# THIS WORKS IN MY PLACE!

# AFRICAN EDITION

## *The WOP contribution to Sustainable Development Goals*

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

DIVISION 1: WORK & ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

PROGRESS REPORT 2024


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THE GLOBAL GOALS

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Bijou Attey is a communications expert with a global worldview and a passion for improving lives through stories and images. With over 10 years of experience in writing, photography, and design, Bijou lends her skills to development communications as a communications officer at the International Centre for Evaluation and Development. Her work is inspired by years of international travel on personal and mission trips from a young age, as well as a passion for supporting others in developing their voices and experiencing equality.

Bijou's background in industrial organizational psychology and fine arts are the foundation for the creative communications activities that allow her to tell stories of different cultures. Her ability to speak 5 languages and connect with other human beings in a deeper sense inform her work in development communications. Beyond her work in the non-profit sector, Bijou is also a certified personal development coach and she works to empower others in overcoming difficulties and barriers. In her leisure time, Bijou can be found volunteering and creating art while globetrotting and discovering new foods.

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Dr. Tosin is a seasoned professional with over 15 years of experience in organizational change advisory and implementation services across both public and private sectors in Nigeria, Canada, and New Zealand. His extensive work in the public sector includes consulting for District Councils, Provincial and Central Governments, multilateral organizations, and Ports and Maritime Authorities. Tosin has contributed to a diverse range of industries in the private sector, including banking, power generation, electricity distribution, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), and non-profit healthcare organizations. Tosin holds a Ph.D. in Organizational Psychology and Project Management from the

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Charles L. TCHAGNENO is Associate Professor in Work Psychology and Ergonomics at the University of Franche-Comté (France). He is from Cameroon, and his research interests focus on the socio-cognitive determinants of work-related behaviors. He has developed an expertise in the relationship with work, notably through work on the work meaning and social representations of work. His work also focuses on precariousness, informal work, beliefs (fatalistic, instrumental, socio-cultural) and relationships to rules in the context of work.

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## 1-INTRODUCTION: RATIONALE, OVERARCHING GOAL, AND OBJECTIVES

The United Nations (UN) has established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/) to achieve a better world for all by 2030. The field of Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) can contribute to the attainment of these goals, particularly those related to "no poverty", "good health and well-being", "gender equality", "decent work", and "innovation". In fact, both research and practice in WOP are increasingly focused on these topics (e.g., Lyness & Judiesch, 2014; Mullins & Olson-Buchanan, 2023; Tokar & Kaut, 2018).

The International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), Division 1, is currently undertaking a project titled "This Works in My Place" to illustrate how WOP can contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals in different geographical regions. The first report in this project was dedicated to Latin America (see https://iaapsy.org/site/assets/files/1082/apaw2022junevol4_2.pdf), and the progress report presented in this document is centered on Africa


For decades, global human development and quality of life has experienced improvement. According to the UN Human Development Report (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 2018), covering the period from 1990 to 2017, the percentage of people with low human development decreased from 60% (3 billion) of the global population to 12% (926 million). However, these gains were reversed in 2021-2022, marked by a significant decline in human development (UNDP, 2023). This setback in human development is partly attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences. Additionally, a complex environment of conflict, uncertainty, and polarization has probably contributed to this decline.

Conflicts, high levels of poverty, and social exclusion persist in our societies. In addition, inequality stands out as a significant obstacle, capable of substantially reducing global human development, particularly impacting countries with low or medium human development levels. Gender inequality remains a formidable challenge, with average human development for women lagging 6% behind that of men. This disparity is even more

pronounced for women residing in countries with lower levels of human development. At the current pace of change, it is estimated to take more than 200 years to close the global gender economic gap. Notably, inequality extends beyond economic differences to encompass education, health, access to technology, and more. These disparities not only foster extremism but also impede opportunities for sustainable and inclusive development (UNDP, 2018).

