Shifting the Landscape: The 2021 Year in Review
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1. Foreword

The world we live in today is different from the world we knew just a year ago. This year, we can start contemplating with hope a post-pandemic era where a sustainable healing process can begin and where many valuable lessons can be learned. We have witnessed with great admiration how women leaders in Africa and around the world have helped successfully steer their nations through the troubled waters of the COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside these women, we have advocated for an equitable global vaccination program that enables the African continent to manufacture, access, and distribute vaccines efficiently.

As we prepare to welcome our third cohort of Amujae Leaders, we look back at the journey we have been through and prepare for the challenges that still lie ahead. This is not the moment to shy away from our leadership responsibilities, nor is there room for fear or lack of decisiveness. We will continue with more determination than ever to advocate for women’s public leadership. We will soon break ground to build a state-of-the-art Presidential Center and Library in Liberia’s capital Monrovia. The Center will provide access to our Board Chair and Founder Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s personal and professional archives. In addition, it will educate, inspire, and drive visitors forward on their own leadership journeys.

This report allows us to reflect on the Center’s activities in 2021 and connect our efforts to the bigger picture of advancing women’s leadership. Africa still has a long journey ahead; women’s representation in political life and leadership is still low. Our struggle to propel more women into public leadership must continue.

Throughout 2021, we also stepped up our efforts to engage male allies in the fight for gender equity. We have been grateful for the support of visionary heads of state and male leaders from government and philanthropy, who have issued a clarion call for their peers to step forward and take action.

As we continue our work in 2022, we do so with renewed commitment to advocate for the advancement of women in public leadership. We hope you will stand beside us in this effort.

Ophelia Inez Weeks, Ph.D.
EJS Center Executive Director
The Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development (EJS Center) was founded in 2018 to be a catalyst for change across Africa by helping unleash its most abundant, yet minimally tapped power—its women. Through a unique blend of programming, advocacy, research, and exhibitions, the EJS Center works to advance women’s public leadership and development on the continent. Through its work, it envisions more voices heard, talents unleashed, and leaders launched that prioritize the aspirations of women. The EJS Center was founded by former President and Nobel Peace Prize winner Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. As the first democratically elected woman president in Africa, Madam Sirleaf is passionate about supporting the next generation of women in public life. By helping women in public leadership to raise their profiles and advance their careers, the EJS Center seeks to amplify the voices of all women and girls across the continent.

About the EJS Center

The Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development (EJS Center) was founded in 2018 to be a catalyst for change across Africa by helping unleash its most abundant, yet minimally tapped power—its women.
2. Introduction

The year 2021 was a promising one that saw African women succeed in reaching leadership positions across national, regional, and international public governance institutions.

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala became the first African woman to lead the World Trade Organization (WTO);¹ Samia Suluhu Hassan became Tanzania’s first woman President;² Uganda appointed Jessica Alupo as Vice President and Robinah Nabbanja as Prime Minister;³ Zambia elected Mutale Nalumango as Vice President;⁴ and Najla Bouden Romdhane was appointed Prime Minister of Tunisia—the first woman to lead a government in the Arab world.⁵

Despite these achievements, considerable effort is still needed to ensure that more African women can overcome the obstacles that hinder their access to the highest levels of public leadership. In many parts of Africa, women who express their political ambitions are being subjected to all forms of abuse, violence, and bias. Such constraints can significantly undermine the ability of African nations to fulfill the commitments made in the African Union’s (AU) Agenda 2063.⁶

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has watched the power of women’s public leadership in real-time. Women-led countries excelled in their responses to the crisis, crafting approaches informed by various stakeholders. As the world enters the third year of the pandemic, we continue to see its effects and how it has exacerbated longstanding inequalities, particularly impacting women and girls.⁷ There is a growing need to draw on previous learnings to develop sustainable, inclusive, and equitable solutions.

African women are drivers of progress, and this yearly publication is dedicated to celebrating their efforts and contributions toward Africa’s success. This report reflects upon the EJS Center’s activities throughout 2021 and the achievements made by the Amujae Leaders—the inspiring group of women public leaders who are part of our flagship program, the Amujae Initiative. Centering on African women’s progress throughout 2021, the report notes the achievements of women at the highest levels of the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary. It also highlights African women’s achievements within three critical development areas: climate change, technology for economic growth, and health. Though improvements are necessary within all spheres of development, these three areas have profound implications for Africa’s future. Arguably, they represent some of Africa’s most critical challenges of the 21st century.⁸

Across these three development spheres, women are key players. Their role as community workers and leaders shows the way forward, creating innovative long-term solutions to help the continent respond to current challenges. This report will shed light on their unique role and contributions in these areas.

Finally, the report draws attention to the significant work of civil society organizations (CSOs) across Africa in 2021 to ensure continued social and political transformation. The individuals and organizations highlighted offer hope for the future.
3. Highlights from the EJS Center

3.1 The Amujae Initiative

The Amujae Initiative is the Center’s flagship program. Amujae, pronounced ā mōō jāēē, means ‘we are going up’ in Kru, a Liberian language.

Launched on International Women’s Day, 8 March 2020, the Amujae Initiative aims to shift the landscape for women in public leadership in Africa, moving from a culture of tokenism to one that genuinely values women leaders.

The Amujae Initiative activities are designed to inspire and prepare women to unapologetically take up roles, excel in the highest echelons of public leadership, and bring other women along.

