AFRICAN FEMINIST COLLECTIVE ON FEMINIST INFORMED POLICIES

A Feminist State of Play on Africa's Foreign Policy Architecture

Prepared by members of the

African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies (AfIP Collective)

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About the AfIP Collective

The African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies (AfIP Collective) is a Pan-African feminist community of scholars, practitioners, policy actors, organisers, media and cultural workers committed to reimagining foreign policy and global governance through feminist, decolonial, and life-affirming approaches. AfIP works across research, storytelling, policy engagement, and movement-building to analyse, interpret, and reshape domestic and foreign policies from African feminist perspectives. The collective seeks to ground the language of foreign policy in everyday life, reclaim Africa's agency in global political discourse, while strengthening solidarities and amplifying African feminist knowledge production. Centring Black/African decolonial traditions, the collective challenges imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism as intersecting systems of oppression, asserting the liberation of Africans, particularly those pushed to the margins. We sustain this work through the revolutionary joy of African feminist histories, prioritizing local autonomy while maintaining global solidarity.

Le Collectif Féministe Africain sur les politiques informées par le féminisme (Collectif AfIP) est une communauté panafricaine féministe d'universitaires, de praticiens, d'acteurs politiques, d'organisateurs, de travailleurs des médias et de la culture engagés à réimaginer la politique étrangère et la gouvernance mondiale à travers des approches féministes, décoloniales et affirmant la vie. L'AfIP travaille à travers la recherche, le récit, l'engagement politique et le renforcement des mouvements pour analyser, interpréter et remodeler les politiques nationales et étrangères à partir de perspectives féministes africaines. Le collectif cherche à ancrer le langage de la politique étrangère dans la vie quotidienne, à réclamer l'agence de l'Afrique dans le discours politique mondial, tout en renforçant les solidarités et en amplifiant la production de connaissances féministes africaines. Centré sur les traditions décoloniales noires/africaines, le collectif remet en question l'impérialisme, le colonialisme, le patriarcat et le néolibéralisme en tant que systèmes d'oppression interconnectés, affirmant la libération des Africains, en particulier ceux qui sont poussés à la marge. Nous soutenons ce travail à travers la joie révolutionnaire des histoires féministes africaines, en donnant la priorité à l'autonomie locale tout en maintenant une solidarité mondiale.

El Colectivo Feminista Africano sobre Políticas Informadas por el Feminismo (Colectivo AfIP) es una comunidad feminista panafricana de académicas, profesionales, actores políticos, organizadores, trabajadores de los medios de comunicación y de la cultura comprometidos con la reimaginación de la política exterior y la gobernanza global a través de enfoques feministas, decoloniales y que afirman la vida. AfIP trabaja a través de la investigación, la narración de historias, el compromiso político y la construcción de movimientos para analizar,

interpretar y remodelar las políticas nacionales y extranjeras desde perspectivas feministas africanas. El colectivo busca anclar el lenguaje de la política exterior en la vida cotidiana, reclamar la agencia de África en el discurso político global, al tiempo que fortalece las solidaridades y amplifica la producción de conocimiento feminista africano. Centrado en las tradiciones decoloniales negras/africanas, el colectivo desafía el imperialismo, el colonialismo, el patriarcado y el neoliberalismo como sistemas de opresión que se cruzan, afirmando la liberación de los africanos, en particular de aquellos empujados a los márgenes. Sostenemos este trabajo a través de la alegría revolucionaria de las historias feministas africanas, priorizando la autonomía local y manteniendo al mismo tiempo la solidaridad global.

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Our Approach

This report is designed as a snapshot of feminist entry points for Africa's foreign policy architecture, and as an advocacy tool. Produced by the African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies (AfIP Collective), it explores feminist entry points within Africa's foreign policy architecture.

The report does not treat African states as objects of external gender governance, nor does it adopt a definition of feminist foreign policy. Rather, this work is grounded in African feminist and decolonial intellectual traditions. It shapes the questions we ask, the evidence we credit, the frameworks we apply, and the conclusions we are willing to draw. For that reason, the report is intended not only to analyse but also to support advocacy: to identify where commitments are substantive, where they are being hollowed out, and where feminist actors can press for more accountable and transformative foreign policy practice across the continent.

This approach engages global frameworks critically, and reads across the porous boundary between domestic and international politics. It also treats ordinary African citizens, including in the diaspora, civil society and feminist movements as co-producers of foreign policy, rather than as actors external to it.

The report does not treat African states as objects of external gender governance, nor does it adopt a definition of feminist foreign policy.

The result is an exploration of what feminist foreign policy means in African contexts, assessing it not only through declarations, representation, or institutional uptake, but also through the wider structures of power that shape foreign policy choices, including conflict, militarism and war, patterns of regional integration, extractive and exploitative economic governance, and transnational anti-gender mobilisations.

The approach taken here seeks honest, longitudinal analysis, and this initial contribution establishes a baseline for future feminist analysis of Africa's foreign policy architecture.

