

Background Guide

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

Women's Inclusion in Financial Development

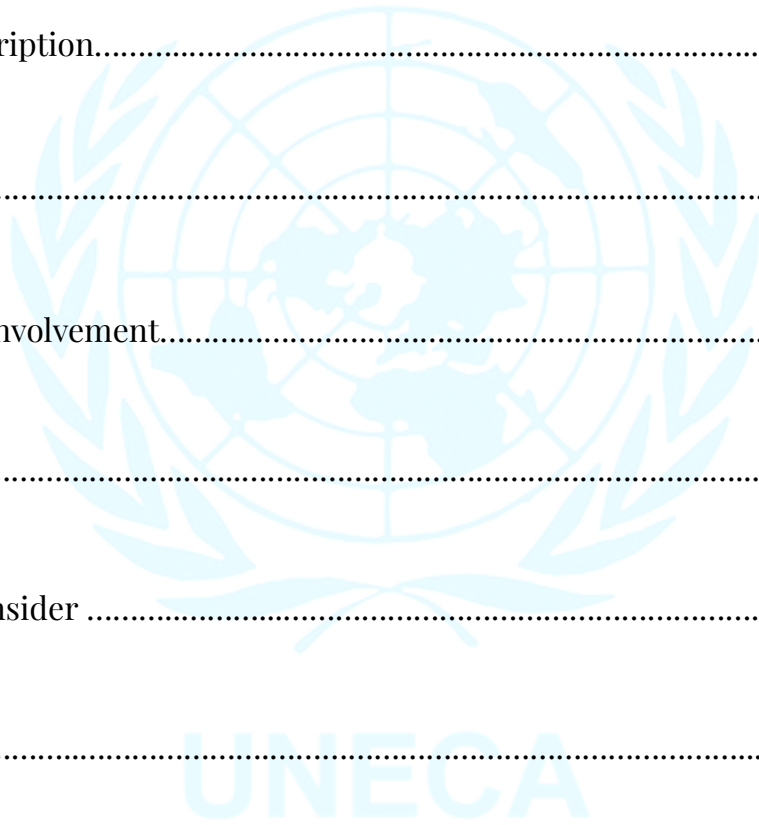


JACKRABBIT MUN VIII

L.B. POLY - MAY 23th, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chair Letters.....	3
Topic Synopsis.....	5
Committee Description.....	6
Background.....	8
United Nations Involvement.....	14
Bloc Positions.....	15
Questions to Consider	17
Works Cited.....	19



CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS

Hi delegates!

My name is Brianna, and I am a sophomore here at Poly. This is my second year of Model UN, and I am so thrilled to have the opportunity to serve as your co-chair! Through MUN, I have learned how to improve my public speaking skills under pressure while also making connections with people—often without even knowing their real names. I am looking forward to working with my fellow co-chair and dais to create the best possible experience for our delegates.

Outside of MUN, I am a JV tennis player, president of our campus's Crochet Club, Vice President and Co-Founder of the Food Bank & Community Club, in addition to being a peer tutor for Math and Chinese. In my free time, I enjoy crocheting, reading, listening to music, watching movies (my favorite is *10 Things I Hate About You*), and, unfortunately, doomscrolling.

Women's inclusion in financial development is such an important topic, especially as Africa continues to develop and industrialize. I hope that during session, delegates will collaborate to come up with ideas to alleviate issues and share new perspectives. Of course, please reach out if there are any questions or concerns. See you in May!

Sincerely,

Brianna Goldstein

UNECA: Women's Inclusion in Financial Development | Co-Head Chair

briannag90808@gmail.com



POSITION PAPER GUIDELINES

- Position Papers are due at 11:59 PM on **Sunday, May 17th**.
- Delegates **must** submit position papers to be eligible for **research AND committee awards**.
- Position Papers can be submitted through a Google form:
 - <https://forms.gle/H3ruhahP2SQuEPs38>
- At the top of each paper, include your character/country name, first and last name, school name, and appropriate committee.
 - United States
 - First Last
 - School Name
 - UNECA
- Papers should be emailed as a PDF file
 - Paper content should also be copied and pasted into the body of the email so it can still be graded in the event of any technical difficulties
 - Please name the file and subject line of the email [Committee_Country]
 - Ex. **UNECA_Algeria**
- Papers should be 1-2 pages in length with an additional Works Cited page in MLA format
- Papers should be single-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font and include no pictures or graphics
- Please include the following sections for each committee topic:
 - Background & UN Involvement
 - Position of your Country
 - Possible Solutions

If you have any questions or concerns, please email one of your chairs.



