# Assessing SDG achievement in Africa: Case studies on poverty, hunger, and gender equality

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## Abstract

There have been debates in Africa regarding the lack of effective strategies on the continent that would enable it to achieve sustainable development goals by 2030. The advancement of Africa toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the objectives, aspirations, and targets outlined in the African Union's Agenda 2063 have exhibited disparities characterized by notable variations across countries nations. This paper examines challenges in achieving sustainable developmental goals SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (No Hunger), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) in three African countries, namely Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa. To reflect on their progress and challenges, this paper employed a qualitative research approach through secondary data and a literature review. The findings revealed that these countries need more time to implement sustainable development goals No 1 (No Poverty), No 2 (No Hunger), and No 5 (Gender Equality). Before this can be achieved, many social and economic issues need to be addressed, such as poverty, political instability and breakdown of government, gender inequality and youth unemployment. Addressing these issues will allow the governments of these countries to narrow down the focus and ensure policies are in place to ensure poverty reduction of poverty and equality and gender-based inclusive politics.

*Keywords:* Development; Support; Poverty; Africa

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## 1. Introduction

Poverty, hunger, and gender imbalances in their various forms have increasingly been given tremendous academic attention in the international system. Past studies in international relations and global governance have shown huge commitments to expose threats posed by poverty, hunger and gender imbalances on the maintenance of international peace and peace. There have been calls and appeals from the developed world to invest in people, strengthen their livelihoods and reduce the misery caused by poverty, hunger and gender imbalances that they suffer throughout their lives. The endorsement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, was a step forward recommended by the international community towards improving people's livelihoods and enabling them to live beyond poverty and hunger lines, as well as live in a conducive environment that favours both genders without any prejudices. Gender equality is a fundamental principle in reducing and eradicating poverty and hunger (Niyitunga, 2024). However, due to the prevalence of gender imbalances in many African societies, the efforts to reduce poverty and hunger have led to futile results because many people, particularly women have been left behind and yet they play a key role in poverty and hunger eradication. The slowness can be attributed to the lingering colonialism and its legacies within the governance structures that were established in post-colonial African states.

When Africa emerged from colonialism and many countries subsequently adopted democratic forms of governance, there was great hope and feelings of jubilation that the post-colonial African leader would consolidate inclusive development, ensure increased participation of citizens in the socio-economic developmental process, respect human rights and put Africans first (Mlambo, 2021). There were similar sentiments across Africa that the post-colonial African leader would use Africa's vast resources to spur inclusive development and, more importantly, consolidate the spirit of Pan-Africanism, African Solidarity and Ubuntu in the quest for collective African Development (Mlambo et al., 2023). Nevertheless, post-colonial African states have become entrapped in inter-communal conflicts and social protests that give rise to refugee and internally displaced person flow, thus deepening poverty, hunger, and human rights violations (Niyitunga, 2021). Political instability has resulted from the breakdown in governance in Africa which has immensely posed a menace to the continent's need to set up development trajectories that lead the continent to overcome poverty, hunger and achieve gender equality. Combined, these issues have impeded the need to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and promote inclusive politics, further pushing Africa away from inclusive economic growth that would lead to sustainable development (Dan-Woniowei, 2020).

The SDGs are a benchmark for nations to ensure a clean, sustainable and habitable environment (Morton et al., 2019). The United Nations (2023) notes the 17 sustainable goals (Goal 1: No Poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger, Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 5: Gender Equality, Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure Goal 10: Reducing Inequalities, Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, Goal 13: Climate Action, Goal 14: Life Below Water, Goal 15: Life on Land, Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals) represent the critical milestone to which African countries ought to adopt to ensure a more concise and cohesive living environment. This paper reflects on SDGs Goal No 1: Poverty, Goal No 2: Zero Hunger and Goal No 5: Gender Equality. It argues that Africa is still far behind in achieving these sustainable developmental goals by 2030 (Mahlatsi, 2021). Africa would not have achieved these goals based on the current developmental trajectories on the continent.