WHY THIS, WHY NOW

This report is necessary for two reasons. First, global discourses on foreign policy often exclude Africa as a legitimate site of foreign policymaking reflecting existing knowledge hierarchies in international relations. Second, the invocation of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) as normative global praxis is incomplete without African perspectives. African feminist priorities remain under-recognised, unevenly institutionalised, and vulnerable to challenge through resistance and backlash both from within and outside the continent. If FFP presents an opportunity

towards more feminist futures, Africa and Africans must be a consideration, and this report makes that intervention.

This report establishes a baseline for feminist scrutiny of Africa's foreign policy architecture to support advocacy, sharpen accountability, and document both openings and reversals over time.

RECENTRING AFRICAN AGENCY IN (FEMINIST) FOREIGN POLICY DEBATES.

Twenty-five years after UNSCR 1325, the development of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and more than a decade into the expansion of FFP debates, gender equality language is more visible in international politics but far less consistently transformative in practice. Across African contexts, commitments to gender-responsive governance have often expanded institutionally without equivalent shifts in resourcing, accountability, or structural redistribution of power. For advocacy, this matters: formal adoption alone is an inadequate measure of progress. What needs tracking is whether foreign policy commitments alter material conditions, widen political space for feminist actors, and reshape the terms on which African states engage regional and global power.

Much of the existing FFP literature still treats Africa as a site of implementation rather than of conceptual and political production (cf Haastrup, 2025; Kezie-Nwoha, 2026). This obscures African feminist histories, sidelines African-owned normative frameworks, and misreads the conditions under which African states and movements engage the international order. Moreover, many of these do not move beyond the acknowledgement of gender equality, a necessary but insufficient condition for a feminist foreign policy. While important, commitments to equality alone do not necessarily challenge the institutions, priorities, and power relations that produce gendered and other intersecting forms of inequality in global politics.

We thus begin with a different premise: African states, regional bodies, and feminist movements are political actors in their own right. The task is not to measure them against externally settled standards, but to assess the extent to which feminist transformation is being pursued, resisted, or repurposed in African foreign policy arenas. This also requires attention to the structural constraints under which foreign policy is made, including debt, donor conditionality, conflict, and geopolitical subordination. Without that wider frame, feminist foreign policy risks being reduced to rhetoric, elite branding, or technocratic compliance.

This intervention provides a framework that is analytically rigorous, politically situated, and aimed at ensuring feminist accountability.

BACKLASH AND SHRINKING POLITICAL SPACE

African feminist advocacy is taking place in a context where strong continental commitments such as the Maputo Protocol (2003) and Agenda 2063 coexist with intensifying anti-gender mobilisation, shrinking civic space, and uneven state commitment to implementation. In some settings, the language of sovereignty and culture is being mobilised to resist gender accountability; in others, governments are caught between conservative domestic pressures and international commitments. At the same time, cuts to overseas development assistance of global North states and wider instability in the donor environment are undermining the organisations and coalitions that have carried feminist policy advocacy

across the continent. Tracking these pressures is essential if feminist foreign policy is to remain more than a symbolic register. We respond to this moment by documenting both openings and reversals, and by treating backlash itself as a foreign policy issue. In that sense, it is intended as a resource for feminist advocacy as much as a contribution to scholarship.

AFRICAN-OWNED NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS

The analysis in this report is anchored in African The analysis in this report is anchored in African normative frameworks. These are not treated as approximations of global standards, nor as the regional translation of external norms. They are the primary frameworks against which African policies and their feminist possibilities are assessed.

The African Feminist Charter, adopted by the African Feminist Forum, articulates the political principles of African feminist movements – including the insistence that feminism cannot be separated from anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, and the struggle against all forms of oppression. It is a foundational document of the feminist politics this report inhabits.

The Maputo Protocol – the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted in 2003 – is the continent's most comprehensive women's rights instrument. Its provisions extend beyond civil and political rights to include economic rights, land rights, reproductive rights, and the right to peace. Critically, it is an African instrument, developed through African political processes, and its adoption and implementation are direct measures of African states' commitments on their own terms.

Agenda 2063, the AU's continental development framework, embeds gender equality as a foundational condition of Africa's transformative vision. Goal 17 specifically commits to full gender equality in all spheres of life by 2063. The framework connects gender equality to economic transformation, political sovereignty, and the aspiration to silence the guns – linking the peace/security and development dimensions that are often treated as separate.

Silencing the Guns – the AU's flagship peace and security initiative – frames the elimination of conflict as both a precondition and an expression of Africa's development agenda. Its connection to gender-responsive peacebuilding, and to the specific conditions of women in conflict-affected contexts, is an ongoing analytical and political project this report contributes to.

The AfIP Statement of Intent grounds this report's own politics. AfIP's commitment to decolonial pan-African feminist analysis – to producing knowledge that is accountable to African feminist movements rather than to global gender governance structures – defines this report's orientation and its accountability relationships.

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY AS A CONTESTED SITE

This report treats feminist foreign policy not as a defined framework to be adopted or rejected, but as a contested political site. The proliferation of FFP adoptions over the past twelve years has not produced a settled definition. Governments have adopted FFP frameworks with radically different intent, purpose and content – from Sweden's relatively comprehensive gender mainstreaming approach to formulations that

amount to little more than a commitment to women's representation in diplomatic appointments.

