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Committee on Gender and Social Development**

Second session

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*

**Parallel sessions: (d) women's economic empowerment:  
boosting female entrepreneurship in Africa**

### **Women's economic empowerment: boosting women's entrepreneurship in Africa<sup>1</sup>**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. Women's economic empowerment is a process through which their capital (human, financial and physical) endowments increase along with their access to and benefits from economic opportunities, leading to improved agency and voice. Improving women's labour market skills and increasing their financial and physical assets can not only empower women directly, but also improve their access to decent employment, with higher wages, better career prospects and competitive business performance.

2. Given the features of African labour markets, with the majority of women in vulnerable employment, they are either self-employed workers (informal entrepreneurs in urban areas) or contributing family workers (agricultural workers in rural areas mostly without pay). Boosting women's entrepreneurship must therefore be a top policy priority not only to empower women economically, but also to ensure inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. In addition to the staunch commitment and various steps taken by African member States to advance gender equality on the continent, integration of gender into legislative frameworks, national policy, plans and programmes, the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063, among others, specifically provide targets for member States to attain women's economic empowerment within time frames.

3. In the light of these responsibilities, the African ministers responsible for gender and women's affairs who attended the sixty-first session of the Africa Pre-Consultative Meeting on the Commission on the Status of Women noted, among other things, the importance of promoting "women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work", which was also the theme for the session. The African Centre for Gender of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) provides information and evidence to support policymaking

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\* E/ECA/CGSD/2/1

<sup>1</sup> An Expert Group Meeting was held in Addis Ababa on 24 and 25 August 2017 to review and validate the present report. There were 33 participants, including government representatives of various line ministries, academia, the private sector and regional civil society organizations. The report is under revision and expected to be finalized by the end of October 2017. The African Centre for Gender can provide country-specific policy action briefs at the request of member States.

efforts by African Governments to strengthen women's entrepreneurship and produced the present report.

4. This report is aimed at offering (primarily) a body of knowledge and analysis on the pathways and policy tools available to Governments in dealing with women's entrepreneurship; showing the relationship between economic empowerment and women's empowerment; and contributing to women's economic empowerment by boosting their entrepreneurship in Africa on the basis of the evidence provided.

5. A wide range of data and information, mainly from international sources that offer individual, firm and country-level data for the post-2010 period, were made use of in this report. It follows an empirical approach and relies exclusively on quantitative methods using data from Angola, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt and Mali. It also includes a profile of women entrepreneurs at each stage and highlights characteristics of their firms or activities in formal and informal sectors; a catalogue of the constraints that women entrepreneurs face in each sector, along with gender gaps; and an evaluation of their firm's performance. It also provides a linkage to increased agency and voice for women. Given the limited data availability, the analysis is limited mostly to the urban non-agricultural economy.

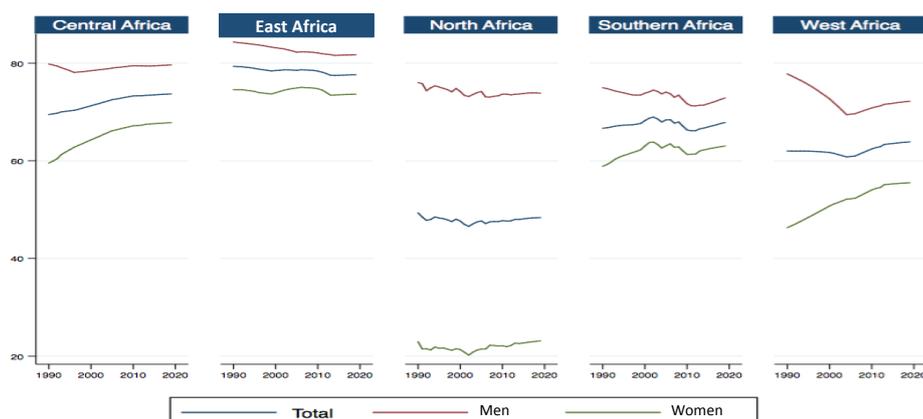
6. The report is a summary of a larger document that the African Centre for Gender will publish later in 2017. It was presented for review and validation to an Expert Group Meeting of authorities from government departments, the banking sector, research institutions, organizations working on women entrepreneurship and other related sectors. The experts provided valuable information that is being used to finalize the larger document. It will be presented to the Committee on Gender and Social Development to generate a discussion on how the ministries of gender and women and other related government departments can use it and look at other work that the ministries deem critical to strengthen women's economic empowerment.

## **II. Profiling women entrepreneurs in Africa**

### **A. Overview of African women in labour markets**

7. Women in Africa participate in the labour force at higher rates than anywhere in the world, with approximately two thirds of women in the labour force, albeit with large subregional variation. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), approximately 66 per cent of women in Africa participate in the labour force, but among employed women, only 20 per cent are in wage employment, leaving the majority in the labour force in self-employment. Figure I shows that 20 per cent of women in North Africa participate in the labour force but that close to 80 per cent do so in Eastern Africa. While participation rates are high for women, they include both unemployed and employed women. It is important to note that unemployment rates for women, in particular for young women, are high in Africa and those employed are often underemployed, with less than 30 to 35 hours of labour supply per week.

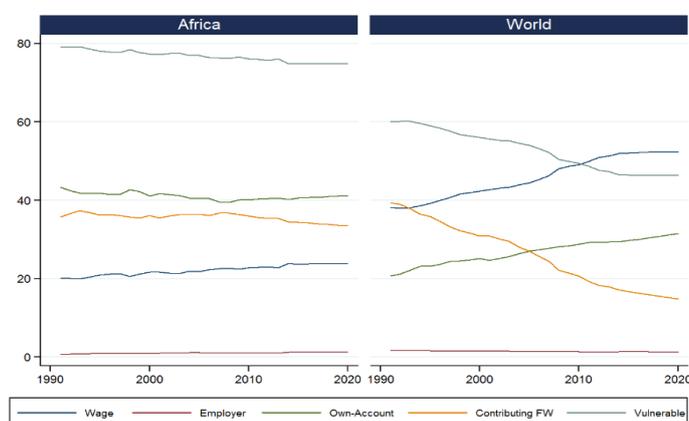
Figure I  
**Women's labour force participation rate by subregion (Per cent)**



Source: International Labour Organization, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market* (1990-2020).