The breakdown in governance, widespread conflict, climate change and the inability of the post-colonial leader to put the people first has resulted in widespread political destabilization, jeopardizing the continent's ability to consolidate SDG 1, 2 and 5 effectively. Mbaku (2022) notes that while many African countries have undertaken institutional reforms that have significantly changed their governance architectures and put in place a new set of leaders, Africa has a long way to go, as too many countries have not yet achieved the type of reforms that can prevent dictatorship, corruption, and economic decline due to continued sectarian violence, weak and ineffective leadership, and lack of political will (Mbaku, 2022). The absence of good governance in many African countries has been highly damaging to the government's corrective intervention role, particularly in maintaining peace and security and promoting economic growth (Mbaku, 2022). This paper argues that unless drastic government and political systems are implemented to ensure the seamless integration of governance processes, achieving not only SDG 1,2, and 5 but all SGDs will remain forever elusive, thus compounding the continent's underdevelopment and limiting its developmental potential. Therefore, with the above, the objective of this paper is to examine progress and challenges in achieving SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (No Hunger), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) in selected African case studies. The guiding question of this paper is to what extent the selected Africa case studies have managed to achieve SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (No Hunger), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and what have been the challenges impeding this process.

## 2. Methodological issues

A search strategy was devised and implemented from December 2022 to April 2024 to identify pertinent literature. This was done by searching through five electronic databases: Scopus, Sabinet, SAGE journals, Emerald, and DOAJ. The total results for each database during the preliminary literature search are presented in Table 1. The chosen search terms were "Development" and "Gender, Poverty", "Inequality" and "Africa". These terms are linked explicitly to the research question addressed in this review; to assess SDG achievement in Africa on selected Case Studies on poverty, hunger, and gender equality, we conducted a literature review spanning the last 25 years. This was necessary as we required older literature to identify trends and explain the most recent developments in this phenomenon.

**Table 1.** Findings from the initial literature investigation conducted using databases

| Databases | Total number of results | Peer-reviewed papers | Included for review |
|---|---|---|---|
| Scopus | 150 | 111 | 22 |
| Sabinet | 85 | 40 | 11 |
| SAGE journals | 40 | 23 | 18 |
| Emerald | 22 | 11 | 10 |
| DOAJ | 30 | 7 | 4 |

*Source: Authors own compilation*

## 2.1. Article selection

Table 1 shows that our initial search yielded 327 articles. However, after eliminating duplicates and studies that were not directly relevant to assessing SDG achievement in Africa, we narrowed the selection down to 192 articles. This reduction was essential to ensure that only the most pertinent and high-quality studies were considered for further analysis. The evaluation process was rigorous and meticulous, adhering to a strict set of inclusion criteria (which will be elaborated on later in this section). After a comprehensive review, only 65 articles met the necessary criteria and were selected for in-depth analysis.

The data extraction process involved initially reading abstracts and making preliminary selections, followed by reading the full-text articles before making the final selection. After finishing this step and gathering the initial articles (or other pertinent literature), the texts were thoroughly examined to verify that they satisfied the criteria for inclusion. In addition, the selected articles were reviewed for references to identify any other articles that may be relevant. The findings were synthesized using thematic analysis, a commonly employed method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in the form of themes within a text (Snyder, 2019). The focal points were literary themes, perspectives, and current arguments on assessing SDG achievement in Africa in selected case studies.

## 2.2. Inclusion criteria

Regarding research quality, deciding on inclusion and exclusion criteria is one of the most critical steps when conducting a review (Snyder, 2019). The inclusion criteria were the year of publication (between 1998 and 2025), the language of the article (strictly English), the type of articles were conceptual and empirical papers, and media sources as well as reports from institutional organizations. Studies considered were qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The sources that did not talk about assessing SDG achievement in Africa on selected case Studies on poverty, hunger, and gender equality were excluded.

## 3. Conceptualizing sustainable development

Even though the term sustainable development is widely recognized to have its origins in the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, SD as a concept began to gather momentum following the 1987 Brundtland Report, Our Common Future, and the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit (Senedd Cymru, 2015). Giving rise to this was the observation that various events globally consolidated an urgent need to rethink how nations should ensure economic growth and improved living standards while at the same time protecting the long-term sustainability of the planet. Sustainable development is highly connected to the ability to industrialize and move with industrial revolutions (Niyitunga, 2022). The Industrial Revolution promotes and strengthens people's livelihoods as it leads to sustainable economic growth and development that is driven by entrepreneurship, sustainable economic prosperity, trade relations among world states and technological innovation that leads to a high level of productivity (Niyitunga, 2023). From the second half of the 19th century, Western societies discovered that their economic and industrial activities significantly impacted the environment and the social balance (You Matter, 2020). Several ecological and social crises took place worldwide and raised awareness that a more