TOPIC SYNOPSIS

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa was first founded by the UN Economic and Social Council in 1958 in order to promote economic growth, sustainability, and cooperation across continental Africa. Including 54 countries, UNECA is an essential part of Africa's political and economic landscape, targeting issues unique to the continent. This regional forum works towards the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063, which seek to uphold and strive towards sustainable development goals globally and turn Africa into a global powerhouse respectively.

Providing a forward-thinking and innovative space for all African nations to convene in think-tank and conference-style discussions, UNECA's work is imperative to relations between Africa and the rest of the UN. Bringing Africa center stage in front of the world, and modernizing while retaining tradition, UNECA seeks to show that Africa is an essential part of the world we live in.



COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

The economic development of Africa has long been a topic of discussion, with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa being founded in 1958 for that express purpose. Combating a long history of colonialism and exploitation, the economic development and diversification of the African continent requires a variety of tactics to address issues that are often intertwined with corruption and social idiosyncrasies, and to properly address them, particular inspection and dissection is necessary.

One such case is the position of women within Africa, which, despite boasting the largest proportion of female entrepreneurs in the world, hosts over 62% of women living in extreme poverty worldwide according to the World Bank. Such issues are of great concern to UNECA, and without being properly addressed, over 50% of Africa's population will be left behind. The situation in Africa is highly varied between regions and individual nations with a variety of issues affecting the social mobility and economic advancement of women, with issues including but not limited to, the restriction of education in conflict zones, a lack of investment in public infrastructure due to corruption, and child marriage.

In this committee, delegates will have to work to create social change and help advance the economic position of over 580 million people, in turn helping the fiscal development of the entirety of Africa. Supporting the economic development of



women supports the economic development of entire communities, and it is sure that this half of the population is essential for the benefit of everyone.



BACKGROUND

FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

From CEOs of major technology firms to wooden stalls selling fruits and vegetables, millions of African women have delved into the world of businesses, large and small. According to some estimates, Africa has the highest rate of women's entrepreneurial activity compared to any continent, with over a quarter (25.9%) of all businesses being either started by or run by women. However, women across the globe still receive significantly less investment and support than their male counterparts. In Africa, where investing in entrepreneurs is crucial to growth and development of the economy, a lack of supportive structure for women means a lack of support for a quarter of the continent's entrepreneurs. Thus, the solutions to the obstacles that women face must be as diverse and potent as the problems themselves.

A crucial factor is investment in start-ups. In a continent with disproportionate unemployment rates that disproportionately affect women, a lot of businesses are started as a means of survival. However, even among scalable businesses such as software and digital products, female-founded businesses still receive significantly less funding. Women founders receive only 7% of all Venture Capital (VC) funding, which is significantly disproportionate, considering African women are also more likely than men to stay with their businesses. One explanation for this is a significant lack of women in the investment sector, in Africa but also among global investors in the African continent. Both increasing the number of senior partners in VC and private equity firms to include more women, and examining the biases among current male investors would be necessary to combat this issue. But beyond funding, female entrepreneurs also have limited access to business networks that are essential to



growth. Ensuring that women are integrated into a broader network allows both success of the business and a solid exit for investors later down the line.

Economic participation is also difficult for women across the continent due to outdated legal systems and cultural biases. For example, in some African countries, women still need a co-signature from a husband or male partner on loans, mortgages, and other papers, which are essential to starting a business.

