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Continuous Assessment of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in South African Context

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Abstract

Varied cultures and customs have varied perspectives on gender roles. As a result, issues pertaining to gender disparity could also vary. Nonetheless, a typical gender-related connection is that women are expected to conform to patriarchal norms, stifled, and discouraged from advancing professionally. The study investigates several facets of gender inequality in South Africa. Information is gathered from official reports of Gender Links, the Commission for Gender Equality, the Public Service Commission, Acts, online publications, journal articles, books, and other sources pertaining to gender issues. Document analysis is used to evaluate the data. The findings show that challenges to achieve gender equality as part of sustainable development goal (SDG) 5 are social norms, economic and political factors, gender-based violence (GBV), to state a few. The challenges to implement SDG 5 are associated with lack of coordinated evidence-based monitoring and evaluation and poor forensic capacity for GBV that is part of target SDG 5.2; high unemployment and economic exclusion of women, related to targets SDG 5.1 & 5.5; lack of Care Infrastructure-Increased Unpaid Care and Domestic Work for women, linking to target SDG 5.4; and the Secondary Victimisation Loop that is target SDG 5.2. The article offers suggestions to improve the gender equality environment as a contribution to the disciplines of Public Management and Gender Studies.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Equality, Gender Mainstreaming, Qualitative, South Africa.

Introduction

The importance of having a common understanding of concepts should not be underestimated, especially when matters such as equality are addressed (Jansen, 2024:34). Gender blindness is defined as “an unawareness of or a failure to account for the significance of gender socialisation, roles, needs, opportunities, and interactions, based on the assumption that men and women react the same way or are similarly affected by a given phenomenon” (Bacchi, 2009; Pedrero 1999 as in Forman-Rabinovici & Mandel, 2022:482). Thorpe (1990:1361; in Jansen & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2025:197) “characterised gender discrimination as an unavoidable evil that has an impact on the environment at work”. Gender equity “refers to the equal participation and access to socio-economic resources by women and men” (National Commission for the Promotion of Equity [NCPE], 2008:73).

Note that gender blindness should not be confused with gender neutrality. Though they may seem similar, there are important differences worth noting. Gender neutrality refers to policies and practices that do not favour any gender but recognises that all genders should be treated fairly by acknowledging that gender does not shape experiences, challenges and opportunities

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(Mosunnic, 2025:3). Gender neutrality is a balanced approach by recognising the need for policies that ensure equality for all genders. Early definitions conceptualised gender blindness as the failure to recognise gender differences and inequalities, leading to policies that assume a neutral, universal subject (Elson, 1999). Gender blindness assumes that discrimination can be eliminated by ignoring gender completely (Mosunnic, 2025:3).

Gender mainstreaming obtained global recognition after its formal adoption at the Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995). The strategy marked a shift from earlier approaches that focused on women-specific interventions toward a more integrated model aimed at transforming institutional processes (Rees, 1998). Gender mainstreaming was seen as a potentially radical project capable of restructuring power relations and embedding gender equality across all sectors (Walby, 2005; True & Mintrom, 2001). It was conceptualised as both a technical process— involving tools such as gender analysis, impact assessments, and budgeting—and a political project aimed at challenging patriarchal norms (Moser & Moser, 2005). However, the dual nature of gender mainstreaming has been a source of tension as the institutionalisation within bureaucratic

systems facilitated widespread adoption, but it often led to its dilution into a procedural exercise (Daly, 2005). Arguments have also been forwarded that the definition of gender mainstreaming is ambiguous and has allowed for various interpretations, ranging from transformative agendas to minimalist compliance approaches (Lombardo & Meier, 2006). Mukhopadhyay (2004) further indicated that gender mainstreaming has been subjected to the logics of neoliberal governance, where efficiency and measurable outcomes are prioritised over structural transformation (Mukhopadhyay, 2004). As a result, mainstreaming efforts often focus on integrating women into existing systems rather than transforming those systems.