These trends in human development align with a rapidly changing world. While Western societies continue to exert significant influence, modernization is becoming increasingly evident in other regions. Contrary to the assumption that modernization is synonymous with Westernization, the highest rates of economic growth have not been confined to Western countries in recent decades (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010). Moreover, the knowledge economy has expanded to developing countries, with digitalization and, increasingly, artificial intelligence, playing pivotal roles. For instance, internet access in developing countries surged by 4,000% from 2000 to 2010 (UN, 2010). This evolution of the internet and technology not only fosters the development and dissemination of business opportunities but also facilitates the exchange of ideas, knowledge, innovation, values related to education, democratic participation, health services, and other aspects of life. However, these advancements also bring about significant challenges, including the spread of fake news, the potential for controlling citizens' lives, cybercrimes, etc.

This new world presents both challenges and opportunities in the pursuit of a better life for all. Modernization and the knowledge society demand highly educated citizens and workers who embrace values associated with democratic participation and the realization of a sustainable and inclusive world. However, there is a possibility that the dialogue between Western societies and other regions lacks a **contextualized approach**. A genuine dialogue necessitates the acknowledgment and respect for particularities, cultural values, and the history of regions. In essence, international dialogue should be characterized, based on a contextualized approach, by the pursuit of UN sustainable development goals and a better life for all, while considering the unique contexts in which these goals are translated into specific strategies and practices. Failure to consider contextual factors may result in fewer positive outcomes from these efforts.

As mentioned above, the current project focuses on the African region, where critical challenges exist. The October 2023 edition of Africa's Pulse, conducted by the World Bank, pointed out that the deceleration in economic growth hinders prosperity, creation of jobs, and the reduction of extreme poverty in the region (World Bank, 2023). The UN Commission for

Africa (2023) also stressed the challenges of recovering from the pandemic and achieving the UN sustainable development goals through the renewal of national strategies, the support to people in situations of vulnerability, and the creation of economies and societies that benefit everyone.

It would be advisable that psychology considers African contextual factors. However, its predominant theories, methodologies, intervention models, and tools have primarily been formulated and applied with a focus on developed countries. Bernhard Wilpert, in his Presidential address to IAAP members (Wilpert, 2000), asserted that the mainstream Western psychological tradition has evolved within a specific cultural framework, making it challenging to seamlessly transfer to different cultural contexts. He also advocates for a psychology that considers the contextual and local embeddedness of behavior. In the same vein, there are authors in Africa who denounce the uncritical adoption of dominant Euro-American psychology, with biases and prejudices towards African reality, neglecting the suffering, strengths, and hopes of Africans and without considering the context of the region (see Nwoye, 2015). Despite the diversity in the region, there is a commitment to formulate and define the identity of African psychology (Mvungu, 2023; Ratele, 2017). In the case of WOP, already in the mid-20th century, Wickert (1960) pointed out the significant influence of the British and the French in Africa, also anticipating the challenges and difficulties of applying WOP from developed countries in the region due to cultural differences. Nowadays, scientific production in WOP is mainly concentrated in South Africa (see Kock, 2018), although there are significant efforts to understand and compare the reality of different African countries (e.g., Maleka et al., 2019) and to address relevant issues through humanitarian industrial psychology (Harry & Dodd, 2016).

With this in mind, and to ensure effectiveness of these initiatives, the contribution of WOP to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in Africa should consider the contextual factors of the region. The motto of this project, '**This works in my place!**', reflects this idea. Accordingly, **the main goal of the current project is to identify, through participation and dialogue with WOP experts in the region, relevant contextual factors that provide inputs (e.g., challenges, opportunities, and barriers) to WOP (e.g., strategies and practices) for achieving Sustainable Development Goals**. This overarching goal is further delineated into the following three specific objectives:

1- To identify contextual factors in the African region associated with achieving a better life for all (as the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals). We define a

contextual factor as any political, social, economic, and cultural factor that characterizes the African Region, acting either as a facilitator or an obstacle (or perhaps even both) for the achievement of UN goals.

