Research article

INVISIBLE TOILERS: CRITICAL TRENDS IN WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract. This article presents a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic status of women in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The purpose of the study is to assess the potential of women's human capital in the context of the region's sustainable growth, as well as to identify the main socio-economic trends related to the changing role of women in the region. The analysis is based on the theoretical and methodological developments of the Gender Research Group of the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which ensures the comprehensiveness of the approach. In the context of global efforts to achieve sustainable development, gender inequality is of particular relevance and requires closer attention. The article highlights that systematic underestimation of women's contribution to the economic development of SSA countries leads to missed opportunities for economic growth and deepening social injustice. Special attention is paid to analyzing the complex relationship between the levels of education, acquired competencies, employment opportunities for women, and their impact on the economic development of the region as a whole. The novelty of the study lies in the identification of the relationship between the various socio-economic factors determining the status of women in SSA, as well as in the comparative analysis of the respective socio-gender indicators with those of South Asia, Middle East, and North Africa. This conveys that despite the existing difficulties and challenges, women's capital in SSA countries not only shows steady growth but also surpasses some gender indicators in South Asia and Middle East and North Africa. This indicates a significant potential for further development and the need to focus on supporting and empowering women in the region and promoting their active participation in building a sustainable future.

Keywords: Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), woman, economic growth, human capital, labor market, skills, gender inequality

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“By educating a man, you educate an individual.
If you educate a woman, you educate a nation.”

African proverb

“If we are to see any real development in the world,
then our best investment is women.”

Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

INTRODUCTION

The aspirations of African women to define independently their role in society are attracting the attention of the international community[1], especially in the context of discussing new opportunities for their participation in the economy [Krylova, Ksenofontova 2022]. As noted during the discussion “New Trends in International Cooperation” at the Fourth Eurasian Women’s Forum in 2024, there is currently a rapid evolution in the socio-economic role of African women: policymakers’ focus is shifting to the underutilization of women’s potential and human capital in the economies in Sub-Saharan African countries[2].

In 2021, the Human Capital Index in Sub-Saharan Africa was 0.4 points[3], while the global average was 0.57[4]. Currently, on average across Sub-Saharan African countries, human capital potential[5] is utilized at only 55%, with the global average of 65%[6]. Moreover, the Human Capital Index, adjusted for actual utilization, reflects that women in the region lose on average up to 20% of their potential contribution due to limited access to the labor market and resources [Pennings 2020: 2‑4]. In 2023, the share of economically active women in Sub-Saharan Africa was 56% compared to 70% for men[7]. Moreover, in 2023, women in Sub-Saharan Africa earned on average 30% less than men, even with comparable levels of education and qualifications[8].

[1] Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences conducts a special research direction on the formation of the identity of African women, both in traditional and modern society, which faces new challenges. Twenty-six monographs prepared by the Institute are dedicated to this topic.

[2] New trends in international cooperation. The Fourth Eurasian Women's Forum. *Roscongress* 18.09.2024. https://roscongress.org/sessions/eawf-2024-delovaya-programma-novye-tendentsii-mezhdunarodnogo-sotrudnichestva/translation/# (accessed: 22.07.2025)

[3] The proposed index, taking values from 0 to 1, reflects the developmental potential of a newborn. The maximum index value (1) is achieved only if the child grows up healthy (without growth delays), reaches the age of 60, and realizes their educational potential (graduates from school by the age of 18).

[4] Africa Dialogue Series Geopolitical Sessions Theme: Human capital and building forward better after the COVID-19. *United Nations*. 26.05.2021. https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org.osaa/files/docs/pr_statement_and_input_osaa.pdf (accessed: 05.07.2025)

[5] Potential includes implicit and difficult-to-measure characteristics such as creativity, leadership qualities, adaptability, which play a crucial role in innovations.

[6] Africa Day: Is Africa the new global talent pool? *CHRO South Africa*. 25.05.2023. https://chro.co.za/articles/africa-day-is-africa-the-new-global-talent-pool/(accessed: 05.07.2025)

[7] Gender Thematic Futures. *ISS African Features with AUDA-NEPAD*. 05.02.2025. https://futures.issafrica.org/thematic/16-gender/ (accessed: 04.07.2025)

[8] Painting the Picture: Using Data to Illuminate Women’s Rights in Africa. *African Feminism*. 28.08.2024. https://africanfeminism.com/painting-the-picture-using-data-to-illuminate-womens-rights-in-africa/ (accessed: 04.07.2025)

Table 1. **Gender Inequality Index (GII)*[9]* of Sub-Saharan Africa by components, 2023**

Sub-Saharan Africa	Reproductive Health Index (RHI)		Index of Political Representation (PR)	Women's Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR)
	Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) (MMR)	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15–19) (ABR)	Share of seats held by women in national parliaments, %	Labor force participation rate (% of the population aged 15 years and over)
Women	448	93	27	65
Men	–	–	73	75

Source: compiled by the author based on World Development Indicators data. *World Bank Group Data*. https://data.worldbank.org/ (accessed: 06.07.2025)

The formula for calculating the Gender Inequality Index (GII) is as follows:

$$\text{GII} = 1 - \sqrt[3]{RHI \times PR \times LFPR}$$

where RHI is the Reproductive Health Index, PR is the Index of Political Representation, and LFPR is the women's Labor Force Participation Rate.

