatives for gender equality in civil society-based organisations and governmental structures. This study makes use of purposive sampling as I interviewed specific individuals with defined affiliations. (Roberts, Sitas and Greenstein, 2003). I used snowball sampling and relied on interviewees to recommend other individuals who would have insights to share on this research topic. In most cases, the participants referred me to other people, but the only challenge was getting responses back from the recommended participants. Even though the participants showed interest in participating, we struggled with their availability to participate in the interviews.

Makhunga notes that the most popular constraint is access to elites. Political elites are not easy people to reach due to their busy schedules. In the process of conducting interviews for my study, I tried many times through different means to reach people from the African Union, but I did not receive a response. I struggled to locate the contact details of elites whose contact details are not in the public domain. It was only through the South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID) that I gained easy access to their contact details as the contact details of the organisation was available on the internet.

The interviews for this study were conducted using virtual tools, including Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The meetings were recorded with the permission of the participants, and in addition, I took notes during the interview process. The interviews ranged from 15 minutes to an hour. I interviewed women from the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID), and a member of the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).

The women I interviewed in this study include Ms Thoko Mpumlwana, the Chair of the South African Women in Dialogue Board of Trustees; Professor Cheryl Hendrics, the director of the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation; and Ms Pravina Makan-Lakha who is the Director of Women, Peace, and Security at ACCORD. The importance of these women in this study is that they provide insights that contribute to the role of civil society in setting the agenda for gender equality from grassroots levels across Africa, into the AU. Moreover, these women have played prominent roles in working with governments in Africa to address issues that affect African

women. For example, Prof. Cheryl Hendricks worked closely with Ms Thoko Mpumlwana on the Ministerial Task Team Report on Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Offences within the Department of Defence in South Africa in 2020. Prof. Hendricks has worked on the advisory board of the Women’s International Peace Centre, while Ms Pravina Makan-Lakha is the Advisor on women, peace, and security at ACCORD. All these women provide academic insight and are public intellectuals who have worked and continue to work on issues that concern the representation of women, gender equality and the protection of women’s rights. The fifth participant from DIRCO, for confidentiality purposes, cannot be named because of the organisation they work for.

Below is a table of the participants interviewed for this study.

Table 1.1: The participants interviewed for this study

Participant	Organisation	Occupation
Ms Thoko Mpumlwana	South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID)	Chairperson of SAWID Trust. Gender and social justice activist; Chair of the Ministerial Task Team Report on Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Offences within the Department of Defence
Marthe Muller	South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID)	Chief Operations Officer of SAWID. Women historian and knowledge management practitioner
Professor Cheryl Hendricks	Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR)	Executive Director of IJR, member of the Ministerial Task Team Report on Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Offences within the Department of Defence
Pravina Makhan-Lakha	ACCORD	Projects Manager
Participant 5	DIRCO	Diplomat

1.6 Researcher Positionality

As a researcher of this study, I acknowledged the influence of my background and experiences both in the personal and professional impact this research. I approached this study from a personal and cultural standpoint shaped by my upbringing in the socio-political and gendered realities of the community I was raised in. I come from a rural background where I was surrounded by women who were left at home to take care of the homestead while the men went to work in the city. Raised by my grandmother, I am familiar with the hardships and challenges women face in navigating inequality in their daily lives. An example I can reflect on is the role of women's organisations in the village I grew up in with the men far away in the city, women worked together in establishing community projects they used as a source of income to avoid depending on their husbands for money. This project allowed these women financial freedom so that they did not have to depend on their husbands to acquire material goods. These experiences, while valuable and close to my heart, also called for self-awareness and potential biases that may arise in the research process. Therefore, I approached this study with openness to different perspectives, experiences and interpretations.

In addition, I brought to this research an academic background rooted in advocacy for gender equality, women's empowerment and the protection of women's rights. While my academic training has deepened my understanding of theoretical frameworks on gender equality, it also prompts me to be vigilant about the limitations of such frameworks when applied to diverse African contexts. This research was informed by an awareness of the historical and ongoing struggles for women's rights across Africa. The intersection of gender, colonial history, economic structures and social norms plays a critical role in understanding the context within which the African Women's Decade was situated. I recognised the need to balance the celebratory narratives of progress with the complexities and challenges that continue to impede the full realisation of gender equality in Africa.

1.7 Limitations of the study.

The Interview Process

The most challenging part of my study was the constraint of getting hold of participants. This study uses elite interviews with elite women who form part of political organisations and prominent civil society-based organisations. Establishing suitable interview times took much work due to their busy schedules. The first challenge was the delay in communication. For

most of the interviews, the participants took a while to respond to emails; at most, I would get a response after two to three weeks, if at all. Some women whom I intended to interview showed an interest in participating in the study; I also reached out on their social media platforms and through referrals; however due to their busy schedules an interview did not happen.

Eventually, when I could secure an interview, I had to postpone two or three times due to the participants last-minute travel plans. This was understandable; the participants work in senior positions in their organisations and are often on the road in and out of the country. Some participants would have last-minute meetings to attend or realise that they were double-booked for the day and therefore had to cancel the interview. This affected my morale. My anxiety always peaked on the day of the interview, as I wondered whether the participant would show up or not.

I was lucky to have a resourceful supervisor, with contacts who could contribute to this study. I am thankful to the Rhodes University Politics Department alumni, Dr Andrea Prah, who helped secure the first participant to interview. Dr Prah advised me to cut down on the number of questions I had for this study. She reasoned that the interviews would be conducted with busy and high-profile people and having many questions might scare them away and take up too much of their time.

When I finally secured the first interview, it was one of the most reassuring features of this research. I was able to interview a participant from ACCORD, Ms Pravina is an ACCORD Advisor on Women, Peace, and Security. The interview was extremely insightful, and Ms. Pravina showed great enthusiasm throughout the process, making it easy and comfortable. The interview felt more like a conversation. The following interview was with Professor Cheryl Hendricks, who is the Chair of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town. I proceeded with interviewing the Chair of South African Women in Dialogue, Ms Thoko Mpumlwana, and the Chief Operating Officer (COO), Mrs. Marthe Muller, I concluded the interviews with a participant from DIRCO. All these participants shared important information that could contribute to this study. They even advised me on other people I could interview, even though those people have yet to respond to emails.

1.8 Thesis Outline

The thesis is organised into four chapters. Chapter 1, the introductory chapter, places the AU Women's Decade within a longer historical and political context of African women's mobilisation for gender equality in multilateral institutions such as the AU and the UN. It introduces the concept of norm creation for gender equality that is expanded on in the next chapter, outlines the research questions that guided the study and the methodological tools that informed this study.

Chapter 2 describes the theoretical framework that guided this study. Drawing from existing literature, this chapter examines how multilateral organisations such as the AU guide how norms are shaped, diffused and localised, to change behaviours amongst nations and states of the AU, using liberal feminism and social constructivism. The chapter explores the possibility of state feminism and how it can ultimately pave the way for intergovernmental organisations being socialised for gendered or feminist multilateralism. Even though states like Sweden, Mexico and Canada started using feminist foreign policies, context variations may differ for the African continent.

Chapter 3 provides the findings and analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with elite women that form part of political organisation structures. In this chapter, the researcher analyses the data collected from the interviews about gender equality and the role of the AU and civil society-based organisations in achieving gender equality. The findings show that civil society organisations are imperative in the journey to achieve gender equality, therefore institutions like the AU need to have collaborations with women-based civil society organisations and grassroots movements. The findings collected in this study demonstrate that achieving gender equality in the AU and Member States faces many challenges such as a lack of funding, political will and failure implement changes. In the analysis of the data collected, the chapter shows that the AU and its Member States have made strides in the codification of gender equality frameworks, protocols and policies, however, there is a gap between the codification and the actual implementation that would lead to a substantive change of gender biases within these institutions. As a result, I make an analysis motivated by Heidi Hudson's (2009) "add and stir" that argues that without tackling patriarchal structural barriers, gender equality initiatives will remain symbolic rather than substantive. This chapter of the study discusses the findings of the data collected and gives an analysis on norm implementation,

diffusion and localisation in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, postulating that for change to occur, Member States ought to be willing to be socialised for feminist perspectives. This research speaks to highly theoretical debates between IR scholars on norms. Acharya (2004: 239-275), as an authority in the study of norms and norm-setting in multilateral institutions, argues for the importance of localisation in norm diffusion. According to Acharya (2004), this theory plays a part in understanding the role of local context in norm diffusion within international organisations. This argument speaks to the international relations literature on localising norms and the importance of domestic dynamics on norm diffusion (Acharya, 2004; Engwicht, 2018; Zimmerman, 2016, 2017; Zwingel, 2011).

Chapter 4 of the study concludes the thesis. This study examines the AU's role in promoting gender equality through the African Women's Decade (2010-2020), focusing on how the Union mobilised various stakeholders to advance gender equality across the continent. It highlights the importance of involving civil society organisations and grassroots movements in ensuring that African women from different backgrounds are represented in policy decisions. The study draws attention to the important and indispensable role played by civil society organisations in holding governments accountable and advocating for gender-sensitive policies. The African Women's Decade aligns with global milestones such as the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The study finds that while significant progress was made, particularly in legal reforms to protect women's rights, challenges remain, including financial constraints, cultural barriers and implementation issues. It notes the positive strides in countries like Rwanda and Senegal, which have high levels of female political participation. However, the study also points to the need for a more inclusive approach, where marginalised groups like the LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual) community are also considered in gender equality frameworks.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – Feminist Liberal Institutionalism and Social Constructivist Gender Equality Norm Creation

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews some of the key research that has been done on how multilateral institutions advocate for gender equality and women's advancement using liberal feminism and social constructivism. Since the 1970s, there has been a growing interest in how intergovernmental organisations incorporate gender equality in their frameworks and how those frameworks accommodate different women from different spheres. This chapter focuses on how liberal feminism frames the debate concerning gender equality within multilateral institutions. The chapter also examines the role of social constructivism and norms in international relations and states the importance of social constructivism in how multilateral institutions have an influence in the socialisation of states regarding gender norms and policies.

Feminist liberal institutionalism examines the role of international organisations (IOs), conventions and legal frameworks and how they can be used in multilateral institutions for gender equality. The perspective brought by liberal feminism illuminates the role played by institutions as forces that can bring normative change by ensuring that gender equality is deeply embedded in the structures of these institutions. Social constructivists focus on the importance of norms. This theory argues that the emergence, diffusion, internalisation and localisation of norms relies on mutual understanding and advocacy to influence behaviours for gender equality.