More fundamentally, FFP as a concept was developed in and primarily for global North states articulating their operations from positions of structural power in the international system. The question of what feminist foreign policy means for states that are themselves structurally subordinated within that system – that still operate within colonially constructed limits, financial and trade conditionalities, debt policy traps, that navigate the interests of more powerful states in their own region and beyond – has not been adequately theorised in the existing literature.

This report begins from the position that feminist transformation of foreign policy in African contexts must grapple with both historic and emerging structural conditions, rather than bracket them. A feminist foreign policy that does not engage the gendered dimensions of extractive economic relationships, challenge the security arrangements that sustain elite interests at the expense of women's safety, or resist the instrumentalisation of gender binary and equality language by external actors pursuing other agendas, is not feminist foreign policy in any meaningful sense.

Foreign policy here is understood broadly to encompass the formal positions and strategies of African states in international arenas – bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, treaty commitments, participation in international institutions, trade and investment policy, peace and security engagements. But it also lies in the institutional conditions that shape what those positions can be: the composition and culture of foreign ministries and diplomatic corps; the role of heads of state and their advisory structures; the influence of regional bodies in shaping national positions. It encompasses the political processes through which foreign policy is contested, pressured, and sometimes transformed – including by feminist movements operating at the intersection of domestic and international politics.

Organising only around formal policy documents would miss the ways in which foreign policy is made in practice and would reproduce the marginalisation of movement actors that AfIP's analytical commitments reject.

This broad understanding is deliberate. Organising only around formal policy documents would miss the ways in which foreign policy is made in practice and would reproduce the marginalisation of movement actors that AfIP's analytical commitments reject. It would also obscure the domestic-international interface that is analytically central to feminist foreign policy analysis – the ways in which a state's treatment of women, girls and marginalized genders within its borders shapes and is shaped by its international gender commitments.

THE FIVE ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS

We explore interventions into foreign policy across five dimensions, each of which captures a distinct aspect of how feminist transformation of foreign policy is possible.

Institutional representation does a brief horizon scan of who occupies positions of foreign policy authority. Representation is a necessary but insufficient condition for feminist informed foreign policies and as such is limited in its possibilities for transformation in Africa.

Formal commitments and policy frameworks examine what states have committed to explicitly that provide entry points for feminist policies and policymaking. Critically, this dimension tracks not only adoption but content, underscoring that a framework or policy without resourcing is just a political signal, not a policy.

Peace, security, and WPS examines the constraints to feminist intervention, especially the rise of militarism and militarisation which exacerbates the gaps in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in Africa.

The economic dimensions of foreign policy explores how debt, trade, extractive political economies, aid dependence, and austerity shape the possibilities and limits of feminist foreign policy transformation across African contexts.

Anti-gender backlash as a foreign policy phenomenon examines how transnationally coordinated and increasingly well-resourced anti-gender mobilisations shape foreign policy positioning. This includes alliances around conservative gender politics, sovereignty claims used to resist gender accountability, and African governments' place within global culture war politics. Backlash is not only domestic; it is also a foreign policy strategy.

Our analytical commitments to pan-African feminism and movement accountability shape what we look for and what we find. All foreign policy analysis is produced from somewhere. This report is produced from here.

BETWEEN FORMAL COMMITMENTS AND THE REALITY

Over the last three decades, African states and regional institutions have developed gender regimes as evidenced by proliferation of frameworks, action plans, and declarations (Haastrup, 2013).

Formal commitments and policy frameworks examine what states have committed to explicitly that provide entry points for feminist policies and policymaking.

These have coalesced around several key frameworks: the domestication of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the adoption of the WPS agenda through regional and National Action Plans (NAPs), gender strategies within foreign ministries and other national institutions, and regional frameworks such as the Maputo Protocol. Additionally, policy commitments to women's representation in

diplomacy and mediation; and the incorporation of feminist or gender-responsive language into peacebuilding and development frameworks has enabled some feminist language to Africa's international relations praxis. This has been bolstered by investments in structural edifices like the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security and the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union level.

Yet the distance between formal commitments and lived political reality remains significant. The proliferation of frameworks, action plans, and declarations has not necessarily translated into transformative shifts in foreign policy practice, diplomatic culture, or security governance. Indeed, one of the defining tensions in contemporary African foreign policy is the gap between normative ambition and implementation capacity. As several assessments of WPS implementation across Africa note, many NAPs suffer from weak institutional ownership, inadequate budgets, inconsistent monitoring, and limited accountability mechanisms.

This implementation gap matters because WPS and gender-responsive foreign policy are often treated as symbolic commitments rather than structural political projects. In many contexts, gender inclusion becomes reduced to numerical representation or technocratic "mainstreaming," while deeper questions about militarism, extractive political economies, authoritarian governance, and unequal global power relations remain unaddressed. Feminist scholars and practitioners across Africa have therefore warned against approaches that celebrate visibility without transforming the institutions themselves.

The expansion of National Action Plans illustrates this contradiction clearly. Nearly 40 African states have adopted WPS NAPs, with the AU and international partners continuing to encourage further uptake (Amani Africa, 2025). Countries such as South Africa have developed comparatively comprehensive frameworks that link domestic safety, peacebuilding, regional diplomacy, and women's participation in security governance. South Africa's NAP, for example, explicitly recognises the interconnectedness of human security and state security, while outlining institutional mechanisms for implementation and monitoring (DIRCO, 2020). However, even relatively advanced frameworks reveal persistent challenges around coordination, funding, political will, and sustained civil society engagement.