sustainable model was needed. Examples of ecological and social crises such as 1907: the American banking crisis, 1923: the crisis of American hyperinflation, 1929: the financial crisis of the 1930s begins 1968: the worldwide protests against bureaucratic elites; 1973 and 1979: oil shocks and 1982: the debt shock of developing countries further gave rise to rise for countries to rethink how can they peruse development while protecting the environment (You Matter, 2020 & Verma, 2022 ). Ecological crises such as 1957: Torrey Canyon oil spill, 1976: Seveso disaster, 1984: Bhopal disaster, 1986: Chornobyl nuclear disaster, 1989: Exxon Valdez oil spill and 1999: Erika disaster also gave rise to urgent discussion on how the comment ought to be protected (You Matter, 2020 & Verma, 2022). Therefore, sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

To contain global warming before reaching catastrophic levels means holistically addressing environmental, social and economic issues. Even though economic development is essential, it is vital to reflect that such growth becomes impossible without a stable planet and ecosystem (Yang et al., 2022). This paper supports this argument and reflects that while the appetite for consistent economic growth characterizes each country, achieving this growth needs to be economically friendly and consider the ecosystem's fragility. Even though many countries have committed themselves through policy implementation to support sustainable development goals. However, for developing countries, persistent challenges, such as the lack of resources to carry out and plan sustainable development (Imasiku, 2021). Additional challenges such as poverty, inequality, conflict and instability, gender inequality, youth underdevelopment, population growth and the lack of adequate economic growth still impede the ability of developing countries to fully consolidate the sustainable development narrative (Adhikar, 2018). Without addressing these factors, it is impossible for developing countries to support the consolidation of sustainable development holistically. To ensure no one gets left behind, it is vital to ensure that countries can work together to achieve these goals. This means developed countries should assist poor counties with sustainable development (Georgieva et al., 2022). For example, the push by rich countries for poor countries to adopt renewable energy needs to consider that these countries lack the finances, resources and technology to ensure this seamless transition, thus warranting support to ensure that it partakes in sustainable development.

## 4. Literature review

### 4.1. Current trends on SDGs in globally

The inability of the Millennium development goals to achieve targeted goals was a wake-up call to the global community. One cannot underestimate the need to protect the natural environment. However, protecting the environment requires resources. However, the economic growth divide between the global south and the global north means those in the south will unlikely have the much-needed resources to undertake such (Blicharska et al., 2021). Many African countries today are struggling to implement sustainable development initiatives. However, Africa is one of many regions struggling with challenges associated with achieving sustainable development goals. In Latin America, the region faces severe challenges in the current century. Environmental changes, persistent inequality, and increasing violence force millions of people throughout the region to live in constant uncertainty (Centeno and Lajous, 2013). In n many Latin American cities, a quarter of the population has no access to potable water and developed sanitation and sewage. This remains a

significant public health hazard. The situation worsens as droughts and their severity become more frequent and harsher (Van Loon et al., 2019). A report titled "Halfway to 2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean", noted that in LAC, 24.6% of the SDG targets have been achieved or will be achieved if the current trends continue (Cepal, 2023). While the trend is positive for 48.4% of the targets, progress is not moving quickly enough for them to be met by the 2030 deadline. Despite these challenges, there has been progress. While Latin America and the Caribbean, a region composed mostly of middle-income countries, countries have displayed an extraordinary commitment to sustainable development. For example, Alva & Rueffm (2019) comment that In Latin America and the Caribbean, 19 out of 33 countries have institutional coordination mechanisms for implementing the 2030 Agenda, and 11 countries have national development plans aligned with the SDGs. For instance, Brazil has the National Commission for the SDGs, Guatemala has the National Council for Rural and Urban Development, and Aruba created a National Commission on the SDGs (Alva & Rueffm, 2019). In Asia, the European Union (2020) remarks that Asian countries have shaped some form of national structures in line with the 2030 Agenda and, in one way or another, most have built separate bodies to monitor the SDGs and at the core of this has been the consolidation of SDGS. However, challenges remain. These include the availability and reliability of data; lack of political will; weak capacity and technical know-how; inadequate mechanisms and structures to recognize financial opportunities and access available financial resources (European Union, 2020).