8. While participation rates are encouragingly high, member States face difficult challenges in moving women into productive and good-quality employment. Figure II provides the trends in status and sector of employment over time. The major cause of concern is the proportion of women in vulnerable employment, that is, self-employed workers and contributing family workers, which is extremely high and projected to be 75 per cent by 2020. According to ILO, self-employment includes employers, members of producers' cooperatives and contributing family workers. It is therefore foreshadowed in figure II that the women entrepreneurs profiled in this report are constituted mainly from the vulnerably employed.

Figure II  
**Status of women's employment (Per cent)**



Source: International Labour Organization, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market* (1990-2020).

## B. Overview of women-owned enterprises in Africa

9. Entrepreneurship is not an easily defined one-dimensional phenomenon. A new definition is not introduced in this report, which relies on the definition put forward by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, a consortium of research institutions that collect global data on indicators that help to catalogue various types of entrepreneurs. According to the Monitor, the definition of entrepreneurship is "any attempt at new business or new venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organization, or the expansion of an existing business, by an individual, a team of individuals, or an established

business". Several advantages follow from this definition. First, entrepreneurship is not just for formally registered businesses. Second, the entire process of entrepreneurship is internalized from the initial planning stage. Lastly, any type of business activity is accepted, thereby ensuring that women who may not be involved in traditional sectors or occupations are not left out.

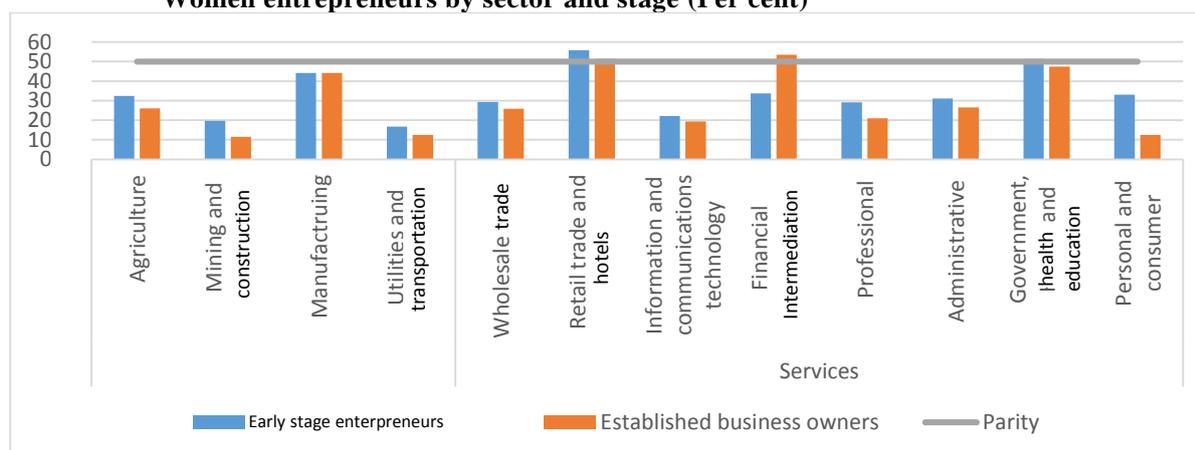
10. It is important to note by the figures offered by ILO above that, among the majority of the 66 per cent of women in Africa who participate in the labour force, only 20 per cent are in wage employment, leaving the majority in the labour force in self-employment. Not all self-employed women in Africa are truly entrepreneurs. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, women entrepreneurs in Africa are more likely to be driven by necessities than opportunities, unlike entrepreneurs who are men. Looking at other regions, necessity-driven entrepreneurship is higher in Africa compared with Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean.

11. A large number of women entrepreneurs in Africa have a more positive self-perception about entrepreneurship than elsewhere in the developing world and they are less likely, on average, to prevent themselves from engaging in entrepreneurship owing to fear of failure. A critical demographic feature in these self-perceptions is age. Women between 18 and 24 years of age have much narrower networks and fear failure more than women aged 25 years and above. The prevalence rates corroborate the positive self-perceptions.

12. Gender gaps, on average, are not high in Africa when dividing the prevalence of entrepreneurship into types of entrepreneurs, for example, nascent entrepreneurs who are at the start of their entrepreneurial activities but have not yet paid their employees and owners of young businesses owners who own firms that are older than 3 months but younger than 42 months. There are also the established business owners who own businesses for more than 42 months and future entrepreneurs who expect to launch a business in the coming three years.

13. Figure III shows the sectoral distribution of women entrepreneurs by stage of their activity. The stylized fact is that the services sector is dominant among women entrepreneurs. For example, close to 60 per cent of the early stage entrepreneurs are in the retail trade and hotels subsector (women in Botswana, Ghana, Senegal and Uganda), while only 15 per cent of the incumbent entrepreneurs in the mining and construction and utilities and transportation subsectors are women. Some shifts are in the making, however, when newcomers are compared with incumbents, that is, newcomers are shifting away from financial intermediation towards personal consumer goods, mining and construction and agriculture.

Figure III  
Women entrepreneurs by sector and stage (Per cent)

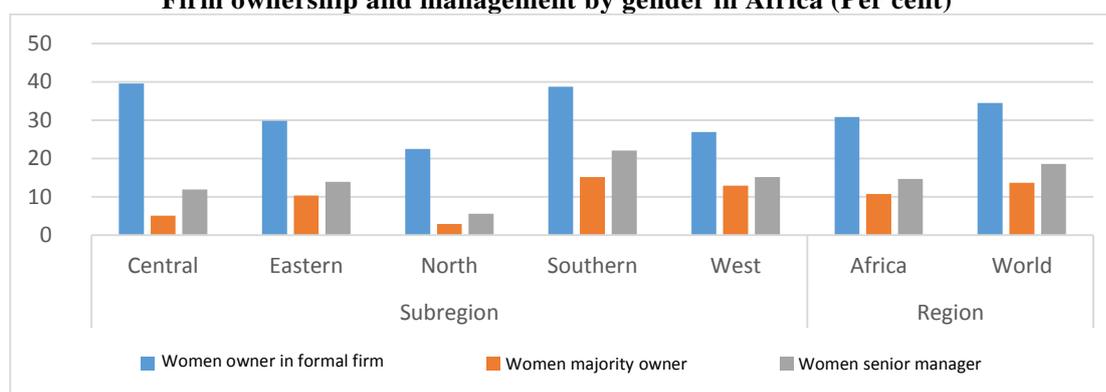


Source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2012-2016).

Note: Early stage entrepreneurs are those who run firms with less than 42 months of operation, while established business owners are those who have been in business for more than 42 months.