We calculated this index for Sub-Saharan Africa based on 2022 data:

$$\text{RHI} = (1 - \frac{MMR}{MMRmax}) \times (1 - \frac{ABR}{ABRmax}) = (1 - \frac{448}{1000}) \times (1 - \frac{93}{200}) = 0.295$$

$$\text{PR} = \frac{\mathbf{W}parl}{\mathbf{W}parl + \mathbf{M}parl} = 0.27 / (0.27 + 0.73) = 0.27$$

$$\text{LFPR} = \frac{\text{LFPR}\, women}{\text{LFPR}\, men} = 0.65 / 0.75 \approx 0.867$$

For Sub-Saharan African countries in 2022, the index value was:

$$\text{GII} = 1 - \sqrt[3]{0.295 \times 0.27 \times 0.867} \approx 0.59$$

The index indicates significant gender inequality: its value approaches the upper end of the scale (1.0) and significantly exceeds the global average (~0.45)[10], which demonstrates the existence of deeply rooted barriers faced by women in the region. They are particularly acute in the areas of reproductive health, as the level of political and labor force participation is better than expected: the proportions of women in parliament (27%) and in the economy (65%) are relatively high. Therefore, with improved access to healthcare and a reduction in maternal and adolescent mortality, GII could decrease sharply.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women make up 48% of the workforce in agriculture, which is the foundation of the economies of many countries in the region[11]. It should be noted

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[9] The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a comprehensive indicator that demonstrates how much a national economy loses in its development potential because women do not have equal opportunities with men in key areas (reproductive health, political representation, participation in the workforce).

[10] Gender inequality index (*GII*). *Human Development Reports Data Center*. https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII (accessed: 08.07.2025)

[11] Employment in agriculture, female (% of female employment) (modeled ILO estimate). *World Bank Group Data*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.FE.ZS (accessed: 04.07.2025)

that women head about 30–40% of households in Sub-Saharan African countries[12]. By earning higher income, African women can improve the well-being of families and communities and, most importantly, invest in the future of children, that is, in the next generations.

It is important to consider that by 2050, the population of Sub-Saharan Africa, where around 1.2 billion people currently live, is expected to almost double[13]. And as the Director of the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, I.O. Abramova, notes, "The rapid increase in the African population compared to other regions of the world will lead to the fact that the quantitative component of human capital reproduction will shift towards Africa" [Abramova 2013: 445]. According to the World Bank's estimates, the total fertility rate (TFR) in Sub-Saharan African countries in 2022 was five children per woman, which is approximately twice the global rate[14]. Therefore, Professor L.L. Fituni rightly states, "When talking about the future, one should not forget that the demographic potential of Africa has largely become the foundation of the modern development of the global economy" [Fituni 2017: 10–11].

Since women, according to estimates by the World Bank, made up 50.2% of the total population of Sub-Saharan Africa in 2024[15], a significant portion of human capital remains underutilized, leading to structural misbalance in the economies of the region [Grishina 2015: 54‑56; Bongaarts 2020: 1–3].

According to Professor V.A. Meliantsev, a comprehensive, multifactorial approach to studying the economies of Asian and African countries should largely rely on comparative factor analysis, which is a valuable tool for examining complex interrelationships that determine economic growth and competitiveness of the Asian and African countries [Meliantsev 2022: 14–16]. In this context, the question arises: is the underestimated potential of women an important driver of economic growth in the region, and what factors contribute to or hinder the realization of this potential?

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Undoubtedly, improving the quality of education for women in Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the key factors in solving the region's economic and social problems. Compared to women who have not received education, educated women manage their finances more effectively, which reduces the risk of poverty for themselves and their families [Rybalkina 2010]. Moreover, women, being custodians of cultural traditions and moral values, play a crucial role in raising children [Ksenofontova, Ilyina, Tatarovskaya 2021].

Women in Sub-Saharan Africa face obstacles to advancing their educational and professional levels from an early age [Gribanova 2012]. As Professor E.S. Lvova notes, these obstacles are both economic and cultural in nature, significantly affecting opportunities for education [Lvova 2014]. Despite gender parity in primary schools in

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[12] Statement by the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa during the African Dialogue Series on Human capital and Building forward better after the COVID–19. *United Nations*. 26.05.2021. https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org.osaa/files/docs/pr_statement_and_input_osaa.pdf (accessed: 26.01.2025)

[13] Shifting Demographics. *United Nations*. https://www.un.org/en/un75/shifting-demographics (accessed: 04.07.2025)

[14] Fertility rate, total (births per woman). *World Bank Group Data*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?view=chart (accessed: 04.07.2025)

[15] Population, female (% of total population). *World Bank Group Data*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?end=2024&locations=ZG&start=2000&view=chart (accessed: 04.07.2025)

many Sub-Saharan African countries, in 2022, for every 100 men entering university, there were, for example, 59 women in Benin, 58 in Burkina Faso, 76 in Rwanda, and 81 in Cameroon[16].

In the last four decades, a steady increase in literacy rates among women aged 15–24 in sub-Saharan African countries has been observed[17].

