## Emerging Trends in Gender and Development: A Rapid Review

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**Abstract:** *This study applies a rapid review methodology to synthesize empirical evidence on emerging intersections between gender and development, focusing on selected issues around: climate-smart agriculture (CSA), digital inclusion, political participation, diaspora remittances, and LGBTQ+ rights across global, African, and Kenyan contexts. The review adapts Arksey and O'Malley's framework while incorporating refinements from Tricco et al. to balance methodological rigor with timeliness, ensuring both policy and academic relevance. Findings reveal notable progress in women's representation, adoption of CSA practices, access to digital platforms, and utilization of remittances for household welfare. However, entrenched patriarchal norms, uneven policy enforcement, resource asymmetries, and restrictive legal frameworks continue to constrain substantive equality. The originality of this study lies in its comparative lens, which highlights how global trends translate unevenly into African and Kenyan realities, while offering context-sensitive insights into barriers and opportunities. The review's contribution is both conceptual and practical: it advances understanding of gender-responsive strategies across multiple domains and provides actionable recommendations for dismantling structural inequities. Policy implications emphasize integrating gender-transformative metrics, scaling inclusive financing, strengthening quota enforcement, and fostering gender norm change at institutional, community, family, and individual levels to achieve substantive equality.*

*Keywords: Gender and Development, Climate-smart Agriculture, Digital inclusion, Political participation, Diaspora remittances, LGBTQ+ rights*

## 1.1 Introduction

Gender equality has become an indispensable dimension of contemporary development debates, intersecting with agriculture, digital innovation, climate adaptation, political representation, and transnational flows such as remittances. Evidence shows that women and other marginalized groups remain structurally disadvantaged across these domains despite decades of advocacy and reform. Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) illustrates this paradox: while gender-responsive designs enhance adoption and resilience, persistent inequities in access to land, finance, and decision-making continue to

blunt outcomes (Huyer et al., 2024; Ngigi et al., 2022). Similar dynamics are evident in the digital sphere, where activism and mobile technologies expand civic space and financial inclusion but risk entrenching inequality without intersectional safeguards (Kashyap, 2025; Bhattacharya et al., 2024). Political representation also reflects uneven progress: global gains in women's descriptive presence coexist with enduring patriarchal barriers that constrain substantive influence, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Bauer, 2022; Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2020). Meanwhile, emerging debates on diaspora remittances and LGBTQ+ rights reveal new gendered fault lines in migration, finance, and social inclusion (Njoroge & Gichuki, 2023; Nash & Nyanjom, 2022). Collectively, this growing body of literature underscores that reforms focused on participation alone are insufficient. Achieving substantive equality requires dismantling entrenched patriarchal structures and embedding gender-transformative strategies across policy, governance, and technology. This paper engages these debates through a rapid review, synthesizing global, regional, and Kenyan evidence to illuminate persistent gaps and transformative opportunities.

## 1.2 Literature review

Recent scholarship highlights the expanding terrain of gender-responsive research, with multiple thematic areas demonstrating both progress and persistent inequities. In the field of climate-smart agriculture (CSA), global syntheses demonstrate that gender-transformative interventions, which address women's agency, decision-making power, and asset ownership, significantly enhance adoption and resilience outcomes (Huyer et al., 2024; Saran et al., 2024; Tilahun et al., 2024). Yet, many programs continue to treat women as a homogenous category, overlooking intra-household and intersectional differences.

Evidence across sub-Saharan Africa shows that women consistently face reduced access to inputs, finance, and climate advisories, resulting in lower uptake and fewer benefits than men despite exposure to similar practices (Hailemariam et al., 2024; Boudalia et al., 2024). Country-specific studies reinforce this: female-headed households in Tanzania and Nigeria adopt fewer CSA strategies and experience limited gains compared to their male-headed counterparts (Awoke et al., 2025; Nchanji et al., 2025; Daudu et al., 2025). Kenyan evidence reveals the importance of targeting interventions at intra-household levels to avoid male-biased access and ensure that climate information services are equitably distributed (Ngigi et al., 2022). Research further shows that CSA projects may reproduce power asymmetries unless designed with explicit shifts in authority, but directing incentives to women can increase participation in mitigation-focused activities such as low-emissions dairy (Brisebois et al., 2022; Tavenner & Crane, 2018). More recent analyses confirm that gendered decision-making patterns significantly shape adoption intensities, underscoring the need for parity in assets, extension, and market linkages (Chepkochei et al., 2025; Okumu et al., 2025).

