

As we celebrate International Women's Day, we recognize that inclusion is not just a principle—it is a powerful driver of progress, innovation, and sustainable development. Inclusion is not solely a women's issue; it is an economic, security, and leadership imperative. When women have a seat at the table—whether in boardrooms, national security, or finance—we witness stronger economies, more resilient societies, and safer communities. This is not merely about fairness; it is about unlocking the full potential of our nations.



Today, women remain underrepresented in leadership, with only 25% of parliamentary seats globally and just 28% of managerial positions held by women. In Kenya, women-led enterprises contribute over 20% to GDP, yet they face significant barriers in access to finance and market opportunities. The evidence is clear: when we invest in women, we accelerate economic growth and drive inclusive development.

In line with this year's theme, "Accelerate Action," it is time to move beyond discussions and translate commitments into measurable impact. Inclusion requires more than initiatives. It demands urgent and bold action. Progress must be matched with decisive implementation, policies, and accountability. As leaders, we must cultivate a mindset that challenges biases, dismantles systemic barriers, and nurtures female talent. This means championing policies that facilitate gender equity, investing in mentorship and leadership programs such as the National Defence College (NDC), Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), and Women in Trade Initiatives, which equip women with the skills and networks to lead at all levels.

Finally, let us not wait for opportunities—we must create them. Let us drive forward together, accelerate action beyond today, and shape a future where growth, resilience, and shared prosperity are a reality for all.



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The pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which is Gender Equality, highlights the transformative role of policies promoting gender inclusion in leadership and high-performance roles. These policies are essential for dismantling systemic barriers and creating equitable opportunities for all genders. To achieve true equality, policies must be rigorously evaluated for effectiveness, implementation and impact, ensuring they foster inclusivity, accountability and sustainable progress.

Effective policies begin with clear goals, such as increasing gender diversity in leadership or closing the pay gap while embracing all genders. They must align with broader diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies to maximize impact. Implementation requires robust accountability mechanisms, adequate resources and training programs to translate policies into actionable change. Representation is critical, with measurable targets or quotas for leadership roles and efforts to address barriers at every career stage. Involving underrepresented genders in policy design ensures their needs are met. Workplace culture must combat bias, offer flexible work arrangements and provide mentorship to nurture talent.

Measurement and transparency are vital, with gender-disaggregated data and regular impact assessments ensuring that policies remain effective. However, challenges like cultural resistance and intersectional barriers persist, demanding long-term solutions. Global best practices, such as gender quotas and pay equity audits, demonstrate that progress is possible. Aligning with SDG 5 and leveraging legal frameworks strengthen these efforts.

In conclusion, achieving gender equality requires holistic policies that address systemic barriers, promote cultural change and ensure accountability. By fostering inclusive environments, we unlock the potential of all individuals, driving innovation and equity. Gender equality must transition from an aspirational goal to a tangible reality for a sustainable future.



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I would like to start by honoring women leaders who not only break barriers but also build bridges for others to cross. These trailblazers understand that true leadership is not just about success but about creating opportunities, amplifying voices and paving the way for the next generation of women to rise #AccelerateAction

My interpretation of IWD therefore is a celebration of women who break biases, champion equity and empowerment. My journey at the NDC has been one of resilience, excellence and breaking boundaries, serving as proof that leadership, strategic thinking and military expertise know no gender.



In closing, I would like to echo the words of Dr Ngozi Okonjo that we need to ensure that women are not just participants but key decision makers in strategies and policies that impact the world. Let us celebrate women

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As a Senior Military Officer in the Kenya Defence Forces, the International Women's Day is a time to celebrate the resilience and strides that women have made in various fields, and especially the male dominated fields. It is a time to recognize the role of women in national security, appreciating the challenges these women face and also the role they play in contributing to global peace.

It was a privilege being nominated to attend the National Defence College, a premier strategic institution in Kenya. As I continue to develop my strategic skills and perspectives at the College, the IWD is a reminder of the progress made by the KDF towards gender equality. It underscores the importance of continued advocacy for women empowerment and inclusivity in strategic roles towards national defence efforts. As part of the global network of women in defence and security, it is important to highlight the power of solidarity and commitment to women inclusion in all sectors.



Essentially, International Women's Day is more than just a celebration; it serves as a call to action for women to overcome barriers in all areas, especially within the Armed Forces to create a lasting impact on their communities and nations.

