

African Union

MADMUN XIV



Get to Know the Chairs

I am Aariya, and I go by she/her/hers pronouns! I am a senior at Verona Area High School! This is my third year participating in Model UN and my first time chairing a committee. I joined Model UN because I wanted to learn more about the world around me and understand issues from the perspectives of countries that aren't always highlighted in mainstream news. Additionally, I am fond of debating and wanted to improve my leadership, public speaking, and collaboration skills, which I definitely have done throughout my time in Model UN. My favorite MUN memory was when our team went to a 4-day conference hosted by UChicago this year. After committee sessions were finished for one day, some of my teammates (including Sam) and I started debating whether jammies or pajamas was the better word. We laughed a lot and ended up staying up 20 minutes past curfew because of how engrossed we were in the debate. It sounds a bit silly, but it was a great time!



Hi! My name is Sam Bass, I go by he/him/his pronouns, and I'm also a senior at Verona Area High School. This is my fourth year in MUN, and, along with Aariya, I'm a co-president of our Model UN team. I joined Model UN because of my interest in global politics and international issues, but I stayed because of the supportive, positive atmosphere that I found in our team and at most conferences. Outside of conferences, I try to explore my passion for history and economics, and generally prepare for my life after high school. I'm looking forward to seeing you all work together to address these pressing issues and make some new friends along the way!



Letter to the Delegates

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to MADMUN XIV! We (Sam and Aariya) are thrilled to be your chairs for the African Union Committee. We are both seniors at Verona Area High School. Sam has done Model UN for four years and Aariya for three years. This is our first time chairing, and we hope it will be an excellent experience for us and you all!

The two topics we have chosen for the African Union are Topic A: Addressing Russian Influence in Africa and Topic B: Status of Women in Agriculture. The theme for MADMUN this year is challenging authority, and both of these topics encapsulate this theme in different ways. Topic A questions Russia's influence on Africa and tasks delegates with ensuring that Russian influence doesn't cause more exploitation or undermining of democracy. In the case of Topic B, it would be challenging patriarchal and class oppression. As we will review in the topic briefings, both topics are relevant in our time. We hope you will be able to explore them in depth and develop nuanced stances that best represent the interests of the country you represent.

The African Union is a beginner committee, so bearing that in mind, we want to make this experience as educational and fun as possible. People will come into MADMUN with different perspectives and experience levels and debate and challenge each other on ideas. However, everyone is here to learn and grow, so please be respectful to all delegates. Additionally, we ask that you respect the diversity of both cultures of different countries and the people in the African Union. As you read this background guide and dive into further research, take notes of anything you deem relevant, and always feel free to contact us to ask any questions!

Thank you,
Sam Bass and Aariya Gopal

Beginner's Guide

To make sure we all start on an even footing, we've prepared a basic guide for anyone who still has questions about what Model UN looks like, what we expect from the delegates, and what you need to succeed in your first conference.

What is Model UN?

Hopefully, since you're attending this conference, you have some idea what MUN is, but if you missed it, here's the gist. You and the other delegates will spend time discussing and debating solutions to one of the two issues in this background guide with the end goal of creating and passing a resolution, which is a document that lays out your recommendations and guidelines for dealing with the issue. You'll have to work together to build a coalition (or "bloc") of like-minded delegates, and work to craft a solution that takes into account the demands and concessions necessary to win over the majority of the assembly.

What role do you play?

In this committee, you are representing a delegation to the Assembly of the African Union (NOT the United Nations) from your assigned country. You should refer to yourself by your real name or "the delegate from [country]". Despite the fact that the Assembly is made up of the heads of state/government of member countries, in committee you will not act as the leader of your assigned country and you will not be able to drastically change its policy stances. (e.g. you can't use "my country will contribute \$50 billion" as a viable funding method for your resolution)

It's important to note that at a Model UN conference, you are representing the political position of your assigned country, but you are not play-acting and you are expected to be respectful of all people during your time in and out of committee at MADMUN. This means that you are expected to dress in Western business attire (i.e. do NOT "dress up" as someone from another country), and you should not under any circumstances behave in a racist, discriminatory, or derogatory way, including but not limited to putting on an accent intended to represent your assigned country or expressing racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise offensive or discriminatory viewpoints derived from your assigned country's government's actions or stances.