14. Figure IV focuses on firm ownership and management at the subregional and regional levels. The blue bar shows the share of firms with women participating in firm ownership, notwithstanding the shares of ownership. The orange bar shows the share of firms in which a woman is the majority owner, holding at least 51 per cent of the firm's shares. The grey bar shows the share of firms with senior managers who are women. In both variables, firms owned by entrepreneurs who are men fare better than those owned by women, but when compared with the world, Africa's prevalence rates are below the world average. Focusing on subregions, North Africa exhibits lower participation, ownership and management by women compared with the other subregions. Southern Africa is at the other extreme, with a large presence of women in senior management.

Figure IV  
Firm ownership and management by gender in Africa (Per cent)



Source: World Bank enterprise surveys (2006-2016).

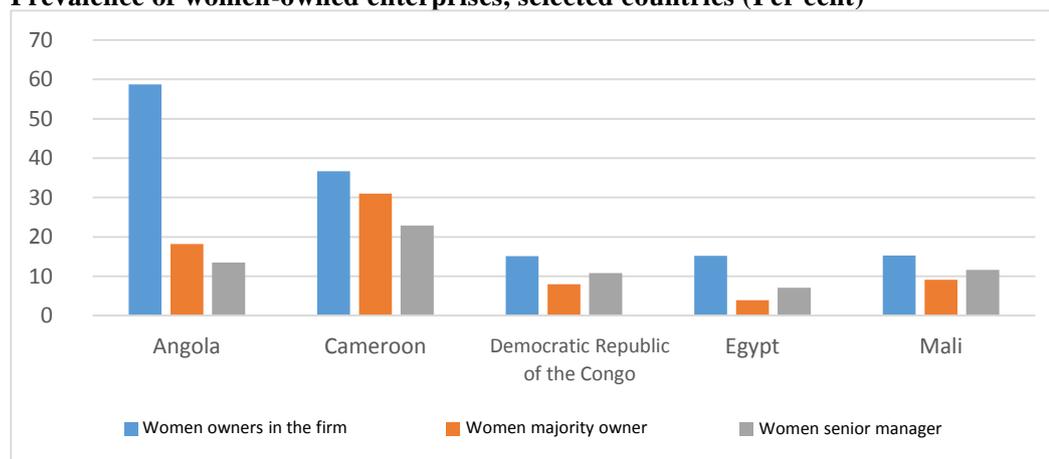
#### Ownership by women among formal enterprises

15. Focusing on Angola, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt and Mali, the prevalence of ownership by women of formal enterprises varies widely between the subregions.<sup>2</sup> Figure V displays three measures of women's involvement in formal enterprises in the same vein as figure IV. The first indicator measures the share of firms with at least one woman owner among

<sup>2</sup> There are more than 4,000 firms in the five countries. Prevalence rates are computed using sample weights to reach a consistent inference on population moments. Coverage by country is as follows: Angola (2010), Cameroon (2016), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2013), Egypt (2013) and Mali (2016).

all owners, the second indicator measures the share of firms owned by women with at least 51 per cent of the shares of the firm and the third indicator measures the share of firms with a woman senior manager. In Angola and Egypt, there are large gaps between women participating in the ownership of a firm and in owning the majority of the firm. Nevertheless, it is very promising to observe that nearly 60 per cent of formal enterprises have at least one woman owner in Angola. While it is often the case that firms owned by women have women senior managers, the gaps between these two indicators suggest that, in Angola and Cameroon, women's access to enterprises owned by men is more limited than in the other three countries. Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt and Mali, women may find it easier to become a senior manager vis-à-vis firm owner.

Figure V

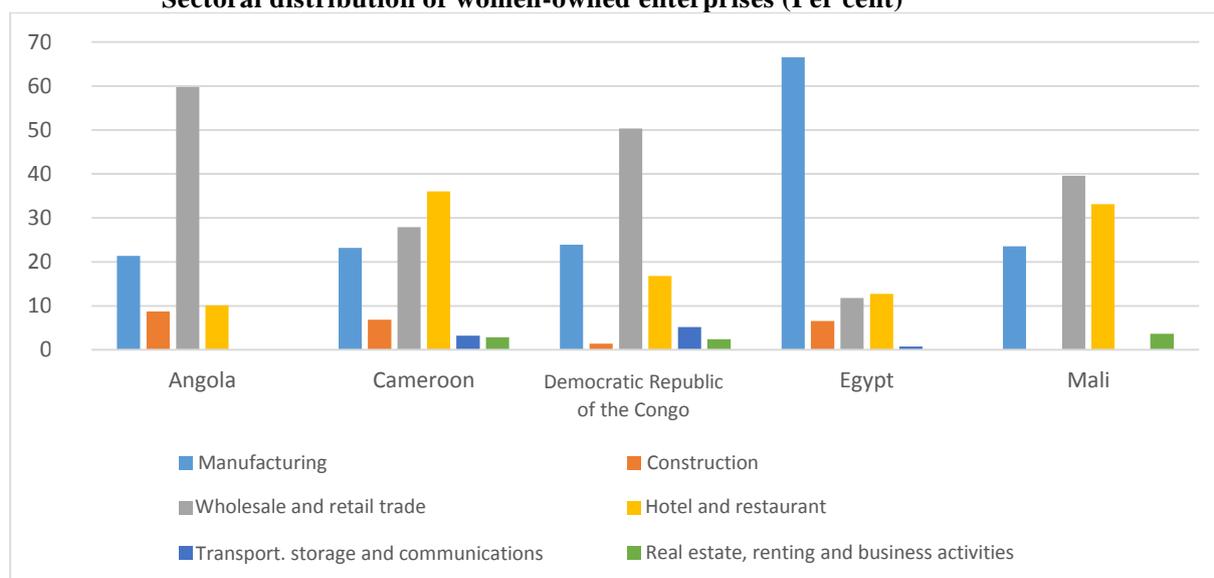
**Prevalence of women-owned enterprises, selected countries (Per cent)**

Source: World Bank enterprise surveys (2010-2016).

16. Figure VI presents the sectoral distribution of women-owned enterprises in the five countries. The three sectors that emerge as the most populated sectors with such enterprises are manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and hotel and restaurant. Wholesale and retail trade comes first as the most populous sector with the exception of Egypt, where two thirds of the enterprises report operating in the manufacturing sector. Excluding Egypt, slightly less than one quarter of these enterprises report operating in the manufacturing sector. The hotel and restaurant sector is the third biggest sector, with Cameroon and Mali recording some one third of enterprises. The gender gaps<sup>3</sup> observed are found mostly in the hotel and restaurant sector in which the women-owned enterprises are, on average, four times more likely to operate. Interestingly, the second largest gap is in construction, again in favour of women, with the only exception of Mali, where no such enterprises exist in this sector.