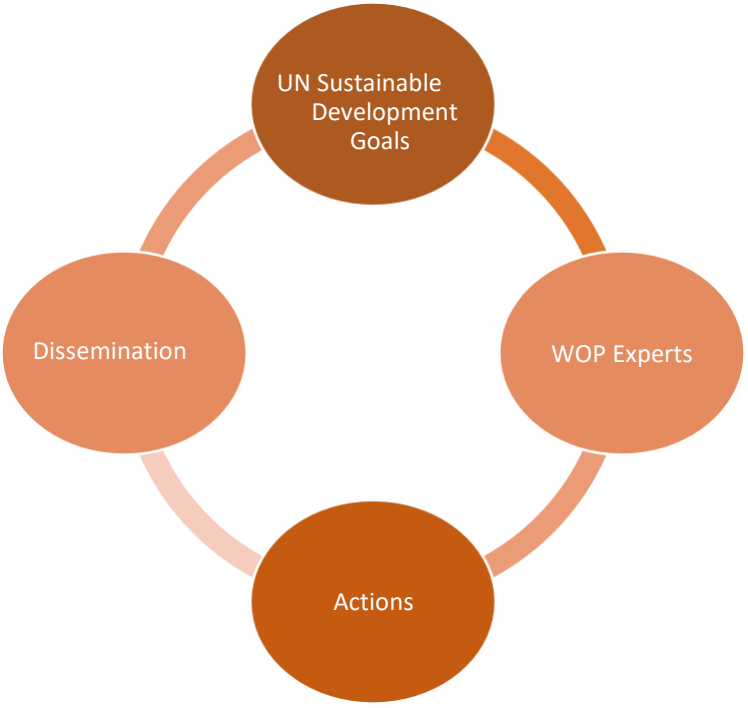
2- To describe how contextual factors in the African region can either facilitate or constrain the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, with a focus on "no poverty," "good health and well-being," "gender equality," "decent work," and "innovation".

3- To identify WOP practices and strategies that can contribute to achieving the aforementioned goals in the African region, considering contextual factors and examining their importance and feasibility of practices and strategies.

## 2-PROJECT STEPS

The project consists of four main steps, as illustrated in Figure 1, forming a circle that commences and concludes with the UN Sustainable Development Goals at its core.