NOTE: In the context of Russia's war in Ukraine and/or Wagner Group actions that have resulted in mass civilian casualties or human rights violations, we highly, highly encourage delegates to avoid expressing support for these actions, and instead, if it is consistent with their country's position, to challenge the place of the African Union in governing member state relations with nations like Russia.

What should you bring?

You may wish to spend some time before the conference to draft your speech on setting the agenda (i.e. choosing which of the two topics will be discussed) and two opening speeches which lay out your policy positions on each topic.

Writing utensils and paper are suggested to send notes to other delegates and work on resolutions.

The most important tool a delegate has at their disposal is their binder. This should be prepared before the conference and contain pre-written speeches, reference documents, notes, facts & statistics, and maybe even a printed copy of this background guide. It should NOT under any circumstances include pre-written resolutions or clauses.

Phones are acceptable, but not preferred. They should not be in use during committee sessions.

Additional resources:

- MADMUN Delegate Guide - See the bottom of the [MADMUN home page](#)
- [How to write a resolution](#) (Best Delegate)
- [Parliamentary Procedure](#) (UCMUN)

About the African Union

Before examining the African Union, we must discuss its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The OAU was founded in May of 1963 with 32 member states. Its mission was to have a united and free Africa that stood against foreign interference and stood for ridding and repairing the damages of colonialism on the continent, creating a better life for people in Africa, and promoting international cooperation. During the 20th session of the General Assembly, the UN decided to vote the OAU in as an Observer Mission, meaning that they are now officially represented in the UN and get to advise the Africa Group(a group of all of the African Nations in the UN that are part of the AU and formerly the OAU that often meet together at general assemblies to come up with a unified position). In 2002, the OAU decided to become the African Union(AU) to increase its focus on economic development and increased cooperation with African States. In doing so, the AU amended the mission statements to add that, amongst other things, it wanted to promote democracy, sustain the economy, give women more voice, and raise living conditions for its citizens. These still follow the general principles outlined by the OAU but provide a more focused vision for Africa.

The AU consists of 10 different organs: The Assembly of the Union, The Executive Council, The Pan-African Parliament, The Court of Justice, The Commission, The Peace and Security Council, The Permanent Representatives Committee, The Specialized Technical Committees, The Economic, Social and Cultural Council, and The Financial Institutions. We will be simulating the Assembly in our simulation of the African Union. The Assembly, consisting of heads of government or their representatives, meets once a year to discuss common policies for the Union. It has other powers that potentially may be in our committee sessions, which are looking at recommendations from different organs in the AU, monitoring policy implementation, establishing organs of the Union, establishing the budget of the AU, considering requests for membership of the Union, giving directives to the Executive Council, and appointing or terminating the appointment of the judges for the Court of Justice(there's one that we definitely will not be using, which is appointing the chairperson of the commission since that's our job)! Unfortunately, we don't have the space to list out what every organ is responsible for; however, we encourage you all to look at the Constitutive Act of the African Union to learn more about each organ and the African Union's mission(hint: it's probably not a bad thing to put in your MUN Binder!). As we are simulating the Assembly, all decisions (besides procedural ones, which a simple majority will make) will be made by consensus, or failing that, a 2/3 majority.

To Learn More About the African Union Check out These Links(and research more online too!):

[About the African Union](#)

[African Union \(AU\) | Britannica](#)

[CONSTITUTIVE ACT OF THE AFRICAN UNION](#)

[Protocol on the Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union \(EN\)](#)