The same tensions are visible in emerging discussions around what FFP means in the African context. While a few African states have made reference to the importance of gender-responsive foreign policy and the importance of gender equality approaches in their international engagements, there is very limited knowledge and unwillingness to engage normative implications of declaring feminist foreign policy, particularly on the part of policymakers. Furthermore, FFP has been met with suspicion by many African feminists who see it as an externally driven agenda and even a reproduction of the same unequal relationships that have characterised the international order (see Haastrup, 2025; Kezie Nwoha, 2026). Fundamentally, it remains the case that gender commitments are incorporated

into diplomatic language but without altering foreign policy priorities or institutional cultures. As a result, there is surface level attention to women's inclusion, which may coexist alongside expanding militarisation, shrinking civic space, democratic backsliding, or economic austerity.

What is clear is that representation alone does not necessarily produce feminist transformation. The growing visibility of women diplomats and mediators across Africa is important and should not be understated. However, African feminist analyses insist that participation must be linked to substantive power and agenda-setting authority. Women operating within foreign ministries, regional organisations, and peace processes frequently continue to navigate institutions shaped by masculinised security cultures, patronage politics, and global hierarchies that constrain transformative change.

So, the central question is not simply whether African states have adopted gender-responsive frameworks, but what these frameworks are being used to do. A feminist assessment of African foreign policy must move beyond counting policies, strategies, or women in office. It must ask whether these commitments are reshaping diplomatic priorities, redistributing power, strengthening accountability, resisting militarised approaches to security, and improving the material conditions of women and marginalised communities across the continent.

In this sense, the gap between formal commitment and political reality is not merely a problem of implementation. It is fundamentally about the struggle over what kind of foreign policy architecture African states and institutions seek to build – and whether gender justice is treated as central to peace, governance, and international relations, or simply as an add-on to existing systems of power.

Power and Institutional Representation:
Gender in Africa's Foreign Policy Architecture

The attempts to institutionalise gender equality and justice across regional governance structures has rarely been engaged as part of Africa's foreign policy approach, though it has often been narrated as evidence of progressive continental leadership.

This section aims to draw that connection between what we know about representation and African foreign policy architecture through the exploration of representation and power. By briefly exploring the current state of women's representation across Africa's foreign policy architecture, it is evident that representation alone does not transform the gendered logics through which diplomacy, security, and governance continue to operate.

Africa's foreign policy architecture is a complex, evolving, and decentralized system. It encompasses the institutions, norms, actors, and governance frameworks through which African states and regional bodies engage international politics and organise external relations. This architecture extends beyond individual state foreign ministries and diplomatic corps to include continental and sub-regional institutions such as the African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), as well as multilateral partnerships, diplomatic networks, and policy frameworks that shape Africa's collective and national engagements with the world.

Countries such as Namibia have near parity in women's legislative representation, while Ethiopia has 45.5% in female ministerial representation (Chukwu and Akpakpan, 2025).

This architecture is shaped by the legacies of colonialism, as much as by liberation struggles, Pan-Africanism, and contemporary geopolitics. It is a site where power is organised and contested through representation, access to decision-making, institutional culture, and the production of knowledge about security, diplomacy, development, and sovereignty. This section therefore explores not only who occupies positions of authority, but also how diplomatic institutions, and regional governance structures continue to reproduce masculinised and exclusionary norms even where formal commitments to gender equality exist.

Notable gains in women's political representation are evident across the continent. Countries such as Namibia have near parity in women's legislative representation, while Ethiopia has 45.5% in female ministerial representation (Chukwu and Akpakpan, 2025). Even in states celebrated for women's parliamentary representation, senior diplomatic and security appointments remain disproportionately male, underscoring the limits of reading numerical gains in domestic politics as evidence of transformation in foreign

policy institutions. According to the Women in Diplomacy Index, women accounted for only 22.5% of diplomats in Africa (Chehab, 2025). This gap matters because diplomatic power is reflected in ambassadorial appointments, participation in multilateral negotiations, peace mediation, and regional security forums, and women remain consistently underrepresented.

Several African states have appointed women foreign ministers or senior diplomats, and countries such as South Africa, Rwanda, Namibia, and Senegal have often been presented as continental leaders in women's political representation. Yet ambassadorial appointments, high-level mediation roles, and security diplomacy continue to be dominated by men.

The persistence of this imbalance reflects broader assumptions about diplomacy as a masculinised domain associated with strategic competition and elite political networks (Haastrup 2026). This is the case because diplomacy historically privileges forms of authority coded as masculine, such as rationality, militarised protection, and elite statecraft, while devaluing care, social reproduction, and relational approaches to politics (see Haastrup, 2026). This is reflected in patterns of appointment and promotion, where access to senior postings often depends on elite patronage networks, prior security or political experience, and informal institutional cultures that have historically privileged men. In Africa, this context is further complicated by the fact that diplomatic institutions continue to be shaped by colonial bureaucratic inheritances and postcolonial elite formations.