Parallel debates on gender inclusion in digital spaces illustrate both empowerment and limitations. Digital activism has amplified the voices of marginalized groups and created new civic spaces, yet disparities in access remain pronounced, with women in low- and middle-income countries still substantially less likely to own devices or access the internet (Kashyap, 2025). While hashtag-driven campaigns raise visibility, scholars caution that they often lack structural depth, reproducing "clicktivism" rather than systemic transformation (Muheed, 2023). Without intersectional strategies, digital expansion risks widening inequality (Bhattacharya et al., 2024). Inclusive digital platforms, such as women-centered entrepreneurial apps in East Africa, suggest promising alternatives (Reuters, 2024),

but long-term progress requires ecosystem-oriented interventions that combine safety, literacy, and equitable platform design.

Women's political representation reflects another area of uneven progress. Global parliamentary averages now exceed 26%, yet growth has slowed and remains far from parity (IPU, 2024). Legislated quotas have boosted descriptive representation, particularly in Latin America and Rwanda, but often without dismantling deeper patriarchal structures (Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2019; Bauer, 2022). Across Africa, structural obstacles such as gendered financing gaps and political violence continue to blunt substantive influence. Kenya's constitutional reforms introduced the "two-thirds gender rule," but implementation remains weak, with women occupying less than 24% of parliamentary seats (Kantai, 2023). Empirical studies reveal persistent cultural stereotypes, harassment, and intra-party bias that limit women's political agency (Khamasi & Murunga, 2021; UN Women, 2024).

Other emerging strands emphasize gendered experiences in climate adaptation, urban planning, diaspora remittances, LGBTQ+ rights, and technological disruption. Globally, women remain disproportionately vulnerable to climate shocks due to structural inequities in land, finance, and extension access (FAO, 2024; Segnon et al., 2024; Nuhu & Matsui, 2022). In Kenya, women leverage social capital and indigenous knowledge but remain constrained by limited assets and institutional support (Liru & Heinecken, 2021). Similarly, employment disruptions from digitalization risk amplifying precarity for women, who are concentrated in routine occupations most exposed to automation (ILO, 2025; World Bank, 2023; Göbel & ILO, 2024).

Diaspora remittances and LGBTQ+ rights further illustrate underexplored gender issues. Studies show that women remit more frequently and allocate funds toward welfare but face barriers in leveraging them for investment, reinforcing care burdens rather than empowerment (Chepngeno, 2021; Njoroge & Gichuki, 2023). LGBTQ+ rights, though increasingly embedded in global gender equality discourse, remain highly restricted in sub-Saharan Africa, where punitive laws coexist with community resilience strategies (ILGA World, 2023; Nash & Nyanjom, 2022).

Taken together, this body of evidence reveals a common thread: while institutional reforms and technological innovations have opened new spaces for gender equality, structural patriarchies, resource gaps, and exclusionary norms persistently undermine substantive gains. The literature points toward the need for intersectional, transformative approaches that go beyond formal inclusion to address systemic inequities in governance, finance, and cultural norms.