Topic A: Prevention of Russian exploitation of African Nations

Overview

Russia considers Africa one of its foreign policy priorities, with one of the reasons being getting an advantage over the West. Thus, it has expanded its influence in Africa by increasing arms trade, giving military aid to different leaders using the private military [Wagner Group](#), drafting security cooperation agreements, and working on information campaigns to support authoritarian leaders. Some of these ways of gaining influence have been described as exploitative since weapons trade and the Wagner Group's protection from rebel efforts in exchange are contingent on Africa's mineral resources, valuable riches to the country. Although Russia isn't considered the biggest foreign investor in the continent, failed states and authoritarian governments in Africa are giving up their resources to Russia for arms and military aid because it's not conditional on obeying democratic principles; thus, they can keep their power while the people in these countries lose out and their country is exploited. Russia also creates media campaigns containing disinformation on democratic leaders and about Russian military aid saving the day by crushing the rebels. Although this has given Russia some popularity amongst citizens in these states, others have criticized it for undermining democracy. The influence of Russia in different African countries is controversial for this reason. Different countries have varying viewpoints. We specifically picked this topic since we knew it would foster good debate, so remember not to shy away from your country's position even if you personally disagree with it.

Impacts

One big issue with Russian influence through private military aid from Wagner and arms trade in exchange for resources is that it creates a [resource curse](#) in weak states. Russia and Wagner are taking the riches from these countries, which means the country will not gain money from their resources to help people in their countries and expand their economy. This is a big reason why these states often have considerable poverty and starvation. The only way they can protect against any threat is to rely on a private foreign military or weapons. However, they only get their protection by giving up their resources. Thus, this cycle continues. Part of the African Union's mission is to "achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and the peoples of Africa," "defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States," and "promote peace, security, and stability on the continent." The impacts of Russian exploitation directly go against this mission, so the African Union must devise a way to address this issue to uphold its mission.

Another significant issue is that Russian influence has - through supporting different coups and authoritarian leaders, spreading misinformation about democratic leaders, and interfering in elections - undermined democracy. Freedom House's democracy score decreased for 31 African nations, largely due to Russian influence. Another part of the African Union's mission is to "promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good

governance.” The African Union must develop a solution that upholds this principle while addressing Russian influence in Africa.

The last major impact of Russian influence I will highlight is that many African nations have either supported or not stood against Russia on the international stage. 48.5% of countries that chose to abstain from the UN’s 2022 condemnation of Russia for invading Ukraine were African, and just over 51% of African nations voted to condemn Russia for the invasion compared to the 81.3% of countries from the rest of the world. This demonstrates Russia allying with African nations to gain more leverage and support against the West. The African Union has typically had a Unified Africa philosophy where Union members try to have similar positions regarding foreign relations. It could be wise to discuss this in committee, given splits in the past on the international stage.

No matter if your country has positive or negative views about the impact of Russian influence on the continent, it’s undeniable that they exist. During committee, we must be fully aware of this and ensure debate and resolutions acknowledge these impacts.

History

Overview

The history of Russian involvement in Africa is very complex, and it is vital to understand that Russian influence and imperialism in Africa has been vastly different from that of other European powers and the United States. Large-scale Russian involvement with Africa did not begin until the time of the Soviet Union when, like the U.S. and other Western powers, the Soviets provided economic and military assistance in the hopes of gaining a geo-political advantage in the cold war. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian presence and influence on the continent decreased until the mid-2010s when the issue of Wagner Group involvement reared its ugly head. Within the last decade, Russian actors have been prevalent in many failed or failing African states, supporting brutal regimes and using barbaric methods to quash terrorism and rebellion in exchange for access to the country’s natural resources. Matters are made worse by Russia’s increased meddling in the world’s elections, especially in fragile African democracies where disinformation spreads quickly and official corruption is often already the norm.

Outside Influence and Imperialism in General

The history of Russia’s involvement in Africa cannot be understood without the context of the colonial and imperial history of the rest of Europe. [Between roughly 1880 and 1913, the vast majority of Africa was violently colonized by European powers](#), foremost among them Britain and France. The colonial process was different in each place and for each country, but broadly it involved European powers exploiting existing tensions in the region, and either directly ruling over colonial holdings or turning independent states into imperial “protectorates,” and imposing a racial hierarchy in which White Europeans were at the top, and certain local

ethnic groups or individuals were given powers and privileges and used as intermediaries to oppress and exploit the remainder of the population. Whichever method was used, the results were horrifying, and Europeans brought death, exploitation, and oppression with them across the continent.