Importantly, limited institutional presence has not necessarily brought about feminist transformation. As Amanda Gouws' work on "femocrats" reminds us, women working within institutions often operate within deeply masculinised bureaucracies that constrain transformative politics (Gouws 1996). In practice, this can mean that women are present in foreign ministries or diplomatic services but remain excluded from the informal networks where postings, portfolios, and negotiating authority are often decided. (Haastrup, 2026). This matters because formal inclusion without access to the spaces where influence is actually exercised leaves the gendered distribution of diplomatic power largely unchanged.

African feminist perspectives already challenge the tendency to reduce gender equality to numerical representation. The dominant governance approach within many foreign ministries and regional institutions often equates progress with increasing the number of women in leadership positions. As African feminist scholarship has long shown, institutional inclusion can coexist with the narrowing of feminist agendas, particularly when gender equality is incorporated in ways that are technocratic, depoliticised, or detached from wider struggles over power and justice (Ahikire, 2014; Haastrup, 2013).

Without an explicitly feminist transformation of Africa's foreign policy architecture, representation alone leaves the core logics of foreign policy intact. Perhaps the most consequential of these is the question of force itself. If feminist transformation means interrogating the core logics of foreign policy rather than diversifying who administers them, then no logic demands more scrutiny than the one that treats military power as the default grammar of security. It is here, in the militarised foundations of how peace is imagined and pursued, that the gap between formal commitment and transformative practice becomes most stark.

A Feminist Reckoning: Decolonising the Economic Dimensions of Foreign Policy

A foreign policy that is truly feminist must examine the economic structures of extraction through which inequality is produced and sustained globally and Africa's (under)development rests.

To date, however, many feminist foreign policy interventions have not paid sufficient attention to the material conditions that shape gendered vulnerability, instead concentrating on questions of access, inclusion and representation. This is precisely why an African feminist intervention is needed. It recentres what matters - debt, trade, extraction, migration, care and social reproduction - as constitutive features of global inequality rather than secondary policy concerns. The central problem is that trade, debt, development finance, resource extraction and migration governance continue to be organised through unequal global rules that rely on Africa's subordinate incorporation into the international economy. These arrangements are not gender-neutral: they shape who carries risk, whose labour is made invisible, and whose livelihoods are treated as expendable.

The central problem is that trade, debt, development finance, resource extraction and migration governance continue to be organised through unequal global rules that rely on Africa's subordinate incorporation into the international economy.

Recent evidence supports this diagnosis. UNCTAD's 2024 Economic Development in Africa Report describes a context of interconnected shocks in which high debt, dependence on commodity exports and weak infrastructure deepen the continent's vulnerability. It notes that in 2023 nearly half of African countries had debt-to-GDP ratios above 60%, and that many were spending more government revenue on debt interest than on health or education. This broader pattern matters for feminist analysis because it shows that macroeconomic constraints are directly linked to the erosion of public provision and the transfer of social reproduction costs back onto households, where women disproportionately absorb them.

Trade illustrates these asymmetries clearly. While the AfCFTA creates an important Pan-African framework for regional integration and structural transformation, available evidence shows that women traders are still constrained by unequal access to information, finance, bribery, arbitrary charges, certification and border procedures. An AfCFTA Secretariat report, The Engine of Trade in Africa found that women are central to cross-border trade but face persistent barriers that limit their ability to benefit from market opening (AfCFTA, 2022). Related studies note that women make up a substantial majority of

informal cross-border traders in many regions, yet the practical requirements of formal trade regimes often exclude them (see Chiukira, 2024). The issue, then, is not simply whether women are mentioned in trade frameworks, but whether trade rules are designed around the realities of those who sustain local and regional economies (Kadau, 2025). The AfCFTA's Protocol on Women and Youth must be operationalized through simplified trade regimes, gender-responsive financial instruments, safe border infrastructure (including childcare), and the inclusive participation of grassroots traders in negotiations and monitoring. Care infrastructure should be recognized as an integral part of trade infrastructure.

Debt provides a second example. Recent reporting from UNCTAD shows that rising debt service is constraining fiscal space across the continent. When governments prioritise repayment under external pressure, expenditure cuts frequently fall on health, education and social protection (Kagumire, 2022). Feminist scholarship has long shown that such retrenchment does not eliminate care needs; it redistributes them into unpaid or underpaid labour, most often performed by women. A feminist lens on foreign policy attentive to economic justice must therefore treat debt governance and conditionality as core feminist concerns rather than as technical matters outside the gender agenda. The majority of African women are employed informally as traders, smallholder farmers, or care workers, with only a small fraction benefiting from social protection. Debt repayments that outpace investments in health and education, coupled with lender-imposed public sector cuts, disproportionately harm marginalised groups and women through job losses, reduced services, and increased unpaid care work (African Feminism, 2020). Full debt cancellation, not mere rescheduling, and comprehensive reform of global financial systems are essential to enable investment in social protection, public services, and care infrastructure—benefiting women and the broader economy.