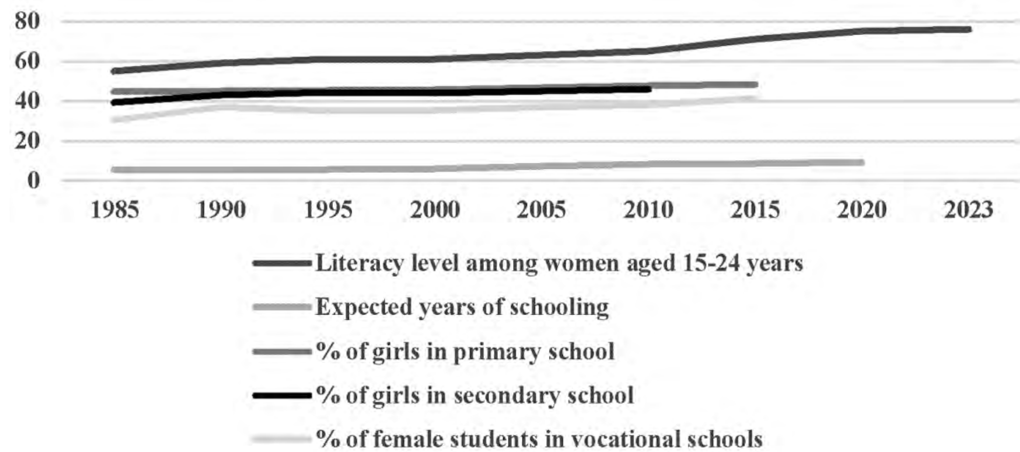

Fig. 1. **Changes in key indicators of female education in Sub-Saharan African countries, 1985–2023, %.**
Source: compiled by the author based on World Development Indicators data.
World Bank Group Data. https://data.worldbank.org/ (accessed: 06.07.2025)

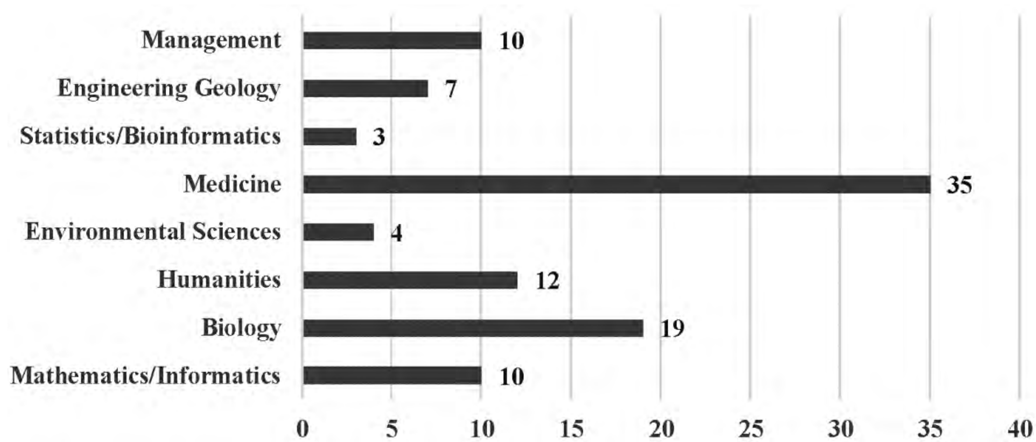

Fig. 2. **Share of female postgraduate students in Sub-Saharan Africa by field of study, 2022, %.**
Source: compiled by the author based on data from the webinar "Achieving gender equality in education in Sub-Saharan Africa on the 2020 Gender Report"[18].

According to the report of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2022, approximately 47% of students and postgraduate students at African universities in STEM fields (Science, Technology,

[16] Ratio of female to male students in tertiary level education. *The Global Economy Data*. https://theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/Female_to_male_ratio_students_tertiary_level_educa/ (accessed: 04.07.2025)
[17] According to the World Bank, in 1985, the literacy rate among women aged 15–24 was 55%, and in 2023, it increased to 76%.
[18] Webinar on the "Achieving gender equality in education in Sub-Saharan Africa". UNESCO GEM Report and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). *UNESCO*. 26.10.2020. http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/events/2020/achieving-gender-equality-education-sub-saharan-africa-regional-webinar-2020-gender (accessed: 06.02.2025)

Engineering, and Mathematics) were women[19]. In 2023, in Mauritius and South Africa, this indicator exceeded 46%; in Kenya, 38%; and in Uganda, 30%[20]. In 2020, women also made up about 30% of doctoral graduates [Fisher et al. 2020: 1] and 32% of the total number of researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa[21].

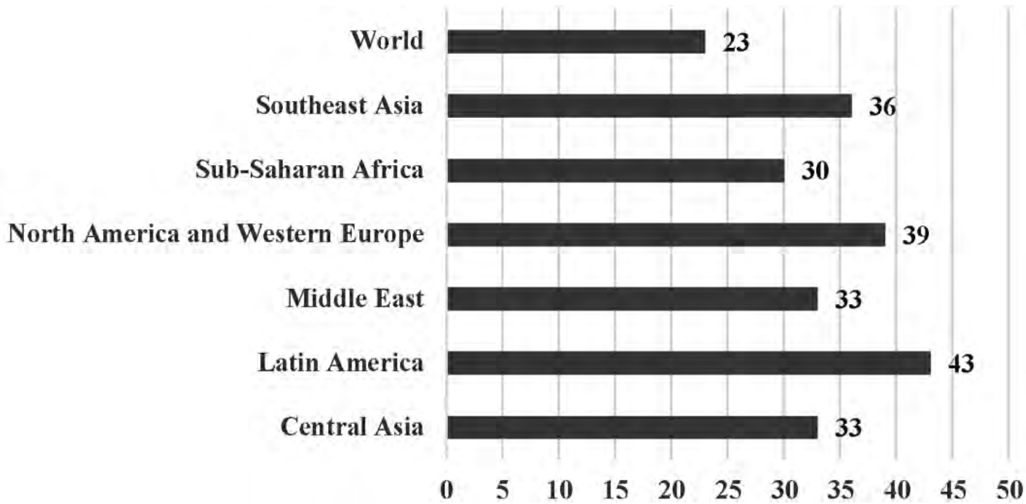

Fig. 3. **The share of women in the field of scientific research and development in 2022, %.**
Source: compiled by the author based on data from the webinar "Achieving gender equality in education in Sub-Saharan Africa on the 2020 Gender Report"[22].