In the period after the world wars (during which the colonies were heavily exploited for both manpower and resources) European colonial empires crumbled as the continent was left to pick up the pieces, and as shifting political attitudes both in Europe and in Africa made it increasingly difficult to maintain these dominions. Between 1945 and 1960, the European stranglehold on Africa was broken and dozens of new states gained independence. In the context of the Cold War, Africa became an important theater as both the Soviets and the West sought to gain access to and/or exploit African resources, and win more members to their “side”. It was in the latter half of the 20th century that the idea of [neo-colonialism](#) was born. The theory holds that, essentially, world powers are (re)building their colonial empires by using financial institutions, support or sabotage of the regime in power, and/or geopolitical maneuvering in order to create a dependency and an extractive system that functionally mimics colonialism. An example of neo-colonialism would be predatory lending practices designed to force a country into debt and create a controlling power dynamic, or sending military aid to a dictator in a precarious position in exchange for special trade or extraction rights. This second example is what Russia has become increasingly infamous for. Some critics believe that the parts of the global development aid system (i.e. the [World Bank](#) and [IMF](#)) can act as a form of neo-colonialism by requiring countries to adopt economically liberal policies, promote extractivism, and follow a free trade economic system as a prerequisite for development loans, which make it easier for wealthy powers to extract resources from developing countries. Other programs, like [China’s Belt and Road initiative](#), have also been accused of neo-colonial practices and effects, and of benefitting China’s economy and geopolitical agenda above genuine humanitarian and development concerns.

Imperial Russia

A common narrative from the government of Russia and Russian-aligned sources is that Russia has always had a “strong anti-colonial history”. While it is true that Russia did not establish colonies in Africa, to suggest that this is indicative of an anti-colonial perspective is blatantly wrong. The most obvious issue with that narrative is that much of the rest of the world, Russia was a colonial power. Russian eastward expansion, made possible through the violent subjugation of the people who already lived there, was textbook colonialism. Russia became involved in the [Russo-Japanese war \(1904-1905\)](#) because of its imperial ambitions in Manchuria and Korea, which directly conflicted with Japanese imperial ambitions in those same areas. The country also expanded into Southwest Asia, fighting in Afghanistan and exerting a great degree of control over Persia (roughly corresponding to modern-day Iran). The Russian Empire even, in fact, [attempted to establish a colony in Ethiopia and surrounding areas \(twice\)](#) at the close of the 19th century. These ventures were unsuccessful, yet they are clear evidence of Russia’s imperial mindset during this period.

The Soviet Era

For a time after the birth of the Soviet Union, the country's involvement in Africa was virtually non-existent, as the government's most pressing concerns were over domestic and European issues. This changed dramatically during the period of decolonization following World War II. Soviet aid was frequently directed toward anti-colonial movements, although this was less out of humanitarian concern and more out of a self-interested desire to grow the Soviet sphere of influence.

A country could join the Soviet sphere, broadly, in one of three ways. The first, which we have already discussed, was as a result of the Soviets supporting anti-colonial movements and rebellions. Not only would this essentially put the regime of the new state in "debt" to the Soviets, but the Soviets were generally only likely to support ideologically aligned movements in the first place (although, it must be noted, one did not have to look far on a continent scarred by the horrors of Western imperialism to find potential leaders who were unfriendly to Western economic and political models). The second method was opportunism. Essentially, a government that found itself in crisis, especially a crisis that would pit it against Western interests, could call on the Soviets for support of some kind. This would usually not result in a lasting relationship, but it was a useful tool to temporarily buy the Soviet Union much-needed political capital. The third method was direct targeting, where the Soviet government would pick a country, almost always one of the least developed on the continent, and invest considerable resources in swaying the regime. This was particularly effective, as leaders often desperately needed economic growth to ensure political stability.

Once a country became more and more influenced by the Soviets, they would, much like the United States, use this influence to build overseas military bases, extract valuable resources, and exploit inexpensive labor.