While gender mainstreaming has received significant attention, the concept of gender blindness has been comparatively under-theorised, often treated as the absence of gender awareness rather than a systemic condition. The widespread suggestion that mainstream management theory is more accurately labelled ‘male stream’, because it fails to recognise the relationship between management and gender, is known as ‘gender blindness’ (Wilson, 1996 as in Mavin, Bryans & Waring, 2002:293). Bacchi (2009) argues that policy frameworks construct certain realities while excluding others, suggesting that gender blindness is embedded within the very logic of policymaking. Similarly, Verloo (2005) highlights how dominant policy discourses can marginalise gender by framing it as irrelevant or secondary. Gender blindness is also linked to the concept of androcentrism, where male experiences are treated as the norm against which all others are measured (Fraser, 1997). This is particularly evident in labour market policies that prioritise formal employment while neglecting unpaid care work, which is disproportionately performed by women (Folbre, 2006).

SDG 5 in South African Context

As a supreme law, the 1996 Constitution of South Africa states that everyone has equal rights, regardless of gender. To provide democratic and transparent local government, ensure

sustainable service delivery to communities, and encourage community and community organization involvement in local government affairs, South Africa has committed to a developmental local government. The local government may achieve its objectives of democratic and responsible governance by placing all citizens at the center of all development initiatives. However, because

women are underrepresented in local government, most planners still have difficulty instilling inclusive planning (Mokoele, 2017:186). There are various legislative frameworks established to obligate gender equality, especially at the workplace. Additionally, there are institutional frameworks ensuring that gender inequality is unacceptable professionally. One such framework is the Commission for Gender Equality. According to Moleko (2021:4) gender transformation in local government is the focus of the Commission for Gender Equality. The objective is to evaluate, among other things, the local government's efforts to achieve gender equality through gender mainstreaming and gender change strategies.

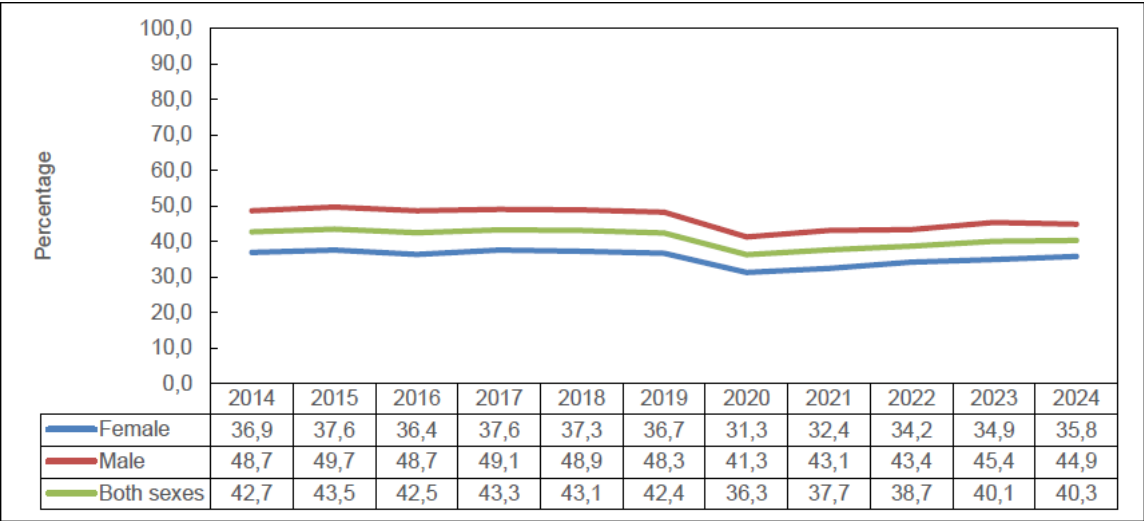
Despite these frameworks gender equality is not absolutely realised in the country. The reasons are varied. Lack of education hamper women to get better employment opportunities. This statement is substantiated by the report published by the Statistics South Africa (2025) highlighting that, “women without a matric certificate recorded an unemployment rate of 42,8%, compared to 37,0% for men. This 5.8 percentage points difference highlights the heightened vulnerability of women with limited schooling, who face both educational and gender-based barriers to employment. For individuals with only a matric certificate, the gender gap widens further. Unemployment among women in this group was 39,3%, while the rate for men was 31,7%. This 7.6 percentage points gap is the widest across all education levels” (Statistics South Africa, 2025), see Graph1.