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Education has long been an essential part of improving women's social mobility, with more required years in school leading to marriage at later ages and a boost in regional economies. According to UNESCO, only $\frac{2}{3}$ of girls in Sub-Saharan Africa complete primary education, and $\frac{1}{2}$ complete their lower secondary education. This means that the majority of girls stop their education before the age of 15, often to get married or support their families through employment. This can propagate a variety of issues for women and girls, with less education being correlated with higher rates of mental health issues, lower independence, and increased rates of poverty. Girls in poverty who are unable to attain a basic education are barred from jobs that require higher levels of education, which often pay better, in turn keeping them in poverty. This can force reliance on a husband to attain financial security, limiting the independence of these women and girls, and exacerbate the severity of marital abuse due to the fact that they cannot leave without risking their fiscal stability.

This is especially important in contrast to these girls' male peers, who are often prioritized by families when it comes to education. Should a family only be able to afford so many children to go to school, the boys are typically prioritized, as dictated by patriarchal standards. Girls are also often subject to child marriage, with over 32% of Eastern and Southern African women being married before the age of 18. With high



rates of poverty in these regions, the dowry money from these marriages can be very attractive, especially when the other option is skipping out on basic necessities.

However, everyone deserves to go to school, and proper education affords women and girls the opportunity to carve out a life that they wish to live for themselves, which is why the United Nations recognizes the necessity of educational requirements. Social mobility has and continues to be dependent on education, and with it, women and girls are able to live in a world where they can be a scientist, lawyer, politician, or mother, if they so choose. Working towards the requirement of at least a secondary school education is thus an essential part of supporting women's finances, as well as their wellbeing.

SUPPORTING HIGHER EDUCATION

In addition to support for education in critical years of development, higher education (university and beyond), is another cornerstone of social mobility. This is especially important for allowing women into fields that have been traditionally male dominated, such as in medicine and law. Such fields can have detrimental effects when women aren't involved, with one in three women reporting feeling unheard by their doctor globally. Instances of medical neglect specifically against women can lead to conditions such as endometriosis and ovarian cysts being left untreated. In addition to the women's right to education as a fundamental one for all of mankind, the specific drawbacks from women not being present in high-education fields can fuel real world harm.

However, many women in Africa struggle to reach higher education not only because of the lack of access to primary education, but also because of the cost. While the cost of university in Africa is significantly less than in the United States—the average combined cost of tuition and board in a South African public university is



\$8,000–\$18,000—this can still be prohibitive for many families. This is where key institutions like the Zawadi Africa Education Fund come in, providing support and scholarships for promising young women in Africa.

EXISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Across the globe, African countries are recently among the top reformers when it comes to gender inclusivity laws. However, enforcing and implementing regulations is difficult, and many countries still lack essential laws prohibiting discrimination and providing support for women in the workplace.

Still, many countries have taken significant steps in the right direction. For instance, in 2003, the African Union ratified the Maputo Protocol, a landmark agreement concerning women’s rights which defines violence against women, grants women equal rights in property and inheritance, and obligates states to provide abortions where the mother’s life is endangered. Additionally, in 2025, the African Union adopted the Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, which solely focused on gender-based violence and seeks to end it for good. Individual countries have also made progress, such as in Sierra Leone’s Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act in 2023, which mandates a 30% quota of women in parliamentary and cabinet positions.

To further these protections, regional and national declarations are not enough. Change has to be enforced at a local level in order to see gender equality come into fruition, and that means that societies have to challenge their patriarchal mindsets. Difficulties enforcing existing protections, especially in rural areas, pose a unique challenge to Africa, where it is not just rules, but hearts that must change.

CAREER DIVERSIFICATION

The African economy as a whole would especially benefit from career diversification, and women are no exception. With most African countries relying on a single major export, economies lack diversity, leaving them vulnerable if that single export crashes. This is especially troublesome considering that many of these major exports are limited resources. For instance, South Sudan's largest export is crude oil, accounting for over 90% of their total export revenue, which not only serves as a strain on the environment, but also leaves the nation at the mercy of price fluctuations in oil.