<sup>3</sup> Gender gap is computed, on the basis of two ratios: the share of women-run enterprises in manufacturing within all such enterprises divided by the share of enterprises run by men in manufacturing within all such enterprises. Constructed this way, gender gaps do not relate to which gender dominates a given sector.

Figure VI  
Sectoral distribution of women-owned enterprises (Per cent)



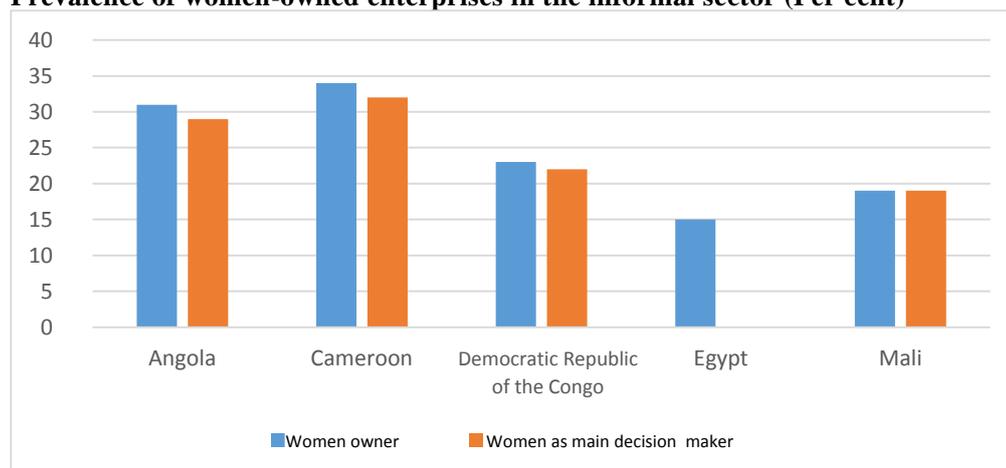
Source: World Bank enterprise surveys (2010-2016).

#### *Women entrepreneurs among informal enterprises*

17. Women employed as self-employed workers is a frequent phenomenon in the non-agricultural economy. It is therefore paramount that the analysis extend to informal enterprises.<sup>4</sup> A large amount of data are available from such enterprises, including demographic variables pertaining to the owners. Figure VII shows that prevalence rates are much higher in the informal sector than in the formal sector. In the five selected countries, on average, there are two and a half times more women-owned enterprises in the informal sector. Only in Cameroon can one observe similar rates of women ownership in the two sectors. Egypt has the largest difference. An additional variable in the surveys is whether the largest owner is also the main decision maker. With few exceptions, in all five countries, there is almost a one-to-one overlap between the largest owner and the main decision maker. Substantial regional variation exists in the five countries. It is worth noting that, only in the city of Benguela in Western Angola, does the share of women-owned enterprises exceed that of enterprises owned by men.

<sup>4</sup> Data in this subsection come from informal enterprise surveys with the following country-year pairs: Angola (2010), Cameroon (2009), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2013), Egypt (2008) and Mali (2010). Informal enterprise surveys are much less common than enterprise surveys, but Africa is the leading region, with the most informal enterprise surveys per region globally.

Figure VII

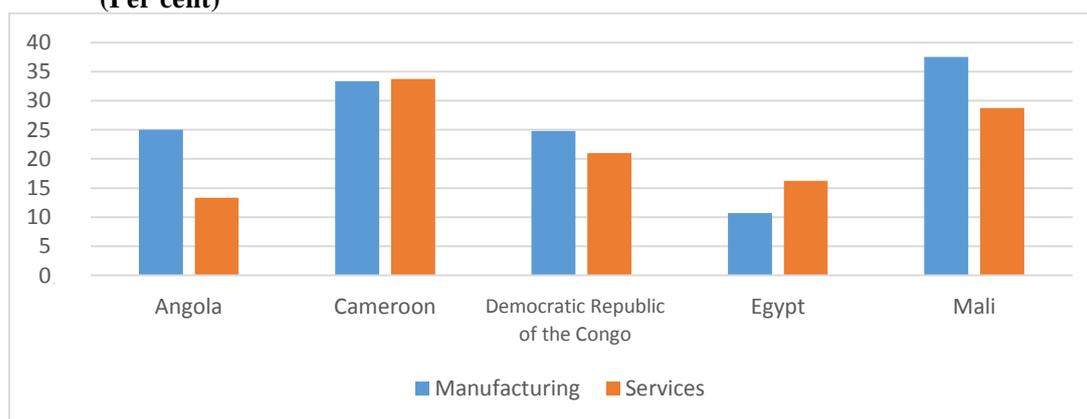
**Prevalence of women-owned enterprises in the informal sector (Per cent)**

Source: World Bank informal enterprise surveys (2008-2013).

Note: In Egypt, the shares of ownership are not given by gender. The share represents the percentage of firms that have at least one principal women owner. Only 2.6 per cent of the respondents are women.

18. In addition, unlike formal enterprises, informal enterprises predominantly operate in the manufacturing sector. Figure VIII shows the share of women-owned enterprises in the manufacturing and services sectors at the most aggregate level. Women-owned enterprises, at best, represent close to 40 per cent of manufacturing firms in Mali, while Cameroon follows, with slightly more than 30 per cent. Further disaggregation of these two sectors indicates that women tend to focus on the following sectors: clothing, coffee, sugar and baked food in the manufacturing sector, and the sale of food and clothing in the wholesale and retail trade sector. Women entrepreneurs are also in cleaning and washing services and hairdressers in the services sector.

Figure VIII

**Sectoral distribution of women-owned enterprises in the informal sector (Per cent)**

Source: Data taken from the World Bank informal enterprise surveys (2008-2013).

19. Gender gaps are computed by relating the share of women-owned enterprises in manufacturing among all such enterprises to the share of enterprises owned by men in manufacturing among all such enterprises. It is important to note that gender parity is attained in Cameroon, gender disparity against women is observed in Egypt and gender disparity against men is observed in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali. The implication here is that women-owned enterprises are more prevalent in the

informal manufacturing sector than in the formal manufacturing sector, except for Egypt.