Post-Soviet era

In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and Russian influence in Africa declined massively and remained low for the next two decades. In 2017, however, the [Wagner Group](#), a Russian private military contractor with strong links to the state, established a large presence on the continent. It has been designated by the U.S. as a "significant transnational criminal organization". Wagner has had the greatest amount of influence over the Central African Republic, where it is the de-facto security force, and Wagner-associated organizations have also been given control over some mining and logging operations. It has also established a presence in Sudan, Libya, and Mali. In Mali, Wagner forces have been supporting the current military junta, which took power in a [2021 coup](#), and were heavily involved in a [2022 massacre in the town of Moura](#), which killed between 300 and 500 civilians. Wagner became involved in [the civil war in Libya in 2019](#), when it began providing aid to the warlord Khalifa Haftar, who was fighting against the internationally recognized Libyan government. Wagner is also present in Sudan, although it has remained neutral in the country's ongoing civil war. In all four African countries where the Wagner Group has a significant presence, it has sought and received resource extraction rights for Russian state actors. The Wagner Group has shown a clear pattern of

involving itself with fragile, authoritarian regimes in order to use them to further Russian political interests and extract the nation's resources.

In addition to its actions through the Wagner Group, Russia has been responsible for supplying a massive portion of Africa's militaries, especially in the past decade, with nearly half of all the continent's military equipment originating from the country. Major regional players often turn to Russia to import weapons and other equipment when requests are rejected by the U.S. or other global powers on human rights grounds. This was the case for Nigeria in 2014 and Egypt in 2015. Outside of arms sales, Russia has increasingly attempted to interfere with African democracies during this period, orchestrating disinformation campaigns which erode democratic safeguards, promote regimes friendly to the Kremlin, and justify military rule.

Potential Solutions

Something important to realize is there are multiple ways to deal with Russian and any other type of foreign influence in Africa. Accept it as it is, try to renegotiate so that your country can get more out of what you are putting in, ask other countries to help, or address the root causes of issues to become self-reliant. There are various reasons you might opt to do or not to do each of these solutions.

Acceptance

This strategy might appeal to delegates whose government's only goal is to maintain power over a fragile state. Of course, this wouldn't really solve any of the issues brought up, nor would it be extremely popular with many countries. However, there is the possibility of a solution that welcomes Russia's influence with open arms.

Renegotiating with Russia

This strategy might appeal to delegates whose government wants to maintain relationships with Russia and increase its capacity to help its people. This might mean that instead of offering up mineral resources for arms or military protection, you ask for other forms of payment that you can use towards improving the standard of living for the people of your country. However, this doesn't necessarily stop all the problems we brought up earlier, as having disinformation campaigns and private military crushing rebel groups still infringes on democracy.

Asking other countries for help

This strategy would appeal to countries who want to get rid of as much Russian influence as possible by asking non-African countries not allied with Russia for help and being able to rely on them for other resources. Something to be wary of is that these other non-African nations may also have ties to colonial history, and this could put African states at risk of being heavily influenced by another country with its own interests, which also may not be able to solve all problems facing African countries sustainably.

Working towards self-reliance

This strategy would likely interest those who want Africa to chart its own way and build African countries up so they don't have to rely on foreign influence. You can still incorporate things from the other strategies mentioned because the road to self-reliance doesn't equate to not building relationships with non-African countries. Solutions to problems facing a country will be more sustainable since there's no reliance on good relations with another country, which can't always be guaranteed. The drawback is that it will take a lot more time than the others and would require allocating many resources to different areas, which could be overwhelming for certain governments.

Guiding Questions

- How has Russia interacted with your country?
- What are the impacts of this interaction specifically in your country?
- Is Russian influence beneficial to your leaders? Your people?
- How do your people and your government feel about Russian influence?
- Does your country support Russia on the international stage? Does it stand against Russia?
- How has your country interacted with other countries in the West (think U.S. and E.U. countries)? How do they feel about these countries?
- Has your country made any strides to self-reliance (not needing to get aid from other countries or rely on other countries for protection)?
- Has your country had colonial influence in the past and how has that impacted the state your country is in now?