This year, the EJS Center will welcome a new cohort of Amujae Leaders who, together with the group of 30 women leaders from the previous two cohorts, will form a distinguished group of African women leaders representing more than 16 countries across the continent. Since its launch, the Amujae Initiative has provided training, mentorship, and coaching to women drawn from a diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds. They share a similar track record of demonstrable achievement in public life and the drive to uplift African women and girls. They include current and former government ministers, a governor, members of parliament, senior government advisors, and activists engaged on issues ranging from refugee rights to gender equality and youth empowerment. Their achievements are as varied as their professional backgrounds encompassing law, government, business, education, healthcare, and activism. Still, they have come together with a common purpose: to serve their countries and advocate for women.

The 2021 Amujae Leaders were welcomed into the sisterhood through a two-day virtual induction event. At the induction event, the second cohort showcased their accomplishments to EJS Center Founder and former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the inaugural cohort of Amujae Leaders, the coaches, Board members, and partners of the EJS Center.

The Amujae Leaders received words of wisdom from and engaged with distinguished women leaders who have been trailblazers in public leadership, including former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of the Republic of Malawi Joyce Banda, former President of the Central African Republic Catherine Samba-Panza, former President of Mauritius Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and inaugural EJS Center Board Member Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa Vera Songwe, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi Zainab Hawa Bangura, Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace, and Security Bineta Diop, and Honorary Consul General of Liberia to Uganda Dr. Thelma Awori.

These former heads of state and distinguished leaders of international institutions provided insight and guidance drawn from their invaluable experience in public leadership.

The Amujae Leaders participated in curated workshops, webinars, and training sessions that focused on leading them to achieve their individual and collective goals.
PROGRAMMING INCLUDED:

- **Capacity building training sessions** that included workshops with Lucina di Meco and Kristina Wilfore, co-founders of the #ShePersisted initiative; Phumzile Van Damme, former South African Parliamentarian; David Axelrod, Distinguished Senior Fellow at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy; and David Simas, Chief Executive Officer at the Obama Foundation.

- **Discussions with accomplished diplomats and leaders of international organizations**, including Jendayi Frazer, former U.S. Ambassador to South Africa and EJS Center Board Member; Monica Geingos, First Lady of Namibia and EJS Center Board Member; Joyce Banda, former President of the Republic of Malawi; Catherine Samba-Panza, former President of the Central African Republic; Dr. Thelma Awori, Honorary Consul General of Liberia to Uganda; and Naquetta Ricks, the first Liberian-American elected as State Representative in the United States.

- **In-person convenings with Liberian leaders and stakeholders**, including Olubanke King Akerele, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liberia; Marjon Kamara, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liberia; Ingrid Wetterqvist, former Ambassador of Sweden to Liberia; Mercedes L. Martínez Herrera, Ambassador of Cuba to Liberia; Liberian peace activist and Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee; and former Chief Justice of Liberia Gloria Musu-Scott.

Towards the end of the year, the Amujae Initiative hosted its second Leadership Forum in Monrovia, Liberia, gathering the two cohorts of Amujae Leaders and Amujae Coaches. Convened under the theme of "Building Resilience," the forum’s activities were designed to deepen relationships among Amujae Leaders, enabling them to share strategies for resilience, and encourage them to focus on their goals. The carefully curated workshops and talks allowed the Amujae Leaders to develop resilience strategies regardless of setbacks and mechanisms for supporting other women.

The leadership forum and all activities throughout 2021 were crafted to create an open, safe space for the coaches and leaders to share their strengths and vulnerabilities - engendering a sense of purposeful sisterhood.

The Amujae Leaders’ outstanding achievements saw them participate in elections, reach high-level leadership positions in the public and private sectors, and earn distinguished awards. Below are some of the Amujae Leaders’ 2021 achievements.

**APPOINTMENTS:**

- **Hadiza Bala Usman** (’20, Nigeria) was re-appointed as Managing Director of the Nigerian Ports Authority. She is serving her second term as the first woman head of this 68-year-old federal agency.

- **Bogolo Kenewendo** (’21, Botswana) was appointed to the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council (GEAC) among 18 other international council members—a group of distinguished scientists, diplomats, business leaders, and advocates tasked with leading the UK’s gender equality work at the G7.

- **Farida Bedwei** (’21, Ghana) designed and coordinated a process to distribute palliative disbursements to over 1,000 Nigerians on behalf of Ovation Group—a Nigeria-based entity.

- **Aïda Alassane N’Diaye-Riddick** (’20, Côte d’Ivoire), **Dr. Adaeee Oreh** (’21, Nigeria), and **Isata Kabia** (’21, Sierra Leone) joined the END Fund African Leadership Champion Program—a network of leaders who are championing the cause of ending neglected tropical diseases.

**CONTESTS:**

- **Fatoumatta Njai** (’21, The Gambia) stood for the position of party leader at a congress held early in 2021.

**RECOGNITION:**

- **Dr. Adaeee Oreh** (’21, Nigeria) was listed among Nigeria’s 100 Most Inspiring Women for 2021 by Leading Ladies Africa.

- **Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, OBE** (’20, Sierra Leone), **Isata Kabia** (’21, Sierra Leone), and **Dr. Yakama Manty Jones** (’21, Sierra Leone) were among the 50 Most Influential Sierra Leonean Women Award winners following a public nomination process that sought to identify "exemplary women that are contributing towards socio-economic, political and cultural development in Sierra Leone." After rounds of voting and shortlisting, these Amujae Leaders emerged among the winners from an initial pool of 908 nominations.