Moreover, climate change and the challenge of migration would make the implementation of some of the SDGs in Asia difficult. In Europe, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (2023) noted that the EU faces its biggest SDG challenges in responsible consumption & production, climate and biodiversity and in promoting convergence in SDG progress across its member states. Over the past two years, progress has stalled on many social and health indicators, including poverty, life expectancy and unemployment (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2023). In the Middle East, Issa and Al Abbar (2015) asserts that natural constraints and underlying political and social issues such as inefficient energy production and consumption hinder efforts towards sustainable development in the Middle East region. This paper selects reflects on the Progress and Challenges in Achieving SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (No Hunger), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality): Selected African Case Studies (Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa). Nigeria is Africa's largest economy and most populous country. Therefore, it becomes vital to reflect on how the country is progressing in achieving SDG 1, 2 and 3 and their associated challenges. Kenya is a fast-growing economy in East Africa, attracting various regional immigrants who seek a better life and economic opportunities. However, the country is also characterized by many structured internal challenges that hinder its practical realization of the SDGs mentioned above. South Africa has been seen as an economically stable country characterized by robust infrastructure, which contributed effectively to the country's economic development in the post-apartheid era. Nevertheless, poverty, inequality, gender-based violence, and corruption continue to challenge the country. Therefore, considering the economic and political make up, these three case studies would serve as an ideal basis to reflect on their progress on SDG 1, 2 and 3.

## 4.2. African in development in a post-colonial era: challenges and achievement

There was consensus in Africa even before the decolonization period; there was a need for Africa to consolidate inclusive development through the consolidation of inclusive politics, gender inclusivity, youth development and citizenship participation in the political process (Melber et al., 2020). This was driven by the notion that

Africa was under colonial rule for decades, where African cultures, traditions and values were removed and replaced by a Eurocentric mechanism of development (Lukale, 2014). Gender imbalances were not known in African cultures and societies. However, gender inequality culture was introduced in Africa during colonialism by colonialists who used it as a colonial tool. Women were also discriminated against in colonial education, with men given priority and women denied the right to study (Tilley, 2016). Colonial laws, customs, and religion prevented women from participating in social, economic, and political activities (Tilley, 2016). Colonialists and missionaries failed to see the role of gender equality, thus preventing women from economic and financial power that would alleviate poverty and hunger in many households. Tilley (2016) argued that colonialists overlooked the political power women possess, leading to the destruction of their energies and strength. Post-colonial African political leadership carried forward this culture and attitudes towards women as a result in many societies women are prevented from any socio-economic and political participation.

Post-colonial Africa was considered ideal for consolidating a pan-Africanist agenda. This pan-Africanist agenda would cement the urgent need for Africans to play a more effective role in development. However, Africa's development trajectory has been elusive despite billions of foreign aids pumped by foreign donors. According to a 2014 report, Africa receives about $133.7 billion yearly from official aid, grants, loans to the private sector, remittances, etc. But at the same time, some $191.9 billion is extracted from the continent through debt repayments, multinational company profits, illicit financial flows, brain drain, illegal logging and fishing (Manji and Yanguas, 2018). This reinforces the notion that Africa is greatly challenged; issues such as never-ending conflicts, poverty, malnutrition, political instability, undocumented migration, the emergence of violent non-state actors and the conflict over resources have compounded Africa's development to such an extent that Africa today continues to be a minimal player within the context of international relations (Oloo, 2016). African governments are still on shaky grounds regarding democratic governance. Africa still suffers significantly from these challenges, which affects the continent's ability to consolidate sustainable development goals. While the African Union has committed itself to ensure the continent's collective development through effective policy, there is still a great fear of supernationalism in Africa. Many African countries are more concerned with national issues than continental considerations (Mlambo and Mlambo, 2018).

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. COVID-19 and SDG 1 (No Poverty), 2 (No Hunger), and 5 (Gender Equality) in Africa