Graph 1: Unemployment rate by sex and education, Q2, 2025



As stated in the report, “no matter the level of education, women in South Africa face significantly greater challenges in securing employment than men” (Statistics South Africa, 2025). This statement is supported by the report of Statistics South Africa (2026), also see Graph 2.

Graph 2: Employment rate by sex, 2014–2024



Source: Statistics South Africa, 2026.

Statistics shown in the graph “shows a trend analysis of employment rates in South Africa between second quarters of 2014 to 2024. Nationally, employment rates have declined from 42,7% in 2014 to 40,3% in 2024, with the lowest rate recorded in 2020. The male employment rates were generally higher than that of females during the reported period” (Statistics South Africa, 2026). When it comes to professional roles, women are under-represented. The information is additionally reflected in Graph 3.

Graph 3: Percentage of males and females in positions of authority: 2020/2021



Source: Statistics South Africa 2023:34; in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2024:38.

The Commission for Gender Equality, 2024 has prepared a table that shows a summary of all SDG 5 targets and status of women henceforth in South African context. In the context of this study, only a few targets are stated in a summarised manner, see Table 1. The rest of the targets may form part of future publications.

Table 1: SDG 5 indicator progress to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – South Africa 2019

5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments	a) Male: 60.8% (2016), 39.2 (2021) Female: 39.2% (2016), 46.8% (2021) b) Local government total: 63% men (2021), 37% women (2021)
5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions	31.1% (2014), 30.5% (2015), 31.6% (2016), 32.1% (2017)

Source: Commission for Gender Equality, 2024.

Table 1 shows targets and difference of statistical progress of men and women in each category. Each category opens a scope for future publications and discussions contributing to varied facts of gender equality. The reasons gender equality is not achieved on absolute basis and affect the

Challenges to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 in South Africa

There are various factors affecting the effective establishment of gender equality in South African context to realise sustainable development goal (SDG) 5.

- **The Crisis of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF)**

GBVF is frequently described by the South African government as the ‘second pandemic.’ It is the most significant barrier to women’s physical security and bodily autonomy. It is linked mostly to *normalisation of Intimate Partner Violence*. In South Africa, the normalisation of GBV is one reason why the problem does not seem to improve. The persistence of GBV is due to the current poor chances of conviction of perpetrators due to factors such as backlogs which affect chances of success convictions. This scenario worsens what is called a ‘justice gap’. Without adequate financial and technical support, progressive legal provisions like the Domestic Violence Amendment Act (2021), the country continues to experience implementation challenges.

- **Economic Inequality and the Wage Gap**

In South Africa women remain trapped in low paying economic sectors if they succeed to get jobs in the country’s high unemployment environment. Unpaid Care work remains a social challenge due to the country’s social challenges that include absent fathers, alcohol and drug abuse. These factors have direct impact on gender-based violence and social strife which women find themselves attending to. The impacts of HIV and TB worsened women’s involvement in voluntary and unpaid care work.

- **The Digital and Financial Divide**

Like in other countries, for example, Kenya and India, South African women also experience challenges in accessing digital services particularly in rural areas. Mobile penetration is high in South Africa but the ‘meaningful use’ of technology for economic advancement remains low. Regarding access to credit, women particularly in rural areas still struggle to access formal credit.

The lack of collateral and the historical legacy of patriarchal land ownership are some of the factors. As a result, women continue to be segregated against full integration into mainstream economic activities that include agriculture and access to financial support.

- **Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR)**

South Africa's liberal abortion laws represent some of the most progressive sexual and reproductive health rights laws under the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act, 2008. However, access is often hindered by institutional stigma and a lack of facilities in rural provinces, for example Eastern Cape and Limpopo.

Implementation challenges to achieve gender equality/ SDG 5

The above-stated challenges cause SDG 5 implementation, discussed below. Some of the implementation challenges linking to SDG 5 targets are discussed in this section.