Further Reading

History:

[Full article: Russia's return to Africa in a historical and global context: Anti-imperialism, patronage, and opportunism](#)

[How Russia tried to colonise Africa and failed | Opinions | Al Jazeera](#)

[Soviet Involvement in Africa](#)

[What does the Wagner Group do? Operations in Africa and the rest of the world explained | Reuters](#)

[A look at the Wagner Group's presence and activities in Africa | PBS NewsHour](#)

[Russia pushes military diplomacy in Africa amid Ukraine war – DW – 11/17/2022](#)

Current Issue:

[Russia Is Still Progressing in Africa. What's the Limit?](#)

[Russia's Wagner Group in Africa: Influence, commercial concessions, rights violations, and counterinsurgency failure | Brookings](#)

[Figure of the week: African countries' votes on the UN resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine | Brookings](#)

[Tracking Russian Interference to Derail Democracy in Africa](#)

[Russia's Strategic Goals in Africa](#)

[The future of Russia-Africa relations | Brookings](#)

[Intervening to Undermine Democracy in Africa: Russia's Playbook for Influence](#)

Topic B: Status of Women in Agriculture

Overview

Throughout the developing world, and in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, women involved in agricultural production face major challenges. In addition to the economic hardships of farmers in general, who often struggle for the bare necessities, women face daunting and unique social and economic issues which threaten their health, livelihoods, and lives. It's important to note that many of the issues discussed here are generalized trends, and they do not necessarily apply to all women working in the agricultural sector in Africa. Any potential solutions must account for the variety of specific challenges faced by women across all regions of the continent. They must also take into account the diversity of the women themselves, and address how membership in minority ethnic or religious groups or in the LGBTQ+ community may create uniquely challenging situations.

Inequitable Division of Labor and Income

In rural areas of developing nations, women and men are expected to perform dramatically different types of labor. Women must care for their families by performing household chores like cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for younger, older, or ailing family members, and collecting water, which can eat up a massive portion of the workday without amenities which are common in higher income areas like running water, washing machines, and safe, clean, ready-to-eat food. In addition to this already large workload, women in agriculture must also take on some of the most grueling farm labor, including hand-digging and weeding, often growing entire plots of [subsistence crops](#) for their families. In contrast, men often grow more marketable [cash crops](#), which they then sell. The effect of this is that women often work longer hours than men, but they are not formally employed and they are not paid for their work, with the male heads of their households controlling the income created or made possible by their work. In short, women on family farms are often financially compensated for their labor only insofar as they benefit secondhand from the income their husbands earn.

Lack of Resources

When women are the primary operators of a farm, or when they independently work their own plots on a family farm, they often face significant barriers to procuring agricultural inputs and technology. (An agricultural input is a resource, like seeds, fertilizer, land, or tools, which is necessary for agricultural production) Female-headed agricultural households tend to have much less wealth and much lower incomes on average. Women in male-headed households tend to have access to only a vanishingly small share of income or wealth. Because of a lack of capital and the prevalence of negative attitudes toward women participating in finance, they often have extreme difficulty obtaining the credit (i.e. loans) necessary to run an agricultural operation without a male sponsor. The lack of credit and capital, as well as the perception that women's work is less valuable than men's, and the stigma surrounding women being parties in certain legal and financial transactions, leads to women having access to smaller plots of land whether they are household heads or members of their husband's or father's household. In addition, again

because of the lack of credit and capital, as well as a lack of proper education, women are much less likely than their male counterparts to be able to make use of emerging tools and technologies such as genetically engineered seeds and chemical fertilizers, and much more likely to perform tasks by hand, without the aid of mechanized equipment.

Training and Education

The final major challenge faced by African women in agriculture is that women's education is typically not prioritized to the same extent as men's, and [outreach and agricultural training programs](#) are overwhelmingly less likely to connect to women than they are to men. The result is that, once again, women lack the resources and training to more successfully operate a farm, resources that are much more readily available to men.