The same logic applies to development finance. If development cooperation addresses the social harms of slavery, colonialism and net capital outflow associated with poverty, inequality and institutional weakness without confronting the historical and ongoing structures that produce those harms, then it risks managing crises rather than transforming conditions (African Feminism, 2020). This is why African and decolonial feminist interventions increasingly frame financing not only in terms of aid effectiveness, but in relation to reparation, policy autonomy and long-term support for feminist organising. In this context, the African Union's designation of 2025 as the Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations gives additional political weight to calls for restorative rather than disciplinary approaches to development finance including rejecting policy-eroding conditionalities, and channelling core, flexible, long-term funding directly to African feminist movements.

Achieving Feminist Foreign policies that champion women's and other marginalised peoples rights globally requires a fundamental restructuring of fiscal systems that currently drain resources from African states. For domestic revenues to increase, illicit financial flows and corporate tax avoidance, which siphon billions annually to wealthier economies must be addressed. In Africa, and especially amongst those countries championing FFP, it is essential to adopt multilateral initiatives such as UN tax conventions to strengthen source countries' taxing rights (Tax Justice Network, 2025). An equitable tax order is fundamental to funding women's rights. If fiscal justice

concerns the financial flows extracted from African economies, a parallel dynamic operates at the level of the physical resources beneath them.

Resource extraction, particularly around critical minerals, further demonstrates how green and digital transitions can reproduce older extractive logics. Recent policy debates increasingly position African mineral reserves as strategic assets for global decarbonisation and technological competition. Yet without attention to ownership, labour conditions, land rights and ecological damage, these transitions risk deepening dispossession rather than enabling equitable development. For feminist analysis, the key point is that extractive economies do not only generate state revenue; they also reorganise everyday life, often undermining the land-based livelihoods, food systems and care networks on which many women depend. Climate justice cannot be financed by sacrificing African women's lands; policy must centre food sovereignty and community-controlled resources. The pursuit of critical minerals for energy transitions risks perpetuating patterns of colonial extraction, resulting in environmental destruction, the displacement of women in rural areas without compensation, and the erosion of vital kinship networks. Women disproportionately shoulder the resulting environmental, economic, and social burdens. Instead, feminist alternatives such as agroecology, food sovereignty, and community-controlled resources must be prioritized and scaled up.

Migration governance should also be understood within this economic frame. Restrictive and externalised border regimes shape mobility in gendered ways, including by exposing women traders and migrants to violence, coercion and the loss of social support networks. Evidence from southern Africa, for example, shows that women informal cross-border traders routinely confront harassment, confiscation of documents and exploitative treatment at border posts. FFP informed by African realities must therefore connect mobility, labour and social reproduction, rather than treating migration only as a security issue. Militarized and externalized borders undermine the principles of FFP by treating the movement of people, particularly from formerly colonised countries, women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ individuals, as , and disregarding their agency. States across the world must work to guarantee safe and regular migration pathways, reject exploitative labor recruitment and trafficking, and channel cooperation through established African institutions. Funding should support the AU and RECs to increase regional capacities and care ethics in the global approach to migration. Importantly, frameworks of migration governance must actively involve migrants including women in the diaspora in designing migration policies that impact them.

The above examples demonstrate the value of African feminist interventions into foreign policy including FFPs by making the argument for why economic justice must be foregrounded. The task is not only to include women within existing arrangements, but to assess whether those arrangements themselves reproduce dependency and dispossession. That is the basis on which a decolonial approach to FFP can move from critique to substantive transformation. Yet, in the current moment the struggle for economic justice is also a struggle over political meaning, and anti-gender backlash has become one of the key ways feminist demands are being resisted, reframed, and delegitimised.

The threat of anti-gender mobilisations for Africa's International Relations

Gender justice has become a critical site of political contestation in Africa's foreign and domestic policy landscapes. Across the continent, anti-gender mobilisations are intensifying through alliances among religious actors, political elites, and transnational conservative networks.

These campaigns do not only target feminist and LGBTQI+ rights domestically; they are increasingly used to frame diplomatic positioning, assert sovereign authority, and resist global norms on gender equality (Paternotte and Kuhar 2017). Recent African scholarship similarly shows how anti-gender politics is gaining traction across the continent, undermining sexual and gender rights while drawing legitimacy from claims to culture, morality, and sovereignty (Sekga, 2024). From an African feminist perspective, this is not simply cultural backlash, but a political struggle over whose values, bodies, and futures matter in shaping Africa's place in the world.

This contradiction is especially stark because many African states publicly affirm commitments to gender equality, women's rights, and inclusive governance in regional and international forums, while anti-gender narratives gain traction in domestic politics and increasingly shape diplomatic posture. Appeals to sovereignty, culture, and decolonisation are often mobilised against feminist and sexual rights claims, even where the actors driving such campaigns are themselves embedded in transnational conservative networks. For African feminists, this reveals that anti-gender mobilisation is not a defence of cultural authenticity, but a political project that selectively instrumentalises anti-colonial discourse to consolidate patriarchal authority.

These narratives are amplified by transnational conservative actors who provide ideological framing, legal repertoires, and strategic connections to African partners, reflecting the wider circulation of anti-gender politics across borders (Case, 2019).