This is where career diversification can vastly improve the sustainability of various African economies, and where women are able to help. African women have the highest entrepreneurship rate in the world at about 24%, meaning that they have the potential to massively diversify African economies with different types of businesses. However, this statistic is in part because formal job opportunities are limited due to scarce access to education, and all women deserve to be able to pursue the careers they choose with the necessary schooling accessible. In any case, the women of Africa as a new force in the workplace have the potential to create great change, and proper support should be put in place to help them achieve career diversity not just for themselves, but for the good of their local and national economies.

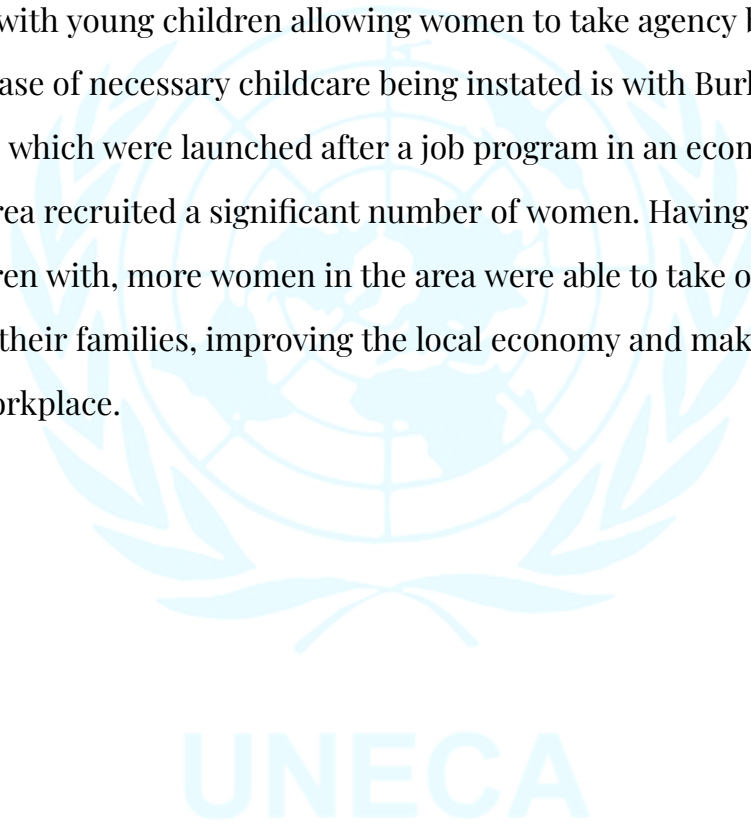
CHILDCARE SUPPORT

Another barrier to women's financial liberation is the lack of affordable childcare support. Just in Sub-Saharan Africa 6 million girls under the age of 18 are not in school due to pregnancy, one of the leading causes of girls dropping out of school. Women that have children often do not have time to take on a job or go back to school because they have to take care of their children, which is not necessarily an



unenjoyable task, but one that can make it difficult to achieve a stable income independently due to the time commitment necessary to raising children. This is not to mention the physical strain that pregnancy puts on one's body, especially for those who aren't fully developed. Over $\frac{1}{3}$ of women are left with lasting health complications after childbirth, with physical injuries such as infections and mental issues such as post-partum depression making returning to school or work even more difficult.

Thus, the need for adequate childcare is clear, with support for all mothers and especially those with young children allowing women to take agency back into their lives. One such case of necessary childcare being instated is with Burkina Faso's mobile daycares, which were launched after a job program in an economically disadvantaged area recruited a significant number of women. Having a safe place to leave their children with, more women in the area were able to take on paid labor and help provide for their families, improving the local economy and making space for women in the workplace.



UNITED NATIONS INVOLVEMENT

The United Nations has long advocated for the financial liberation of women globally as well as African women specifically, with UN Women being officially founded in 2010 to target gender-based issues. The work of UN Women stretches across multiple disciplines, whether it be in assisting governments with creating legal frameworks to protect women or supporting women in the workforce, and across all regions of Africa.