**Figure 1. The Circle of "This works in my place!"**



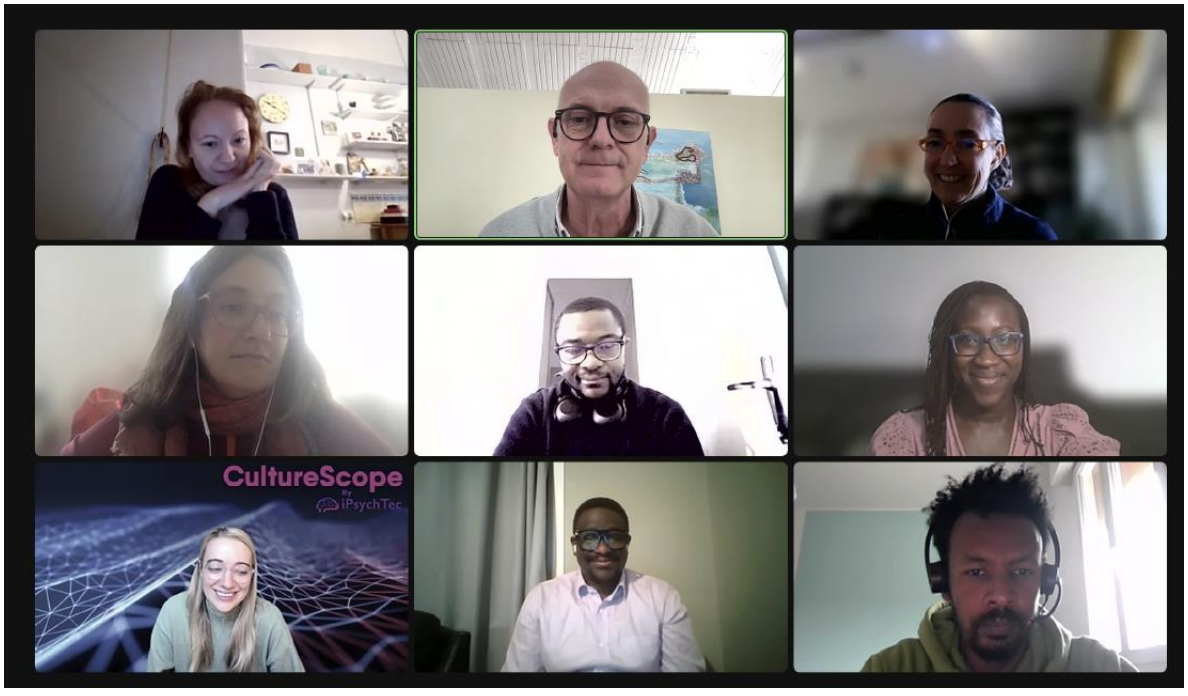

1-**The first step**, which marks the starting point of the project, involved the set of Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, the project concentrated on five goals: "no poverty," "good health and well-being," "gender equality," "decent work," and "innovation."

The selection of these goals was grounded in their direct relevance to the WOP discipline. In other words, activities associated with the research and practice of WOP are more closely linked to these goals than to others established by the UN.

2-**The second step** involved inviting and recruiting WOP experts from Africa. To participate in the project, individuals had to meet two requirements: a) engage in academic and/or professional activities in the field of work, organizational, and/or personnel psychology, and b) be native to Africa with a thorough understanding of the region. Additionally, we aimed for gender balance among the participants.

3-The **third step** involved actions, conducted with the participation of WOP experts from Africa, as follows:

Action 1: Nine WOP experts from Africa individually and remotely participated in an activity during May-June 2023. They proposed contextual factors for each of the selected UN goals.




**Participants in one of the Workshops (December 2023)**

Action 2: Two remote workshops were organized in November-December 2023, where the nine experts jointly analyzed and classified contextual factors for each of the selected UN goals.

*Next steps*:

-The contextual factors to be translated into WOP actions and strategies.

-A questionnaire to be designed, including WOP actions and strategies based on the identified contextual factors.

-Implementation of a Delphi methodology (or, alternatively, a survey study), with the participation of experts from Africa, to capture the importance and feasibility of each WOP action-strategy.

## 3-METHOD FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS IN AFRICA

For the identification and classification of contextual factors, IAAP Officers (Division 1) organized and coordinated two workshops. As mentioned earlier, nine WOP experts from Africa participated (5 women and 4 men), representing Nigeria, Ethiopia, Uganda, Cameroon, Tunisia, Ghana, and South Africa. Their biographies are available in Appendix 1.

There were three stages in organizing and implementing the workshops. First, a pre-workshop activity was conducted. Participants received a document (tool) via email to collect their perceptions about relevant contextual factors in Africa for achieving UN goals. In this tool, officers provided the project's definition of contextual factors: "any political, social, economic, and cultural factor characterizing the African Region, acting either as a facilitator or an obstacle (or perhaps both!) for the achievement of UN goals." Participants were asked to provide at least five contextual factors for each of the five UN goals: 'no poverty,' 'good health and well-being,' 'gender equality,' 'decent work,' and 'innovation.' A short sentence was expected for each contextual factor. Division 1 Officers encouraged participants to include both positive (i.e., those facilitating the achievement of UN goals) and negative (i.e., those hindering the achievement of UN goals) contextual factors. Examples from another region (Europe) were provided (e.g., 'Low investment, compared to Asia and USA, in innovation related to 5G technology') to help them understand the task.

The second stage comprised two remote workshops. The officers coordinated group activities for two hours each workshop. The primary objective was to analyze and categorize the contextual factors provided during the pre-workshop activity. Additional factors emerging during the group activities could be incorporated. The expected outcome was the identification and classification of contextual factors relevant to achieving UN goals that describe the situation in the African region.

Finally (third stage), the categorization of contextual factors was distributed among the nine participants to confirm, correct, and/or add any useful information that was not present in the initial version of the current report.[1]

## 4-CATEGORIZATION OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

In the following subsections, we describe the categorization of contextual factors that participants proposed for each of the five UN goals considered.

### 4.1 No poverty


**Socio-economic factors**. Participants indicated the existence of many relevant socio-economic factors related to "no poverty". In general, *employment and labor conditions* represent important constraints to achieving the "no poverty" UN goal in Africa, such as: high unemployment, precarious work, and underemployment, especially among the youth; high inflation combined with stagnant salaries; a minimum wage that does not allow to get out of poverty (although in some countries like Uganda there is no minimum wage, despite this being discussed); job insecurity; the existence of a mismatch between skills and labor market demands; and limited investment in job creation.