20. Lastly, in the informal sector, the study found that there are more women-owned young enterprises than in the formal sector. They are predominantly micro-sized and small-sized firms. Relative to enterprises owned by men, women reported a much higher likelihood of operating from their household premises, in particular in Angola, Cameroon and Mali. While most women purchase assets, only a minority have financed assets through formal financial institutions. This relates to another finding that less than one third of women-owned enterprises in the five countries report having applied for loans in the previous year, while the majority of them hold bank accounts. In addition, looking at the demographic features of women-owned enterprises, the majority of women are married and above 30 years of age but exhibit a strikingly higher level of educational attainment relative to relevant national averages.

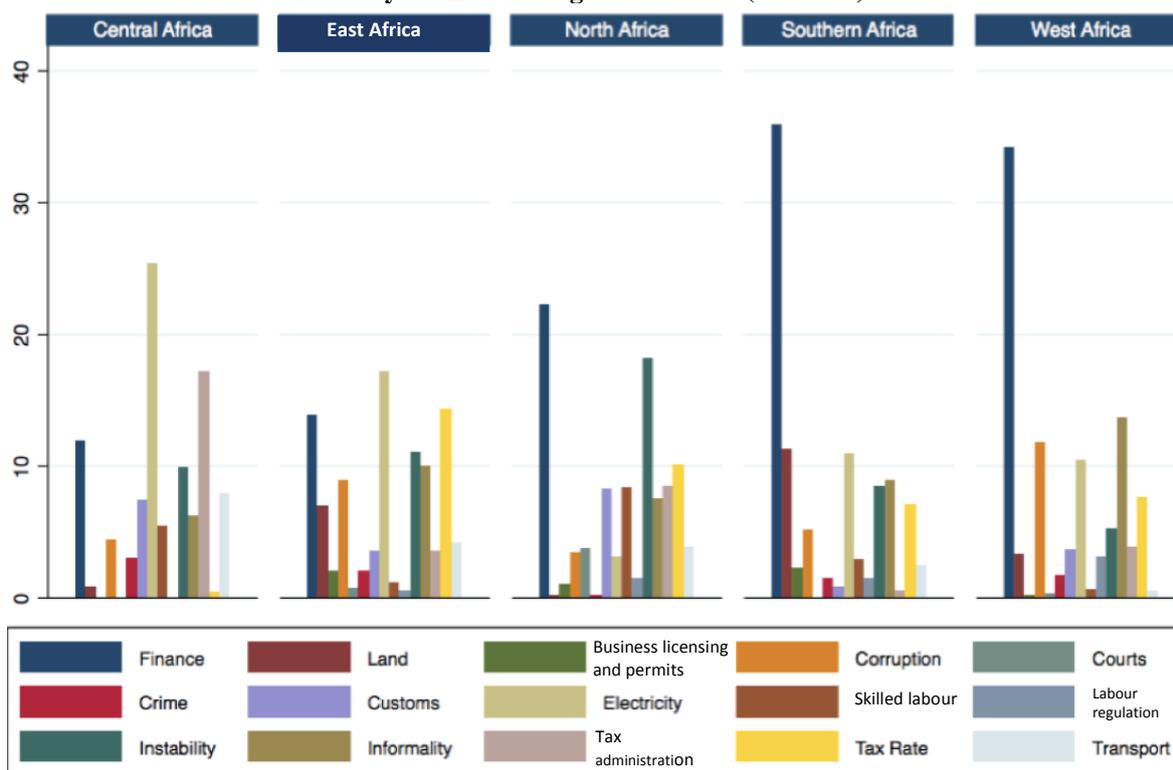
### **III. Constraints to women entrepreneurs in Africa**

21. Given the profile of women entrepreneurs and women-owned enterprises in Africa, this report contains an outline of a list of identified major constraints faced specifically by women entrepreneurs and their enterprises. It is nevertheless important to underscore that these constraints vary from country to country and over time. Even in a specific country, women-owned enterprises in the manufacturing sector face a different set of constraints than those in the services sector. In addition, registered firms report a broad variety of constraints than unregistered firms. Lastly, constraints differ throughout firms of various sizes.

22. Prior to country-level analysis, figure IX provides an overall picture of the major obstacles facing women entrepreneurs with formal enterprises by subregion. First, the most frequently reported biggest constraint by women senior managers is access to finance, in particular for Southern and West African women. Notwithstanding the large share of women-owned firms that do not apply for loans, access to finance remains the biggest obstacle for their firms' operations. Corroborating this finding is the fact that the majority of women-owned firms in Africa finance their working capital and asset purchases through retained earnings. Given that most firms are in the services sector with low profit margins and high competition, it is unlikely that retained earnings can accumulate to an extent that would allow either sectoral shifts or significant growth in the sector of operation.

23. Electricity is the second most frequently reported biggest obstacle, in particular in Central Africa and Eastern Africa. For example, more than 40 per cent of women managers in the Central African Republic and Djibouti complain that it is the biggest obstacle to their operations. Political instability is the third most prevalent constraint, especially in North Africa, owing to the recent turmoil in the subregion. Various parts of Africa voice similar concerns. For example, in Madagascar (2013), 54 per cent of the firms identified political instability as their biggest constraint. In Guinea and Mali, more than 40 per cent of women senior managers complain about political instability as the biggest constraint to their operations. At the other end of the spectrum, business licensing and permits, access to courts and labour regulations are the least frequently noted constraints.

Figure IX  
Constraints faced by women managers in Africa (Per cent)