With policy work in various nations across Africa, UN Women has worked to create stable economic growth opportunities for women alongside their governments, providing them with a way to independently support themselves. In 2020, UN Women organized a forum in which female entrepreneurs and business owners were able to collaborate and discuss the future of the African Continental Free Trade Area, a platform that aims to become a major continental market for African goods.

UN Women also works more indirectly for women's economic sovereignty, with one such case being their fight against female genital mutilation (FGM). This practice is the partial or total removal of female genitals, which is practiced mostly on adolescent girls and can cause permanent health effects and potentially make childbearing even more risky or impossible. Practices like these stop women from being able to take on work by physically disfiguring them, thus making going to school and keeping a job even more difficult given the complications to their health. However, UN Women has worked to combat this issue, for instance intervening in Gambia when there were attempts to repeal the ban on FGM.



BLOC POSITIONS

NORTHERN AFRICA

Globally, countries in the North Africa region face the largest overall gender pay gap. In this region, 46 percent of women own a financial account, while 60 percent of men own a financial account. The reason for this gap stems from a lower amount of female participation in the paid workforce, as women often have jobs in agriculture, services, and informal work. Although these sectors are crucial for many women's livelihoods, women's overrepresentation in these industries makes them vulnerable, as they not only lack sustainable wages but also lack social protection, such as sick days and pensions.

WESTERN AFRICA

Women in Western Africa face better circumstances when it comes to their finances, but they still face challenges that require help. For one, these women simply are not as well financed as their male counterparts, with the gap being around \$42 billion, which also leads them to be unable to pay back high amounts of collateral. However, specific initiatives like the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre help women with career training, loans, and technical assistance, improving the ability of local women to sustain jobs.

EASTERN AFRICA

Eastern Africa, like most of the rest of the continent, is seeing improvements with women's financial independence, with microloans proving to be a success, especially with large donors such as Ecobank through platforms such as the Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa. However, due to issues that are



widespread, such as the pervasiveness of patriarchal norms, as well as localized, like border tensions and displacement crises, women are often limited to lower level positions and struggle to get promotions. Such issues are further exacerbated when women are up to 24% less likely than men to have a bank account, barring them from accessing essential economic programs.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Through the use of technology allowing Southern African women to make money and attend school remotely, their financial situation has improved, but nevertheless there are still pervasive issues. For instance, many are swept up in the “missing middle,” where businesses are too big for microloans but too small for traditional bank loans. This is particularly frustrating for women working in fields with a large starting cost, such as female farmers in Mozambique, who require large sums of money in a short period of time to facilitate the start of growing season.