Other factors were related to the *characteristics of the social and economic structure* in Africa, hindering the "no poverty" goal. Participants referred to: the excessive disparity between social classes; subsistence farming economy for an important number of families; unfair distribution of resources; lack of basic infrastructures, especially in the rural areas; excessive economic dependence on primary commodities (such as oil, minerals, and agricultural products), creating vulnerabilities when facing price fluctuations in global markets; and informal economy (although it provides a source of income for many individuals, it often lacks job security, social protection, and access to formal financial services).

Participants also pointed out that the *behavior of politicians* in Africa is not positive in reducing poverty. Corruption is more stimulated than entrepreneurship. Corruption and political instability reduce the effectiveness of public institutions, hampers economic growth, and exacerbates social inequalities. Corruption undermines efforts to address issues such as

[1] Officers are not responsible for the opinions participants provided, which are described and categorized in the current report.

education, healthcare, and infrastructure development, perpetuating poverty.

Finally, the socio-economic obstacles are accentuated due to *climate change*, especially in some countries. North African countries, particularly those in arid and semi-arid regions, face challenges related to climate change, including droughts, desertification, and water scarcity. These environmental factors can impact agricultural productivity, disrupt livelihoods, and contribute to poverty, especially in rural communities heavily dependent on agriculture and natural resources. Although Africa contributes a minimal amount to climate change, it has been affected by the effects of climate changes such as severe drought and flood.

**Financial support**. Participants reported problems related with the *access to financial support* in Africa. They indicated lack of access to financial support (credit, capital, and economic opportunities) for establishing, operating, and growing businesses, limiting the emergence of new businesses. Participants also indicated the existence of *high dependence from others in financial sources* in two ways. First, most countries depend on aid from international organizations and developed countries. Second, there is an important dependency on remittance. Money sent to families back home by Africans in Western countries and other developed countries has surpassed foreign direct investment and economic aid. This has a positive side because these resources help to deal with poverty and deprivation. However, there is a negative side, as this can create vulnerabilities due to fluctuations in remittance flows that significantly impact household livelihoods.

**Technology and innovation**. *Technology* was seen *as an opportunity* for reducing poverty. Technology has provided opportunities that never existed 10 years ago to young and educated professionals. The growth of Gig work and service delivery platforms have provided opportunities for highly skilled professionals to make income in foreign currency, which help in tackling poverty issues. Moreover, technology enables knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) development. It has helped young people to achieve better-paying jobs on the Gig economy platforms, which in turn helps reduce poverty. However, there is a *lack of industries* in Africa that can promote this economic activity, hindering the reduction of poverty. Also, in some African countries, certain platforms such as Facebook that have been widely used by young people for trading have been blocked.

**African development**. In general, participants reported that Africa suffers from lack of development, especially in the *rural and other marginalized areas*. There are significant disparities in development and infrastructure between urban and rural areas or different regions within the countries. Marginalized regions often lack basic services, such as access

to clean water, healthcare, electricity which is critical to many activities, including the utilization of technology, and education, contributing to persistent poverty and exacerbating social inequalities. However, participants are *optimistic regarding the development of Africa* for two reasons. First, there is an increasing economic Integration in the region. African countries are trading with each other creating new markets, which has the potential to increase income for people. Free trade agreements under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), and the East African Community (EAC) have ensured free movement of people and goods within the region which have provided prosperity and have lowered poverty levels. Second, there is an important *opportunity for growth* because urbanization and industrialization are increasing.

**Regulatory and legal issues**. In general, participants reported *positive experiences related to regulation*. Examples are positive regulations in the labor market in some countries (e.g., South-Africa) and in the social protection of workers (e.g., Mauritius). However, for *most of the countries this regulation of social protection is very limited*.