However, according to UNESCO data, women occupy only about 30% of STEM positions in Africa, indicating a significant gap between educational potential and its realization in the labor market[23]. For example, only 25% of university lecturers are women, and their share among researchers is about a third[24].

In the field of primary education, female staff in 2022 made up a significant proportion of teachers, reaching almost 50%, which indicates a notable presence of women in this area[25]. According to the World Bank, in 2023, the proportion of women among all secondary school teachers in Sub-Saharan African countries increased to 35%[26] from 30% in 2018 [Boniol et al. 2019: 3]. Moreover, in 2022, women made up 72% of the main medical professions in the region, while men accounted for 28%. The

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[19] Rose-Innes A. Africa has highest proportion of female STEM graduates. *Women in science*. 03.08.2022. https://womeninscience.africa/africa-has-highest-proportion-of-female-stem-graduates/ (accessed: 05.07.2025)

[20] Researchers (female), %. UIS Data Browser. *UNESCO*. https://databrowser.uis.unesco.org/browser/SCIENCE_TECHNOLOGY_INNOVATION/UIS-ScienceOPRI/fem-res/per-fem-res?highlightId=FRESPTHC&highlightGroupId=IG-FRESP.THC (accessed: 05.07.2025)

[21] Celebrating African most talented young female scientists. *UNESCO*. 27.12.2024. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/celebrating-african-most-talented-young-female-scientists (accessed: 05.07.2025)

[22] Webinar on the "Achieving gender equality in education in Sub-Saharan Africa". UNESCO GEM Report and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). *UNESCO*. 26.10.2020. https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/events/2020/achieving-gender-equality-education-sub-saharan-africa-regional-webinar-2020-gender (accessed: 06.02.2025)

[23] What You Need to Know about the Challenges of STEM in Africa. *UNESCO*. 26.11.2024. https://unesco.org/en/articles/what-you-need-know-about-challenges-stem-africa (accessed: 07.07.2025)

[24] Closing the Gender Gap in science: call to action! *Blog of Evelyne Para, Representative at UNESCO.* 05.08.2024.https://soroptimistinternational.org/closingthegendergapinsciencecalltoaction/ (accessed: 24.02.2025)

[25] Primary education, teachers (% female). *World Bank Group Gender Data Portal*. https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/se-prm-tchr-fe-zs?view=trend&geos=WLD_SSF (accessed: 05.07.2025)

[26] Secondary education, teachers (% female). *World Bank Group Gender Data Portal*. https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/se-sec-tchr-fe-zs?view=trend&geos=WLD_SSF (accessed: 06.07.2025)

following specialties are predominantly feminized: midwives (94%), primary healthcare workers (79%), and nurses (73%), whereas men predominate in pharmacy, dentistry, and medical practice[27].

Table 2. **Gender Parity Index Indicators for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2022**[28]

Level of education in science	Women (%)	Men (%)	GPI
Higher education (*STEM*)	47	53	**0,89**
Postgraduate studies (*STEM*)	30	70	**0,43**
Researchers (scientific field)	32	68	**0,47**

Source: compiled by the author from the African education research database. *ESSA*. https://essaafrica.org/node/501?keywords=Higher%20education&action=searchadvanced&page=1 (accessed: 25.07.2025)

At the level of higher education in STEM, gender parity is almost achieved (GPI = 0.89); however, at the postgraduate level, the proportion of women significantly decreases (GPI = 0.43) and among researchers remains extremely low (32%), practically not differing from the postgraduate level (GPI = 0.47). We observe how the participation of women in Sub-Saharan Africa in science decreases with each subsequent stage of their academic career.

LABOR MARKET

According to data from the International Monetary Fund, an increase in the share of women in the workforce by 10% can lead to a 1% increase in GDP. Moreover, expanding women's economic participation in Sub-Saharan Africa could increase GDP by 10–30%[29].

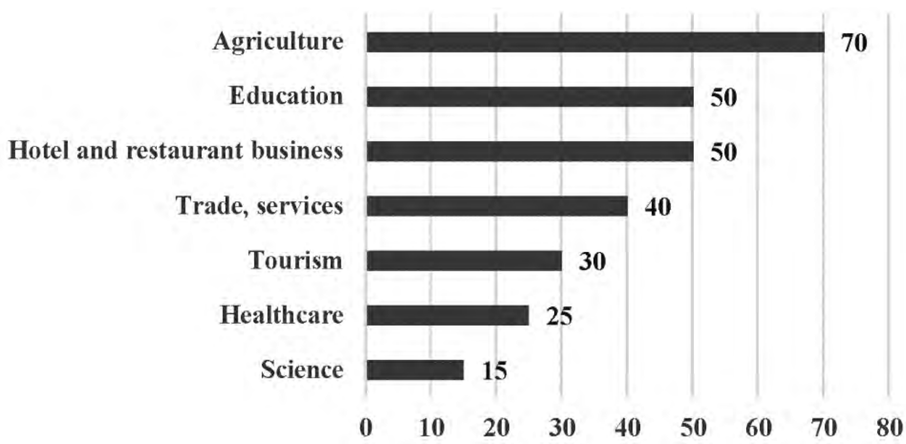

Fig. 4. **Share of employed women in Sub-Saharan Africa in total employment in 2020, %.**
Source: compiled by the author from the webinar "Achieving gender equality in education in Sub-Saharan Africa on the 2020 Gender Report"30.