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International Women's Day provides a platform for advocacy and mobilising global action towards attaining gender parity. This year's theme of Accelerate Action is a signal of the urgency with which we should actualise our previous commitments to dismantling systemic barriers to promote a more equitable society.

As a student of National Security and Strategy at the National Defence College, I recognise that Africa stands at a pivotal point in redefining its role in an increasingly dynamic global landscape where disruption is the new norm. With women constituting at least half of our continent's population, failing to include their voices or acknowledge the intrinsic value their contributions add to society only works to delay Africa's development.



It is therefore imperative to revisit the commitments made by the public and private sector towards achieving the sustainable development goal on gender equality and those reaffirmed annually during the IWDs celebrations. By translating these commitments into tangible initiatives that resonate at the grassroots level, we can accelerate the attainment of gender parity not in the relatively distant projected future of 2158, as indicated in the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report of 2024, but within our lifetime.

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As the world celebrates this year's International Women's Day, there is need for renewed action and commitment towards accelerating the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, particularly the need to ensure women's full and equal participation in leadership and decision-making. It is trite that women have remained in the peripherals of leadership and decision-making. Such exclusion impacts on the attainment of SDGs as women are a key element in every society's developmental agenda.

On the above premise, there is need to adopt laws and policies that will systematically support gender inclusion in leadership and high-performance. Such policy interventions should at the minimum, address and eliminate barriers like discrimination, violence, and unequal opportunities that disproportionately affect women participation in leadership and decision-making.

As students of policy and strategy at the National Defence College -Kenya, we value the role women play in development at national, regional and global level. We, thus, believe that inclusion of women in leadership roles will not only create a just and fair society, but will catalyse the attainment of SDGs and bring meaningful development at all levels of society.



Africa is deep rooted in culture. There is a lot of gender stereotyping in the African culture. Traditionally, gender roles confine women to domestic provinces and tend to limit their potential. However, this is gradually changing with time. In the Modern world, some African cultures limit women to particular levels of education, employment and leadership positions. These cultures portray women as weak in certain fields like Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Socially, there are practices that tend to perpetuate inequality e.g. unequal inheritance rights, child marriage and gender-based violence. Dominance and decision-making is subjugated by males in the society.

Several strategies can be employed to break these barriers. They include;

a. Education and awareness. This can be harnessed through promoting gender-sensitive education that challenge stereotyping and fostering critical thinking and also through public awareness campaigns.

b. Empowerment and advocacy. This can be achieved through supporting women's organizations and movements that advocate for gender equality and also facilitating women access to resources and requisite training.

c. Policy and legal reforms by enacting and enforcing laws that protect equal opportunities in education, employment and leadership.

d. Engaging men and boys. By involving men and boys in the effort towards challenging gender stereotyping. Men and boys can also be used to promote masculinity and challenging harmful norms that bring violence against women.

e. Cultural shifts. Dialogue and education can be used to shift culture norms by constantly working with communities. Women can also be projected to perform roles that were predominantly occupied by men
By addressing these barriers, the world can create a more equitable and just society for all.



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This annual International Women's Day (IWD) event recognizes women's contributions across various fields, raises awareness about gender equality, and promotes empowerment. It serves as a platform to highlight social, economic, cultural and political achievements.

As a participant at National Defence College-Kenya (NDC), it is an opportunity to reflect and appreciate the journey towards inclusivity and equity of all members of the society. At NDC a strategic training institution under the Kenya Defence Force, selected senior military and civilian leaders are trained in National Security and Strategy. This training and mentorship is curated to provide an opportunity to appreciate Strategy and National Security aspects both locally and internationally. The experiences have demonstrated that in a Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear, Incomprehensible (BANI) operating environment inclusivity and equity are key pillars in the long-term planning for purposes of securing National Interests thus drawing us closer to achieving National Security despite the BANI environment.

Leaders both male and female past and present have paved the way to a more inclusive environment. Shout out to General Tonje for your vision to have more inclusivity in the military by disbanding the Women Service Corps. Today I stand on the shoulders of great leaders who have provided the opportunities to harness my skills and capabilities in order to be able to contribute to the National Security and Strategy discourse. Despite progress, significant barriers remain, this call for all of us to deliberately recommit to policies and strategies that align with inclusivity and equity for all in the society



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