2.2 Gender multilateralism and the liberal international order

According to Keohane (1990:731) in *Multilateralism: an agenda for research*, multilateralism is when states come together and create policies through ad hoc arrangements or institutions. These institutions are called Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs). According to Mingst, McKibben and Arreguin-Toft (2008), they provide an arena for states to share common goals, interests and challenges. It has been argued by Keohane (1984) that the post-World War II era is built on the liberal principles of the Liberal International Order which promotes multilateral institutions and state cooperation (Keohane, 1984). It is because of the liberal international order, liberal feminists argue, that multilateral institutions play an essential role in advancing

women's rights by creating opportunities for women's participation in decision-making processes (Zhukova, 2021:20).

The liberal international order is an ideology whose foundational framework is guided by the ideas that democratic institutions are the tools needed to maintain peace between states (Ikenberry, 2018). This order was led by the United States of America and its allies, and its core values lie with the ideas of freedom, the rule of law, individual rights and a free market (Reus-Smit, 2013; Ikenberry, 2018; Alexandroff, 2019). This led to the establishment of many multilateral institutions such as the United Nations (Ikenberry, 2018). In IR theory, liberalism looks at international institutions as the main players in the stage of global politics (Kinsella, 2017:5). In its frameworks, the UN, as one of the biggest multilateral bodies in global politics, is highly influenced by ideas of liberalism.

At the end of the World Wars and the triumph of liberalism at the end of the Cold War, liberalism and liberal institutionalism were presented as the way forward in international relations, which held that institutions are what is needed to keep peace, as democracies do not go to war with each other (Axelrod and Keohane, 1985). Through the creation and advocacy of the liberal multilateral institutions, the hope was that the world would adopt a new order that would resolve conflicts through dialogue and cooperation instead of violent measures.

Liberal theories focus on appropriate ways to reform the international system. These theories promote diplomacy and multilateralism as the most efficient strategies for states to pursue and establish supranational political structures (Ali, 2020: 2). These political structures view violence as the policy of last resort. Scholars of liberalism such as John Ikenberry have argued that state power is important but so are international institutions and liberal values (Ikenberry, 1998). The concept of liberal institutions is an international relations theory that highlights the importance of global governance, multilateral institutions and shared interest through which states cooperate (Ali, 2020:3).

Kardam (1993) argues that multilateral institutions lack the systematic measures that ensure that gender equality issues are incorporated as part of development. Kardam (1991) argues that efforts to integrate women's issues into mainstream development fell short on structural transformation. To ensure that gender equality became a priority, the five women's conferences (Mexico City in 1975, Beijing 1995, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi, 1985, and New York 2000) hosted by the UN allowed for women's non-governmental organisations to lobby for a gender

perspective in development policies and strategies. The importance of the involvement of non-state actors is that the advocacy can support local women through the representation of non-governmental organisations. In the book, *The Emerging Global Gender Equality Regime from Neoliberal and Constructivist Perspectives in International Relations*, Kardam (2004) argues that a global gender equality regime is identifiable by its norms, principles and legal instruments. Neoliberal theories have also highlighted the importance of transnational networks, women's networks and multilateral organisations, which are instrumental in shaping global norms on gender equality.

2.3 Liberal Institutions and Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminist institutionalism emerges from liberalism and liberal institutionalism, by extending it to address issues that concern gender inequality and the advancement of women's rights. According to Curtin (2018), liberal feminist institutionalism examines how the dynamics of power and gender shape institutions. Liberal feminists and scholars of liberal feminism argue that it is important to have multilateral institutions, and these institutions can be used in promoting peace and development, which can be used to encourage states to promote gender equality (Kenny, 2014). The importance of this is that it challenges the masculine and patriarchal nature that possibly comes with these institutions in excluding women from representation and the decision-making processes (Thomson, 2018; Hernandez-Truyol, 2000). Liberal feminists advocate for multilateral institutions to promote gender equality.

Feminism is an ideology that operates under the idea that women should have rights that are equal to men in political, social and economic spheres (Nairan, 2014). Feminism is made of collective social theories and political movements that are motivated by the experiences of women (Bala, 2019). Feminism focuses on the issues of gender differences and advocates for equality. The feminist movement is one with a long history that has been divided into three waves. The first wave of feminism was concerned with the right of women to suffrages in the 19th century. The second wave of feminism is argued by some to have been a continuation of the first wave, with a focus on other issues of gender equality, such as bringing an end to discrimination (Nairan, 2014). The third wave of feminism took place during the 1990s, challenging the second wave of feminism and its neglect of how different women have different experiences and face oppression differently due to their race, ethnicity, class, nationality and religion (Nairan, 2014). This study focuses on liberal feminism, which contends that equality

can be attainable by removing legal and other barriers that prevent women from having the same rights as men. (Tickner, 2001).

Liberal feminism originates from the liberal political theory, this theory holds the principles of autonomy, universal rights, equal citizenship and democracy. Liberal feminists argue that, society perceives women, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men (Tong, 2009). Liberal feminists argue that all humans are equally capable of performing any job and the subordination of women is due to the reinforcement of outdated beliefs.). Society judges and values men against their while women are judged by their sex (Jagggar, 1983). Liberal feminists stress that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities and believe that there cannot be an elimination of gender oppression unless there is change in society from the bottom up (Federici, 2018).

Liberal feminism states that international organisations and institutions operate within gendered paradigms that are mostly dominated by men (True, 2009:243). This is why liberal feminists advocate for the address of gender inequality by highlighting the importance of increasing the representation of women in governmental positions (Kinsella, 2017). Liberal feminism therefore challenges institutional cultures and structures. In advocating for change, liberal feminism focuses on making use of the rule of law through demanding that exclusionary laws be changed to allow for more inclusion and recognition of marginalised actors (Hardest, 2002; Kinsella, 2017). The importance of this is that it sets out a path of long-term goals of establishing gender parity in IOs and institutions, by looking at gendered inclusivity and distribution of power (Kinsella, 2017). State and multilateral feminists have relied on liberalism at a multilateral level for various reasons. The core values of the liberal order believe and put an emphasis on the importance of individual rights, equality and justice. These values are also echoed by multilateral institutions as they are a by-product of the liberal world order.

According to Kinsella (2017:197), “The institutional change of foreign policy remains one of the most important policy changes to achieve as the fate of nations is tied to the status of women”. Tickner (1996) argues that the realm of IR is gendered in a way that marginalises women’s voices. Tickner therefore argues that women carry knowledge, perspectives and experiences that should be brought to the study of international relations. In the conversation about security, Tickner (1996) maintains that conversation should not only be about defending the state from attacks, but there should also a consideration of security of women in the state,

and that “security for women is different as women are likely to be attacked by men, they know than strangers from other states”. According to Tickner (2004; 45) feminist theory seeks to understand women’s marginalisation and subordination, and feminists ensured that issues such as wartime rape and military sex work are brought forward onto the security agenda, questioning the role of the state in its ability to provide security for women. What feminists fight for is that the conversation about security should address and centre acts of rape and violence not only from outside, but from local citizens as well, for example in countries like Rwanda, rape was used as a strategy of war.

Liberal feminist institutionalism focuses on how institutions address gender equality and advancement of women’s rights. It examines how gender and power dynamics influence institutions that are structurally dominated by masculine powers that exclude women. Therefore, liberal feminism criticises multilateral institutions for being masculine and male dominated, and advocate for legal reforms to eradicate gender-biased systems within international relations. For example, Hudson (2021) argue that peacebuilders need to treat gender as a tool of power relations, rather than as a variable of an identity category. This allows for the consideration of how global politics are gendered in nature, instead of fixating on women. The issue that liberal feminism raises from this is that if women continue to be put in spaces that mirror the experiences of men, women will continue to be invisible and will not benefit from such.

2.4 Social Constructivism

According to Adler (2005) constructivism is a theory that looks at how the world is shaped by human actions and interactions. Social constructivists argue that “gender norms and identities are socially constructed, contested and reconstructed in historical and socio-political contexts” (Kardam, 2004:85). International relations norms can evolve and adapt with time. Social constructivists view multilateral institutions as platforms that shift attitudes, beliefs and behaviours amongst states and in the international community. Kardam (2002:189; 2004:85-86) argues that the constructivist theory allows for examining contested norms, their interactions and the power relations that legitimise them. Acharya (2011:96) also states that when it comes to norm implementations, constructivist theory must adopt norm diffusion with a bottom-up approach, where those seen as weak actors can challenge normative processes adopted in multilateral institutions. Other scholars have argued that the importance of social

constructivist theory in multilateral institutions is that it helps in analysing global material changes and has become a platform for new definitions and interactions with women's movements as active agents (Ruggie, 1992:4).

Multilateral institutions can create avenues for women's empowerment and gender equality through the sharing, defining and redefining gender norms globally and locally (Kardam, 2004:94). The study draws from scholars like Acharya (2000, 2004, 2011), Kardam (2004) and Zimmerman (2016, 2017) to look at the ways in which the Women's Decade thinking, formulation and implementation reflects the development of gender equality norms in the AU. According to Burchill (2005:210) the study of cultures and international relations is closely identified with constructivism (Burchill, 2005:210).

Constructivism may help us analyse the place of law in international politics, suggesting that it is more than simply a result of political contestation, but also has a feedback effect, shaping politics. (Biersteker, 2007:10).

When looking at multilateral institutions, constructivists see these organisations as places that can be used for the study of norms, how they emerge, travel and localise to others. In the same way, constructivists also look at who spreads the norms and why those norms matter. It is argued that constructivism looks through these institutions to track and understand how the world order evolves through various actors pursuing different agendas. According to Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) there are three ways to the "norm life cycle": emergence, cascade and internalisation. Norm emergence refers to how norm creators persuade states to agree on and implement new norms; norm cascades refer to the acceptance of new norms and whether there is advocacy for other states to accept and follow these norms; and lastly, internalisation is achieved when new norms have been accepted and are no longer subject to debates (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998).). The constructivist theory contends that world politics is deeply rooted in a system of norms and values (Kotz, 1995).