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[27] State of the health workforce in the WHO African Region: decade review of progress and opportunities for policy reforms and investments. *BMJ Glob Health.* 25.11.2024. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39592187/com (accessed: 05.07.2025)

[28] The index is calculated using the formula: GPI=$\frac{share\ of\ women}{share\ of\ men}$

[29] Dabla-Norris E., Kochhar K. Closing the gender gap: the economic benefits of bringing more women into the labor force are greater than previously thought. *Financial and development magazine.* 01.03.2019. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2019/03/closing-the-gender-gap-dabla (accessed: 23.01.2024)

[30] Webinar on the "Achieving gender equality in education in Sub-Saharan Africa."

Notably, despite the steady growth of women’s share in the service sector from 29% in 2000 to 42% in 2023[31], for a significant number of women, the source of livelihood remains low-paid or subsistence labor in natural resource sectors such as agriculture and forestry [Christiaensen, Demery 2018: 11–13].

At the session “Women of Russia and Africa: International Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Social Progress” within the framework of the second Russia-Africa Summit in 2023, the issue of women's participation in the energy sector and mining was raised[32]. Women make up approximately 8–17% of the workforce in the mining industry in Sub-Saharan Africa[33]. It is important to note, however, that of those 47% receiving higher education in STEM, only 13% work in the energy sector[34]. Nevertheless, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the share of women managers in renewable energy companies reaches 27%, which is higher than the average for the G20 countries (around 20%)[35]. Although, according to recent estimates, the proportion of women employed in agriculture in Sub-Saharan African countries has decreased from 63% in 2000 to 48% in 2023, they still constitute the main workforce in this key economic sector of the region[36].

In Sub-Saharan Africa, there is also an alarming “feminization of poverty” phenomenon: in 2023, for every 100 poor men aged 25–34, there were 127 poor women [37]. According to the UN forecast, by 2030, more than 60% of the 235 million women and girls living in extreme poverty worldwide (on less than $2 per day) will reside in Sub-Saharan Africa[38]. Low living standards seriously limit the opportunities of African women not only in access to education and healthcare but also in choosing decent work [Krylova et al. 2019: 36–38]. As a result, low-paid and unstable types of labor characterize women’s employment in the region: in 2023, 88% of non-agricultural female employment fell on the informal sector, while for men this indicator was 81%[39].

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the informal sector of the economy acts as the dominant source of female employment [Grishina 2019: 98]. Moreover, 85% of working women in

UNESCO GEM Report and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). *UNESCO*. 26.10.2020. https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/events/2020/achieving-gender-equality-education-sub-saharan-africa-regional-webinar-2020-gender (accessed: 06.02.2025)

[31] Employment in services, female (% of female employment) (modeled ILO estimate). *World Bank Group Data*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.SRV.EMPL.FE.ZS (accessed: 14.07.2025)

[32] Women of Russia and Africa: international cooperation for sustainable development and social progress. The Second Summit, the Russia–Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum. *Roscongress*. 27.07.2023 .https://roscongress.org/sessions/africa-2023-zhenshchiny-rossii-i-afriki-za-ustoychivoe-razvitie-i-sotsialnyy-progress/about/?ysclid=mdmwt0umze641980246 (accessed: 22.07.2025)

[33] Shaping the future minerals: unlocking mineral supply for global development and the energy transition. Report by Future minerals forum. *Future minerals forum*. 16.12.2024. https://www.africanmining.co.za/wp-content/uploads/FMF25-Content-Report.pdf (accessed: 23.01.2025)

[34] Fowzia Hassan, Meskerem Mulatu Legesse, Marie-Paule Ngaleu, Osman Bin Masood. A journey to empowering women in Africa's energy sector. *World Bank Blogs*. 26.08.2024. https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/nasikiliza/journeyto-empowering-women-in-africa-energy-sector-afe-0824 (accessed: 31.01.2025)

[35] Results and impact: Annual report 2021. *Sustainable stock exchanges initiative*. 03.11.2021. https://sseinitiative.org/sites/sseinitiative/files/documents/2021-results-and-impact.pdf (accessed: 31.01.2024)

[36] Employment in agriculture, female (% of female employment) (modeled ILO estimate). *World Bank Group Data*.https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.FE.ZS (accessed: 15.07.2025)

[37] Gender Equality improves in Sub-Saharan Africa. *The Borgen Project*. 18.12.2023. https://borgenproject.org/gender-equality-in-sub-saharan-africa/ (accessed: 15.07.2025)

[38] Progress on the sustainable development goals. The gender snapshot 2023. *UN Women*. 12.09.2023. https://bit.ly/gender-snapshot-2023 (accessed: 14.07.2025)

[39] Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical update. *ILO*. 07.03.2023. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_protect/%40protrav/%40travail/documents/publication/wcms_869188.pdf (accessed: 04.07.2025)

Sub-Saharan African countries have unsafe working conditions, which significantly exceeds the global average level (49%)[40]. Meanwhile, women continue to devote more time to household chores and family care, which forces them to choose lower-paying jobs that allow them to combine professional and family responsibilities.