The first finding shows that despite the struggle to achieve good governance in post-colonial Africa, there are immense achievements towards eradicating hunger, poverty and implementing gender equality. For instance, events like the COVID-19 pandemic and the way the African continent addressed it confirmed that there have been positive gains towards poverty and hunger eradication as well as the eradication of gender inequality. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) reported that COVID-19 reserved the positive gains made by the continent in addressing pressing socio-economic issues, such as poverty, hunger, and gender inequality. Despite the global push by the United Nations to consolidate the sustainable development goals, many challenges mentioned above reflect the vulnerability of developing countries. The World Bank notes that more than 30 million people 30 million more people were at risk of falling into poverty,

and the number of acutely food-insecure people would significantly increase (The World Bank, 2022). Moreover, Oxfam highlights how the pandemic caused social disintegration in Southern Africa. The report noted that as many as 35.5 million people in SADC countries lost their jobs in 2020 due to the pandemic (Oxfam, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the extreme inequality in Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries and pushed millions into poverty. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the region was negatively affected by the pandemic. As a result of the pandemic in 2020, the region suffered its first-ever economic recession, pushing about 50 million people into extreme poverty, most of whom are children (United Nations Children's Fund, 2022). As a result, the saw region's total number of impoverished livings in sub-Saharan Africa likely crossed the 500 million marks, approaching nearly double the number in 1990 when progress against the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) started to be measured.

The second finding is that there are key gains in hunger eradication because the continent invested in Agriculture to achieve food security and food is distributed at equal basis. These gains were visible during COVID-19 pandemic which brought about lockdown and other measures to contain the pandemic, people depended on food security levels. This means that COVID-19 confirmed some successes in fighting hunger, poverty and gender inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there were 239 million undernourished people, with a prevalence of 22.8 percent as measured by the Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU), a Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) indicator (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2020). Even before the pandemic, the share of the population suffering from hunger and food insecurity had risen in Africa since 2014. COVID-19 pushed these rising rates even higher.

Nearly 60% of the African population—799 million people—was affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2020 (Yongyi, 2021).

The third finding is that how the African continent addressed and dealt with COVID-19 showed that the event has ignited the existing inequalities. This means that efforts to address gender inequality and promote gender equality have not yet brought about positive gains and successes. The paper found that this gender inequality such as lack of women empowerment has limited every effort advanced by the African government towards eradicating hunger and poverty in Africa. A virtual multi-stakeholder hearing titled "Accelerating the Realization of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of all Women and Girls" held by the UN General Assembly on the 21st of July found that COVID-19 is exacerbating existing inequalities, not creating new ones (Grund, 2022). Obstacles impeding women's empowerment: unemployment, the digital divide, conflict, gender-based violence, and exclusion from governance (Grund, 2022). The pandemic threatened decades of progress for women and girls, disproportionately impacting women's incomes, employment, and education opportunities while increasing pressures of unpaid care and fueling the "shadow pandemic" of gender-based violence (Tang et al, 2021). Gender inequality remains a significant threat to development in Africa, with millions of women not reaching their full potential. The pandemic and related quarantine and lockdown measures exacerbated these gender inequalities. The effects included increased reports of gender-based violence, the economic consequences of reduced income and unemployment for women and families, and disruptions to essential health services (Bello et al., 2023).

The above findings show that gender inequality threatens progress towards poverty and hunger eradication thus impeding the achievement of sustainable development in Africa. Gender inequality intensifies women's disempowerment in political leadership and development trajectories presents challenges that handicap Africa's possibility of achieving SDGs by 2030. These challenges yearn for urgent interventions

should the continent seek to realize its developmental potential. COVID-19 also reserved gain in addressing pressing socio-economic issues in the continent. The African Union Agenda 2063 seeks a peaceful, stable, growing and cohesive continent characterized by cooperation and political inclusion; however, it becomes difficult to reflect on how such can be achieved in the face of many developmental challenges (Mushoriwa, 2023). Even though African governments have made significant efforts to incorporate the SDGs and Agenda 2063 goals into national strategies and development plans, have identified government units to coordinate their implementation and prioritized specific targets and indicators, the continent still needs to ensure effective policy to protect it from external shocks and external shocks.