2.5 Norms, Norm Implementation and Gender Equality

In global politics, multiple actors such as states, multilateral organisations, local actors and transnational advocacy groups play a huge role in exerting pressure on states to ensure that their actions reflect and conform with international expectations and laws (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Meddie (2020:44) believes that international actors have different methods and tools that they use to pressure states, and these include (1) coercion (use of force and legal

enforcement); (2) changing incentives (sanctions and rewards); (3) persuasion and discourse; and (4) capacity building.

Before one dives into the understanding and the framing of gender norms, their diffusion, and all the actors involved in such a process, we need to understand what norms are. The well-known definition of norms is that they are “standards of appropriate behaviour shared by a critical mass of states” (Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink 2002:15). Since the 1970s when the development era came into effect, gender equality norms have been integrated as a significant part of international law and multilateral institutions. In the adaptation of norms as part of multilateral institutions, Amitav Acharya speaks on the idea of norm localisation: the borrowing of ideas from different contexts and constructing them to fit the local context (Acharya, 2004:245). What is significant about norms and multilateral institutions is that norms that emerge and re-emerge at a global level, and can be diffused and adopted by regional bodies and then translated into local norms (Nedziwe, 2020:41).

Nedziwe (2020) further argues that due to the evolution of contexts in globalisation and neoliberalism, women have the platform to participate in norm development and how these norms are diffused and adapted. This is in relation to how states interact globally, regionally and locally. Peace Meddie (2020) asserts that norm implementation is a complex process that involves various actors and conditions that are contextually dependent and constantly changing. Theories of implementation that apply to all policies and scenarios are thus inevitably limited in their scope of application.

The participation of women is seen through the involvement of non-state actors in the changing and the adaptation of norms. Scholars like Tickner (2014), Amadiume (1987), Nedziwe (2020: 44) argue that the importance of non-state actors and civil society-based organisations is that they seek to provide stability for the insecurities that are perpetuated by patriarchal structures. The importance of the non-state actors and their organisations is that they can provide a dimension for local people to be included in the decision-making processes that take place at the bigger multilateral institutions.

One of the arguments Acharya (2004:239) makes is that norm diffusion does not prioritise whether ideas matter, but rather, whose ideas matter. This is one of the reasons why norm diffusion looks beyond international norms, and it highlights and stresses the role of domestic and local political organisations. The significance of such an approach is that it looks at how

things like culture pave the way of how new global norms are received (Acharya, 2004:243). This study highly depends on the work of Amitav Acharya on norms, solely because even though the context of his work is Southeast Asia, for comparison purposes his work can be used as a footprint to investigate how norms spread through international systems, from global to local, and region to region. Many IR theories find ways to explain change in global politics, and constructivists contribute to this theoretical debate by arguing that states behave in accordance with what is appropriate, as well as the logic of material consequences for their actions (Finnemore, 1996; March and Olsen, 1989; Wendt, 1999). Regarding the notion of norm diffusion and how norms travel, Krook and True (2017) speak on the “boomerang effect” which looks at how norm diffusion occurs even when states resist such trends. This model argues that in instances where states and their actors are not adhering to the demand of civil society, non-state actors are able to rely on transnational allies who use the power of principled ideas and norms to persuade their own states or international organisations to put pressure on the non-cooperative states from the outside (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). As much as this may be the case, it is important to note that when speaking on norms, Acharya (2004) argues that there is no one definition for individual norms, but they may be filled or localised in a variety of ways at both the international and domestic levels. Due to this, it is important for states and non-state actors to work together in translating norms to fit their context.

According to Fejerskov, Engberg-Pedersen, and Cold-Ravnkilde (2020:2) in the study of global norms, gender equality has been used as an arena to explore how gender equality norms are engaged with and move, and the influence they have in policies and practices. Gender norms that are internationally acknowledged seek to change norms that marginalise women (Zwingel, 2016). What this means is that norms are important in eradicating deeply embedded social values that prohibit gender equality.

According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), regional government institutions can be used and have come up as a platform for political contestation and for advocating for gender equality norms. This has been seen through the involvement and participation of women-based organisations. These organisations have worked in mobilising for gender equality and women’s empowerment. On the African continent, this was first signified by the PAWO in 1962. Founded just a year before the OAU, the PAWO aimed to fight the struggle for the recognition of African women and their inclusion in the decision-making processes in the field of

economic, political, cultural and social life, both at national and international levels, which enabled them to express their opinion in laws regarding the welfare of women and children.

The importance of the AU's participation in gender equality and women's empowerment projects is that the AU, as a regional organ, holds the potential of persuading states to adopt policies and frameworks that would rectify issues of gender inequality. According to Barlow, Grugel, and Murray-Evans, (2023:255) Scholars of constructivism argue for the importance of regionalism in shaping and orientating "Member States' behaviour through the spread of norms, whether through socialisation or rhetorical entrapment."

2.6 Areas of Cooperation in Interregional Gender Equality Norms: AU, EU and UN

The AU has played a major role in solidifying its position in global politics through establishing relations with the United Nations and the European Union. The AU dedicated itself to work with these two institutions for gender mainstreaming, gender quality and women's political participation. The UN played a role in assisting the AU and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Agency to realise African and global platforms for action through the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, UN Women and the United Nations Development Program (Martin, 2013). Furthermore, the UN plays a key role in collaborating with important African institutions to strengthen relations, provide support and transformation (Martin, 2013).

As mentioned above, when multilateral institutions were formed under the liberal international order, the aim was to prevent war and ensure good relations among different states while respecting each states' sovereignty. The history shared by the AU and the EU is entrenched in the design of these institutions (Van der Vleuten and Van Eedewijk, 2020), but while the AU struggles with financial autonomy, the EU is a well-financed institution. The AU has complained about the lack of reciprocity in its relationship with the EU, because when it comes to summit addresses the AU is not invited to EU meetings, even though the EU is invited to AU meetings in Addis Ababa (Rutazvubwa, 2010).

To strengthen its relationship with the AU, these regional bodies established a strategy document that consists of an agreement for the AU and EU to work together to address common challenges (Van der Vleuten and Van Eedewijk, 2020). The Joint African Union European Union Strategy (JAES) was established to focus on addressing issues of peace and security,

migration, development and environment. The Strategy aligns with the goals of the AU that speak to prioritising the people through empowering non-state actors and civil society and maintaining a relationship with economic partners (Kell and Vines, 2020). Based on the oppressive and colonial history of the African continent, the JAES promises to be based on shared values, interests and objectives (Kell and Vines, 2020). The JAES aims to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to address the feminisation of poverty, advocate for women in decision-making processes, peace and security, and fight against sexual and gender-based violence against women (Kell and Vines, 2020). The two organisations promise to work together to address embedded institutional norms for gender equality in all legal frameworks, programmes and actions (Van der Vleuten and Van Eedewijk, 2020). At the UN level, the cooperation between the AU and UN has some complexities and challenges. One of the significant areas of cooperation between the AU and the UN has been at the women, peace and security agenda (WPS). The African Union incorporated the UNSCR1325 in its legal frameworks, and has worked on efforts of developing National Action Plans UNSCR1325 with assistance and support from the UN (African Union, 2025).

The relationship between these two regional bodies speaks to the idea of multilateralism for gender equality, by shifting norms. However, even though the AU and the EU share a common goal for gender equality, it is important to note the vast differences between the two institutions, and the distinction in context, background and socio-economic and political issues. The AU, through the African Women's Decade 2010-2020, highlighted the significance of grassroots mobilisation and advocacy in challenging oppressive norms against women, and the importance of community-focused change. What can be said about the relationship between the three institutions is that they need to work together to strengthen their relations, move away from a donor-recipient type of relationship and respect the differences of each organisation.

2.7 Feminist Foreign Policy and State Feminism

In the year 2014, Sweden became the first country in the world to define itself as a feminist government. This came as a part of its plan and ambition to be the “strongest voice for gender equality and the full employment of human rights for all women and girls” (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; 323). The launch of a feminist foreign policy is defined as a moment that marks radical policy change, and it complements global efforts that seek to promote gender equality on the global stage. I argue that strides like this speak to the idea of

liberal feminism – of using legal frameworks and policy changes to address gender equality issues.

According to Thomson (2019), many states adopted the idea of gender equality to indicate their adherence to liberal values and international norms. As mentioned above, the idea of a feminist foreign policy was encapsulated by the Swedish government in 2014. It is mentioned that:

the use of the “F-word” represented not only a clear new direction for Swedish foreign policy, but also a continuation of the state’s existing international commitments on women’s rights and Sweden’s ongoing understanding of itself as a moral voice in the international sphere. (Aggestam and, 2019:41)

According to (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, 2019) the idea behind the adoption of the Swedish feminist foreign policy (FFP) is rooted in the international agreements focused on gender mainstreaming and the status of women. Some of these agreements include the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the United Nations Security Council 1325 (UNSCR, 1325). In the Global South, Mexico is the first country to have adopted a feminist foreign policy. In January 2020, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador’s government welcomed feminism as one of its guiding principles. Mexico’s FFP stands on five pillars: (1) the creation of a foreign policy with a feminist agenda and gender perspective; (2) the achievement of gender parity within the Foreign Ministry and the implementation of organisational reforms; (3) The elimination of gender-based violence in the Foreign Ministry; (4) increased visibility of feminist leadership and contributions to the country’s foreign policy; and (5) The adoption of an intersectional feminist approach to all foreign policy actions (Delgado, 2020).

What all these foreign policies have in common is the importance and the prioritisation of gender equality. According to the guiding principles of the Swedish FFP,

In pursuing our foreign policy, it is reassuring to have a solid ideological foundation for gender equality and the full support of the political leadership. This has provided us with sharper tools for pursuing gender equality issues in various forums. (Thompson & Clement, 2019; 2).

Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond (2019) argues that FFP puts three things into perspective at the centre of its analysis, and these include violence, discrimination and exclusion. Feminist Foreign Policy therefore seeks to abolish any narrative that perpetuates any form of violence, discrimination and exclusion. Feminist Foreign Policy, according to Thompson (2021), is not

a new phenomenon, rather a “repackaged commitment to a liberal policy agenda, with feminism and gender equality anchored as its central defining mission.”

When it comes to the application of FFP in Africa, there has been a show of great interest by Germany to transform its development cooperation policy in Africa (Haastrup, 2023). The remaining issue that justifies Germany’s interests is its colonial history on the continent, however minimal. Even with its interest in and journey towards correcting the wrongs of the past, we cannot move away from the genocide against the Nama and Herero people of Namibia.