## 1.3 Materials and Methods

A rapid review was conducted to systematically assess literature, policies, and empirical studies on gender and development. Unlike traditional scoping reviews, which are broader and exploratory, rapid reviews are designed to provide timely, policy-relevant evidence through streamlined but rigorous methods (Tricco et al., 2017). This approach was chosen due to its suitability for synthesizing diverse sources—academic, policy, and institutional reports—within constrained timelines while still maintaining transparency and replicability (Haby et al., 2016). The review process adapted steps from Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) seminal framework, including formulating guiding questions, systematically searching databases and grey literature, selecting relevant studies, and synthesizing findings. To enhance comprehensiveness, keywords were generated from core gender and development

studies and refined iteratively as new terms emerged during the review process, consistent with best practice in rapid evidence synthesis (Kelly et al., 2016). Quotation marks were applied to narrow specific searches and improve precision. This approach enabled the identification of major trends, disparities, and policy gaps that shape gender-responsive development in Kenya, Africa, and globally. By adopting a rapid review, this study provides both breadth and depth, ensuring evidence is directly applicable to policymakers and practitioners seeking timely interventions in dynamic contexts.

## 1.4 Results and Discussion

This section presents emerging intersections of gender and development through a rapid review of thematic domains where gender inequalities persist despite targeted interventions. The sections synthesize global, African, and Kenyan empirical evidence while applying a comparative lens to highlight both progress and persistent barriers. The first theme, *gender-responsive climate-smart agriculture (CSA)*, interrogates how interventions enhance resilience and adoption yet risk reinforcing inequities when women are treated as homogenous beneficiaries, emphasizing the need for gender-transformative design. *Digital activism and gender-tech inclusion* explore how feminist digital platforms expand agency but also risk superficiality unless embedded in systemic strategies that address structural inequities in access, literacy, and safety. The discussion on *women's political representation* underscores advances through quotas and reforms but critiques persistent patriarchal gatekeeping, violence, and weak enforcement that constrain substantive influence. *Gender and climate change adaptation* is reviewed through a comparative lens, showing how women exhibit agency and local innovation but are consistently limited by resource asymmetries, policy neglect, and exclusion from finance and extension systems. *Gender-responsive urban planning* highlights how techno-centric and tokenistic participation approaches fail to dismantle deeper inequalities in mobility, housing, and energy. Emerging issues such as *diaspora remittances* illustrate gendered patterns of sending and usage, with women contributing significantly yet constrained in leveraging remittances for structural empowerment. Together, these thematic sections advance scholarly and policy debates by showing that gender equality requires moving beyond descriptive inclusion to transformative structural change across sectors.

### *1.4.1 Gender-responsive climate-smart agriculture (CSA)*

Gender-responsive climate-smart agriculture (CSA) consistently improves adoption and welfare while exposing persistent inequities. Global syntheses show that gender-transformative CSA—targeting agency, assets, and decision power—raises uptake and resilience, but many programs still treat women as homogeneous "beneficiaries" (Huyer et al., 2024; Saran et al., 2024; Tilahun et al., 2024). Across sub-Saharan Africa, multi-country analyses find significant gender gaps in CSA adoption and benefits; women face lower access to inputs, climate finance, and advisories, with differentiated returns to similar practices (Hailemariam et al., 2024; Boudalia et al., 2024). Country studies echo this: in Tanzania and Nigeria, female-headed households adopt fewer practices and gain less, even when exposed to similar interventions (Awoke et al., 2025; Nchanji et al., 2025; Daudu et al., 2025). Kenyan evidence links women's access to climate information services with higher CSA uptake; design details matter—household-level, intra-couple targeting reduces male-biased access (Ngigi et al., 2022). Gender-attentive governance also matters: in Kenya, CSA can reproduce power asymmetries unless projects explicitly shift authority and recognition; conversely, directing incentives (e.g., payments) to women increases participation in low-emissions dairy and aligns mitigation with equity (Brisebois et al., 2022; Tavenner & Crane, 2018). Finally, recent Kenya analyses show gendered decision-making strongly shapes

adoption intensities, underscoring the need for parity in extension, assets, and market linkages (Chepkochei et al., 2025; Okumu et al., 2025).