- **Lack of coordinated evidence-based monitoring and evaluation and poor forensic capacity for GBV-SDG5.2**

Despite having a progressive National Strategic Plan on GBVF South Africa lacks a coordinated 'Evidence-Based Monitoring' (E&M) and poor forensic capacity for DNA-based GBV investigations. In 2025, the South African Police Service (SAPS) reported that an average of 12 women is murdered daily in the country. Over 10,500 reported rape cases were between July and September 2025 alone (South African Police Service [SAPS], 2026). However, the backlog in DNA processing despite recent public-private sector forensic laboratory support, the country is yet to fully clear the historical backlogs.

- **High unemployment and economic exclusion of women — SDG 5.1 & 5.5**

South Africa faces a tricky balancing act where women enter the labour market but cannot rise due to care burdens. The unemployment rate for women is 35.2%, significantly higher than that for men (30.6%). This is worsened by the gender pay gap which persists, with women earning approximately 23% less than men for work of equal value (Stats SA, 2026a; also refer to 2026b and 2026c for additional information). For example, only 7% of CEOs in JSE-listed companies are women. This picture reveals that the private sector lags far behind the public sector (46% women in Parliament) in achieving leadership parity (Price Water House Coopers [PwC], 2025).

- **Lack of Care Infrastructure-Increased Unpaid Care and Domestic Work for women— SDG 5.4**

In South Africa, the lack of 'Care Infrastructure' means women's time is spent doing less economically productive work for survival. Women in South Africa spend roughly 218 minutes per day on unpaid care work, compared to only 84 minutes for men (Statistics South Africa, 2026c). In rural KwaZulu-Natal, the lack of reliable water and energy infrastructure forces women to spend upwards of 3 hours a day collecting basic resources like firewood and water. This directly impacts on the time remaining for education or participate in formal paid work.

- **The 'Secondary Victimisation' Loop (SDG 5.2)**

While the National Strategic Plan (NSP) on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide is a robust policy document, its implementation is hampered by the frontline operational challenges. For example, many survivors report that the frontline police and medical personnel are often dismissive or lack the specialised forensic training required to secure convictions. As a result, increased reporting of rape cases is not matched by the low conviction rates which are below 10% in many jurisdictions. This is largely due to lost evidence or poorly handled dockets (South African Police Service [SAPS], 2026). These challenges are worsened by the lack of real-time, decentralised data tracking systems that allows for accountability at a precinct-by-precinct level.

- **Implementation Inequity across Provinces**

The Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG) and Western Cape often have higher resource allocation than rural provinces like Limpopo or the Eastern Cape. This implementation ‘asymmetry’ means a woman in a rural municipality may have no access to a Thuthuzela Care Centre or a specialised sexual offenses court, despite these being national mandates (UN Women, 2025). Recent statistics reveals that access to specialised GBV services is nearly 40% lower in rural districts compared to metropolitan hubs (Statistics South Africa, 2026b).

- **The ‘Care Penalty’ and Economic Absorption (SDG 5.4)**

Women absorb the ‘care penalty’ or ‘care tax’ due to the South African economy’s failure to absorb women at the same rate as men, primarily due to the ‘double burden’ of unpaid labour. The lack of state-funded, universal Early Childhood Development (ECD) infrastructure is a huge gap that limit women’s entry the formal workforce or participate in training because they are the default caregivers. Black South African women spend an average of 4.1 times more hours on unpaid domestic work than men (Statistics South Africa, 2026c). This is effectively an ‘informal tax’ on women's time.

- **Private Sector Non-Compliance (SDG 5.5)**

While the public sector has reached near-parity, the private sector operates largely on ‘voluntary’ gender transformation guidelines. Without the ‘Norway-style’ mandatory quotas, corporate South Africa remains heavily male-dominated at the executive level. With only 32% of senior management roles and 7% of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions in Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE)-listed companies, it means South Africa has a long way to even out gender disparities in the corporate sector (Price Water House Coopers [PwC], 2025). This liberal approach will impact negatively on the overall national gender plans and programmes. Achieving SDG5 will require all players, government and private

The core implementation challenge in South Africa is the ‘Evidence-Brokerage’ gap. The current gender-related monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems collect quantitative data such as the number of kits distributed, but they rarely evaluate the impact. The current indicators

rarely focus on the reduction in trauma or increase in successful convictions.