Currently, in Sub-Saharan African countries, women rarely occupy leadership positions and often perform tasks at lower levels, which does not allow them to realize fully their professional potential. Despite the fact that 43% of university graduates in the region are women, only 5% of them become leaders, which indicates a significant gap between educational achievements and career growth[41].

The presence of women in leadership positions is limited in most economic sectors, especially in the education sector [Sadovskaya 2008]. Women lead notably only a third of leadership positions in telecommunications, media, and technology, and only 9% of African technology startups[42].

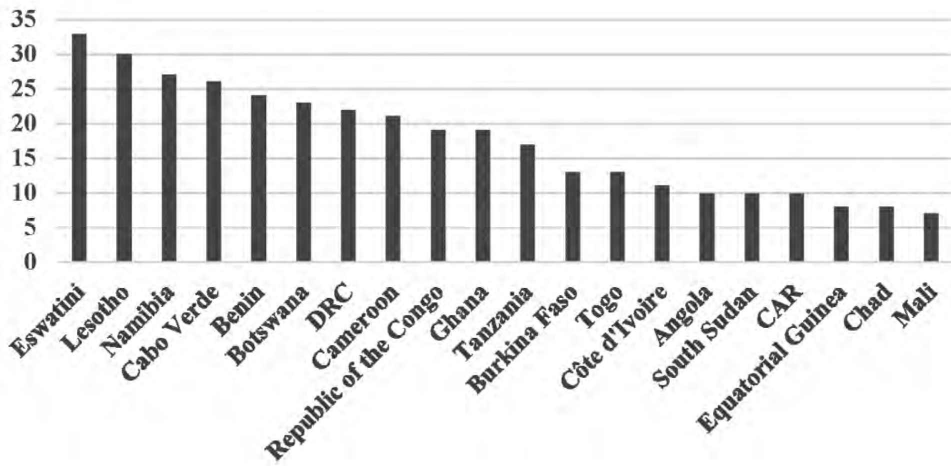

Fig. 5. **Companies with women in top executive positions in 2023, % of firms**
Source: compiled by the author from World Development Indicators.
World Bank Group Data. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IC.FRM.FEMM.ZS (accessed: 06.07.2025)

Despite these difficulties, according to the results of a sociological survey by the Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA) organization, 81% of female respondents working in the public civil service strive to develop their professional skills to advance to leadership positions. Similar results were demonstrated by the women working in higher education and the private sector (82%)[43]. At the same time, women in Sub-Saharan Africa comprise only 33% of candidates for leadership positions. Many female applicants noted that they would like to hold a leadership position one day; however, 59% of them believe that men have more opportunities for career advancement[44].

[40] Five facts about informal economy in Africa. *ILO News*. 18.06.2015. https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/five-facts-about-informal-economy-africa (accessed: 31.01.2024)

[41] Unlocking the potential of female education leaders. *ESSA Blog*. 01.07.2021. https://essa-africa.org/node/976 (accessed 03.02.2024)

[42] Toesland F. Women led tech startups on the rise in Africa. *Africa Renewal*. 08.08.2018. https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-november-2018/women-led-tech-startups-rise-africa (accessed 03.02.2024)

[43] The state of women leading report: Unlocking the potential of female leadership in tertiary education. *Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA)*. 01.07.2021. https://essa-africa.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/ESSA%20Women%20Leading%20Report_July%202021_0.pdf (accessed 03.02.2024)

[44] The state of women leading report: Unlocking the potential of female leadership in tertiary education. *Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA)*. 01.07.2021. https://essa-africa.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/ESSA%20Women%20Leading%20Report_July%202021_0.pdf (accessed: 03.02.2024)

INTERNATIONAL INDICATORS IN THE ASSESSMENT OF GENDER INEQUALITY

Currently, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa often serve as regions for comparative analysis in the context of women's human capital development, their role in the economy, and gender equality, which regularly becomes a topic of discussion at international forums[45].

According to the report "Global Gender Gap 2024" by the World Economic Forum[46], Sub-Saharan Africa, with a gender parity index of 68%, is ahead of South Asia (63%)[47] and the Middle East and North Africa (61%)[48]. However, the progress in this sphere in the region is uneven: Namibia (0.80), Rwanda (0.79), and South Africa (0.78) have reduced the gender gap by more than 70%, while DRC (0.61), Mali (0.60), and Chad (0.57) lag significantly behind. If current dynamics continue, Sub-Saharan Africa will achieve full gender parity in 102 years. Moreover, despite the global Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)[49] reaching 0.721, in Sub-Saharan Africa (0.498), South Asia (0.507), and the Middle East and North Africa (0.565), it is significantly lower. It is approximately the same in these regions, which indicates comparable problems in the areas of gender equality and human development in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa, which lag far behind global trends[50].

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[45] All three regions are characterized by relatively low levels of gender equality compared to other parts of the world.

[46] Global Gender Gap 2024: Insight Report. *World Economic Forum.* 01.07.2024. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf (accessed: 24.02.2025)

[47] The leaders of South Asia are Bangladesh (0.72), Bhutan (0.68), and Sri Lanka (0.66), while Pakistan (0.57), Iran (0.57), and Afghanistan (0.40) lag significantly behind. If the current dynamics continue, full gender parity in South Asia is projected to be achieved in 149 years. Global Gender Gap 2024: Insight Report. *World Economic Forum.* 01.07.2024. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf (accessed: 24.02.2025)

[48] The leaders in the Middle East and North Africa are the United Arab Emirates (0.71), Israel (0.70), Bahrain (0.66), and Oman (0.60) closes the list. Egypt (0.62) and Algeria (0.61). At the current rate of progress, it will take 152 years to achieve full gender parity in the Middle East and North Africa.Global Gender Gap 2024: Insight Report. *World Economic Forum.* 01.07.2024. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf (accessed: 24.02.2025)

[49] The Gender Empowerment Measure index (GEM) measures the level of women's participation in economic and political decision-making and control over resources.