As with many other European countries, Germany has followed suit and committed itself to a FFP, through its Feminist Development Policy, and establishing guidelines to achieve their FFP (Haastrup, 2023). The FFP adopted by Germany is no different from the one that has been adopted by other states, as it also seeks to challenge gender inequality in global politics (Haastrup, 2023). However, the FFP proposed by Germany regarding its work in Africa must face certain blind spots that need to be addressed. For example, Haastrup (2023) argues that this FFP only focuses on one axis of development cooperation with Africa. The challenge is that it is separated from the broader foreign policy approaches in the continent: it fails to address sustainable economic development, employment, poverty, good governance and peace and security, to name just a few (Haastrup, 2023). Be that as it may, the German FFP promises a positive relationship between Africa and Germany.

The adoption of an FFP by states such as Sweden, Canada, Germany and Mexico might be signalling a shift from “women and gender” to ideological feminism. According to Kantola and Oudtshoorn (2007), state feminism has changed, influenced by factors such as globalisation, which has called for rethinking the concept. The increased participation of women in the workforce and the reliance on welfare programmes have led to ideological shifts. The adoption of FFPs shows that feminism goes beyond social issues, reframing feminist ideology as a central component in adapting to new challenges and restructuring approaches to gender equality (Piven, 2018, Duong, 2012). Feminist institutionalism in South Africa (Gouws, 2022) can be viewed as a demonstration of how states can be transformed to feminist states, however the role of institutional structures has a huge impact on gender equality. Gouws (2022) argues that state feminism in South Africa has been met with multiple challenges, even though South Africa has made progress in including gender equality in its state mechanisms. Issues of political commitment, corruption of femocrats, a dysfunctional Commission of Gender

Equality (CGE) and a ghettoised ministry of poverty, youth and women continue to disrupt the equitable treatment of women.

The significance of this section in this study is that it shows the rise of feminist foreign policies in the countries mentioned above. This reflects a significant shift that symbolises an integration of gender equality in global governance. Feminist Foreign Policies pioneered by Sweden and Mexico serve as an example of how gender equality has been incorporated as an ideological foundation that guides foreign policy on gender equality. The global shift towards FFP is remarkable and can be noted as a rethinking of state feminism, noting that the inclusion of feminist principles is important in addressing contemporary challenges. However, even though FFPs offer a favourable framework for women's rights, challenges remain. Scholars like Gouws (2022), writing on South Africa's political landscape of its transition from the apartheid government to democracy, gives a unique background for examining feminist institutionalism. While it may be challenging, states can be transformed to incorporate FFP, proving that it is possible to include feminist principles into governance. But for this to be possible at a multilateral level, there must be a commitment to institutional reform and collaboration between states, civil society and multilateral institutions.

2.8 Conclusion

Liberal Feminism has been relied on for many decades to tackle gender inequality in different spheres. The discipline relies on making use of conventions, treaties and legal frameworks to tackle gender biases and ensure that women's rights are protected. Liberal feminism in multilateral spaces allows for women to be involved in decision-making processes, especially on issues that affect women directly. The theory understands that the multilateral order is high masculinised, rendering it non-conducive for women. This study employs liberal feminist theory and constructivist theory because of how they complement each other. Liberal feminism highlights the significance of multilateral institutions in promoting gender equality. At the same time, constructivists emphasise the role of multilateral institutions and their influence on the socialisation of states regarding gender norms and policies. Feminist Foreign Policy also appears as one of the results of liberal feminism in ensuring that women are represented in foreign policy and the decision-making process, both at a local and global level. This proves that states can be transformed into state feminism where women can contribute in the normative structure of how a state operates, essentially confirming that new norms that speak to gender

equality can be introduced and accepted by states to advance women. This chapter shows that multilateral political organs such as the UN or the AU can influence states to adopt new norms.

Chapter 3: Findings and Discussion: Transnational civil society, gender equality norms, and the challenge of implementation

There must be a conscious effort to ensure that there are programmes that help women know that they have a responsibility – not just a right – but a responsibility, to be part of nation-building, to be part of the solutions to their country, to be active and that their voice matters and that their issues matter. (Thoko Mpumlwana, SAWID)

3.1 Introduction

This study examines the mobilising and shifting of norms and behaviours for gender equality using the African Women's Decade, seeking to understand whether intergovernmental organisations like the AU can be socialised into gender or feminist multilateralism. The findings in this study show that civil society organisations are agenda-setting entities that play a significant role in how states interact with the question of gender equality. Civil society-based organisations can motivate governments to adopt gender-sensitive policies that encompass different women in the African continent through grassroots mobilisation. But even though civil society-based organisations play their role, they are still met with many challenges such as funding. In addition, states establish legal frameworks on gender equality but fail to implement them. This chapter presents and analyses key findings of this study and assesses the role of civil society organisation in promoting gender equality norms and the challenges encountered in their implementation. The key findings of this chapter emerge from interviews with actors engaged in civil society organisations and transnational advocacy for gender equality in Africa. The combination of the results and the analysis, this chapter offers a cohesive examination of how local and global civil society actors influence norm development and norm diffusion and the complexities of translating these norms into practise. Rather than separating the two sections, the integration of these two sections allows for a richer and more dynamic narrative. This chapter illuminates the significance of transnational work and its implications such as the complexities of working with government institutions. Drawing on the experiences of organisations such as ACCORD and SAWID, alongside a government organisation like DIRCO. The chapter unpacks the dynamics of civil society organisations and transnational work in the establishment of progressive legal frameworks that protect women's rights in Africa, the nuanced relationship between civil society and government institution, and the enduring obstacles that civil society organisation face. This chapter highlights the achievements

and the persistent gaps in the pursuit of gender equality in the African context, particularly in initiatives such as the African Women's Decade. The findings show that issues of political will and investment in gender equality, create a gap in results showing substantive transformation.

3.2 Agenda Setting for the Women's Decade

As it has been mentioned in Chapter 2, civil society-based organisations play an integral role in mobilising states and multilateral institutions for gender equality. Findings from this study show that the role of civil society organisations in the adoption of the African Women's Decade was important and aligned with its aim of using a grassroots approach. Civil society organisations played an indispensable role in mobilising for the adoption and implementation of the African Women's Decade, The AU worked closely with FEMNET and SOAWR in the campaign to launch the decade. The involvement of civil society was to ensure that the African Women's Decade encompassed and sought to address the lived realities of African women, especially those in rural areas. What this study shows is that at the AU level there has been an effort towards gender equality through gender equality initiatives, policy adoption and ratifications. However, there still exist several obstacles that hinder the progress of gender equality on the continent. The AU has made progress in codifying gender equality through multiple legal frameworks and declarations, and these show a growth of commitment towards women's rights and gender equality. This highlights the disconnect in the AU's policy commitments and the actionable outcomes of gender equality.

The concept of a women's decade was first introduced by the UN in 1975 at the first World Conference on Women held in Mexico. Since then, African women have been active and continue to participate in local and international conferences on women's rights and gender equality (African Union, 2010). African women's contributions were recognised and sparked recognition at subsequent conferences in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).

In December 2008, in Maseru, Lesotho, the AU Ministers for Women Affairs and Gender called on Heads of States to proclaim 2010 as a Decade for African Women, creating a platform to further raise awareness on gender-based issues. The African Women's Decade was launched on October 15, 2010, in Nairobi, the Decade was launched to amplify the voices of women and raise awareness on issues of gender equality (African Union, 2010). The launching of the Decade coincided with significant anniversaries in the history of gender equality initiatives.

“The year 2010 marked thirty years of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), fifteen years of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), ten years of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, six years of the adoption of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) and five years since the coming into force of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa”(African Union, 2010). The significance of the adoption of the African Women’s Decade aligning with these anniversaries shows the AU’s commitment to demonstrate Africa’s determination to integrate international norms and policies into the African context. Moreover, the significance of all these anniversaries is that the AU created a platform to mobilise civil society and governmental institutions to show their commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment (African Union, 2010).

Civil society organisations such as Femmes Africa Solidarite (FAS) and African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) advocated for the African Union to prioritise women’s rights by committing to the regional commitments, such as the Beijing Platform for Action 1995 and the Maputo Protocol. According to FEMNET (2016), when the African Women’s Decade was launched, it committed itself to lead African women’s organisations and popularise the Decade and its aims to its constituencies, particularly at a grassroots level. The African Women’s Development and Communication Network used the Decade to further strengthen women’s communications, advocacy and networking by contributing to the agenda for peace, equality and development in Africa (FEMNET, 2016). The Solidarity for African Women’s Rights (SOAWR) collaborated with the AU to strengthen its institutional commitments to the African Women’s Decade (FEMNET, 2010). Prior to the continental launch of the African Women’s Decade, on behalf of SOAWR, FEMNET coordinated the preparation of the NGOs forum in collaboration with other women’s organisations in Kenya. This forum was to spread awareness about the African Women’s Decade. Two hundred and fifty of the women in attendance at the forum were from grassroots organisations (FEMNET, 2010). This highlights the importance of strategic alliances between civil society-based organisations to support the AU’s initiatives for gender equality.

According to Goetz and Hassim (2003), civil society is an important arena for gender equality and women’s rights. Civil society acts as a platform that can unite constituencies to advocate for the achievement of a common goal (Johansen, 2011). Hassim and Gouws (1998) state that

the term “civil society” is not gender neutral due to its focus on the public and the private sphere, essentially obscuring the role of women in politics and in civil society. In Africa, according to Geisler (2004) and Tripp et al (2009) women’s civil society organisations face challenges of engaging and participating in politics, because authoritarian states restrict the political engagement of women.

Civil society activism is growing and influential throughout the continent, and governments and international agencies note the importance of civil society and its cooperation with government for legal reforms, advocacy, implementation and protection of human rights (Civicus, 2011). In this study, the findings underscore the pivotal role of civil society organisations in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment. Civil society organisations, like SAWID and ACCORD, are instrumental in mobilising and organising to push for policy changes that prioritise gender equality and women’s rights. This is evident in the work around UNSCR 1325 and the women, peace and security agenda, where civil society-based organisations have lobbied for the inclusion of women in peace processes and conflict resolution. Their advocacy is critical in shaping and influencing global and regional policies.