As noted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2025), South Africa's gender machinery is 'over-legislated but under-capacitated.' Departments often work in silos; the

Department of Justice, SAPS, and Social Development do not share a unified digital dashboard for tracking a survivor's journey, leading to 'leaky pipes' where survivors drop out of the system before reaching justice.

Discussion

There are various reasons that gender equality and SDG 5 are not absolutely realised in South Africa. Some of the challenges are discussed in this section.

The conversation begins with social-traditional-cultural norms that view patriarchy as a legitimate norm, in which women are subjugated by laws and expectations that adhere to societal approval of gender-based roles. According to the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) (2000), patriarchy supported men's dominance over women as the shared characteristic of the South African people; this system of dominance transcends many economic systems, historical periods, geographical locations, and social classes.

Lack of access to education is another issue that is connected to societal factors that contribute to inequality; girls who drop out of school are more likely to be abused and trafficked (Department of Education and Training, 2012). While a lack of education restricts a person's employment opportunities, dropout rates might also support societal views of women as illiterate. When parents in poor nations cannot afford to send all their children to school, they prioritize boys, which puts girls at greater danger of being coerced into child labor or child marriage. By boosting girls' self-esteem and confidence, adequate education can dramatically lower the likelihood of abuse and exploitation, and formal education and knowledge can help them land better employment with more steady incomes (Sibanda, 2015).

What is important to consider that women could get professional opportunities if hold required skills and competencies. It is important to invest in capacity-building programmes for women to gain expertise in their areas of work. This statement is supported by the opinions of Ncholo (2012:50) who states that strategies designed to guarantee that public sector agencies and municipalities implement capacity building interventions for women's empowerment and gender equality are known as capacity building interventions. Hora (2014:18) adds that these interventions will enable human resources and line managers to identify the training needs of female employees

and give them the chance to do so to improve their competence and create better career opportunities in both the public and private sectors. The need of capacity-building was also supported by Bangani (2020: 130; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023:416) who stressed that "corrective measures can therefore be established to improve gender equality in Public Service structures, processes, organisational strategic and leadership portfolios, department-based decision-making processes, and work-based policies and programmes, hence meeting the goals of SDG

5 (gender equality and women's empowerment). However, the achievement of SDG 5 also demands political and administrative will to ensure that gender equality is streamlined and aligned with all organisational and departmental processes, structures, strategies, and policy frameworks". Local governments in Africa, following the opinions of Bangani (2020: 130; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023:416) "should finance training and education initiatives that ensure capacity building starts early, focusing on girls, to guarantee that many women are being groomed for leadership. For example, short courses and seminars might be organised in collaboration with educational institutions in this context".

Shefer (2008:157) claims that these areas are characterised by a lack of access to basic utilities including electricity, water, and sanitary amenities. Women are forced to travel long distances every day to obtain firewood and water, which puts their health and safety at danger. Additionally, according to Rallings and Thrasher (2008:67) women are the heads of households and the primary providers of income due to the lack of men, mostly due to the phenomena of urban migration and the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in rural areas. The challenges brought on by gender disparity in South African municipalities are likewise influenced by these problems.

In the workplace challenges relate to gender inequality require strategic interventions. Government department, ministries and public sector, all are obligated to implement gender equality policies. However, "the challenge is that departments had adopted different variations in developing their policies or strategies, that is, some only developed the ones that are externally focused and did not have the internally focused policies or strategies" (Department of Public Service and Administration [DPSA], 2013; Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020:6). Furthermore, the causes of such situation to remain challenging are (Department of Women [DoW], 2014; Nhlapo, 2020; Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020:6): "lack of stakeholder understanding and commitment to

gender mainstreaming; lack of sharing information and knowledge; failure to comment on existing legislation and bills that negatively impact the socio-economic empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality; inadequate oversight capacity and expertise on policies and programmes for the socio-economic empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality; predominance of gender imbalances or disparities in the country, especially in key decision-making positions; reversal of the women's empowerment agenda; the inability to promote and protect the social and related rights of women; and the insufficient gender expertise".