- **Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, OBE** (’20, Sierra Leone) was shortlisted for the 2021 World Mayor Prize and received the Charleston Sister Cities International 2021 Woman of the Year Award.

- **Anne Waiguru** (’21, Kenya) was ranked Kenya’s second-best governor in 2021 by research firm Mizani Africa.

Building upon the success of the 2020 and 2021 cohorts of Amujae Leaders, the EJS Center began recruitment for the third cohort of women leaders at the end of 2021. This new cohort will be formally announced in the second quarter of 2022. The EJS Center received over 280 applications from 35 countries, with representation from all five regions and various professional backgrounds. From this application pool, the EJS Center will select another 15 of Africa’s leading women, continuing its mission to build a wave of fully equipped women to assume the highest levels of public leadership.
3.2 Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Library and Archives

In 2021, the EJS Center continued working towards creating the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Library, which will provide access to the archives documenting Madam Sirleaf’s life, presidency, and legacy. The collection will feature papers, photographs, artifacts, memorabilia, and audio-visual material that will tell the story of her life before, during, and after her twelve-year tenure as President of Liberia. The Center’s goal is for the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Archives to be made available to a global audience for research and education purposes.

In 2021, considerable progress was made in identifying, gathering, and sorting more of Madam Sirleaf’s records. In addition, the Center began working with conservationists to implement proper preservation and handling of the documents. The EJS Center also began engaging with a number of institutions to identify a suitable partner in the collection’s preservation, cataloging, and digitization. Ongoing conversations look promising.

In 2021, the EJS Center received funding from the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Open Society Foundation and Ford Foundation to assist in the initial work of archival training for staff, arranging the records, providing adequate climate-controlled storage, and acquiring the supplies and equipment to preserve and digitize the collection.
3.3 Strategic Communications, Advocacy, and Research

EVENTS
As the EJS Presidential Library and Archives are being developed, the EJS Center has continued to host virtual and in-person events. In anticipation of the EJS Center’s launch anniversary and International Women’s Day, the EJS Center hosted a roundtable discussion with women leaders in Liberia on March 2, 2021. The event—entitled ‘Liberia in Focus’—facilitated an exchange of experiences and lessons learned between women political leaders, including Liberia’s only women senators—Senator Nyonblee Karnga-Lawrence, and Senator Botoe Kanneh—in addition to two inaugural Amujae Leaders, Kula Fofana (‘20, Liberia) and Cornelia Kruah-Togba (‘20, Liberia).

Building on the success of the ‘Liberia in Focus’ event, the EJS Center hosted a virtual forum on good governance in Liberia in collaboration with the Mo Ibrahim Foundation. The event generated a robust discussion that attracted over 100 participants from across the African continent, including leading policy experts and renowned academics addressing the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) and its application in Liberia and further afield on the continent. As a follow-up to the event, the EJS Center published an outcomes document detailing a path forward to improve Liberia’s governance.

Following the virtual forum, the EJS Center hosted a physical event in collaboration with Liberia’s Governance Commission, the Angie Brooks International Centre, and the African Development Bank to launch a book on the legacy of Madam Sirleaf’s presidency. The book explores the reconstruction of post-war Liberia, detailing the challenges and achievements during Madam Sirleaf’s tenure.

ADVOCACY
In 2021, the EJS Center took on an essential public advocacy role. Activities included launching the ‘#HaveHerBack’ campaign recognizing men’s critical role in promoting gender equality; media sensitization training; publishing blogs, reports, and articles; and the commissioning of data-driven research activities.

The #HaveHerBack campaign invited men from across the continent to make concrete pledges to further women’s leadership in their spheres of influence. It also provided an opportunity for women to recognize the men who have supported them throughout their careers—and encourage other men to follow their lead. The men who joined the campaign included His Excellencies Alassane Ouattara, President of Côte d’Ivoire; Cyril Ramaphosa, President of South Africa; Ernest Bai Koroma, former President of Sierra Leone; Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria; as well as Dr. Mo Ibrahim, Founder and Chair of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation; and Dr. K. Y. Amoako, Founder and President of the African Center for Economic Transformation.

The media play an essential role in shaping public perceptions about women’s leadership. As such, the Center is working to create a level playing field for women leaders on the continent by addressing gender biases in media reporting. Specifically, the EJS Center launched a series of training workshops for journalists aimed at helping them recognize potential “gender traps” in their reporting and giving them the tools and strategies needed to cover women leaders fairly. Over the year, workshops were conducted in Zambia, Kenya, and Senegal.

In addition, the EJS Center continued to create original content highlighting its work and the activities and accomplishments of the Amujae Leaders and Madam Sirleaf. This led to 48 pieces of media coverage throughout the year. Also notable was Madam Sirleaf’s contribution to the opening essay for the chapter on gender in the Brookings Institution’s Foresight Africa 2022 publication ‘The Art of the pivot: African women as critical problem solvers in the 21st century.’