GEM $=\frac{\text{Politics + Economy + Income}}{3}$ где,

Politics$=\frac{\text{Share of Women in Parliament}}{50\%}$

Economy$=\frac{\text{Economic average}}{50\%}$

Economic average $=\frac{\text{Share of women among legislators and managers + Share of women among technical specialists}}{2}$

Income $=\frac{\text{GNI\_f}}{\text{GNI\_m}}$

The value of the index ranges from 0 (complete absence of women's empowerment) to 1 (full equality with men in political and economic influence and income control).

[50] The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality. Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women 2023. *United Nations.* 18.07.2023. https://unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/the-paths-to-equal-twin-indices-on-womens-empowerment-and-gender-equality-en.pdf (accessed: 27.01.2025)

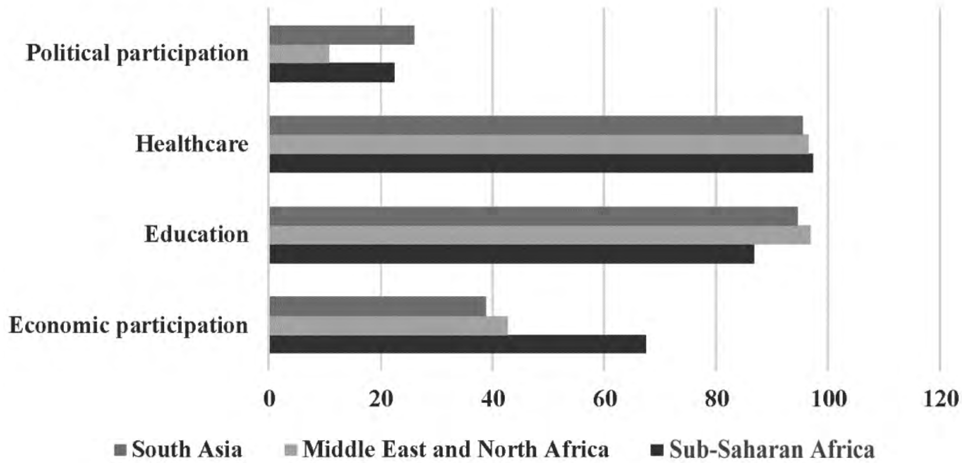

Fig. 6. **Regional indicators broken down by components, 2024, %**
Source: compiled by the author based on Global Gender Gap 2024: Insight Report. *World Economic Forum.* 01.07.2023. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf (accessed: 24.02.2025)

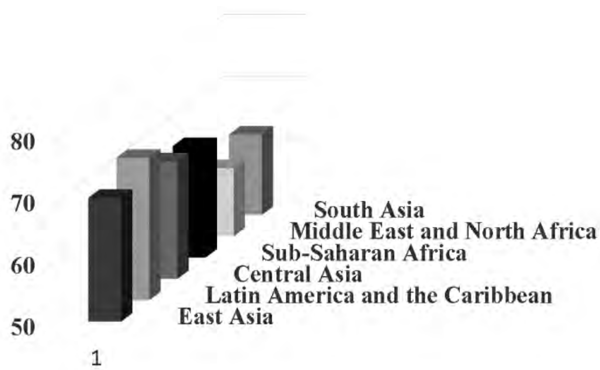

Fig. 7. **Closing the gender gap by regions, 2024, %**
Source: compiled by the author from the data of the report "Global Gender Gap 2024: Insight Report"[51]

Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates a slightly higher Gender Development Index (GDI) [52] of 0.894 compared to South Asia at 0.858 and the Middle East and North Africa at 0.864. While sub-Saharan Africa has low scores on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index[53] (0.498), reflecting poor social institutions and political instability that

[51] Global Gender Gap 2024: Insight Report. *World Economic Forum.* 01.07.2023. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf (accessed: 24.02.2025)

[52] The Gender Development Index (GDI) is a measure that demonstrates the extent to which women have achieved the same level of human development (health, education, income) as men. A value of 1 indicates equality; a value less than 1 indicates women's lag. The GDI is measured as the ratio of the Human Development Index (HDI) of women to that of men.

GDI = $\frac{\text{HDI f}}{\text{HDI m}}$

[53] The "Women, Peace, and Security" (WPS Index) measures the status of women in terms of inclusiveness, fairness, and safety in society. The index is calculated using the formula:

WPS Index = $\frac{\text{Sub−index\_Inclusiveness + Sub−index\_Justice + Sub−index\_Safety}}{3}$

For the calculation of the sub-index, key indicators are selected, with values averaged using the arithmetic mean.

Sub-index=$\frac{\text{Index1 + Index2 + …+ IndexN}}{\text{N}}$

where N is the number of indicators in the sub-index.

make African women particularly vulnerable, South Asia (0.581) and the Middle East and North Africa (0.458) also face significant challenges in this area. Women, Business and Law Index (WBL Index)[54] reflects significant differences in the legal status and social protection of women in Sub-Saharan Africa (57 points), South Asia (46 points), and the Middle East and North Africa (39 points), highlighting unequal conditions for women in these regions[55].