3.2.1 Transnational Advocacy for Gender Equality

Reflections from the interviewees in this study surface the importance of transnational advocacy. Transnational advocacy for gender equality in Africa is crucial in establishing progressive laws that protect women’s rights. Marthe Muller of SAWID traces women-focused civil society’s role back to the peace negotiations that led to the formation of SAWID, during the Inter-Congolese dialogue in Sun City, South Africa, in 2002. Observing the absence of Congolese women as part of the fighting parties, the then South African First Lady, Mrs Zanele Mbeki, brought together South African women and political and civil society leaders to a dialogue with Congolese women. It is this dialogue that made Congolese women speak to each other across the political parties to mobilise for the codification of gender equality and quotas in the peace agreement and future constitution.

Marthe Muller (SAWID): The use of transnational networks plays a big role. South Africa played a significant role in showing this when it met with the women from Congo to find means to establish peace in the region. This took place in 2003, during the first SAWID dialogue at the University of Pretoria. Mrs Mbeki and about 60 other women from the TRC, [and] Dr Brigalia Bam from the Independent Electoral Commission went

to Sun City to speak to these women and invited them to a dialogue. In that dialogue, the South African women supported the Congolese women, many of whom had not even spoken to each other because they all came from fighting factions in conflict with each other. Mrs Mbeki emphasises the importance of shaking networks to achieve peace and the importance of women being at the front line of peace negotiations. Mrs Mbeki shook the networks by reaching out to other civil society-based organisations such as the South African Council of Churches, traditional leaders, women councilors, LGBTQIA communities, and disability communities. The SAWID women also embarked on a journey to Chile and Tunisia, where they used social workers as a structure that helped to dismantle poverty and discrimination. This encouraged women to be agents of their own change, which is one of the essential goals of the African Union Women's Decade.

Organisations such as SAWID have shown great impact across the continent. Gouws (2022) defines it as an organisation that has provided women with a platform to make their voices heard. Ms. Pravina (below) speaks to the constraints of working across countries, while Muller shows that the groundwork for the Women's Decade was set up by the coordination among women across countries to ensure that women were part of peace process, that peace agreements contained a commitment to women's representation and sometimes, quotas. This sets the foundation for the Women's Decade.

Ms Pravina (ACCORD): *I think that regional dialogues and regional lessons exchange initiatives try to bring that and try to use those opportunities to share experiences across. You know, particular experiences. Or particular regions, but there's no, you cannot interfere in another, in another member state. I mean, there are the principles of subsidiarity, there are the principles of sovereignty, and it's also got to do with the space civil society has in some Member States, you know. We have to be honest about that, there isn't a unanimous condition for civil society in Member States. So, we try to do that by cross-regional exchanges, by South-South discussions, you know, where you bring participants and role players from different areas, and you show good practice, but that's as far as you would be able to do it.*

What these two participants illustrate is the power of transnational advocacy as a tool to advance gender equality. The collaborative efforts between women's civil society-based organisations such as peace efforts with the women of Congo, show the great potential of

transnational advocacy to create lasting change for women across the African continent. So, with the African Women's Decade, different women from different African countries are able to take lessons from other states on how they can improve gender equality initiatives.

3.2.2 “Crevice in Society”: Collaborative Efforts with Governments

This section focuses on the role of collaborating with civil society institutions to address gender equality issues. The participants note the role played by civil society organisations despite the challenges they face. This speaks about how civil society-based organisations can rely on intergovernmental organisations to achieve gender equality. Mam' Thoko makes the note that the role of civil societies is important because even at times of crisis governments rely on the support of civil society organisations to go on the ground to collect necessary information. The participant from DIRCO makes a point regarding the importance of coordination that, when coordination fails, it causes inefficiencies, making NGOs like SAWID run into difficulties, as they are redirected between various agencies instead of receiving clear support. Effective collaboration between government and civil society is essential for successful implementation of gender-equality policies.

DIRCO SA: For example, at a grassroots level like the SAWID, the women who are part of the SAWID network are at the epitome of grassroots work that government officials can't reach. We work at a certain level, not by design but by circumstance, because, as a government, there are crevices in society that we can't access. So that's why we depend on collaboration with civil society. Yes, there are financial resources, there's political will, and the third one is coordination. That is in terms of policy coordination and coordination of government institutions. I see it not only when it comes to the gender of women in terms of working with civil society organisations, but everything it does affects the implementation. So that is also a key one because, for example, as DIRCO, we had to find a way to work with the Department of Women to make sure that DIRCO fulfills its responsibility. The Department of Women fulfills its responsibility, because the Department of Women – I'm saying women in short. Still, you know, it includes all the others, but its mandate is primarily domestic. When it starts to become international, including the AU and the UN, DIRCO must be involved. So those are the things that we must work out. And when we don't work well together as a government institution, then things fall through the cracks. We start sending the NGOs

that we work with from pillar to post, no, ask that one for this, ask this one, and then it's taking away time from them, from their implementation, etcetera.

The DIRCO participant and Ms Pravina speak about the importance of collaborative efforts, coordination and the inclusion of multiple state actors in gender-equality initiatives, and creating meaningful, sustainable and substantive changes. Moreover, Ms Pravina highlights the significance of the work done by ACCORD at a global level and specifically in Africa, implying that the women, peace and the security agenda have had an impact across the world and have been particularly influential on the continent. This can indicate the growing regional momentum toward recognising the importance of gender in peace and security, with Africa playing a pivotal role in advancing these commitments, especially given the high number of conflicts and the central role women have played in peace processes on the continent.

Ms Pravina (ACCORD): *To mobilise, to organise, and to advocate for policy at one level. So, I think that the global set of advances that you see around policy for gender equality, for women's inclusion and for women's empowerment really comes from the lobbying and advocacy of women from civil society. So, I think that's an important point to make. The second point then is to make that with these policy commitments then framed by the institutions, including, you know, the UN, the African Union, the regional economic communities, and including national governments, you then find that the next step then becomes the lobbying for its implementation. And where that fails, you also find that civil society has been playing the role of closing the gap on implementation by doing some of the implementation of this themselves, whether it is educating about women's rights, whether it's educating about policy commitments that advance women, whether it is, you know, building capacity of women to engage in these spaces, either in leadership or even just at the table. Civil Society has carried a good share of the burden in doing that. My own organisation has been involved in doing that, and we have helped popularise the commitments to women in conflict situations. This is encompassed in the groundbreaking resolution, which we call United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, and the whole policy architecture that the adoption of that resolution has precipitated, including the subsequent nine resolutions, which now give you the Women's Peace and Security agenda globally and on the continent.*

Ms Pravina's insights underscore the essential role that civil society plays in both advancing policies for gender equality and ensuring its implementation. Her reflections point to the persistent efforts of civil society organisations, like ACCORD, that work tirelessly to not only advocate for women's rights but also to fill the gap in implementation when governments or institutions fall short. This is especially evident in the case of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, which was significantly influenced by the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the subsequent resolutions.

However, as Cheryl Hendricks (IJR) aptly notes, gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be achieved by the government alone. It requires the combined efforts of various stakeholders, including governments, civil society, intergovernmental organisations, regional economic communities and development partners. The key to success lies in collaborative engagement, where each stakeholder contributes their unique resources and expertise while maintaining a critical, independent stance. In this way, a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach ensures that the policies crafted for gender equality and women's empowerment are not only enacted but also effectively implemented, creating real change at both local and global levels.

Cheryl Hendricks (IJR): I don't think that the government alone can-do gender equality and women's empowerment. Nor do I think civil society alone can do it. I don't think any stakeholder can do this on their own. I think that gender equality, women's economic empowerment, and women in peace processes are about multiple stakeholders. It's about intergovernmental organisations. It's about governments. It's about regional economic communities, civil society and development partners.

What these participants have found is that working collaboratively with government agencies while maintaining independence is crucial for ensuring the effective implementation of gender equality policies. The key is finding the right balance between cooperation and critical engagement. By combining their grassroots expertise, research capabilities and advocacy power, SAWID and other civil society-based organisations CSOs can work more effectively with the government to translate gender equality policies into tangible change on the ground. Civil society-based organisations play a crucial role in promoting women's rights and holding governments accountable for their failures in implementing gender equality and the advancement of women's empowerment.

In the findings, Marthe Muller from SAWID notes the importance of non-state actors and civil society-based organisations as the voices of people who are marginalised, and it is important that civil society organisations work with governments to ensure implementation takes place and accountability measures are established. Ms Pravina, from ACCORD, states that states and civil society-based organisations need to have a relationship of respect and acknowledge the importance of collaboration between the two entities to achieve gender equality.

Ms Marthe Muller (SAWID): The importance of non-state actors and civil society-based organisations. And I think it also leads to the next question that I have. So, we know the importance of civil society-based organisations and non-governmental organisations in being the horn blowers against the marginalisation of the people fighting for people and being the voice of the people. That means working with government organisations to ensure that implementations take place, policies are adopted and accountability is achieved from the perspective of the non-state actor. So, we went to make presentations to the government structures. We made presentations to the cabinet, and of course, it helped that our founder (Zanele Mbeki) had that position. But we also brought together all the women decision-makers, women premiers and ministers and presented to them this model that we had seen in these two countries.

What the participant states here is that civil society organisations play an important role in gender equality initiatives as the voices of the people. The participant notes that collaboration between civil society organisations and governmental institutions are important to achieve transformation for gender equality.

Ms Pravina (ACCORD SA): So, there's a plethora of actors that you know are in the space, and I think that some have particular roles. So, we expect governments to commit to policymaking. We expect governments to sign up to international, national and regional protocols. We expect governments to develop national frameworks on which to implement those activities. But in doing it themselves. I don't think that they would do it all by themselves, and we know that too well in the case of South Africa, where a severe or a high reliance is on civil society organisations to play their part in policy advocacy, in the policy popularisation, in the capacity building and also keeping accountability, you know, playing the role of monitoring and ... and ... and

accountability. So, it is a relationship of respect and exchange to ensure that we achieve gender equality.