Impacts

The effects of the disempowerment of women in agriculture across Africa are dramatic and far-ranging, but there are a few that stand out most prominently. The first and most obvious impact is the economic and social disenfranchisement of these women. The adverse conditions faced by women working without proper compensation in male-headed households may often amount to [economic abuse](#), where victims' access to financial resources is obstructed; this widespread problem directly conflicts with the African Union's goals to empower women, as do other previously mentioned issues such as the lack of equitable access to credit, land, technology, and education. The difficulties faced by women in obtaining access to these resources amount to structural or systemic economic violence in many cases, as women are prevented from accessing vital resources by a discriminatory system which infantilizes them purely because of their gender and in doing so puts their lives and livelihoods in jeopardy and violates their basic rights. It should be obvious to even the casual observer that these concerns alone are sufficient motivation for the African Union to take action.

In addition, providing support to women to close the productivity gap would be a huge economic gain for the continent as a whole. Based on [UN estimates for a small sample of African countries](#), productivity-boosting support for female agricultural workers across the continent could increase crop production substantially, boost African GDP by billions of dollars (USD) and lift millions out of poverty. Addressing the needs of women in agriculture would not only be a vital step in the direction of gender equality, it would benefit all of Africa.

History

Women have historically been, and still are, tasked with more responsibilities as they are most often responsible for domestic needs of the home, like feeding children, cleaning, and cooking, while also making up about 40% of labor in crop production continent-wide (varies widely by region, there are some countries where they make up less and others where they make up more, but as an average). However, despite their big contributions, women have historically been kept out of decision-making on the local and national levels and kept from owning any livestock or land in some places. Many women in agriculture take part in smallholder farming, which is essentially a family farm in that, at most, farmers are in charge of up to 24 acres (with

most in the developing world only taking control of about 5 acres), raising livestock, and cultivating crops on a limited scale. Smallholder farming makes up about 70% of the food supply across the African continent. However, some past solutions have not addressed these smallholder farms when creating plans to increase agriculture output, address poverty, and give them the ability to feed themselves and their families properly. Instead, they have focused on market-ready agricultural production and haven't focused enough on inequality and the lack of resources and technologies awarded to smallholders that would increase production. Past solutions have also had difficulty being executed as countries have missed targets. This negatively impacts women as it renews the poverty cycle, allows them to slip further into poverty, and makes it harder and harder to get out.

Past Solutions

Malabo Declaration

Written in 2014, [the Malabo declaration](#), though recognizing women and those from disadvantaged sectors must benefit from agricultural policy and be given preferential participation, didn't address the specific inequalities that women in smallholder farms face or the inequalities that smallholder farms placed in general. That being said, we encourage you to read the Malabo Declaration as it has promising goals and ideas for achieving these goals that you can draw from while coming up with your own solutions. In summary, this declaration created the values of the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP)(the program in charge of carrying out the actions outlined in the Malabo Declaration). It also called for enhancing investment finance in agriculture, ending hunger in Africa by 2025, halving poverty in Africa by 2025, boosting trade in agriculture within the African continent, and enhancing resiliency to livelihood and production systems due to our changing climate. The latest biennial report on the CAADP tells us that only Rwanda was on track to meet the 2025 goals, but 21 others (out of 51 total countries) are progressing.

Check out the Malabo Declaration: [Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods](#)

Check out the latest Biennial Report and your countries findings: [3rd CAADP Biennial Review Report](#)

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Strategy

Although the GEWE focuses on women's empowerment in all contexts, it does talk about issues of women in the context of agriculture and some action steps they can take. This strategy has four pillars: 1. Maximize opportunity Outcomes and E-Tech dividends; 2. Dignity, Security, and Resilience; 3. Effective Laws, Policies, and Institutions; 4. Leadership, Voice, and Visibility.

Pillar 1 of the framework proposes ensuring smallholder farming women are educated on how to use climate-resilient technology that can make for easier production and make these women feel more economically empowered.

Pillar 2 of this framework suggests implementing humanitarian action, starting global women's health initiatives to end violence against women, and promoting more participation in the political process. These things would positively affect women in rural areas and working in agriculture because climate change has made farming, especially for smallholder farmers, a lot more risky. Men sometimes go to cities to find jobs, leaving their wives and kids at home. Additionally, droughts have made it harder to collect water for the day in these rural communities, so women will have to walk further to get it.