### 5.1.1. Nigeria

Nigeria is Africa's largest economy and Africa's most populous country. Nevertheless, the country has been troubled by numerous issues of political instability the conflicts. The Boko Haram insurgency, increasing banditry and the increase in kidnapping for ransom are problems that have affected Nigeria's quest for inclusive socio-economic development (Ojo et al., 2023). Other pressing issues have been the high poverty rate, inequality, and unemployment. Ajala (2022) communicated that Nigeria has a slim chance of attaining Goal 1 of the SDGs (No poverty). The number of Nigerians living in poverty is over 133 million, representing 63 per cent of the nation's population (Erezi, 2022). The existence of a vast gap of income inequality; public expenditure on social services, which do not necessarily benefit people experiencing poverty; poor governance due to incompetent leadership and quest for power for private gains; overconcentration on oil, which has no future at the expense of other sectors; inadequate structural transformation; environmental degradation; and high rate of population growth among others are part of the challenges contributing to increased poverty rate and why poverty alleviation initiatives have failed to succeed (Dauda, 2019). The implication of this has been the inability to build a nation underpinned by economic growth. Thus, banditry and another form of crime, become prevalent as people seek alternative means to survive. Within the country, 65% of the poor (86 million people) live in the North, while 35% (nearly 47 million) live in the South (Multidimensional Poverty Peer Network, 2022).

From the case of Nigeria, the findings of this paper show that, like poverty, the need to address hunger has become another vital policy approach for the Nigerian government. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: Zero Hunger requires a multifaceted approach, including assessments and solutions for malnutrition, food security and nutrition security (Hackman et al., 2021). This approach must consider the role of women empowerment, thus promotes gender equality. Africa remains one of the most affected regions by malnutrition and, as a direct result, food and nutrition security. Most of the continent, 22 of the 34 countries, are affected by malnutrition. Seven alone are in West Africa (Hackman et al., 2021). Nigeria has high food and nutrition insecurity rates, particularly in the northeastern region (e.g., Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states).

The findings from the above case study present moreover that Nigeria's indicators of undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting, and child mortality combine with Nigeria's 103 out of 121 countries under the Global Hunger Index in 2022 (Hackman et al., 2021). To address this, the government must ensure increased access to education, improved and mechanized agriculture, healthcare and access to finance in rural areas, as these are crucial resources that every nation needs to break its poverty cycle (Osadebay, 2023). Another disadvantage to the government revenue collection is its dependence on oil. With oil accounting for more than 90 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and about 70 percent of government revenues, the fall in

crude prices and output has hurt Nigeria's finances and its naira currency, with foreign investors pulling out of its stock and bond markets (Reuters, 2015), thus undermining the country revenue collection and the availability of finances to address hunger and malnutrition.

The paper found that gender inequality in most African states is still a very delicate issue. Adisa et al. (2021) confirmed this finding and note that Nigeria remains a deeply patriarchal society where women are still not given the same space and respect as men. This means women are likely to play less in development and have fewer economic opportunities. Omotoso (2023) notes that women comprise about 49% of Nigeria's population. Their representation in government is a far cry from what's been achieved in other countries on the continent. For example, in Rwanda, women make up 61.3% of members of parliament. In South Africa, they make up 46.5% of the country's parliament. Recently, women were protesting in Nigeria in their attempt to pursuit of gender equity.

Five gender bills presented to the National Assembly were thrown out. The bills sought to advance women's rights on several fronts (Omotoso, 2023). These included: providing special seats for women at the National Assembly; allocating 35% of political position appointments to women; creating 111 additional seats in the National Assembly and the state constituent assemblies; and a commitment to women having at least 10% of ministerial appointments (Omotoso, 2023). The rejection of the bills showed that the assembly wasn't interested in gender parity in politics. It has 469 members (Omotoso, 2023). Only 21 are women. In society, women are still trapped mainly in culture and tradition, which undermines the potential of their economic contribution.

### 5.1.2. Kenya

In Kenya, poverty measured under the national poverty line declined from 46.8% to 36.1% of the population. However, a closer look shows that not every population segment benefited from this impressive growth (Pape & Mantilla, 2019). The Word Bank stated that the country's economy achieved broad-based growth averaging 4.8% per year between 2015-2019, significantly reducing poverty (from 36.5% in 2005 to 27.2% in 2019 ($2.15/day poverty line) (The World Bank in Kenya, 2023). While on paper, the growth ought to be welcomed. Pape and Mantilla (2019) note that even when the country boasts of impressive economic growth, this class of people have little, if anything, to celebrate since the gains do not trickle down to touch their lives positively. As such, they often feel marginalized and sidelined as far as the national development agenda is concerned. While before the COVID-19 pandemic, the country was experiencing a growing economy, after the pandemic, millions were pushed into poverty as wages decreased (McLean, 2021). Kenya's main socioeconomic challenges are declining economic growth, increased poverty, high unemployment and under-employment levels, insecurity, declining health standard, declining school enrollment rates and bad governance (Waithaka et al., 2003).