The EJS Center also expanded its research activities. In 2021, it published its first Year in Review report, ‘Taking Stock of Women’s Public Leadership in Africa: The 2020 Year in Review.’ Towards the end of the year, the EJS Center also began developing a data dashboard on women’s public leadership in Africa. The first iteration of the EJS Data Hub, which is due to launch in the second quarter of 2022, will focus on all 15 West African countries, with coverage of additional regions to follow. In addition, the EJS Center began efforts to commission a multiphase and mixed-method baseline study of women’s public leadership across all five subregions in Africa.
4. Shifts in Women's Public Leadership in 2021

4.1 Women in Legislative Assemblies

Since the adoption of the AU’s Agenda 2063—a blueprint for achieving sustainable development by 2063, African countries have seen numerous substantive changes in the gender make-up of legislative governments. As of 2021, women hold 24% of positions across Upper and Lower chambers in African countries,⁹ standing just below the current global average of 26%.¹⁰ Though the rate of increase has remained stable over the years,¹¹ women’s representation varies significantly across the continent.¹²

Women’s Representation in African Legislatures from 2015 to 2021

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union: Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, 2015-2021

COUNTRIES WITH DECLINING REPRESENTATION

Algeria and Nigeria, among others, have experienced a decline in the number of women in legislatures between 2020 and 2021. Algeria’s fall is the most significant. Women’s representation in the legislature fell from 25.8% to 8.1%. Activists and researchers attribute this decline to the government’s decision to abolish the country’s gender quotas.¹³ Nigeria registered a decrease of 3%.

Africa’s Declining Legislatures

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union and World Bank DataBank World Development Indicators: Yearly Averages 1990 to 2021
COUNTRIES WITH INCREASED REPRESENTATION

Though the data presented above might seem discouraging, there are positive signs that women’s representation in legislatures is improving in several countries across the continent.

Chad, Cabo Verde, and South Sudan experienced an increase of 15.8%, 13.9%, and 4% respectively, between 2020 and 2021—placing all three countries above the Beijing Platform for Action goal of more than 30% women’s representation in parliament. Rwanda remains the only African country to have exceeded the Beijing 30% target and the Agenda 2063 goal of parity. With these achievements, the number of African countries that have met the 30% target in their lower house or single house increased to 14—three more than in 2020.

Africa’s Increasing Legislatures

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union and World Bank DataBank World Development Indicators: Yearly Averages 1990 to 2021

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union: Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, 2021

Africa’s Leading Legislatures

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union: Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, 2021
Highlights from Parliamentary Elections in 2021

In 2021, twelve African countries held legislative elections: Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Algeria, and Morocco.¹⁴ Below are noteworthy milestones for women’s representation in legislatures in some of these countries.

ALGERIA
2021 marked Algeria’s 7th multiparty election in its history.¹⁵ Algerian women won only 34 seats—8% of the 407 available seats in the national legislature. These results are in stark contrast to the outcomes of the elections in 2012 and 2017, where women held 145 seats and 120 seats, respectively.¹⁶ It is said that the amendment to the election law—which had included a non-mandatory 50% quota on party candidate lists—primarily accounted for the decline in women’s share of legislative seats.¹⁷

THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)
Elections in the Central African Republic were held in two stages, the first in December 2020.¹⁸ The December elections were marked by violence that specifically impacted women—with physical violence and verbal harassment directed at women candidates. The 2021 elections ushered in 6 more women than in the last elections in 2016. Of the 140 seats in the national assembly, women secured 18, increasing the representation from 9% in 2020 to 13% in 2021.¹⁹

SOMALIA
Elections for the Upper House of parliament in 2021 ushered in 14 women out of the 54 available seats, representing 26% of the senators.²⁰ Several CSOs advocated for a 30% quota for women’s representation during the election period. The Lower House elections due to take place in 2021 were delayed to 2022.²¹ The most recent Lower House election in 2016 saw 67 women elected out of 275. Women currently hold 24% of seats in the Lower House, just below the continental average.²² The government and electoral commission have agreed to reserve 82 seats for women in the Lower House.

MOROCCO
Morocco’s 2021 House of Representatives elections ushered in 90 women and 305 men—increasing women’s representation by 2% compared to 2016.²³ Morocco is working on expanding the number of seats held by women by adopting new measures and reforms within its electoral code.²⁴ Since 2000, women’s representation in parliament has significantly increased from 0.6% to 23%.²⁵

ZAMBIA
Zambia experienced a decline in women’s parliamentary representation after the 2021 elections. Of the 167 available seats, only 25 seats were won by women. In contrast to 2016, women’s political representation dropped by 4% in parliament and 19% in executive cabinet positions.²⁶ According to Zambia’s current Vice President, Mutale Nalumango—the second woman to hold this position—election violence is an undeniable concern and deterrent for women interested in running for parliament.²⁷

 Though the data presented in this section is of some concern, the increased presence of women in parliaments across Africa should be celebrated. Nevertheless, countries must continue to address the barriers impacting women’s participation. Issues such as election violence, lack of access to campaign financing, exclusionary party structures, and negative public perception affect women’s access to legislative power. Moreover, the Algerian case underscores the importance of simultaneously enforcing legislation that addresses gender equality while implementing localized interventions that aim to change attitudes towards women’s political participation.
4.2 Women Presidents and Prime Ministers

In 2021, two women Prime Ministers were appointed—Uganda’s Robinah Nabbanja and Tunisia’s Najla Bouden Romdhane. They join a group of previously appointed African prime ministers—Prime Minister Victoire Tomegah Dogbé of Togo, appointed in 2020; Prime Minister Rose Christiane Raponda of Gabon, appointed in 2020; and Prime Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila of Namibia, who has held the office since March 2015. With the addition of Uganda and Tunisia, 15 African countries have had women prime ministers since Elisabeth Domitien was appointed as Prime Minister of the Central African Republic in 1975.
Spotlight: Africa’s New Women Prime Ministers

**Robinah Nabbanja**
Country: Uganda
Appointed: June 2021

Robinah Nabbanja is the first woman Prime Minister of Uganda. In 2011, Prime Minister Nabbanja successfully contested for Kibaale District Woman Representative in the 9th parliament—maintaining that seat from 2011 to 2016. Before her appointment, Ms. Nabbanja was Minister of State for Health.