Mam' Thoko Mpumlwana³: *As SAWID, in 2003, told ourselves that we are not anti-government. We are an NGO that facilitates and assists the government in doing the work it is supposed to do. Because we believe that people sitting in offices do not fully understand what happens on the ground, they have a paper, which is a policy. And then, out of that paper policy, they expect people to come to them. But they don't know where these people are. And it becomes challenging. You know, we saw this during COVID, and it was difficult to have proper data. We ended up being quite helpful because people were sitting at home because the government wanted to help people. But because we have networks on the ground, we had to use our networks to ensure that help reaches people who could not now go to work. The only thing they had was their cell phone. And the government did not know where to get the vulnerable and the hungry in the country. So, we see our work as ensuring that what is on paper in policy is implemented to assist women. And where policy is a hurdle, through dialogues to hear what people are saying and take the outcomes of those and take them to the government and say, this is what women are saying.*

The two participants emphasise that civil society organisations do not work against government. It seems there is a belief in the spirit of a collaborative effort to achieve gender equality. The participants show the importance of dialogue to find solutions to any challenges that hinder progress and implementation of gender equality initiatives, also emphasising the role and importance of networks in being able to showcase the realities of what is happening on the ground. Moreover, both civil society organisations and governmental institutions need to operate on mutual respect, in the realisation of what they can achieve in working together. Mam' Thoko highlights that even during life threatening times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, CSOs were still eager to work to provide support to governments. This emphasises

³ Throughout the chapter, I refer to Ms Mpumlwana as Mam' Thoko Mpumlwana because of how we first communicated. When she called to confirm our interview, she said "Hello mntanam" which translates to "Hello my child", and the teachings of my grandmother immediately took over that when speaking to an elder, you refer to them as Mama.

the centrality of CSOs as drivers of change in Africa, ensuring that citizens are protected and accommodated by governments.

The role of CSOs is paramount in gender equality. The African Union Women's Decade mobilised different stakeholders to advance the implementation of the Decade. As the African Women's Decade focused on using a grassroots approach, CSOs played a significant role in spreading the objectives of the Decade, especially in ensuring the representation of local women in rural areas and in other marginalised areas across the continent. The dedication of CSOs and women's organisation has played an important role in holding governments accountable during the African Women's Decade. The AU (2020) Report noted the increase of youth movements joining and contributing to advancing women's rights and gender equality. The Make Every Women Count (MEWC) organisation states that the rise of the youth movements played a part in expressing and advancing the perspectives of young people (MEWC, 2020). The increase of the youth movements contributes to the idea of fixing the family structure, introduced by Marthe Muller from SAWID. In the interview she explains that at SAWID, they focus on the importance of the family structure in bringing favourable change in society.

3.2.2 Lack of Financial Support and Political Will.

Gender inequality remains one of the biggest stumbling blocks in Africa. Despite the progress made by several African states in adopting and ratifying international conventions, gender disparity remains as an issue. This section highlights the deep-rooted cultural norms, unequal resource distribution and discriminatory institutional culture, and how these factors play a role in hindering gender equality progress in the continent. In countries like South Africa and Uganda, according to Kine Fjell Johansen (2011) in her Master's thesis titled *The state and civil society in Uganda, Kenya and South Africa: The case of women's movements*, the period from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s represented a period of a good relationship between women's organisations and the state. Then, post-independence, the states disintegrated the relationship. She argues that in South Africa the conversation on gender equality was centralised by the state, therefore weakening the voices of these organisations. In the case of Uganda, the government did not show concern for women's rights and gender equality (Johansen, 2011). Moreover, the present obstacle to civil society in many African CSO's is the lack of financial resources. Civil society-based organisations functionality is highly dependent

on funding from government or external sponsors, and the lack of thereof affects the functionality of CSOs. According to Fallon and Viterna (2007), in some African states, women's CSOs fail because their progression is stalled by the state, to undermine and control them.

In the findings, Mam' Thoko Mpumlwana highlights that although SAWID is 20 years old, this is a huge accomplishment for an organisation that does not have a stable financial resource, resulting in employees working without compensation. The DIRCO representative draws attention to the issue of implementation due to the lack of financial resources and consequent lack of implementation, and coordination between policy and government institutions. This issue extends to the relationship between governments and CSOs. All these issues demonstrate the multiple challenges that affect gender equality initiatives.

***Mam' Thoko Mpumlwana:** We turned 20 last year as an organisation. We are very proud that it's scarce for an NGO to last that long. NGO that has no money because we're not funded by any stable organisation. Then, at some point, there's no money; we just have our staff work for free entirely.*

***DIRCO:** Another issue I didn't speak about that is a hindrance in the implementation is as a financial resource, as a political will. The third one is coordination. That is in terms of policy coordination and coordination of government institutions. I see it not only when it comes to the gender of women in terms of working with civil society organisations, but everything it does affects the implementation. So that is also a key one, because, for example, we had to find a way to work with the Department of Women to make sure that they fulfill the responsibility, and the Department of Women fulfills its responsibility because the Department of Women saying women in short, but we know it includes all the other but its mandate is domestic, mostly, and then international, including the AU at the UN then DIRCO has been involved. So those are the things that we have to work out. And things fall through the cracks when we don't work well together as a government institution. We start sending the NGOs that you work with from pillar to post. No one for this as this one. And then it's taking away time from them, from the implementation, etc. So, so, yeah, so that's another aspect. Yeah, it's a pity. It's a pity. Others will say it's a financial, financial regroup, but it's actually political.*

The two participants show that organisational culture in government institutions significantly impacts the implementation of gender equality policies. Member states lack of achieving gender equality is that initiatives like a Women's Decade are more symbolic than legally binding policy documents. They do not have specific metrics or evaluation mechanisms built into them. The participant from DIRCO mentioned that the African Union has specialised technical committees that monitor and evaluate progress on the goals and target the broader Agenda 2063 framework. However, the principles themselves do not have dedicated measurement systems. Therefore, it could be worth investigating whether there are any efforts to measure the impact of the principles or whether the existing monitoring and evaluation under Agenda 2063 is sufficient to capture progress on women's empowerment and gender equality. However, the principles and policies of the AU Women's Decade have not seen dedicated evaluation processes according to the information provided in some reports.

3.3 Failure and Lack of Implementation

Studies show that gender equality initiatives in Africa face several challenges that hinder their implementation. African social and cultural norms often conflict with Western gender concepts, affecting the effectiveness of policies (Chaurata, 2012; Wendoh and Wallace, 2005). Beyond this the policy commitments on issues like women's land rights in Africa are rarely implemented due to lack of political commitment and patriarchal values (Ananda, Moseki, and Mugehera, 2020).

What the interviews I conducted seem to have in common, is that government structures are good at adopting and creating policies for gender equality. However, there seem to be challenges with following up on the implementation of those policies, ascertaining that they work and determining what shortfalls need to be covered after the implementation processes. The AU has made significant strides in developing legal frameworks and protocols for gender equality but there is a gap between the codification and action despite these efforts. The lack of enforcement resources, accountability and gender equality remains aspirational instead of transformational.

Mam Thoko Mpumlwana: women's empowerment means living in a patriarchal society. There must be a conscious effort to ensure that there are programmes that help women know that they have a responsibility, not just a right, but a responsibility to be part of nation-building, to be part of the solutions to their country, to be active, and

that their voice matters and that their issues matter. So, you need to empower women in that.

The issue of implementation is a consistent issue amongst African states. Often, governments and organisations cite the issue of funding. Funding plays a vital role in ensuring that the gender equality initiatives adopted by states are implemented. This means putting money into the informal sector and hiring stakeholders that will bring about all the services required. When it comes to influential women in the various African states, the common trend cited in much feminist and gender equality research is that even when women are given access to “influential positions”, they are given jobs that are at a lower level. Thus, they remain in positions that give them less power to make decisions and influence policy making.

DIRCO South Africa: *The implementation of gender equality initiatives and policies is sometimes hindered by the conservative leaders in some African states. Most of the time, when issues of gender equality are addressed, they encompass “women, children, and the LGBTQIA” community. The inclusion of the LGBTQIA community opens up more debates and controversy, and some states are against that, therefore meaning those policies do not get implemented. The LGBT issues (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender) are not appropriately addressed. There is still stigma and hatred directed at these individual, there has been more intentionality regarding how we serve women within the African Union. Implementation is a different discussion because the African Union is an intergovernmental organisation, but implementation depends on the Member States. And so, one of the significant challenges, I will say, I know now I’m going beyond what you asked, but one of which I also encountered in my studies is that we have excellent policies and charters. However, it’s a matter of getting on board Member States to implement the beautiful charters that we have. You know, on the continent, it’s a bit more conservative, so a lot of countries are not as gender progressive as South Africa.*

Marthe Muller (SAWID COO): *There is a lack or failure to implement gender equality goals because of the structure adopted to achieve these goals. At SAWID, it all begins with the family structure and the governmental institutions. Another issue in achieving gender equality is the lack of time equality. The family structure’s importance is to show*

that the government is meant to administer and cater to what the people need on the ground level.

What one understands from the principles of SAWID is that changing gender norms in the household is one of the crucial factors that could help in the realisation of gender equality. Treating the family and the governing structures in isolation does not have any effect on the behaviors' changes required for influencing gender norms and gender equality.

Prof Cheryl Hendricks (IJR): *The lack of implementation lies with the commitment of states and their interests in achieving gender equality. If states do not show the will to participate or invest in ensuring gender equality goals are achieved, that results in failure and lack of implementation.*

The failure and lack of implementation of gender equality initiatives in Africa is an outcome of the unending effort to end inequality and achieve gender equality for African women. Even though the continent has achieved significant strides to show commitment through progressive frameworks and initiatives like the AU Women's Decade 2010-2020, these participants argue that challenges still exist that need to be addressed, such as the issues of political will, lack of funds and lack of accountability mechanisms. Governments need to work closely with multiple stakeholders, including their constituencies, to change the narrative for gender equality and to invest in gender equality initiatives.

3.4 Achievements of the African Union Women's Decade 2010-2020

The year 2020 marked an end of the first AU Women's Decade. During the AU Women's Decade 2010-2020, the African continent showed its commitment to achieving gender equality and advancing women's rights. The Make Every Women Count (MEWC) initiative reported that most African countries made significant progress in gender equality through the introduction of legal and constitutional frameworks and institutional gender mechanisms. The AU Union Women's Decade aligned with important legal frameworks of the AU such as the Maputo Protocol, in promoting legal frameworks that address issues that concern gender equality and women's rights. Notable progress has been achieved by various African countries such as South Africa, Rwanda, Namibia and Ethiopia. At a continental level, there has been an effort to tackle the rampant issue of gender-based violence through campaigns such as Silencing the Guns. The Silencing the Guns campaign was about peace and security and ending

all wars, civil conflicts and gender-based violence, and preventing genocide on the African continent (African Union, 2014)

Even though tremendous efforts have been made by the AU, a gap remains when it comes to policy adoption, implementation and enforcement. The participant from DIRCO mentioned that certain attributes that link to the failure of gender equality initiatives is closely tied with the lack of political will from governments.