Furthermore, as stated by Stamarski and Son Hing (2015, cited in Nhlapo 2020:170), when human resource (HR) policies are fundamentally prejudiced against a group of workers, regardless of their performance, knowledge, skills, or talents connected to their jobs, this is known as institutional discrimination. Any kind of HR policy might involve institutional discrimination against women, starting with the hiring and selection of a person and continuing through their role assignments, training, compensation, performance reviews, promotion, and dismissal. For instance, women are subjected to systematic discrimination, if possibly unintentionally, if they are underrepresented in a certain educational program or job type and

their credentials or prior work experience are required to be taken into consideration for selection.

This statement is supported by the opinions of Bruns (2007: 43) who stated that the discrimination against women in human resources is one of the institutional reasons. Organizational structures, procedures, and practices all exhibit gender inequality, which is a complicated problem. Meintjies (2005: 273) also opined that human resources practices perpetuate some of the most detrimental gender disparities for women. This is because hiring, training, compensation, and advancement of women are impacted by HR processes, including policies, decision-making, and their implementation. One of the main reasons for gender imbalance in organisations is job segregation. Men are thought to be better suited for some vocations in society.

International Case Studies: Challenges and Interventions

Two case studies, one international (Sweden) and another African (Rwanda) are explored to understand the manner gender equality is considered significant and appropriate measures are in place to ensure implementation of SDG 5 in selected case-studies.

- **Sweden: The Care Economy and Gender Equality (SDG 5.4)**

The Swedish have what is called a ‘Dual-Earner/Dual-Caregiver’ model which is designed to break the structural link between womanhood and unpaid labour. The following are some of the successful interventions designed to remove structural barriers for women due to unpaid care work:

The Universal Childcare. The Swedish case study provides evidence of how government interventions in childcare programmes can directly impact gender equality interventions while improving child enrolment in early childhood development. The country currently maintains near- universal enrolment for children aged 3–5. As a result, the country is one of those investing significant public spending on early childhood education in the OECD at approximately 1.6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2024).

Paid Parental Leave. Sweden 480 days paid parental leave cushions parents particularly women from income loss due to domestic needs to care for children. To encourage shared responsibility, 90 days are reserved specifically for each parent on a ‘use it or lose it’ quota basis.

High women Participation in economic activities. In 2025, the employment rate for women aged 20–64 in Sweden reached 79.7%, nearly at parity with men at 80.4% (Statistics Sweden [SCB], 2025).

Despite high participation, structural barriers remain in some areas in the Swedish gender

➤ **Sweden continues to have a Gender Wage Gap.** Despite significant achievements in advancing women's economic participation, women in Sweden still earn less compared to their partners in couple households (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2025). Sectoral segregation still exists as women continue to work in lower-paying public sector care roles. Additionally, recent evidence also suggests gaps between women (42%) and men (23%) still exist regarding intensive childcare roles in Sweden (EIGE, 2025). This gap persists despite the huge financial and infrastructural investments into ECD and social services to free women's time for productive work.

➤ **Gender and leadership in private sector.** While women hold 46% of parliamentary seats, the situation is way lower in corporate sectors. Women represent only 38% of board members in the largest quoted companies as of 2026, indicating a glass ceiling in the private sector (EIGE, 2025). The Swedish model proves that while infrastructure (childcare) fixes 'access' to the economy, it does not automatically fix culture (the expectation that women 'should' care). This realisation is a lesson for African governments to ensure that they fix the 'software' issues such as culture, social norms and the 'hardware' which is the infrastructure required to lessen time for women involvement in unpaid care work.

- **Rwanda — Gender Quotas and Political Representation (SDG 5.5)**

Rwanda's SDG5 Successes are hinged on the country's 2003 Constitution built on the history of the 1994 genocide which necessitated rebuilding of strong governance structures that include gender transformation. In Rwanda, there is a 30% Constitutional Floor. Article 10 of the Rwandan Constitution mandates that women must hold at least 30% of positions in all decision-making organs. In practice, the country has far exceeded this floor (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2026a; also refer 2026b for additional information).

➤ **Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB).** The Rwandan case study provides helpful insights into how statutory financial commitments can drive positive results towards SDG5. The country provides legal commitment for all ministries and departments to submit a Gender Budget Statement (GBS) to the Ministry of Finance. This approach represents how government can translate political commitments into direct benefits for women through actual resource allocation (UN Women, 2025).