**Najla Bouden Romdhane**
Country: Tunisia
Appointed: September 2021

Najla Bouden Romdhane is the first woman Prime Minister of Tunisia and the first woman to head a government in the Arab world. Prime Minister Bouden Romdhane is a former professor of geophysics who implemented World Bank projects at Tunisia’s Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research over several years. In 2011, she was appointed Director-General in charge of quality at the Ministry of Higher Education.

As of 2021, there were only two sitting women Presidents in Africa: Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia and Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania.

Spotlight: Africa’s New Woman President

**Samia Suluhu Hassan**
Country: Tanzania
In office since: March 2021

Before becoming President, Samia Suluhu Hassan served as Tanzania’s first woman Vice President. She also served as a Minister of State in the Vice President’s Office in Union Affairs.
In 2021, eight women served as Vice Presidents across the continent. Five of these women became Vice Presidents before 2021: Jewel Howard-Taylor, Vice President of Liberia (2018 – Current); Dr. Isatou Touray, Vice President of the Gambia (2019 – Current); Rebecca Nyandeng Garang de Mabior, Vice President of South Sudan (2020 – Current); Samia Suluhu Hassan, Vice President of Tanzania (2015 to 2021); and Inonge Mutukwa Wina, Vice President of Zambia (2015-2021). Two of them are no longer Vice Presidents: Inonge Mutukwa Wina resigned in 2021, and Samia Suluhu Hassan replaced late President John Magufuli in March 2021. Three women ascended to the position of Vice President in 2021.

**Spotlight: Africa’s New Women Vice Presidents**

- **Mariam Chabi Talata**  
  **Country:** Benin  
  **In office since:** May 2021  
  Mariam Chabi Talata was the first woman Vice President of Benin. She was also the first woman President of the National Assembly and a founding member of her political party.34

- **Jessica Alupo**  
  **Country:** Uganda  
  **In office since:** June 2021  
  Jessica Alupo is the second woman to hold the Vice President position in Uganda. Before becoming Vice President, she held the role of Minister of State for Youth and Children Affairs (2009) and Minister of Education and Sports (2011 – 2015).35

- **Mutale Nalumango**  
  **Country:** Zambia  
  **In office since:** August 2021  
  Mutale Nalumango is the second woman to hold the Vice President position in Zambia. She was the former Deputy Minister of Information and the first woman Deputy Speaker in parliament in 2010.36
Highlights from Presidential Elections in 2021

Twelve African countries held presidential elections in 2021: Benin, the Gambia, Libya, Somalia, Zambia, Uganda, Sao Tome and Principe, Cabo Verde, Chad, Djibouti, Niger, and the Republic of Congo.37

**BENIN**
Benin’s 2021 presidential election saw 20 candidates submit paperwork for the election. Benin’s electoral commission approved only three of those twenty candidates. All three presidential candidates were men. Reckya Madougou, the leader of Benin’s largest opposition party and the only potential woman candidate for the 2021 election, was jailed a few weeks before the election.38 President Talon selected a woman—Mariam Chabi Talata—as his vice-presidential running mate.

**THE GAMBIA**
The Gambia registered its potential first and only woman presidential candidate during the 2021 elections—Marie Sock. However, the electoral commission rejected Sock’s application.39

**LIBYA**
Of the 98 candidates in Libya’s 2021 elections, only two were women—Leila ben Khalifa and Hunaida Tumia. Ben Khalifa and Tumia were the first women candidates in its history.40 Both candidates faced verbal harassment for their participation in the election.41

**SOMALIA**
Somalia’s 2021 election boasted only one woman candidate—Fawzia Yusuf H. Adam. Adam was Somalia’s first woman Deputy Prime Minister and first woman Minister of Foreign Affairs.42

**ZAMBIA**
Zambia’s presidential election included one woman out of 16 presidential candidates—Chishala Kateka. There were five women vice-presidential candidates.43

**UGANDA**
In Uganda, of the 11 candidates for President, Nancy Kalenbe was the only woman candidate. Kalenbe was the fourth woman to run for Uganda’s highest office.44

As in 2020, none of the women who contested in the 2021 presidential elections were successful. Nevertheless, their candidacies highlight a shift in the perception of women’s political participation. Women are demanding a seat at the table, despite barriers such as prejudice, financial constraints, and electoral violence. These women challenged the status quo, creating a path for future generations.
4.3 Women in Cabinets

A review of government publications and the report ‘Women in Politics: 2021,’ by UN Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), indicates that eight African countries sit amongst the top 40 countries globally for women’s representation in cabinets. Rwanda and South Africa are the only African countries with 50% or more women’s representation in the cabinet.