### 1.4.2 Digital activism and gender-tech inclusion Issues

Digital activism increasingly empowers gender-marginalized groups to engage in civic discourse and reconfigure power structures. Feminist multivocal platforms have exposed significant disparities in digital access; for instance, women in low- and middle-income countries are 22% less likely than men to use the internet and 14% less likely to own a mobile device (Kashyap, 2025). Yet many campaigns risk superficial impact—hashtag-driven mobilizations can amplify visibility but rarely foster lasting digital literacy or structural transformation (Muheed, 2023). Research across Africa highlights that without intersectional gender strategies, digital expansion may actually widen inequality (Bhattacharya et al., 2024). In East Africa, app-based entrepreneurial platforms for women, such as those developed for hair braiders, illustrate inclusive digital models that circumvent literacy barriers (Reuters, 2024). To genuinely advance gender-tech inclusion, digital activism must be paired with ecosystem-oriented interventions: policy frameworks that address structural inequities, intentional digital literacy efforts, and platform designs prioritizing safety and agency rather than mere visibility.

### 1.4.3 Women's Political Representation Issues

Women's political representation has increased globally, reflecting decades of advocacy, quota systems, and institutional reforms, yet progress remains uneven and deeply constrained by patriarchal norms. Empirical data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union show that women now hold over 26% of parliamentary seats worldwide, a marked improvement from less than 12% in the 1990s, but still far below parity (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024). Quota systems have been particularly effective in Latin America and parts of Europe, where legislated gender quotas significantly boosted women's descriptive representation; however, critics caution that quotas often secure numbers without dismantling structural barriers such as clientelism, gendered party hierarchies, and informal power networks (Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2019). In Africa, women's parliamentary representation averages 25%, with Rwanda leading globally at 61% due to constitutionally mandated quotas. Yet research finds that patriarchal culture, limited campaign financing, and gender-based violence in politics hinder women's ability to translate representation into substantive policy influence (Bauer, 2022). In Kenya, constitutional reforms in 2010 introduced the "two-thirds gender rule," mandating that no more than two-thirds of elective and appointive offices be held by one gender. Despite judicial pronouncements, enforcement has been weak, and women remain underrepresented, occupying less than 24% of parliamentary seats (Kantai, 2023). Studies also reveal that women leaders often face double burdens of scrutiny, cultural stereotypes, and exclusion from elite patronage networks that shape electoral outcomes (Khamasi & Murunga, 2021). These findings underscore that while formal representation has advanced, patriarchal structures continue to restrict women's substantive political influence. Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond quotas to structural transformations, strengthening enforcement mechanisms, tackling gender-based violence in politics, equalizing campaign resources, and fostering cultural shifts that legitimize women's leadership beyond symbolic presence.

Progress in women's descriptive representation over recent decades is real but uneven: global averages rose into the mid-20s percent range, yet growth has slowed and substantive parity remains distant (IPU, 2025). Cross-national research demonstrates that institutional levers—especially legislated quotas and party mandates—produce the most rapid gains in numbers, but numerical boosts do not automatically

translate into policy influence or transformations in gendered power relations (Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2020). Empirical studies show two interrelated mechanisms that blunt the impact of increased representation. First, electoral and party gatekeeping (candidate selection, finance, and informal networks) often channel women into less influential posts or "safe" districts, limiting their agenda-setting power (Bauer, 2022). Second, political violence and gendered harassment—online and offline—function as structural deterrents that limit women's willingness to run, campaign, or speak publicly; Krook and Restrepo Sanín's empirical review documents widespread sexualized and psychological forms of violence that increase the cost of political entry for women (Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2020; UN Women, 2024).

In the African comparative context, quotas and post-conflict institutional redesign (e.g., Rwanda) have produced world-leading female representation, demonstrating the efficacy of strong legal instruments combined with political will (IPU data; Rwanda case studies). Yet continent-wide surveys and qualitative work reveal that such descriptive success coexists with limited substantive change where patriarchal norms, clientelist politics, and constrained fiscal resources persist (IDEA/Africa Barometer, 2021; Bauer, 2022). Empirical research from multiple African legislatures finds women legislators often prioritize social policy but lack the committee chairs, budgetary control, and senior party posts needed to translate goals into law (Bauer, 2022).