Table 3. **Regional indicators of the Gender Development Index by components, 2022**

	Gender Development Index (GDI)	Human Development Index (HDI)		Life expectancy		Expected years of study		Average years of schooling		Gross National Income (GNI) per capita (in 2017 PPP, thousands of $)	
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.894	0.51	0.57	62	58	10.1	10.6	5.1	6.9	2,970	4,429
South Asia	0.848	0.56	0.66	69	66	11.5	11.6	6.3	7.3	2,352	10,426
Middle East and North Africa	0.864	0.64	0.74	73	68	12.2	12.5	7.6	8.6	4,745	21,667
World	0.959	0.71	0.74	74	69	12.9	12.7	8.4	8.9	12,241	21,210

Source: compiled by the author from data Our World in Data. *Global Change Data Lab*. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/genderdevelopmentindex?tab=table (accessed: 20.02.2025)

Despite the fact that Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates better indicators on a number of gender equality indices compared to similar regions of the Global South, the internal disparities within countries, low values in health and safety components, and limited access to opportunities hinder the full realization of women’s potential.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the findings of the book “Gender Equality and Economic Development in Sub-Saharan Africa,” which emphasizes significant gender inequality in women’s participation in labor and politics in Sub-Saharan African countries compared to other regions of the world, the conducted analysis indicates the presence of multidirectional trends [Kolovich, Newiak 2024].

[54] The “Women, Business and the Law” (WBL Index) measures how laws and regulations in different countries affects women's economic opportunities by comparing them to men’s opportunities. The calculation is based on an analysis of laws and regulations covering 8 key areas (mobility, employment, wages, marriage, motherhood, entrepreneurship, assets, pensions) in women's lives, from the start of their careers to retirement. Each of the 8 areas is scored from 0 to 100 points.

The overall 'Women, Business and the Law' index is calculated as the simple arithmetic mean of the scores across all 8 areas: WBL = $\frac{(\text{Score\_Mobility} + \text{Score\_Employment} + \ldots + \text{Score\_Pension})}{8}$

[55] Women, Business and the Law 2024. *The World Bank*. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b39e2a7-ea65-4ed0-a471-d285ded8c4c7/ content (accessed: 26.01.2025)

On the one hand, the female capital of Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates steady growth, especially in education, economic participation, and political representation, and surpasses a number of gender indicators in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Women in Sub-Saharan Africa are increasingly participating in the economy, developing small and medium-sized businesses in various industries. They make up 50.2% of the population in the region[56] and at the same time provide almost 48% of the workforce [57] in agriculture, which places them in the central place in the economy of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In the field of education over the past 40 years, the proportion of literate women aged 15–24 has been growing by an average of 0.86% per year, which indicates a slow but steady progress[58]. At the same time, although up to 40% of STEM graduates are women, only about 30% of them work in related sectors in Sub-Saharan Africa, which points to a significant gap between educational potential and its implementation in the labor market[59].

Moreover, limited access to resources, gender stereotypes, and the “glass ceiling” in politics and economics form a persistent structure of barriers that hinder the full realization of women's potential.

Thus, we should consider women’s human capital in Sub-Saharan Africa not only as a factor of inclusive growth but also as an indicator of the region's development quality. After all, women's involvement in the economy and politics is not just a matter of fairness but also of a rational economic strategy. Overcoming the gender gap can become a catalyst for GDP growth and improvement of institutions.

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Научная статья

«НЕВИДИМЫЕ ТРУЖЕНИЦЫ»: ВАЖНЕЙШИЕ ТРЕНДЫ СОЦИАЛЬНО-ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО ПОЛОЖЕНИЯ ЖЕНЩИН В СТРАНАХ АФРИКИ ЮЖНЕЕ САХАРЫ

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Аннотация. В данной статье представлен всесторонний анализ социально-экономического положения женщин в странах Африки к югу от Сахары (АЮС). Цель исследования – оценить потенциал женского человеческого капитала в контексте устойчивого роста региона, а также обозначить основные социально-экономические тенденции, связанные с изменением роли женщин в регионе. Анализ опирается на теоретические и методологические разработки Группы гендерных исследований Института Африки РАН, что обеспечивает комплексность подхода. В контексте глобальных усилий по достижению устойчивого развития, гендерное неравенство приобретает особую актуальность и требует пристального внимания. Отмечается, что систематическая недооценка вклада женщин в экономическое развитие стран АЮС приводит к упущенным возможностям для экономического роста, углублению социальной несправедливости.

Особое внимание уделяется анализу сложной взаимосвязи между уровнем образования, приобретенными компетенциями, возможностями трудоустройства для женщин и их влиянию на экономическое развитие в целом. Новизна исследования заключается в выявлении взаимосвязи между различными социально-экономическими факторами, определяющими положение женщин в АЮС, а также в сравнительном анализе социально-гендерных индикаторов с показателями Южной Азии (ЮАЗ), Ближнего Востока и Северной Африки (БВСА). Подчеркивается, что, несмотря на существующие трудности и вызовы, женский капитал в странах АЮС не только демонстрирует устойчивый рост, но и превосходит ряд гендерных показателей в ЮАЗ и БВСА, что свидетельствует о значительном потенциале для дальнейшего развития и необходимости акцентирования внимания на поддержке и расширении прав и возможностей женщин в данном регионе, их активному участию в построении устойчивого будущего.

Ключевые слова: Африка южнее Сахары (АЮС), женщина, экономический рост, человеческий капитал, рынок труда, компетенции, гендерное неравенство

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