Highlights from Africa’s leading cabinets:

**RWANDA**
Rwanda has maintained its position as the African country with the highest proportion of women in cabinet, with 55% of ministerial roles. Women occupied 17 of 31 available positions in 2021. The women on the Rwandan cabinet oversee vital portfolios such as ICT and innovation, trade and industry, economic planning, environment, agriculture and animal resources, education, judicial affairs, and gender. Amujae Leader Clare Akamanzi has occupied the position of Chief Executive Officer of the Rwanda Development Board—a cabinet-level position—since February 2017.

**BURUNDI**
Burundi is one of the countries where women hold more than 30% of the cabinet positions. As of 2021, women account for 33.33%, five of the 15 cabinet positions.

**UGANDA**
2021 was a momentous year for women’s leadership in Uganda. The country has 43% women’s representation at the ministerial level. President Museveni appointed women to two of the highest positions at the executive level—Vice President and Prime Minister. 2021 marked the second time in history that a woman was appointed as Vice President.

**ETHIOPIA**
Ethiopia continues to be one of the leading countries on the continent in terms of women’s representation in cabinet. At the beginning of 2021, women accounted for 40% of available cabinet seats.

**NAMIBIA**
As of 2021, Namibia has 33.3% women’s representation in cabinet. Of the 24 cabinet portfolios—including the positions of Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, both currently held by women—eight are managed by women.

**SOUTH AFRICA**
In South Africa, women hold 14 of the 29 ministerial positions, making up 48% of the total cabinet positions. Women on the South African cabinet oversee diverse portfolios ranging from gender to defense.

**MOZAMBIQUE**
At the time of writing, there are currently eleven women in cabinet positions in Mozambique, holding 50% of its 22 available seats. In 2021, before the appointments of Ministers Lídia de Fátima da Graça Cardoso and Josefin Mpelo, Mozambique was one of four African countries with 40% or more women’s representation in cabinet.

Although a number of the countries highlighted above experienced a decline in women’s representation in 2021—falling short of Africa’s goal of parity—several achievements were registered: Africa set the tone in appointing women to ministerial positions that have traditionally been assigned to men, such as the position of Minister of Defense. In 2021, women were appointed as Ministers of Defense in Tanzania, South Africa, Togo, Kenya, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, and the Central African Republic. As a result, 27.5% of the world’s women Defense Ministers are in African governments.
Spotlight: Africa’s Defense Ministers

**Stergomena Tax**  
Country: Tanzania  
In office since: September 2021

**Thandi Modise**  
Country: South Africa  
In office since: August 2021

**Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula**  
Country: South Africa  
In office from: June 2012 to August 2021

**Essozimna Marguerite Gnakiade**  
Country: Togo  
In office since: October 2021

**Monica Juma**  
Country: Kenya  
In office from: January 2020 to September 2021

**Angelina Teny**  
Country: South Sudan  
In office since: March 2020

**Marie-Noëlle Koyara**  
Country: Central African Republic  
In office from: January 2015 to June 2021

**Oppah Muchinguri Kashiri**  
Country: Zimbabwe  
In office since: September 2018
4.4 Women in Judicial Positions

In contrast to the other branches of government, shifts in the leadership of the judicial branch are less frequent and are harder to track. Nevertheless, a number of notable judiciary appointments took place in 2021.

Kenya and Mauritius appointed women as Chief Justices—Martha Koome and Rehana Bibi for the first time. Koome and Bibi joined Nemat Abdullah Khair (Sudan), Maria de Fátima Coronel (Cabo Verde), Hilda Chomba (Zambia), and Sisi Khampepe (South Africa) as Chief Justices of African countries. Kenya and Mauritius joined several African countries that have appointed women to their highest courts. These countries include Benin, Burundi, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Seychelles, and Lesotho.

African women are not strangers to international and regional courts. Today, three African women—Miatta Maria Samba of Sierra Leone, Reine Alapini-Gansou of Benin, and Solomy Bossa of Uganda—are among the four African judges at the International Criminal Court of a total of 18 judges. Samba was the only African judge appointed to the court in 2021.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has 15 members. Of the three African members, only one is a woman—Judge Julia Sebutinde. She was re-elected in February 2021.

Regional courts, such as the African Court of Human and Peoples’ Rights (AfCHPR) and the ECOWAS court of justice, also reflect the increasing presence of women. In 2021, Lady Justice Imani Daud Aboud was re-elected to the AfCHPR, becoming President of the court. Today the AfCHPR has 11 judges, of which six are women from Nigeria, Algeria, Malawi, Rwanda, Cameroon, and Tanzania.

The ECOWAS court of justice has only five judges, two are women—Justice Catherine Dupe Atoki of Nigeria and Justice Januária Tavares Silva Moreira Costa of Cabo Verde.

An essential highlight from 2021 comes from Egypt. The State Council of Egypt—an independent judiciary body—appointed 98 women judges. This tremendous shift will shape the courts in Egypt for years to come and inspire and invite future women and girls to join the institution.