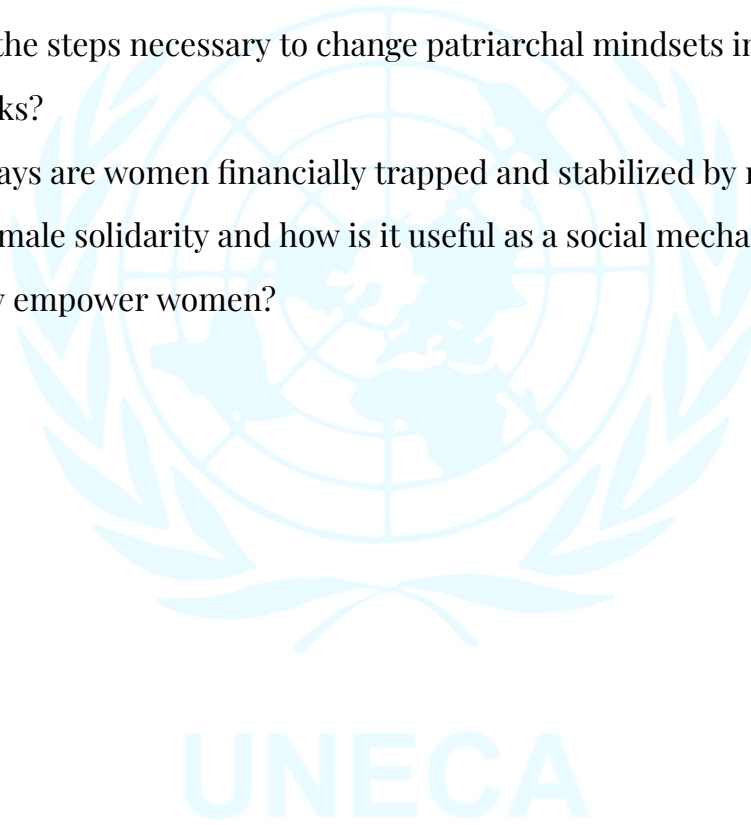
CENTRAL AFRICA

Much like the rest of the continent, Central Africa has been progressing towards female financial empowerment through programs such as microloans and financial literacy programs. However there is an additional need for specific financial support for women who work in nontraditional fields, such as tailoring, hair braiding, and food catering, who need specialized materials and monetary support. Additional issues, such as gender-based violence, prevent women’s economic participation, with up to 37.5% of the population being vulnerable in just the Central African Republic.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do systems that support women's finances and entrepreneurship benefit the economies and societies of Africa as a whole?
2. In what ways do the different circumstances of African women living in different regions affect the ways in which they are able to grow their personal capital?
3. What are the steps necessary to change patriarchal mindsets in addition to legal frameworks?
4. In what ways are women financially trapped and stabilized by marriage?
5. What is female solidarity and how is it useful as a social mechanism to financially empower women?



WORKS CITED

“Africa Teachers Reports Series, Educating Girls and Ending Child Marriage in Africa: Investment Case and the Role of Teachers and School Leaders.” *Unesco.org*, 2026, unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390382.locale=en. Accessed 15 May 2026.

Blake, Jessica. “Comment: Africa has the highest proportion of women entrepreneurs. How can we make sure they get funded?”. *Reuters*, 12 April 2023.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/sustainable-business/comment-africa-has-highest-proportion-women-entrepreneurs-how-can-we-make-sure-2023-04-12/>

“Enabling Women to Work and Their Children to Blossom: The Double Success Story of Mobile Childcare in Burkina Faso.” *World Bank*, 8 Mar. 2021,

www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/03/08/enabling-women-to-work-and-their-children-to-blossom-the-double-success-story-of-mobile-childcare-units-in-burkina-faso.

Haveman, Robert, and Timothy Smeeding. “The role of higher education in social mobility.” *The Future of children* vol. 16,2 (2006): 125-50.

doi:10.1353/foc.2006.0015

Hopps, Jason. “The Ingredients Helping Africa’s Women Entrepreneurs Succeed”.

International Finance Corporation, 4 November 2024.

<https://www.ifc.org/en/stories/2024/the-ingredients-helping-africa-s-women-entrepreneurs-succeed>

Kadilli, Etleva, et al. “Supporting the Education and Health of Young Mothers in Africa.”

Unesco.org, 2024,

www.unesco.org/en/articles/supporting-education-and-health-young-mothers-africa.

Kasura, Shanice, et al. “6-Million Young Moms in Africa Are Not in School. They Can Be.” *2gether 4 SRHR Knowledge Hub*, 3 Mar. 2025,

www.2gether4srhr.org/news/6-million-young-moms-in-africa-are-not-in-school-they-can-be.

“South Sudan (SSD) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners.” *Oec.world*, 2024, oec.world/en/profile/country/ssd.

Tchoukou, Julie Ada. “Africa’s New Treaty on Violence against Women: A Decolonial Turn in Global Feminist Law?” *Opinio Juris*, 7 May 2026,

opiniojuris.org/2026/05/07/africas-new-treaty-on-violence-against-women-a-decolonial-turn-in-global-feminist-law/. Accessed 15 May 2026.

“Unsdg | across Africa, Women’s Rights Are Moving from Words to Action.” *Un.org*, 2026,

unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/across-africa-women%E2%80%99s-rights-are-moving-words-action.

World Health Organization. “More than a Third of Women Experience Lasting Health Problems after Childbirth, New Research Shows.” *Www.who.int*, 7 Dec. 2023,

www.who.int/news/item/07-12-2023-more-than-a-third-of-women-experience-lasting-health-problems-after-childbirth.