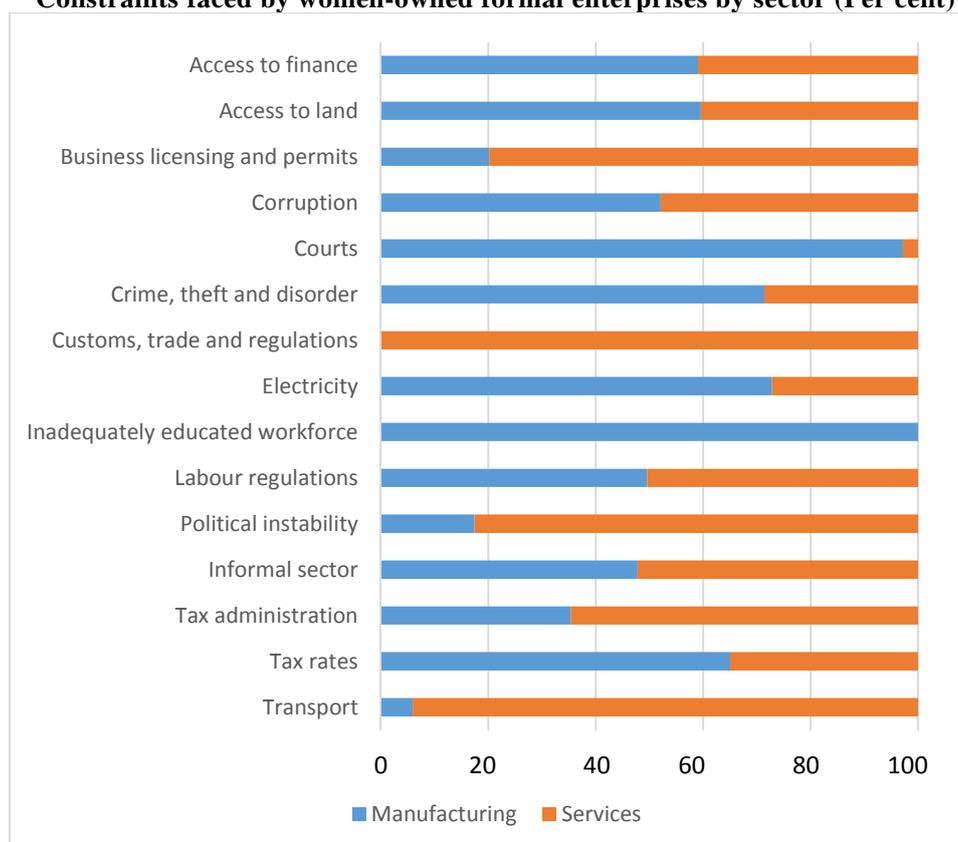


Source: World Bank enterprise surveys (2009-2016).

#### IV. Formal enterprises and profile of constraints

24. Formal enterprises face a myriad of constraints in simultaneous way. Figure X refers to the biggest constraint affecting the operation of establishments owned by women and presents an aggregation of their response to constraints (for Angola, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt and Mali) by the manufacturing and services sectors. It is important to note that these are all perceptions of the main decision maker in each enterprise. Accordingly, they are subjective measures and open to transient circumstances, such as recent experiences of a firm's owner.

Figure X  
**Constraints faced by women-owned formal enterprises by sector (Per cent)**

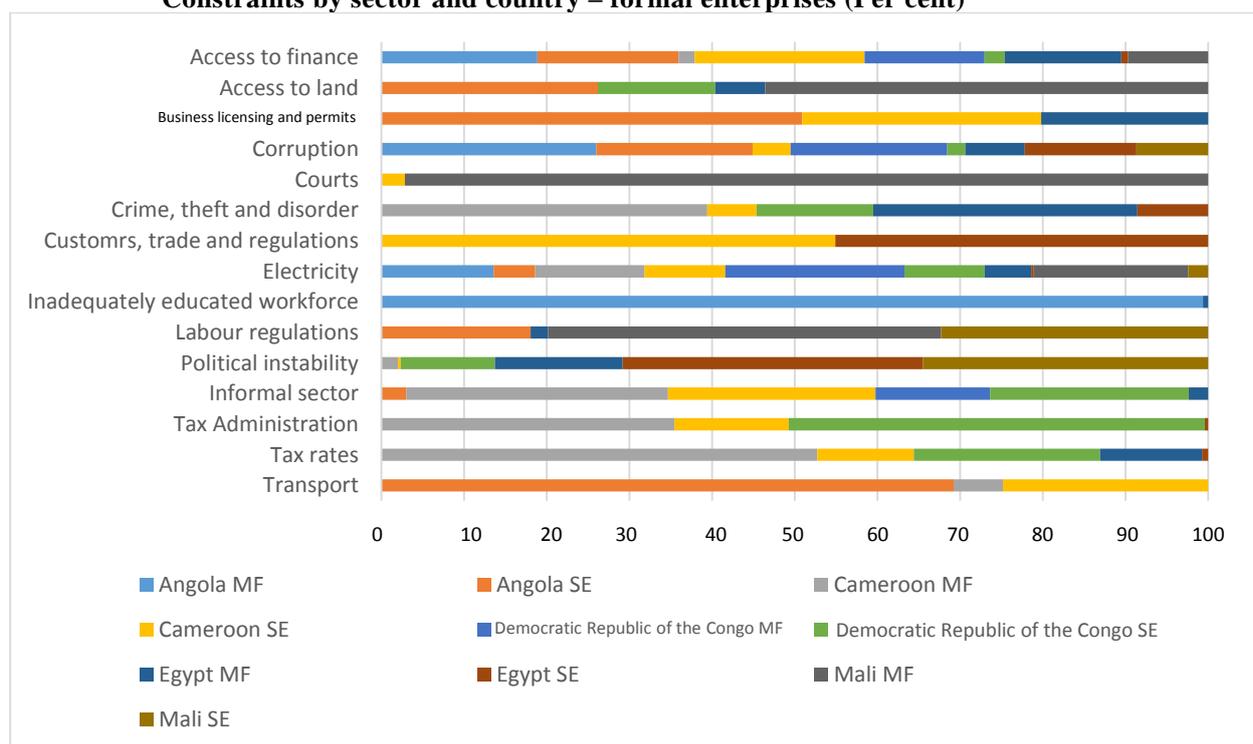


Source: World Bank enterprise surveys (2010-2016).

25. A firm's sectoral choice influences the types of constraints faced. For example, firms in the manufacturing sector complain mainly about an inadequately educated workforce, access to courts and electricity, while firms in services complain about customs, trade and regulations, political instability, business licensing and permits and transportation. Although manufacturing firms are more likely to complain about access to finance, the gap between firms in both sectors is a lot less than the constraints mentioned earlier. Lastly, some constraints affect firms in each sector equally. Corruption, labour regulations and practices of the informal sector and the competition that follows from informal enterprises are among the top constraints that receive equal attention from both sectors.

26. Figure XI disaggregates sector-level constraints by the five countries. First, manufacturing firms are more likely to report access to finance as their biggest constraint, with the exception of Cameroon, where firms in the services sector disproportionately refer to this constraint. While access to land is more relevant for the services sector, the manufacturing firms in Mali complain about it more.