The breakthroughs and successes that African women achieved in the judiciary throughout this year are a testament to the continent’s commitment to ensuring women make it to the highest levels of leadership across all institutions.
5. Civil Society and Women’s Organizations in Africa

The increasing number of women leaders in public governance is intrinsically tied to the efforts of local women’s organizations and movements. Historically, African women’s movements and women-led organizations have played a pivotal role in shaping national agendas and institutions.\(^{71}\)

Not only did they advocate for more inclusive institutions, but they also demanded change, helping to expand women’s access to the highest levels of leadership within governmental institutions.\(^{72}\)

Today, women’s activism on the continent expands beyond nationalist and second liberation movements. Women are leaders in CSOs and movements that oppose all forms of violence, demand access to financing for businesses, advocate for sexual and reproductive justice, and address varying forms of political and social exclusions.\(^{73}\)

In the four African countries that experienced coups in 2021—Sudan, Mali, Chad, and Guinea—women-led organizations continue to hold transitional governments accountable to ensure that women are key participants in newly formed institutions. In Sudan, the work of women’s activists resulted in the constitutional declaration provision of 40% women’s representation. Unfortunately, as of 2021, this has yet to be realized—only one woman sat on the transitional council.\(^{74}\) Rather than accept defeat, women-led organizations and leaders in Sudan continue to pressure transitional leaders to keep their promises.

It is important to note that these organizations only represent a small number of women-centered organizations in Africa. The EJS Center supports the work of grassroots organizations, as it believes their efforts are critical to achieving a more secure and equitable future for women and girls across the continent.

**Spotlight: Women-Led Civil Society Organizations and Movements in 2021**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women's Parade</th>
<th>The Coordination des Association et ONG Feminine du Mali (CAFO)</th>
<th>The National Council of Women Leaders of Chad (CONAF)</th>
<th>The Federation of Young Women of Guinea</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sudan</strong></td>
<td>CAFO is a consortium of women’s organizations in Mali that works to link the government with women’s organizations across the country. Today, CAFO includes more than 2000 organizations.(^{75}) It continues to use its networks and influence to advocate for increasing women’s presence in politics.</td>
<td>CONAF is a women-led civil society association of more than 300 women leaders, women from local associations, and village groups throughout Chad. They aim to foster women’s participation in public life, especially during the current period of transition and national dialogue.(^{77})</td>
<td>The Federation ensures young women’s voices are heard during the transition. They advocate for parity and are fighting to ensure that women can participate at all levels of the transitional period and beyond and lead decision-making bodies.(^{78})</td>
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<td><strong>Mali</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Chad</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Guinea</strong></td>
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In April 2021, hundreds of Sudanese women protested against domestic and gender-based violence. Through the collective work of 50 women-led CSOs, they developed the Feminist Manifesto, which makes critical legal demands for women and girls.\(^{75}\)
6. Pressing Concerns for Africa’s Future

African women’s public leadership strength is not limited to any particular policy area.

As Madam Sirleaf stated in her contribution to Brookings Institution’s Foresight Africa 2022 publication, ‘The Art of the Pivot: African women as critical problem solvers in the 21st century,’ African women are fundamental problem-solvers actively addressing Africa’s most pressing issues. This report draws attention to three crucial areas for ensuring Africa’s development—climate change, technology, and health—and highlights African women’s efforts to find solutions in these areas.

6.1 Climate Change

Climate change is one of Africa’s most pressing concerns today. Although Africa contributes the least to global greenhouse gas emissions, the impacts of climate change are felt the most in the continent and other parts of the Global South.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to climate change as key community workers and laborers. Issues such as water scarcity, changes in weather patterns, and floods can cause displacement and limit the ability of girls to access education. Displacement also increases insecurity for women and girls, as it often results in higher risks of gender-based violence or exploitation.

Women play a crucial role as decision-makers, stakeholders, educators, and experts across all sectors. They are the main drivers behind adopting climate-sensitive approaches that meet the needs of women and girls. The increasing number of global portfolios related to the environment and energy sectors that women manage at the executive level is encouraging.

Below is a highlight of some women across Africa working to shift strategies and mindsets, ensuring that African countries are well equipped to address the long-term effects of climate change.
Spotlight: Climate Change Leaders

Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, OBE
Country: Sierra Leone

Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr is an Amujae Leader, political leader, and climate change activist with a strong commitment to driving positive social, economic, and environmental change for her city.86

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim
Country: Chad

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim is an environmental activist and the Gender and Climate Representative for Congo Basin for the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee.87

Elizabeth Wanjiru Wathuti
Country: Kenya

Elizabeth Wanjiru Wathuti is the founder of the Green Generation Initiative, which is dedicated to building green schools and empowering youth to become environmental enthusiasts. Since its launch in 2016, Green Generation Initiative has planted 30,000 trees in Kenya.88

Fatou Jeng
Country: The Gambia

Fatou Jeng is a climate activist from The Gambia, working to address climate change through her youth-led NGO focused on climate change, conservation, gender, and environmental awareness.89

Agnes Kalibata
Country: Rwanda

Agnes Kalibata was the UN Secretary-General Special Envoy to the 2021 Food Systems Summit.90

Damilola Ogunbiyi
Country: Nigeria

Damilola Ogunbiyi is the CEO of Sustainable Energy for all and is the co-Chair of UN-Energy.91

Sanda Ojiambo
Country: Kenya

Sanda Ojiambo is the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC). Previously, she was the CEO and Executive Director of UNGC.92

Vanessa Nakate
Country: Uganda

Vanessa Nakate is a climate justice activist and founder of the Africa-based Rise Up Movement.93
6.2 Technology for Economic Development

Technological advancements ranging from expanding internet access to harnessing solar energy are boosting Africa’s development and economic growth.

Though technology is more accessible than ever before in Africa, sub-Saharan African women account for only 30% of the tech industry professionals. A gender gap exists in access to technology and leadership positions.