African feminist analysis helps to illuminate how these campaigns move across borders and become locally resonant. Anti-gender actors do not simply import ideas wholesale; they translate them into national idioms of morality, family, religion, and sovereignty. In Kenya, for example, conservative mobilisations draw on transnational anti-gender networks, with religious leaders and political elites framing gender equality and sexual rights as alien, "Western" impositions that threaten national culture and sovereignty (see Hörter, 2025). As feminist Sylvia Tamale (2020) suggests, these claims gain force through moralised public performances of respectability, family, and protection, allowing

anti-gender discourse to be recast as culturally authentic and politically legitimate while also projecting them into wider regional and international arenas.

Religious institutions are central to this process. From an African feminist perspective, they are not peripheral moral actors but key political infrastructures through which anti-gender agendas are legitimised, organised, and circulated. Evangelical and Catholic networks mobilise across borders, portraying reproductive justice and LGBTQI+ rights as existential threats to the family, religion, and nation. These narratives are amplified by transnational conservative actors who provide ideological framing, legal repertoires, and strategic connections to African partners, reflecting the wider circulation of anti-gender politics across borders (Case, 2019).

States have also instrumentalised anti-gender politics in ways that clearly exceed the domestic arena. Legislation such as Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act (2023), Nigeria's Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (2013), and recent anti-homosexuality initiatives in Mali (2023), Burkina Faso (2025)[1] and Senegal (2026) function not only as instruments of repression, but also as signals of sovereign defiance in relation to international scrutiny and donor pressure (Bosia, 2020). In these contexts, anti-gender politics becomes part of diplomatic positioning: governments frame gender and sexual rights conditionalities as neo-colonial interference, while presenting themselves as defenders of cultural integrity and national autonomy. For African feminists, this is a crucial insight. Anti-gender mobilisation is not only about restricting rights at home; it also shapes how states negotiate legitimacy, aid, and authority in the international arena.

The consequences are profound. Anti-gender mobilisations shrink democratic space, deepen insecurity for feminists and queer communities, and narrow the terms on which citizenship and belonging are imagined. They also distort Africa's engagement with global governance by recasting gender justice as foreign intrusion rather than as part of long-standing African struggles for dignity, autonomy, and emancipation. The transnational mobilisation and strategic misuse of gender discourse demands a feminist pivot to the foreign policy domain that recognises anti-gender politics as a structured political project that links domestic repression to wider contests over sovereignty, legitimacy, and Africa's place in the world.

A feminist response to anti-gender mobilisations must begin by recognising them not simply as domestic cultural backlash, but as transnational political projects that shape governance, diplomacy, and rights across the continent. This requires moving beyond reactive defence toward coordinated feminist strategy.

Towards feminist action: Reparations as a Framework of Care and Just Foreign Policies

Across Africa's foreign policy architecture, a common pattern emerges: African states and regional institutions have made important normative commitments on gender equality, peace, representation, and justice. Yet these commitments remain constrained by deeper structures of militarism, extractive political economy, institutional exclusion, and anti-gender backlash. These dynamics suggest that feminist action cannot be limited to inclusion within existing foreign policy arrangements. It must instead ask what would be required to repair the conditions that continue to make inequality, insecurity, and political marginalisation possible.

From an African feminist perspective, reparations offer one way of naming that task. Reparations are not only about financial compensation for historical wrongs, though material redress matters (Chigumadzi, 2023; AFLab, 2026). They are also a framework for confronting how slavery, colonialism, racial capitalism, patriarchal state formation, and ongoing global inequalities continue to shape foreign policy in the present (AfIP, 2026). In this sense, reparations provide a political language for linking historical injustice to contemporary structures of debt, dispossession, militarisation, border violence, democratic erosion, and the shrinking of feminist political space.

This framing is particularly urgent in the context of the African Union's reparations agenda. But its significance extends beyond any single policy process.

Understood in this broader way, reparations are inseparable from care. Care is not simply interpersonal support or welfare provision; it is the social, material, and political labour through which lives are sustained and futures made possible (Mezzadri, Newman and Stevano, 2021). An African feminist approach insists that foreign policy must be judged not only by how states defend territory, project power, or secure investment, but by whether they protect the conditions of life: peace, bodily autonomy, food systems, health, mobility, ecological survival, and the collective infrastructures that enable communities to endure and flourish. Where states retreat under conditions of austerity, militarisation, or backlash, the burden of repair is displaced onto women, communities, and feminist movements (Kelleher, 2020). A politics of care makes that displacement visible and refuses to treat it as natural.

Reparations as a framework of care therefore push feminist foreign policy beyond symbolic recognition. They demand redistribution, institutional transformation, and accountability (Kagumire, 2022). In economic terms, this means debt justice, fairer tax and trade regimes, protection against extractive transitions, and long-term support for public and care infrastructure. In peace and security terms, it means shifting resources and legitimacy away from militarised responses and toward feminist peacebuilding, social protection, and community survival. In institutional terms, it requires more than the presence of women in diplomatic spaces; it requires changing the norms, priorities, and cultures that continue to marginalise feminist agendas. And in political terms, it means defending feminist organising and resisting anti-

gender mobilisations that seek to narrow who counts, whose rights matter, and what forms of justice can be named.