Kenya illustrates the ambivalence between formal reform and entrenched patriarchy. The 2010 Constitution's "two-thirds gender rule" and increased use of nominated seats show institutional intent, yet implementation gaps, weak enforcement, and elite resistance have kept women's elected share below parity (MSWG, 2024; Kantai, 2023). Empirical analyses of Kenyan elections and interviews with women politicians point to campaign finance deficits, intra-party bias, and gendered media framing as persistent obstacles; documented threats and harassment further depress candidacy rates (Kantai, 2023; UN Women, 2024). These studies suggest that legal quotas need complementary measures—resource redistribution, violence prevention, and party reform—to produce substantive power shifts.

The literature convincingly shows that legal instruments matter but are insufficient alone. Too many evaluations stop at descriptive statistics; robust longitudinal and mixed-methods studies that track women's policymaking influence, control over budgets, and changes in gender norms are still scarce. Moreover, interventions often neglect intersectionality (class, ethnicity, rural/urban divides), which shapes access to political opportunity.

### 1.4.4 Gender and Climate Change Adaptation
Climate change is widely recognized as a great challenge in the 21st century, posing significant environmental, social, and economic threats. As a result, climate adaptation is increasingly gaining significance in the face of global climate change. Men and women experience the impact of climate change differently. Women are often disproportionately affected by disasters, including climate change. They face unique social, geographical, and biological vulnerabilities that exacerbate their risk (Awiti 2022; Murray, 2025). The findings of a systematic review conducted by Asomah (2024) highlighted that gender-sensitive strategies are crucial for strengthening climate resilience and promoting sustainable development.

Empirical evidence highlights both strides and persistent barriers in gender-responsive climate adaptation. Globally, the FAO's landmark analysis of 100,000 rural households across 24 countries reveals that female-headed households lose 8% more income during heatwaves and 3% more during floods than male-headed ones, yet only 6% of national adaptation plans mention women explicitly, demonstrating a glaring policy blind spot (FAO, 2024).

In West Africa, a vulnerability assessment in Mali found that female-headed households face higher climate vulnerability due to unequal access to resources and social capital; gender-transformative entry points include promoting women-focused extension services and advisory systems (Segnon et al., 2024). In Ghana's Upper East, women smallholders, typically with under five acres, express urgent needs for finance, land, cooperative networks, mechanization, and climate information, underscoring structural barriers to adaptation (Nuhu & Matsui, 2022). Ghanaian bean and cowpea farmers likewise show gendered determinants of adaptation: women benefit more from extension services, while men leverage education and credit; inclusive planning increases diversified strategy uptake (Frontiers study, 2023).

In Kenya's Kakamega County, women leverage social capital and indigenous knowledge to adapt, through crop–livestock integration and collective learning, but lack natural, financial, and physical capital, limiting sustainable resilience (Liru & Heinecken, 2021). Overall, while women demonstrate agency and adaptation capacity, persistent constraints, resource access, exclusion from policy, education, and formal support, undermine transformative adaptation. Addressing these gaps requires gender-targeted finance, extension, land rights, inclusive policy design, and strengthening women's collective institutions.

### 1.4.5 Employment disruptions due to technology *reshaping Gender Dynamics*

Employment disruptions driven by digitalization and automation are already reshaping gender dynamics in the labour force, producing uneven risks and opportunities across contexts. Global analyses find that women are disproportionately exposed to AI and automation because they are overrepresented in clerical and routine occupations—sectors with high exposure—raising the likelihood of displacement unless policy and reskilling are gender-targeted (International Labour Organization, 2025; UNESCO, OECD, & IDB, 2022). The rapid expansion of online gig work offers entry points for women—especially young and rural workers—but the World Bank cautions that platforms often reproduce precarity, pay gaps, and weak social protections that disproportionately harm women's long-term security (World Bank, 2023). Africa-focused empirical work shows similar patterns: platform growth creates paid opportunities but amplifies income insecurity and care-burden tradeoffs for women, who face lower representation in higher-paid remote tasks and higher exposure in low-paid place-based work (Anwar, 2022). Kenya-specific evidence finds burgeoning digital labour participation among women but documents gendered barriers, lower earnings, limited onboarding, and unequal access to devices and training—limiting structural gains (Göbel & ILO, 2024). Conversely, evidence on mobile-money–enabled labour reallocation suggests that digital financial services can help women reduce unpaid work and enter paid employment if combined with complementary training and social protection (Islam, 2020). Collectively, these studies critique techno-optimism: technology alone does not equal gender equity. Integrated, gender-sensitive policy, social protection, and targeted upskilling are essential to prevent widening inequalities.