Figure XI  
Constraints by sector and country – formal enterprises (Per cent)



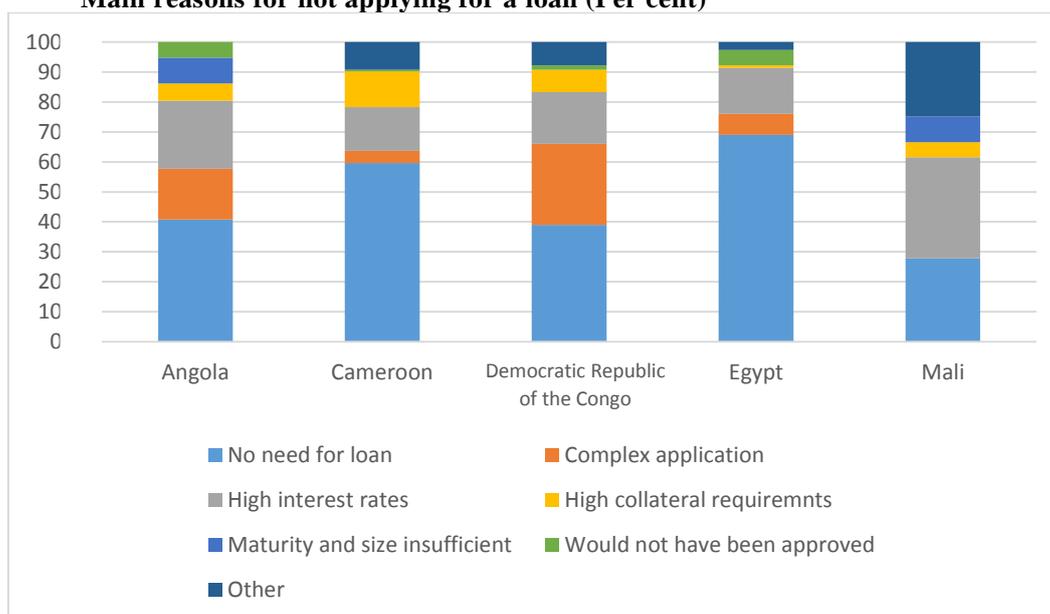
Source: World Bank enterprise surveys (2010-2016).

Abbreviations: MF, manufacturing; SE, services.

27. Access to courts is a predominantly Malian problem in the manufacturing sector and transportation is a problem for the Angolan services sector. Manufacturing firms in Angola feel constraints caused by an inadequately educated workforce. In Cameroon, firms in the services sector complain primarily about customs and trade regulations, while labour regulations receive the utmost attention from all Malian women-owned enterprises. Lastly, it is worth noting that mainly manufacturing firms in all five countries mentioned the problem of electricity. Among the 15 constraints listed (see figure XI), electricity and access to finance emerge as the most cross-cutting constraints in the sample countries.

28. With regard to having access to finance in the five countries, slightly less than 40 per cent of the women-owned firms reported having purchased an asset. When asked about financing the enterprise, the majority of both enterprises owned by men and women reported having used retained earnings. The share is as high as 98.4 per cent in Egypt, 91.1 per cent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 89.2 per cent in Angola. In these three countries, the share of firms that used financing from banks is less than 5 per cent. It is only in Mali that less than 60 per cent of the firms used retained earnings, and almost 30 per cent of the women-owned enterprises used bank financing.

Figure XII  
Main reasons for not applying for a loan (Per cent)



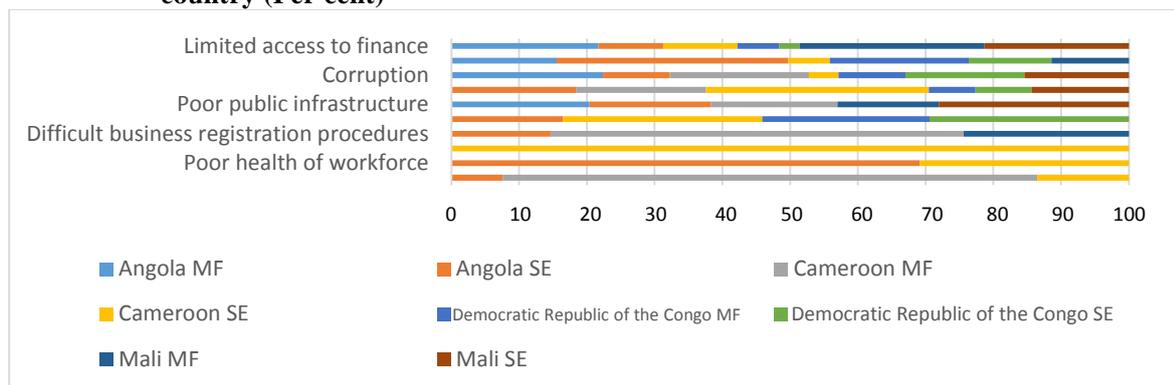
Source: World Bank enterprise surveys (2010-2016).

29. Looking at the financing sources for working capital does not change the overall picture that close to 90 per cent of the women-owned enterprises reported retained earnings as their main source for working capital. One reason behind this result is the reluctance of women-owned enterprises to apply for loans. Figure XII provides some insights as to why these enterprises do not apply for loans. In the sample of firms that did not apply for a loan in the five countries, for example, at least 40 per cent suggest that they do not need a loan. This figure reaches 70 per cent in Egypt and 60 per cent in Cameroon. In Mali, high interest rates rank as the number one reason why firms did not apply for a loan, while the firms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo argue that the application procedure is too complex. While 5 per cent of the women-owned enterprises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo report that the requirement to obtain a partner's permission discouraged them from applying for a new loan, this figure drops down to 1 per cent for enterprises owned by women.

## V. Informal enterprises and profile of constraints

30. The constraints perceived by owners and managers of registered and unregistered firms that operate in the manufacturing and services sectors (without excluding registered microfirms) are similar. Figure XIII shows a sectoral analysis of the constraints faced by women-owned unregistered enterprises, comparing constraints in the manufacturing sector with the services sector.