Kenya is one of many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa currently experiencing one of the most alarming food crises in decades. Severe drought due to the failure of four consecutive rainy seasons means millions of people in the country are facing hunger and thirst (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2022). Apart from drought, high inflation, climate-related disasters, conflicts, and displacement are just a handful of the other local and global factors that put people's lives across the country at serious risk (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2022). The finding in this case study revealed that Kenya still faces issues of hunger and poverty, and disparities between the haves and have-nots.

Moreover, due to the hunger crisis, there has been an increasing rate of child marriage, increased school dropouts and escalating conflicts as people try to cope and access precious resources. The above reflects one crucial observation. These challenges have given rise to hunger issues in the country, thus exerting tremendous pressure on the government to support the population through effective political intervention. Kenya has also been unlucky to the changes in the climate. Smith and Kayama (2020) notes that in Kenya, where locusts have torn through more than a quarter of the country's counties, farmers and nomadic pastoralists have been left devastated. The locusts have devastated the production of maize, millet, watermelons, and vegetables in a single day. Locust swarms, said to be the worst in 70 years ravaged farmlands just before harvest (Binding, 2020), destroying vast swathes of food crops. Thus, contributing to food insecurity in the country.

The case study findings show that despite Kenya's progressive Constitution and many public pledges, enforcement of laws that promote gender equality was inconsistent at best, and programs were often underfunded. Women and girls contended with unequal political representation, harmful traditional practices such as early marriage, and insufficient legal protections (Wa-Shiko, 2021). Civil society organizations (CSOs) and feminist leaders pressed the government to do more, but they often lacked the resources to coordinate and reach larger audiences. COVID-19 exacerbated gender-based violence globally and made the action case even more dire. However, there have been significant strides in advancing gender equality, with the enactment of laws on domestic violence, and sexual offences, the establishment of affirmative funds for women-led businesses and increasing representation of women in public and elective office. This is confirmed by UN Women (2020) that reported that despite such developments, only 29% of women in Kenya are empowered. Moreover, the same report highlighted that Kenya faces numerous challenges including the inadequate implementation of gender equality laws, inadequate funding, weak accountability mechanisms and slow transformation of discriminatory and patriarchal gender norms, attitudes, and practices (UN Women, 2020). The paper found that the failure to enact gender equality laws and address gender disparity in Kenya, have retarded the fight against poverty and hunger. This failure has thus made it impossible to achieve SDGs by 2030.

### 5.1.3. South Africa

In a post-apartheid era, South Africa has made some gains towards inclusive development, most notably in social welfare services, access to education and healthcare. However, the country faces numerous challenges that continue to hinder its developmental potential, such as corruption, poverty, unemployment, gender inequality and lack of economic growth, to mention a few (Salahuddin et al., 2020). South Africa suffers among the highest levels of inequality in the world. Inequality manifests through a skewed income distribution, unequal access to opportunities, and regional disparities. Low growth and rising unemployment have contributed to the persistence of Inequality (International Monetary Fund, 2020). While Black South Africans have outnumbered Whites in the wealthiest 10% of the population for about seven years, the gap between South Africa's most affluent and poorest has not narrowed as the decline in racial inequality has been driven almost entirely by a surge in the top Black incomes rather than increased wealth for the poorest (Sguazzin, 2021). Since taking power, the ANC-led government has faced the challenge of transforming the economy to ensure that the majority plays a meaningful role in economic development. The percentage of the population living below the upper-middle-income country poverty line fell from 68% to 56% between 2005 and 2010 but has since trended slightly upwards, to 57% in 2015, and is projected to have reached 60% in 2020 (The World

Bank in South Africa, 2022) Structural challenges and weak growth have undermined progress in reducing poverty, heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The achievement of progress in household welfare is severely constrained by rising unemployment. FocusEconomics (2023) notes that high inequality is perpetuated by a legacy of exclusion and the nature of economic growth, which is not pro-poor and does not generate sufficient jobs. From the case study, the paper's findings show that in South Africa, inequality in wealth is even higher, and intergenerational mobility is low, meaning inequalities are passed down from generation to generation with little change over time. This inequality is linked to gender inequality and has thwarted any efforts of eradicating poverty and hunger in South Africa.