### 1.4.6 Digital planning and Urban planning

Digital planning that looks gender-aware often reveals deeper structural blind spots: recent empirical work shows promise but mixed translation into equitable urban outcomes. A global bibliometric synthesis finds gender-sustainability scholarship growing yet fragmented, with few studies linking evidence to practice-oriented urban interventions (Gudekli et al., 2023). Detailed city-level evidence reinforces that gap. Salon and Gulyani's large household survey in Nairobi demonstrates how mobility poverty disproportionately restricts women's access to employment and services, highlighting that technical transport fixes without gendered targeting reproduce inequality (Salon & Gulyani, 2010). In informal settlements, Anditi et al.'s gender-analysis framework for energy innovations points to how co-design can increase uptake and agency, but cautions that techno-centric solutions fail unless they address intra-household power and affordability (Anditi et al., 2022). McKague et al.'s qualitative work on health social enterprises across Africa shows pragmatic gender-intentional strategies (training, flexible roles) that improve service delivery while exposing how donor and market logics can undermine sustainable gender gains (McKague et al., 2021). A South African case study of gender mainstreaming in public space design finds participatory processes essential but often tokenistic without institutional accountability (Rampaul, 2022). Collectively, these empirical studies argue that gender-responsive urban development requires integrated, accountable policy instruments that pair technical measures with sustained shifts in governance, finance, and household power relations.

### 1.4.7 Diaspora Remittances as an Emerging Gender Issue

Diaspora remittances continue to draw a lot of attention from scholars from different disciplines economics, sociology, and migration (Akanbi & Yusuf, 2024; AlBataineh, 2024; Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2006; Ayyub, 2020; Foote et al., 2015; Galstyan & Ambrosini, 2023), among others, with vibrant research findings on the role of diaspora remittances in contributing to economic growth, especially in Low and medium-income countries (LMIC). However, there is limited disaggregated empirical data on the highlights and challenges brought by gender dynamics in remittance management. Kenyans in the diaspora rely heavily on digital technologies to remit funds to their family and friends back home. Due to distance, time, and cost of transfer, many will rely on a mode of remittance that offers some form of integrity, privacy, and security (Osabutey & Jackson, 2024).

The advancement in technology that allows for immediate transfer of money, like MPESA (Asongu & Le Roux, 2023; Bastia et al., 2023) argues that while digital money has been found to improve financial inclusion. However, Osabutey & Jackson (2024) are of a contrary opinion through research that shows the benefit is tiered. Those at the bottom of the pyramid or the poorer section of the economy do not enjoy the same level of benefits as do the elite. This resource and infrastructure constraint is indicated as an emerging theme needing more in-depth empirical research. Recent reports by (CBK, 2021) indicate that while more men remit money to Kenya than women, over 58% of remittances sent to Kenya are received by women, even if the majority of the senders are men. Women have also been shown to send a higher proportion of their income in comparison to men (Ayyub, 2020; Hennebry et al., 2017; Munge, n.d.). It has raised the question of whether the impact of remittances mediates financial development and sustainable human capital investment in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ali Bare et al., 2022). Ha et al. (2025) found that financial services for unbanked populations, among them women, significantly improve when digital financial solutions are utilized. The inclusion of digital finance is key to the reduction of poverty and gender inequality while it increases economic empowerment in developing countries.  Digital

financial inclusion ensures that the diaspora remittances are conveniently received and utilized, therefore reducing poverty in developing countries (Inoue, 2024)