The Rwanda case study is a global best practice for parliamentary representation. The results of this statutory budget commitment include 63.8% of seats in the Chamber of Deputies being held by women (IPU, 2026).

The country is yet to expand these success strategies into the private sector. Currently, only 31% of women occupy senior management positions in the private sector in Rwanda. The boardrooms of Rwanda's largest banks and telecommunications firms remain significantly male-dominated (World Bank, 2025).

➤ **Agricultural Gender Gap:** Women continue to face access to productive land and

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fair benefits despite being the backbone of Rwanda's agriculture. Recent statistics shows that women in Rwanda are 20% less likely to participate in high-value export crop chains like coffee and tea compared to women who are relegated to subsistence farming (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2025).

➤ **Unpaid Care Burden:** High political participation just like the corporate legal support in Sweden and Norway, women in Rwanda still spend 3.5 times more hours on unpaid care work than men. Thus, political influence does not automatically translate into entrepreneurial growth (UN Women, 2025).

The Rwandan case provides useful lessons for Africa and the world. Firstly, the political quotas are a ‘top-down’ success, but they do not automatically resolve ‘bottom-up’ economic disparities. The Rwandan case suggests that representation is a prerequisite for change, but without specific Private Sector Quotas similar to Care Infrastructure like the Sweden case, the structural ‘spillover’ remains limited. Through addressing the ‘Care Tax’ (Sweden), South Africa’s high female unemployment (35.2%) is partially a ‘time tax.’ If South Africa invests in the care economy as Sweden did, it could potentially create millions of ‘pink collar’ jobs while simultaneously freeing up women to enter the ‘blue collar’ formal sector. The lessons are briefly summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Key summary of lessons learnt

Sweden (Care Economy)	Infrastructure is the prerequisite for equality.	Policy Shift: Move from unpaid "volunteer" community care to a professionalized, state-subsidized ECD and elderly care sector.
Rwanda (Governance)	Political parity is the "top-down" fuel.	Policy Shift: Leverage South Africa’s high parliamentary representation (46%) to mandate Gender-Responsive Budgeting across all 3 spheres of government.

Source: Grand, 2026.

Conclusion

Since gender disparity occurs in every nation, it is a topic of ongoing discussion. Legislative measures are in place in South Africa to guarantee that governmental offices, entities, and sectors adhere to gender equality policies. Gender-based programs can also be implemented through institutional frameworks. Gender equality has not fully materialised despite these efforts.

The realisation of gender equality is influenced by several factors. Among these are societal, cultural, and traditional standards that limit women's ability to empower themselves by viewing them as only fit for household chores, suppressing their desire to further their education, and discouraging them from applying for professional positions. Male children are prioritised above female children for educational purposes due to economic factors. There are political reasons why some political parties do not prioritise women as leaders or consider their participation in their manifestos. Women are not given the chance to develop themselves, are not given consideration for promotions, and do not advance in their careers at higher levels due to institutional factors, to mention a few. These factors make it more difficult to effectively implement SDG 5 in a national setting.

Gender-based issues need to be given more consideration at the policy level. Women's participation and representation must be included in political parties' manifestos. To build gender-based policies through policymaking processes, the parties must then collaborate to identify gender-related issues. These gender-based regulations will then be applied across all industries. To guarantee that roles are gender-neutral, institutional monitoring and assessment procedures must be improved. Human resource procedures must include gender-neutral hiring procedures, gender-based capacity-building initiatives, gender-related training opportunities, gender-consideration in appointments, and gender-neutrality in promotions.

To empower themselves on a personal level, women must develop inner strength. Due to the numerous variables involved, this is not an easy task. Nonetheless, women's organisations, gender activists, and others can help empower women by providing financial support to launch a business, opening doors for entrepreneurship, and teaching them regarding civic rights. There may be more effective alternatives that call for ongoing participation and conversations on gender equality at all

societal, community, and professional levels. This is a path of worthy development that is still unfolding.

Note

* Dr Zacharia Grand is a PDRF who compiled the information stated under Table 2. This note is to acknowledge his assistance.

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