A conversation about creating sustainable development goals in Africa cannot take place without acknowledging the important role that women play in various sectors politically, economically and socially, as well as environmentally (Pikramenou & Mahajan, 2019). In that sense African states cannot move forward without making efforts towards gender equality, which can be achieved through the role of women in political leadership. According to Mollmann (2011) women's political leadership is fundamental in achieving a well-functioning democracy. Therefore, states need to show political will for gender equality. The importance of having women in political leadership is that it they play an effective role in advocating for women's rights (Pikramenou & Mahajan, 2019). This also speaks to the importance of women representation in decision-making processes. One of the successes of the AU Women's Decade 2010-2020, the AU report (2010) notes, is that in the Central African region, tremendous efforts have been made to increase women's participation in public platforms and the achievement of gender equality through the adoption of National Gender Policies and Strategies (Pikramenou & Mahajan, 2019). Similarly, as in South Africa, as the participant from DIRCO explains, affirmative action programmes for gender equality have made significant strides to include women as decision makers and increase their representation in political leadership.

***DIRCO Participant:** If you are in an institution that fundamentally does not believe in the equality of women, it's going to be very difficult to implement that, and, it's going to be very ... even if they ... even if there's a quota, let's say, it gets to a point where there's a quota in how you appoint people so that you have a representation. Qualitative, as we discussed earlier, shows up with, for example, at DIRCO. This is also an ongoing conversation at DIRCO. There've been some improvements recently, but we have not been immune to the same challenge whereby, at a leadership level, we've had a woman minister for a long time.*

The participant points out that political will from states and their institutions plays a crucial role in ensuring that women are represented, that there are frameworks put in place for gender equality purposes and stakeholders assigned to ensure that all the initiatives that have been adopted produce results. One of the challenges noted in the Central African Region is that it is institutional, cultural and financial constraints that hinder women's political participation (Pikramenou & Mahajan, 2019). Therefore, the intentionality of states to ensure that women are represented, by transforming institutional norms that marginalise women and women's rights, contributes greatly towards gender equality and women's political participation. The influence of women's leadership in political spaces has been manifested in various African states that have adopted legal frameworks that protect survivors of violence and harassment, and laws that prevent child marriages. This is a significant achievement (Pikramenou & Mahajan, 2019).

The report by the AU at the end of the Decade highlights the enthusiasm of states in adopting and implementing the objectives of the AU Women's Decade 2010-2020. Multiple gender specific campaigns and initiatives were launched under the AU (2020). The Gender equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy (GEWE) aimed to realise the Maputo Protocol and Agenda 2063 by eradicating the major constraints hindering gender equality and women's empowerment (MEWC, 2020). Also, the AU's campaign to end child marriages from 2015-2023 and the AU campaign to end female genital mutilation (FGM), in which the AU worked closely with the UN. The UN passed a resolution banning FGM by 2030. The campaign aims to engage communities, young people and women in dialogue on this harmful practice in a multi-dimensional perspective (AU, 2020; MEWC, 2020). The AU also adopted the Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020 campaign, the AU Agenda 2063, the SDGEAs, and the Network of African Women and Conflict Prevention Measures (FEMWISE).

During the campaign on the prevention of child marriages in Africa by 2018, 30% of the 24 AU Member States that launched the campaign enacted laws to advance its implementation, 41% of the states developed national strategic plans to address child marriages, while 55% of the states established national inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms. These statistics speak to the importance of political will from governments by making sure that actions for change and transformation are followed up on and to ensure that implementation takes place. Liberal feminism as mentioned in Chapter 2 makes use of legal frameworks to fight for gender equality and women's rights within multilateral institutions like the African Union. Liberal feminism

argues that international organisations and institutions operate within gendered paradigms that uphold patriarchal values (True, 2009:243). This is why liberal feminists advocate for the address of gender inequality by highlighting the importance of increasing the representation of women in governmental positions (Kinsella, 2017). Thus, the important role of liberal feminism is that it challenges institutional cultures and structures.

The AU Women's Decade 2010-2020 is a commitment that was adopted by the AU to show its commitment to promote the empowerment of women through shifting norms and behaviours. As social constructivists argue, regional government institutions can be used as a platform for political contestation and for advocating for gender equality norms (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). This is seen through the involvement and participation of women-based organisations, which mobilise for gender equality and women's empowerment. The changing of norms and behaviours for gender equality during the AU Women's Decade was imperative to ensuring its success. Generally, in the AU, it is insufficient to adopt and show the importance of gender policies without transforming social norms and practices that marginalise women. Advocacy against harmful cultural practices such as FGM has gained traction within the continent. The AU adopted a campaign called the *Saleema Campaign* and *Girls Not Brides* in Sudan and worked with communities to challenge these practices. In countries like Kenya and Burkina Fasso, legal routes were taken to protect girls and women against FGM, and the government worked closely with grassroots organisations to highlight the dangers of these harmful practices.

The adoption of the Maputo Protocol and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) are examples of how the AU provides organisations and African states with the necessary tools to advocate for gender equality and women's rights (Geng, 2019). As noted above, progress was made in countries such as Rwanda and South Africa. Liberal feminism aims to remove institutional chapter barriers that hinder gender equality implementation. Liberal feminism advocates for gender equality and women's rights in multi-faceted ways, such as access to education and access to the economy. Initiatives such as the AU Women's Decade Fund provide women with resources for entrepreneurship, and through education, the AU provides young girls and women with education opportunities.

The AU has developed a detailed gender equality architecture that includes various gender policy machineries, legal frameworks and multiple initiatives and campaigns for gender

equality. However, Member States of the African Union have shown mixed reactions to some of the gender equality initiatives with a lack of adoption, non-compliance and lack of accountability. The AU, even while facing these issues, has continued to adopt and advocate for women's rights and gender equality (Viljoen, 2011). The AU's dedication to gender equality on the African continent is a complex one. As it has been mentioned in the chapters above, the AU is the successor of the OAU which was founded to fight against colonial rule on the continent and for the sovereignty of African states (Karbo & Murithi, 2018). After succeeding the OAU, the AU adopted liberal governance norms that advocate for human rights, development, peace and security, amongst others. Even though the AU has made these strides and operates within the parameters of the liberal world order, it is argued that the issue of human rights and its implementation by its Member States are weak (Viljoen, 2011).

3.5 Women in Leadership, Battling Institutional Cultures

This section highlights the role of African women leadership in achieving gender equality. As been mentioned, African women have a long history of leadership from the liberation struggle to independence. In contemporary times, notable change that reflects advocacy for gender equality has been seen in Rwanda with its high representation of women in its parliament, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the first African female president to have been democratically elected (Ogusanya, 2007). This section reveals that there needs to be a conscious effort by states to transform for gender equality and women's empowerment, because without showing political will and investing in gender equality programmes, anticipated transformation cannot happen.

***Mam' Thoko Mpumlwana:** In order to reach gender equality, you need to ensure the empowerment of women. And the empowerment of women means living in a patriarchal society. There must be a conscious effort to ensure that there are programmes that help women know that they have a responsibility, not just a right, but a responsibility to be part of nation-building, to be part of the solutions to their country, to be active and that their voice matters and that their issues matter. So, you need to empower women. Of course, I always say you can't start with an adult. It usually works better if you start at the bottom, younger ones. Yes, that is why we talk about the family because an adult will default to patriarchy, even if, when things are tough, the tendency is to default to patriarchy because you are comfortable with that space rather than accepting that you are in society.*

What Mam' Thoko alludes to in this point is that to achieve gender equality is a conscious effort to transform institutions and society for gender equality. This means changing the gender biased norms within governmental institutions. In the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Barometer Report (2022), addressing socialisation processes is mandatory in transforming patriarchal institutional cultures. This ties to the point raised by Mam' Thoko on transforming patriarchy through the family structure and in government institutions. In the SADC barometer report (2022), it is highlighted that societal norms have an influence in institutional cultures, often resulting in the inequality and marginalisation of women in political spaces. Therefore, to change these cultures, the report suggests that to transform society and institutions, socialisation must be targeted. This includes transforming the education programmes and policy initiatives. The SADC (2022) Barometer Report acts as an important tool to track what efforts states take to achieve gender equality and transform patriarchal cultures and norms in their institutions. Essentially, even though the AU has the responsibility to lead its Member States, norms at a continental level reflect the commitment of states on societal norms and the political willingness from them. The AU has the responsibility to create platforms for advocacy, financial assistance and policy frameworks, however, for substantive change to occur for gender equality at the AU level, there needs to be a form of alignment between the states and the AU. Without this alignment, regional norms are at risk of being only symbolic, rather than substantive. The AU strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) (African Union, 2018) emphasizes that Member States of the AU should implement and adopt laws that align with AU gender equality commitments, creating an environment where regional norms can flourish.

***DIRCO Participant:** If you are in an institution that fundamentally does not believe in the equality of women, it's going to be very difficult to implement that, and, it's going to be very ... even if they ... even if there's a quota, let's say, it gets to a point where there's a quota in how you appoint people so that you have a representation. Qualitative, as we discussed earlier, shows up with, for example, at DIRCO. This is also an ongoing conversation at DIRCO. There've been some improvements recently, but we have not been immune to the same challenge whereby, at a leadership level, we've had a woman minister for a long time. This is, you know, as for me, as far as I can remember, because I was too young when there was a minister until before so, so. But then, this is a new male. But even in those years, it has been a challenge to have meaningful*

representation of women in some space. For example, post the appointment of ambassadors abroad, the majority has been the males, and when women did get the role, there would be maybe second in charge, you see, or the instances where you do get a young ambassador, it's for males, but for women, it will be the old. If you're a woman, when you even get it, you are old. And also, sometimes you find that when you do have women in the role or included in specific spaces. It's a supportive role. It would be, you know, why can I say, like, hardcore stuff will be given to men.

The point raised by this participant speaks to the issues of how institutions are cultured and harbour gender biases. Even though progress is made within these institutions and multilateral institutions such as the AU make efforts for progressive laws, the embedded culture of patriarchy affects women in the roles they are given. The issues that women continue to face even when they have been “included” in important leadership roles, Heidi Hudson (2009) argues, are that institutions use a “add and stir” approach to show superficial efforts of integrating women in political positions without addressing the underlying structures of inequality. Women are simply included for checkbox purposes, as the participant highlights that in peace building processes, women are included in advisory or symbolic roles that do not necessarily show meaningful impact in decision-making. This shows the lack of substantive representation that ensures that women’s participation translates into decision-making powers, not only symbolism. Hudson (2009) argues that gender equality initiatives focus on increasing the number of women without focusing on addressing structural barriers.