Diaspora remittances have become a critical livelihood strategy globally, but their gendered dynamics reveal both opportunities and inequalities. Empirical studies in South Asia show that women are increasingly both senders and recipients, yet female migrants often remit smaller amounts due to concentration in low-wage, care, and domestic sectors, underscoring structural labor market inequities (Rahman & Fee, 2019). Comparative evidence from sub-Saharan Africa highlights a similar trend: while women remit more frequently, their transfers are often directed toward household welfare—health, education, and food security—whereas men prioritize investment, revealing gendered remittance usage patterns that sustain care burdens on women (Chepngeno, 2021). In Kenya, recent household survey analyses find that women recipients exhibit greater financial prudence in allocating remittances to long-term welfare but face systemic barriers in leveraging remittances for productive investment due to limited asset ownership and credit access (Njoroge & Gichuki, 2023). Critically, while remittances provide resilience against economic shocks, the gendered segmentation of migration and finance reproduces inequalities: women's contributions remain undervalued, and their agency in decision-making over remittance use is constrained. A more transformative agenda requires integrating gender into migration and remittance policy, strengthening women's asset rights, and creating inclusive financial instruments to translate remittances into empowerment rather than reinforcing care-based roles.

### 1.4.8 LGBTQ+ rights and gender policy as an emerging Gender issue

Discussions around LGBTQ+ rights and gender policy are gaining prominence in some parts of the wolrd. According to the American Psychological Association (2021), LGBTQ+ inclusion refers to the recognition and acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals in all aspects of social, economic, and political life. In Africa, however, there exist laws that criminalize same-sex relationships and target LGBTQ+ individuals (Scott, 2024; Agyapong, 2023). This criminalization and related practices are occasioned by African beliefs, which include deep-rooted religious values. Those who identify as heterosexual are the most common sexual group in Kenya and Africa at large (Nyoni, 2020). It is reasonable to believe that homosexual, bisexual, and transgender sexual individuals exist in Kenya. Same-sex sexual relationships are prohibited in Kenya, and LGBTQ+ rights are severely restricted (Agyapong, 2023; Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018).

The politics of LGBTQ+ inclusion in Africa presents a diverse and intricate landscape characterized by variations in attitudes, legal frameworks, and societal acceptance across the continent (Agyapong, 2023; Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018; Van Heerden, 2019). In recent years, LGBTQ+ rights have been expanded across various countries, especially economically developing countries. For example, Nepal's constitution explicitly bans discrimination based on sexual orientation (Blue Diamond Society [BDS], 2018). Anti-discrimination and hate crime laws covering both sexual orientation and gender identity were passed in Mongolia in 2017 (BDS, 2018). Multiple African countries have modified their laws to encourage LGBTQ+ tolerance, but others continue to impose harsh sanctions, including the death sentence, for same-sex relationships (Scott, 2024; Agyapong, 2023). While Kenya remains conservative as global shifts toward gender inclusivity suggest that Policy discussions incorporating protections for gender-diverse individuals (Nazneen & Okech, 2021). The U.S. and parts of Europe have provided legal recognition for non-binary and transgender individuals, an area that remains largely unexplored in Kenya's gender discourse (Agyapong, 2023; Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018).

Discussions around LGBTQ+ rights have increasingly intersected with gender policy debates. South Africa is the only African country with constitutional protection for sexual minorities. However, research in South Africa reveals a paradox where legal frameworks coexist with high levels of social stigma and violence, limiting substantive equality (Matebeni et al., 2020). In Kenya, studies document resilience strategies among LGBTQ+ communities despite criminalization under Section 162 of the Penal Code; exclusion from gender policy and state protection exacerbates vulnerability, particularly in healthcare access and political participation (Nash & Nyanjom, 2022).