Nevertheless, African women tech entrepreneurs are shaping the continent’s tech industry. Women-led global tech firms achieve a 35% higher return on investments than those managed by men, despite receiving 50% less venture capital funding. Therefore, women’s leadership is crucial to realizing the full potential of Africa’s tech industry.

Highlighted on the following page are African women leaders working on advancing the tech industry in Africa.
Spotlight: Africa’s Technology Leaders

Paula Ingabire  
Country: Rwanda
Paula Ingabire is the Minister of Information Communication Technology and Innovation in Rwanda.95

Khumbudzo Ntshavheni  
Country: South Africa
Khumbudzo Ntshavheni is the current Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies in South Africa.96

Mapolao Mokoena  
Country: Lesotho
Mapolao Mokoena is the Director for Infrastructure of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).97

H.E. Amani Abou-Zeid  
Country: Egypt
H. E. Amani Abou-Zeid is the current Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy of the African Union Commission.98

Rose Mwebaza  
Country: Uganda
Rose Mwebaza was appointed the Director of the Climate Technology Centre & Network (CTCN)—the implementation arm of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Technology Mechanism—in 2019.99

Farida Bedwei  
Country: Ghana
Farida Bedwei is an Amujae Leader, CEO of Byte The Bits, a digitalized data company that helps African institutions and organizations tell stories with the data they generate, and Chief Technology Officer of Logiciel (Ghana) Limited.100

Blessing Abeng  
Country: Nigeria
Blessing Abeng is Co-Founder of Ingressive For Good, an ed-tech non-profit organization that aims to empower 1m African youths, provide 5,000 jobs, and award $1m in scholarships by 2025 across the continent.101

Mariéme Jamme  
Country: Senegal
Mariéme Jamme is the Founder of iamtheCODE, the first African-led global movement to empower women and girls through technology and digital literacy training.102
6.3 Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on global health systems and services. In Africa, over 200,000 people have died since the pandemic began. The pandemic disrupted and undermined existing health services that already had difficulties in responding to community needs.

The distinct challenges healthcare systems face in Africa pose a specific set of burdens on African women. Socio-economic pressures, such as poverty and inadequate healthcare, prevent African women from realizing their full potential. Moreover, the lack of adequate healthcare management coupled with gender inequality increases death rates among African women—with maternal health being a pressing concern for many African countries. Though women make up 65% of nurses in Africa, they only account for 28% of physicians. Today, only 30% of science professionals in Africa are women. Only 44 of the world’s health portfolios are held by women at the executive level. Knowing the critical role African women play in community health systems, their expertise can help generate inclusive responses to complex health issues.

On the following page is a highlight of African women leading health systems nationally, regionally, and internationally.
Spotlight: Africa’s Health Leaders

Dr. Catherine Kyobutungi
Country: Uganda

Dr. Catherine Kyobutungi is the Executive Director of the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC).112

Dr. Matshidiso Moeti
Country: Botswana

Dr. Matshidiso Moeti is the first woman to be elected as WHO Regional Director for Africa.116

Dr. Ayoade Olatunbosun-Alakija
Country: Nigeria

Dr. Ayoade Olatunbosun-Alakija is Co-Chair of the AU African Vaccine Delivery Alliance (AVDA) and WHO Special Envoy for Access to the COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-Accelerator).117

Dr. Winna Byanyima
Country: Uganda

Dr. Winna Byanyima is the Executive Director of the United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS).113

Edna Adan Ismail
Country: Somaliland

Edna Adan Ismail is a nurse, midwife, women’s health advocate, and UN diplomat who previously served as the first woman Foreign Minister of Somaliland.118

Umra Omar
Country: Kenya

Umra Omar is an Amujae Leader and the Founder of Safari Doctors, a community-based social enterprise that provides innovative, community-driven healthcare solutions for marginalized populations.114

Nyovani Madise, Ph.D.
Country: Malawi

Nyovani Madise, Ph.D. is the Director of Research for Sustainable Development Policies and Head of the Malawi office of the African Institute for Development Policy, and a WHO advisor.119

Tlaleng Mofokeng
Country: South Africa

Tlaleng Mofokeng is the first African woman to serve as UN Special Rapporteur on the right to physical and mental health.115
7. Looking Ahead

2021 presented several setbacks to address and successes to celebrate. While women leaders grappled with the long-term reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, they also persisted in advocating for positive socio-political and economic change and a just recovery.

Their collective efforts to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, address social and economic disparities, and counter the damaging effects of climate change are only a few of the ways that African women are using to cultivate stronger, sustainable, and more equitable communities for the future of the continent.

The EJS Center will continue to build upon its existing efforts to propel women to the highest levels of public leadership. In 2022, the EJS Center will welcome the third cohort of Amujae Leaders into a growing sisterhood with the collective goal of driving Africa’s development. We look forward to supporting them along their journeys, elevating their profiles, and helping them achieve their goals.

This year, the EJS Center will also launch its capital campaign and commence construction of the Presidential Center and Library in Monrovia. And through advocacy, strategic communications, and research, we will continue our work to build knowledge around the history and current state of women’s leadership in Africa. To this end, the EJS Center will be launching an online data dashboard of women’s leadership in Africa.

The 2021 Year in Review report reflects on the progress of women’s leadership in Africa. Through a collective and concerted effort, we hope that progress towards women’s leadership can be realized across all 54 countries, achieving parity in all public institutions by 2063.
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