Findings from this case study presented that poverty and gender inequality have also given rise to extreme hunger. This is remarkable on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. For example, due to gender inequality, the impact of COVID-19 on the economy has worsened poverty leaving many families vulnerable. Poverty is inherently associated with food insecurity – a state in which socially vulnerable people cannot get enough nutritious and safe food. Nair (2022) further reflects that one in ten South Africans go hungry daily. As a result, malnutrition levels are high and are causing numerous diseases that affect the propensities of advancing towards achieving SDGs by 2030. The paper understood this malnutrition in three simultaneous dimensions such as undernourishment, micronutrient deficiencies and over-nutrition. These can manifest in stunting – short for one's age because of long-term undernutrition. In 2016 it was estimated to be 27% among South African children. This is high. Africa is currently the only continent where stunting rates continue to rise, with 27% of African children classified as stunted in 2018 (Nair, 2022). From 2019 to 2020, the population of South Africa changed from roughly 58 million people to 59 million people. This significant increase in population size, in turn, decreases the income per capita and can cause families to struggle to feed their children. With more children being born per family, the income needed to support these children also increases. However, the salary of the breadwinners in the family remains the same. This can cause families to become impoverished (Manning, 2021).

After liberation, it remains far from being the paradise it promised to be for women. Patriarchy remains deeply entrenched. Women continue to be discriminated against in the workplace, as seen in the latest South African Revenue Service statistics. Incidents of rape and domestic violence remain stubbornly high. According to the Saartjie Bartman Centre for Women and Children, a woman is raped or battered every four minutes in South Africa. This is despite South Africa's proactive efforts in fighting this scourge, which cuts across all strata of society irrespective of education, social status or economic wealth. Before 1994, the South African Parliament had a mere 2,7% representation of women. Fast forward to the sixth Parliament, women Members of Parliament (MPs) now account for 44.5% in both the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces – a dramatic improvement on women's representation post-1994 (People's Assembly, 2020). Also, for the first time in South Africa's history, women now make up half of the government's cabinet under Cyril Ramaphosa's term as president. However, in society, most women are relegated to low-income employment compared to men. They are also expected to perform domestic chores and rear their children (Mlambo et al., 2023). Violence against women in South Africa is immense despite the availability of laws and machinery meant to protect women. Patriarchy has firmly ingrained itself in the psyche of society. Mlambo et al., 2013). South Africa needs urgent, genuine dialogue about patriarchy and to change women's lamentations about misogyny into mallets to fight injustice and gender discrimination. Such a unitary movement can exist only if women and men, regardless of their political affiliations, can unite to map out the future for an anti-sexist, egalitarian society that we so much yearn for (Thobejane, 2015).

## 6. Conclusion and recommendation

From the above discussion, one can see that achieving zero hunger and no poverty with the rampant gender inequality in Africa is impossible. One cannot also help but argue that there is a great need to enact and implement gender equality laws and policies to drive inclusive socio-economic development. The achievement of zero hunger and no poverty depends on the enactment of gender equality. Zero hunger, no poverty and gender equality are vital SDGs that ensure the achievement of the other goals thus achieve a sustainable economic development. These goals ensure continual development that protects the environment while ensuring countries can achieve economic development. This development needs to be characterised by inclusive politics. However, this will be easier said than that as one cannot ignore that poverty, hunger, and gender inequality continue to hinder Africa's pathways towards realizing SDGs. The need for African leaders to understand the role of gender equality in achieving zero hunger and no poverty must be made clear. There should be enactment of laws and policies that address gender inequality and need to be made a priority.

Selected case studies in this paper reflected numerous issues that still need to be addressed by African governments as they have considerable bearing on achieving the SDGs by 2030. The case studies confirmed that from West Africa, all the way to North Africa through central and East Africa, and to Southern Africa, the progress towards achieving zero hunger and no poverty has brought about contradicting results. The case studies showed that gender inequality is still rampant in Africa, and as result it has hindered the possibility of achieving zero hunger and no poverty on the continent. This therefore calls for the African governments and the African Union as a continental body to implement progressive policies that ensure collective development. This can be done through external and internal multi-stakeholder cooperation to address gender equality since poverty and hunger feed inequality issues. From the case studies, it was made clear that gender inequality has slowed the process towards achieving sustainable development in Africa. For this reason, the African continent still faces various developmental issues. The need to establish effective policy implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to assess the progress towards eradicating gender inequality is unavoidable if we need to achieve zero hunger and no poverty status in Africa.

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