Figure XIII  
**Constraints faced by women-owned informal enterprises by sector and country (Per cent)**



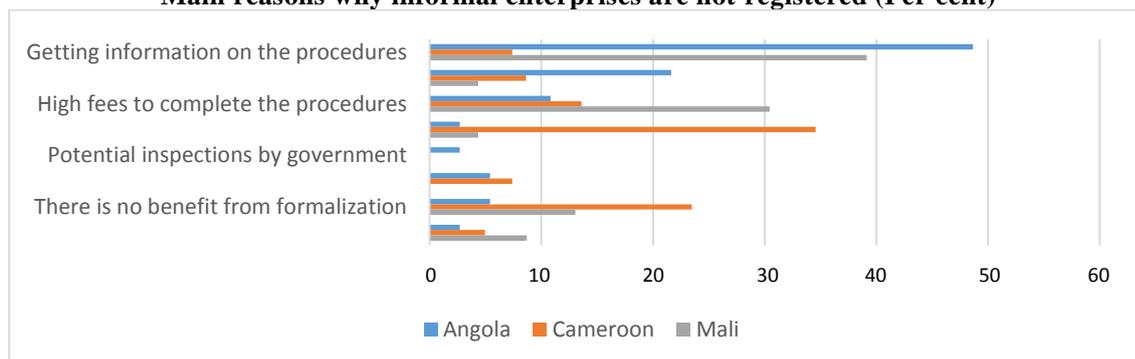
Source: World Bank enterprise surveys (2008-2013).

Abbreviations: MF, manufacturing; SE, services.

31. Firms in manufacturing and services sectors equally identify corruption and poor public infrastructure as the biggest obstacle to their operations. Sectoral gaps are not wide in terms of limited access to finance and restricted access to land. For firms in the services sector, quality of workers emerges as a bigger constraint, compared with the manufacturing sector. For example, only firms in the services sector identified unreliable workers and poor health of the workforce (Cameroon and Angola) as their biggest constraints, albeit the majority reported inadequately educated workforce as the biggest constraint. In the manufacturing sector, on the other hand, firms reported business registration procedures and limited demand for products and services as the biggest obstacles to the operations of their enterprises.

32. Figure XIV provides some insight into the reasons why some of the women-owned enterprises are not registered. In Angola and Mali, the most frequent responses for not registering relate to the procedure itself. In addition, only 5 per cent of the firms in Angola state that there is no benefit from registering. This figure increases to 13 per cent for Mali.

Figure XIV  
**Main reasons why informal enterprises are not registered (Per cent)**



Source: World Bank informal enterprise surveys (2008-2013).

33. In Cameroon, the main reason for remaining informal is a structural one, in the sense that the majority of women-owned enterprises are concerned about taxes and close to one quarter of the firms argue that there is no benefit from formalization.

## VI. Findings and policy recommendations

34. This report has provided an outline of the situation with regard to women entrepreneurs in Africa in the five countries under study and has highlighted the major challenges facing these women. Evidence from the study shows that the majority of women in the labour force are self-employed informally in the services sector on the continent. They are constrained, however, by social, cultural, economic, political, personal, and household and community factors that hinder them from engaging in productive activities in lucrative sectors. Specifically, the study produced the following key findings:

- (a) Labour markets in Africa are not conducive to women's economic empowerment. Women are stuck in vulnerable self-employment, with large wage and income gaps and sectoral and occupational segregation, and they face legal barriers to economic opportunities;
- (b) Legal barriers, insufficient incentives and time poverty force women to self-select into necessity-driven entrepreneurship in the services sector;
- (c) The prevalence of women-owned enterprises varies throughout Africa but remains below 30 per cent. In both the formal and informal sectors, women-owned enterprises are widespread in the services sector, with the exception of Egypt (only 4 per cent of formal enterprises are owned by women). The majority of women-owned enterprises are micro or small ones and operate in wholesale and retail trade and hotels and restaurants subsectors. Women-owned enterprises are younger, less likely to be formalized and less likely to export their goods. They are more likely to operate from household premises;
- (d) In the business world, women-owned enterprises face similar challenges to those owned by men, especially when comparing those ones from the same sector, formality and location. Women report access to finance as being one of the top listed constraints in formal, informal and microenterprises. While only a minority of firms report having loans, the main response from among those that do not have loans is that they do not need them. Both men and women have used retained earnings to finance asset purchases and working capital for their enterprises;
- (e) The majority of informal enterprises in the selected countries identify non-structural barriers to formalization, given that only a few report taxes as their main reason for not formalizing. Streamlining the formalization process should help most of these firms to make the transition into formal firms, given that they report several expected advantages, ranging from access to finance to markets;
- (f) Women-owned enterprises, in particular informal and microenterprises, are more likely to hire women employees than enterprises owned by men. In most of the selected countries, the differential is as much as one additional woman employee among women-owned firms relative to those owned by men.

35. While access to finance is often reported as the biggest constraint, it is not clear what women could do with such financing and whether they have financial and business skills to use it for productive purposes and remain solvent. There is no evidence yet on how women use loans to make the transition from unproductive to productive sectors.

36. In the light of the above findings, it is important for policymakers to do more to allow these women to reap the benefits of their labour and contribute to removing some of the hurdles faced by women entrepreneurs in Africa. With this in mind, the following policy recommendations emerge:

- (a) Financial inclusion is not only access to credit. In the absence of insurance markets, it is paramount that women entrepreneurs have access to formal savings accounts for their businesses, separate from their personal accounts. Women entrepreneurs remain more vulnerable to negative income shocks than entrepreneurs who are men do;
- (b) Women are better clients among microfinance institutions, given that their repayment rates are higher. The credit history of women must therefore be captured to help women to graduate from microfinance institutions to commercial banks. Widening the interpretation of assets to include movable assets could also help to ease stringent collateral requirements;
- (c) Loan conditions among microfinance institutions must improve, in particular at the early stage of entrepreneurship when women need breathing space until they break even;
- (d) Targeting is critical. The poorest of the poor or the most marginalized women are the most credit-constrained and bear the maximum gains in case-provided capital;
- (e) Mobile banking in Africa has played a critical role in helping women to gain access to financial services. It is also a great instrument to ensure their secure control over assets, loans and savings.

37. Lastly, African legal frameworks require gender mainstreaming. While many countries recognize statutory laws, the valid legal instrument, implementation and enforcement problems often emanate from social norms and local traditions. In addition to this, the following areas should be dealt with:

- (a) The wide rights gap between married and unmarried women must be resolved immediately. The study found that the majority of women business owners are married but not provided the rights and incentives to engage in income-generating activities;
- (b) Women's access to legal advice must be encouraged and organizations that focus on this objective supported. Commendable progress was made in Africa during the periods 1960-2010 and 2010-2016. To what extent women are aware of their rights is not clear, yet low levels of literacy and access to the media would suggest that women are unaware of their rights, especially in rural areas;
- (c) Customary law is very powerful in Africa, given that it has penetrated deeply and widely throughout society. Positive values on gender equality in local traditions must be identified and publicized. Strengthening the role of women at all levels of the judiciary could ease their enforcement problem, especially in rural areas, where customary law is more likely to apply.