3.6 Intersectional Challenges to Gender Equality in Africa.

One of the interesting points pertaining to the implementation of gender equality programmes and initiatives in African has been the conservative beliefs of some African states. In the interview with the participant from DIRCO, it was mentioned that besides the issues of funds and political will from governments to implement changes, at times African governments do not implement gender equality programmes because of their extension to and inclusion of the LGBTQIA community. The participant cites that:

***DIRCO South Africa:** The implementation of gender equality initiatives and policies is sometimes hindered by the conservative leaders in some African states. Most of the time, when issues of gender equality are addressed, they encompass “women, children, and the LGBTQIA” community. The inclusion of the LGBTQIA community opens up*

more debates and controversy, and some states are against that, therefore meaning those policies do not get implemented. The LGBT issues (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender) are not appropriately addressed. There is still stigma and hatred directed at these individuals.

The pervasive and poor understanding of gender and the sexuality of LGBTQIA persons continues to expose these individuals to marginalisation and danger in society. It is argued that all over the world, LGBTQIA persons continue to experience violations of their human rights (Izugbare, Bakare, Sebany, Ushie, Wekesah, and Njagi, 2020). For instance, in some African countries, being a homosexual is illegal and one can be sentenced to death in Sudan, Somali, Uganda, Kenya and Malawi (Izugbare et al, 2020). Even in liberal countries with a strong constitution against discrimination, such as South Africa, there has been a failure to fully protect the LGBTQIA community from violence and discrimination (Mkhize, Bennet, and Moletsane, 2010). The link here is that both gender equality and the rights of the LGBTQIA community aim to fight against discriminatory norms in society, however due to their shared advocacy, gender equality programmes are very broad when advocating for equity. Some states interpret this as an initiative that encompasses LGBTQIA rights. Due to this, in certain states, the gender equality initiatives are met with resistance. In many African cultures, people are guided by their belief systems that are either traditional or religious, but are against LGBTQIA rights. In countries such as Uganda and Nigeria, where governments have passed and supported laws that are against LGBTQIA rights, the intersectionality between gender equality and LGBTQIA rights has been used by politicians as a weapon against women's efforts for gender equality initiatives, making it hard to achieve any progress (Nel, 2014). Nigeria passed anti-homosexual legislation in January 2014, followed by Uganda in February 2014 when its anti-homosexuality bill became law (Nel, 2014).

Such complexities impact gender equality initiatives. Tamale (2011) in *Researching and theorizing sexualities in Africa*, states that sexuality and gender go hand in hand as they both are creatures of culture and society, Tamale argues that both these play an important role in power relations in society. She furthered argues that factors that have an impact on gender such as class, race, religion and culture have an influence on the sexual lives of men and women. Therefore, the alienation of the LGBTQIA community by African leaders in gender equality programs is another area of concern that needs to be investigated. As Sylvia Tamale notes, it is important for researchers to note that concepts such as sexuality and gender denote power and

dominance. It is therefore important to speak of gendered sexualities, as this approach allows for a nuanced approach to the intersectionality of the ideological and historical system of each concept. This plays an integral part in knowledge production and changing narratives, essentially shifting norms and behaviours for gender equality in societies.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter provides both the findings and analysis of themes that emerged from the findings. In this study, I argue that the African Union, over the years since its succession to the OAU, has played a huge role in showing commitment to advancing gender equality across the continent. The AU has made great efforts in institutionalising gender equality through various legal frameworks to show this commitment. From the adoption of the Maputo Protocol to the AU Women's Decade at a continental level, demonstrates this commitment to gender equality. Moreover, the study shows that the AU recognises the role of women in political participation, decision making and leadership. As a part of its institutional frameworks, the AU understands the imperative need for advocacy and norm setting for gender equality through various initiatives such as the *Silencing the Guns* initiatives, and the *Saleema Campaign, Girls not Brides* campaigns. This shows that the AU recognises the need, with gender sensitive approaches, to improve the status of women in Africa.

The majority of the literature consulted for this study affirms the importance of norm change and transformation for gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa. The work of scholars like Nedziwe (2020) and Meddie (2018) maintains that the role of civil society carries the weight of where governmental institutions fall short, and therefore there cannot be much progress without collaborative efforts with CSOs to change norms for gender equality. The insights provided by the research participants interviewed for this study demonstrate a unique understanding of approaches that can be adopted for gender equality. For instance, organisations such as SAWID believe that non-state actors and state actors cannot operate in isolation. For the full realisation of gender equality and eradication of gender biases and belief in the patriarchy, work needs to start in the family structure and build up to governmental institutions. The work with civil society organisations also demonstrates the role of transnational civil society in mobilising women of different contexts for the same goal of achieving gender equality. Initiatives such as these show that institutions like the AU form part

of transnational and multilateral institutions that are guided and held accountable by civil society and global legal frameworks.

The findings of this study also contribute to the literature of other scholars of gender equality and IR. The themes of this study showcase the successes of gender equality under the AU, but also show the challenges such as the lack of political will from African governments, lack of funding, and failure and lack of implementation of gender equality programmes. Some of these challenges allude to the issue of prioritisation of gender equality by the AU. This is why scholars like Heidi Hudson (2009, 2021) criticize gender equality initiatives because they do not deal with the actual issues lodged within the systematic foundations of political structures that continue to marginalise women. Moreover, the work done on gender equality further highlights other aspects of marginalisation on the continent, such as the criminalization of homosexuality. On the theme of political will, it is stated that some African states are apprehensive about adopting gender equality initiatives because of how these initiatives broadly advocate for LGBTQIA rights.

The themes that emerge from these findings show that the AU has made significant changes for gender equality, and although that may be so, achieving meaningful change for gender equality requires more than mere codifications of what the AU aspires to, but a stronger commitment to implementation, political will, investment and valued collaboration with civil society and grassroots movements. Furthermore, there needs to be focus on systematic change and substantive representation which will mean having more women in important decision-making roles who can take decisions and make transformative changes.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The aim of this study was to understand how the AU, has mobilised and shifted norms for gender equality through the AU Women's Decade from 2010-2020. This study examines the role played by the AU in promoting and advancing gender equality for African women. The study focused on how different stakeholders were mobilised by the AU for the implementation of the AU Women's Decade from 2010-2020. The African Union Women's Decade 2010-2020 demonstrated the importance of gender equality, addressing issues that concern African women and the importance of women as decision-makers. The AU Women's Decade 2010-2020 took place at a time that the world was celebrating the 20-year anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and 25 years of the Beijing Platform for Action. The study puts an emphasis on how intergovernmental organisations can be socialised into feminist multilateralism through the shifting of norms for gender equality.

This study argues that the AU Women's Decade 2010-2020 was able to make use of different stakeholders to ensure that African women from different contexts are represented. The inclusion of and consultations with CSOs were important in showcasing the grassroots approach for the AU Women's Decade. As argued by Kardam (2010), women's movements and NGOs are attributed with the emergence of the gender equality regimes adopted by states and government institutions. Studies on international regimes emphasise the critical role played by non-state actors in the spread of norms across the world. Moreover, CSOs act as the voice of local women from rural areas to suburbs, by ensuring that governments are held accountable, and they adopt policies that are gender sensitive and protect women's rights from all spheres. Even though women's organisations and CSOs are an integral part of the gender equality regime they face challenges in addressing issues that concern women. The findings in this study express that there needs to be an evaluation of the relationship of non-state actors such as CSOs and women's movements with the state. To have a state that is fully feminist, CSOs should not be threatened and restricted. Establishing this relationship assures the civil society that these organisations are an important part of the state.

In the global arena, the gendered nature of international relations and multilateral organisations sparked interest in the 1970s. Organisations such as the United Nations Women's Decade from 1975 to 1985 prompted women from different regions across the world to take action within their own countries and advocate for gender sensitive policies and the protection of women's

rights. This study argues that through its gender policies and the dedication of the AU Women's Decade 2010-2020 the AU continues to show its commitment and political will to achieve gender equality and women's rights advancement. A significant amount of progress was achieved during the AU Women's Decade using legal reforms, with the aim of eradicating harmful practices to young girls and women.

Through the AU Women's Decade 2010-2020 the continent has seen progress in some African states in the representation in women's political participation and decision-making processes. Countries such as South Africa, Namibia, Senegal and Rwanda rank as being in the top ten in the world for the representation of women in parliament (UNECA, 2019). This study highlights the important role of women in peace negotiation processes as they are most affected during times of war and conflict. The AU Women's Decade focused on ten thematic areas, including education and use of technology and infrastructure which are important for women in Africa. There is much that can be celebrated from the AU Women's Decade as the first one in the continent. Ultimately this study shows that through women-focused civil society, African women have used the AU as a platform to advance gender equality, holding state and governmental institutions accountable in their commitments to gender equality. In continuous engagements between the AU and civil society organisations, African women stand a chance to achieve more progress for gender equality in the continent. Most importantly, this study shows that intergovernmental institutions such as the AU can be socialised into a gender and feminist multilateralism through conscious efforts to change and challenge deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. The socialisation of intergovernmental organisations such as the AU into gender and feminist multilateralism involves the inclusion of feminist perspectives in decision making processes, and institutionalising gender equality and gender mainstreaming initiatives for meaningful change.

Even through tremendous efforts were achieved during the AU Women's Decade 2010-2020, African women still face several obstacles that prohibited the goals of the AU Women's Decade from being realised. Financial and resource constraints, issues of norm change and norm acceptance, implementation challenges, cultural constraints, lack of property rights and ownership and global issues such as the Covid-19 pandemic, continue to perpetuate the challenges African women face. As the continent continues to pursue its goals for Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and the new AU Women's Decade on Financial and Economic Inclusion of African Women 2020-2030, African states must learn from the first AU Women's Decade

2010-2020 and ensure that there is an availability of all the necessary resources, and efficient implementation and accountability processes for Member States of the AU. Furthermore, the AU carries the burden of ensuring that other issues of marginalised groups like the LGBTQIA community are addressed and accommodated when adopting laws that speak to achieving gender equality on the African continent.

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