Pillar 3 of the framework covers removing the head of the household and related duty laws, reforming community-based laws, getting women more staffing in law-making positions, and strengthening compliance with laws. The actions outlined in pillar 3 will positively affect women in agriculture because they often get less of a voice on different policies and are expected to do more work based on the man being considered the household's health and how things have always been at the community level. Although there have been initiatives to give them more of a voice, these often aren't listened to, so something that can better hold countries accountable for compliance would be great.

Pillar 4 focuses on mobilizing women as leaders by funding their campaigns, training them, and having educational programs. This is important because if we want to ensure women in rural and more remote communities are being heard, getting equal treatment, and have improved living conditions, we need to be able to empower them, especially at local levels, to discover solutions to issues facing their communities and advocate for their rights.

We encourage you all to look at the GEWE Strategy document if you want more information and to take some of these ideas to incorporate into your solutions.

Check out GEWE Strategy: [AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment](#)

Potential Solutions

Microcredit

Microcredit, small loans anywhere between \$5-\$1000 USD designed to help borrowers purchase land, machines, or home improvements, is a widely explored solution that is often lauded as incredibly effective in helping people in rural communities in the developing world, especially women, to increase their income and raise their standard of living. Some studies have found, however, that microcredit and microfinance can have less-than-stellar impacts on agricultural productivity, and many critics warn that microcredit institutions have the potential to trap borrowers in debt and actually keep them in poverty, achieving the opposite of the intended effect. If microcredit or microfinance is used as a solution, delegates must address these concerns.

Access to Time-Saving Equipment

A key barrier to women's success in the agricultural sector is the added responsibility often placed on them to care for their household. One of the solutions advocated by the United Nations and other organizations is to increase women's access to efficient technologies like rainwater harvesting and improved cooking stoves, which would allow women to save time and energy when completing household work and reduce the overall burden placed on them.

Safeguards Against Economic Abuse

The African Union could encourage member states to adopt policies giving women greater access to their household's financial resources. Although the effect of these new laws and regulations, were they actually implemented, would be severely hamstrung by existing cultural attitudes on women's place in relation to money, they would represent a significant step in the right direction and open up a path to widespread change.

Educational Programs

Most educational and training programs, as has been said, connect overwhelmingly with male farmers at the expense of women. To reverse this trend, the African Union could create educational programs targeted primarily toward women to address blind spots in previous initiatives.

Shift to Profitable Farming

Farming operations led by women consist disproportionately of subsistence agriculture; that is, they are focused almost exclusively on growing food to feed the farmholder. If some of the underlying causes of this issue were addressed by other solutions, the African Union could explicitly focus on helping women shift to growing more profitable crops, helping them become more financially stable; however, this could come at the cost of offsetting the gains in continental food security from increased agricultural productivity.

Guiding Questions

- What is the role of women in agriculture in your country?
- What are the main challenges that they face?
- What's something that people should know about the topic that they often don't?
- What are some rights that women in agriculture often have that they can't or don't exercise? What related laws are often not equitably enforced?
- Who is best equipped to help women in agriculture?
- Which groups of people are most impacted by these issues? (think intersectionality)
- What existing solutions could be easily scaled up?
- Why hasn't this issue been solved yet?
- What organizations might be willing to partner with the AU on this issue? What problems might arise or what cost might that partnership come at?
- What cultural factors might contribute to the position of women in agriculture? How can those factors be addressed in a respectful yet effective way?

- What economic factors might contribute to the position of women in agriculture? How can those factors be addressed with the capabilities that the AU has now?

Further Reading

[African Women in Agriculture Burdened by Climate Change](#)

[Women, Agriculture and Work in Africa](#)

[Women Smallholder Farmers: What is the Missing Link for the Food System in Africa? | Wilson Center](#)

[The gender gap in agricultural productivity in sub-Saharan Africa: Causes, costs and solutions | UN Women](#)

[Expert's Take: Gender Inequalities Reducing Agricultural Productivity | UN Women – Africa Women in agriculture | Reduce Rural Poverty](#)

[The Cost of the Gender Gap in Agriculture](#)

[African Women Are Crucial to Agricultural Development – IFDC](#)

[The Impact of Microfinance in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review of the Evidence - ScienceDirect](#)

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