This framing is particularly urgent in the context of the African Union's reparations agenda. But its significance extends beyond any single policy process. Reparations, understood through African feminist politics, offer a way to connect justice across the different terrains examined in this report. They provide a language not only of redress, but of reorientation: away from foreign policy as elite management of crises, and toward foreign policy as a practice of collective care, historical responsibility, and structural transformation. If feminist foreign policy in African contexts is to be meaningful, it must be able to repair as well as represent; to sustain life, not merely manage harm.

Against this broader reparatory horizon, the recommendations below set out actionable priorities for feminist transformation across Africa's foreign policy architecture.

1. African states and regional bodies should move beyond symbolic inclusion by strengthening institutional accountability for women's equal participation in diplomacy, mediation, and international representation, including through recommitment to CEDAW Article 8, transparent reporting, and measures to address patronage and informal gatekeeping.

2. Women, Peace and Security commitments should be repositioned as core to regional security governance, with sustained financing for women-led mediation, stronger accountability for implementation, and the inclusion of feminist movements and conflict-affected communities at all stages of peace processes. This requires mainstreaming WPS across foreign, defence, and finance ministries, not confining it to gender units, and integrating arms control and disarmament into WPS implementation, specifically addressing the gendered impacts of weapons proliferation.

3. Economic justice should be treated as a central foreign policy concern, including through support for debt justice, fairer trade and tax arrangements, protection against extractive transitions, and investment in public and care infrastructure as essential conditions for feminist transformation.

4. Anti-gender mobilisations should be treated as a foreign policy and democratic governance issue, with coordinated efforts to monitor transnational networks, expose their political and financial infrastructures, and defend feminist and queer organising under conditions of backlash and shrinking civic space.

5. African feminist movements and communities should be recognised as political actors in foreign policy, with sustained, flexible, and direct support for organising, knowledge production, and advocacy rooted in local histories, emancipatory traditions, and the everyday struggles that shape Africa's engagement with the world.

Conclusion

Recognised as a core feature of feminist foreign policy, gender equality is undoubtedly a feature of Africa's foreign policy praxis. The challenge is whether this has changed policy formulations and their practices especially in the foreign policy domain. Across diplomacy, peace and security, economic governance, and struggles over rights and political space, feminist language is more visible than before, yet too often without the institutional, financial, and political shifts needed to make it meaningful. For policy actors and funders, the implication is clear: commitments, frameworks, and representation matter, but they are not sufficient measures of transformation on their own.

What emerges instead is a more complex picture. African states and regional institutions have developed significant normative frameworks, and feminist actors have created important openings within and around them. Yet these gains continue to be constrained by militarised approaches to security, unequal economic structures, donor dependence, weak implementation, shrinking civic space, and coordinated anti-gender mobilisation. In this context, the challenge is not only to expand gender-responsive language, but to ensure that foreign policy is judged by whether it redistributes power, strengthens accountability, broadens political participation, and improves the material conditions under which women and marginalised communities live.

This analysis also underscores that Africa should not be approached only as a site where feminist policy is applied or tested. African feminist movements, regional instruments, and political traditions have long articulated approaches to justice, dignity, collective responsibility, and self-determination that are directly relevant to foreign policy. These perspectives matter not only for legitimacy, but for effectiveness. Policy frameworks are more likely to endure and deliver when they are grounded in the histories, priorities, and struggles of those who are most affected by conflict, extraction, exclusion, and backlash.

A key feminist lesson from the African perspective is that foreign policy cannot be separated from the wider systems that organise everyday life. Militarisation shapes whose safety counts. Debt, trade, extraction, and migration governance shape who bears economic risk and whose labour is made invisible. Anti-gender mobilisation reshapes democratic space and diplomatic positioning. Taken together, these dynamics make clear that feminist transformation cannot be reduced to inclusion within existing systems. It requires institutions and funders alike to engage with the deeper conditions that reproduce insecurity and inequality across the continent.

This is why AfIP argues for a broader reparatory and care-centred horizon. Reparations, understood in this context, are not only about historical acknowledgement or compensation; they offer a way of thinking about present-

day responsibility, redistribution, and repair. Likewise, care is not an optional social add-on, but a practical measure of whether foreign policy supports the infrastructures of life: peace, social protection, mobility, bodily autonomy, ecological survival, and the conditions under which communities can endure and flourish. For funders and policymakers, this means that support for feminist foreign policy must extend beyond short-term programming and symbolic commitments toward sustained investment in public institutions, care infrastructures, feminist organising, and accountability mechanisms.

Across the dimensions examined here, there is a practical but demanding conclusion. If feminist transformation is to be meaningful in African foreign policy, it must be resourced, monitored, and made answerable to those working at the sharpest edges of violence, exclusion, and dispossession. It must take African feminist movements seriously not as stakeholders to be consulted after the fact, but as political actors shaping what just foreign policy should look like. And it must recognise that backlash, militarisation, and economic injustice are not separate from foreign policy, but part of the terrain on which its future will be decided.

Ultimately, the measure of progress is not whether feminist language has been adopted, but whether foreign policy is being reoriented toward repair, accountability, and the sustaining of life. That is the standard this report proposes, and the challenge it leaves with governments, regional institutions, donors, and funders alike.

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