## 1.5 Reflection

As Kenya navigates persistent gender and development challenges, a central question emerges: how can policymakers mainstream gender-responsive strategies across all sectors to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth? While significant progress has been made through constitutional reforms, gender quotas, and sectoral initiatives, persistent structural inequities continue to undermine women's access to resources, decision-making, and opportunities. Empirical evidence shows that interventions often remain descriptive, focused on participation and representation, without addressing deeper patriarchal norms and institutional biases that constrain substantive equality. The challenge, therefore, is not only to design gender-inclusive policies but also to ensure their effective implementation through accountability mechanisms, adequate financing, and intersectoral collaboration. Multi-level engagement is critical: global frameworks provide normative guidance; regional institutions foster harmonization; national governments translate commitments into laws and budgets; and community, family, and individual actors shape everyday practices and social norms. Stakeholders such as civil society, the private sector, and academia also play pivotal roles in monitoring, innovating, and advancing gender equity agendas. Addressing policy gaps thus requires an integrated approach that embeds gender-transformative strategies, strengthens institutional capacity, and fosters inclusive governance. Only then can Kenya move beyond symbolic inclusion toward equitable development outcomes that align with sustainability and social justice.

## 1.6 Conclusion

This rapid review demonstrates that while strides have been made in mainstreaming gender across climate-smart agriculture, digital inclusion, political participation, remittance flows, and LGBTQ+ rights, deep-seated inequities remain. Globally, descriptive gains in representation and participation are not translating into substantive equality because patriarchal institutions, discriminatory laws, and structural barriers persist. In Africa and Kenya, specifically, women's access to resources, digital opportunities, and decision-making spaces continues to lag behind men's, while LGBTQ+ communities remain marginalized from formal policy frameworks. These findings underscore that gender equity cannot be achieved by participation-focused interventions alone; rather, transformative approaches must tackle structural and institutional inequalities.

## 1.7 Recommendations

*Global level:* At the international scale, organizations such as UN Women, FAO, and the World Bank should mainstream gender-transformative indicators in climate, digital, and governance programs, ensuring that interventions measure not just participation but also shifts in decision-making power. Multilateral donors, including the EU and USAID, can strengthen accountability by tying funding to demonstrable outcomes such as women's land ownership or closing digital gender gaps. Equally, global

technology platforms like Meta and Google have a role in embedding safety-by-design standards to protect women and other marginalized groups online, while creating localized training programs that expand women's participation in digital entrepreneurship.

*Regional/African level:* The African Union should enforce member states' commitments under the Maputo Protocol by integrating gender equity into climate adaptation and digital policies. Regional development banks, such as the African Development Bank, can provide concessional finance for women-focused CSA and digital enterprises. At the same time, regional CSOs and research networks should expand knowledge-sharing platforms that scale up successful gender-responsive interventions across the continent.

*National/Kenya level:* The Government of Kenya must operationalize the two-thirds gender rule by enforcing compliance among political parties, while also mainstreaming gender quotas into climate financing and diaspora remittance schemes. The Central Bank and financial institutions can design remittance-linked savings and credit products targeted at women, while the ICT Ministry and private telecom companies expand digital literacy programs for women and other marginalized groups. Parliament and the judiciary should simultaneously reform discriminatory laws and strengthen protections against gender-based political violence.

*Community/grassroots level*: County governments should support women-led cooperatives in climate-smart agriculture and inclusive extension services that balance household decision-making. Community-based organizations can facilitate safe spaces for women politicians, youth, and other marginalised persons to build resilience and voice. Traditional and religious leaders also carry responsibility in shifting cultural norms by endorsing inclusive leadership and governance, while households themselves should promote joint decision-making in agriculture, remittance use, and political engagement to reduce entrenched male bias.

*Family level:* Families should normalize joint decision-making in agriculture, household budgeting, remittance management, and political participation, ensuring that women's voices are valued equally. Intra-household dynamics must be reoriented toward shared responsibility in caregiving, resource use, and adaptation strategies.

*Individual level:* Women, men, and gender-diverse persons should be empowered through targeted training, mentorship, and financial literacy programs that enhance their agency in decision-making. Building personal digital literacy, climate knowledge, and political awareness can equip individuals to actively challenge inequalities within households, communities, and institutions.

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