**Human capacity development**. Participants indicated the existence of important obstacles related with the *low investment in education and self-development*, which results in a high multi-dimensional poverty rate. Although *positive experiences* exist in some countries, regarding training and development of skills (e.g., Rwanda, Kenya), most of the countries suffer a situation where this training and development is very limited.

**Demographic advantage**. Demographic characteristics of Africa were seen as an *opportunity for the future* if they are managed properly. About 70% of Africa's continent population of over 1.4 billion people are under 30. The proportion of people available for work is greater than those who do require support. Because of high unemployment, most young people engage in entrepreneurship which helps reduce poverty. Thus, the challenge is to take advantage of this labor force and reduce poverty in the future.

### 4.2 Good health and well-being


**Socio-economic standards**. Some aspects considered above are also connected with this UN goal. Participants reported *poverty and bad social and labor conditions as obstacles* to achieving good health and well-being. Participants reported that poverty and proliferation of slums lead to inadequate nutrition, poor living conditions, and limited access to healthcare, contributing to higher disease rates and poorer health outcomes. They also indicated crucial aspects, such as income distribution, employment opportunities, housing conditions, and social support

networks, that significantly impact the health and well-being of individuals and communities. According to the participants, it is necessary to address social inequalities in Africa and to promote social protection programs to enhance overall health outcomes and well-being. Unemployment also affects the overall well-being of individuals and communities. In the workplace, participants mentioned poor work-life balance and lack of a supportive workplace culture. Finally, lack of financial resources is also a precursor of health problems and low well-being. There is a limited number of financial institutions, subsistence living is pervasive and there is low financial self-sufficiency.

Participants missed a greater *investment in health in Africa*. This includes lack of programs for mental health in most of the countries. They also mentioned the existence of great disparities in the opportunities to access this basic service. That is, some people can access it, but others have important obstacles. Nevertheless, positive experiences were also stressed (e.g., emergence of public and private specialized medical institutions in Ghana).

Despite the aforementioned problems mentioned above, participants also pointed out a positive aspect based on the *community-social support*. Most African countries are collectivist societies where people are tightly knitted within their community. This support has lowered the incidence of mental health crises expected in dire economic times.

**Diet**. Participants indicated the existence of an ambivalent situation in Africa. On the one hand, there is access to healthy fruits and vegetables. Agriculture is the mainstay of most countries in the region enabling the majority of people to grow their food and sell the excess in the open market. However, at times, many subsistence farmers sell all fruits and vegetables leaving nothing for personal consumption in efforts of meeting their other financial demands. Access to affordable fruits and vegetables ensures that individuals have the nutrients they need for health. On the other hand, there is an increasing consumption of foreign processed foods (e.g., arrival of more fast-food establishments) that lead to worse nutritional and dietary choices and, therefore, increased prevalence in disease.

**Education**. Participants missed more educational opportunities. After all, access to education and health literacy programs are crucial for promoting good health and well-being. Education equips individuals with knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their health, adopt healthy behaviors, and access appropriate healthcare services. It is crucial to promote comprehensive health education in schools and communities to empower individuals to take control of their health and well-being. In addition, participants also pointed out that there is a high level of inability to comprehend western knowledge systems, and to take advantage of their positive facets. Despite the problems, they also indicated a positive

trend. Technological access and increasing education have enabled growing awareness about health risks and mitigations, including adopting healthy lifestyles and behaviors.

**Politics, policy, and regulation**. Participants mentioned some *good initiatives* from African governments in some countries such as improvement of social protection (e.g., in Namibia) or Occupational Health and Safety regulations (e.g., in Ghana). However, their comments are generally negative. Countries are usually involved in *conflicts* that negatively affect health and well-being of the population by increasing physical injuries and death; increasing the number of people requiring mental support, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression; lack of access to healthcare and essential services caused by displacement and migration; faster spread of disease in case of an outbreak; and food shortages and malnutrition. The *effort to hire doctors is low*. For example, the national average doctor to citizen ratio is 1:10,000 in Nigeria. The situation is even worse in some communities of this country, and it is not much different in most African countries. *Climate change and natural disasters* also have an important role and the response from governments is limited. Climate change, erosion, flooding, and other natural disasters negatively impact health and well-being in Africa. Although the rest of the world is facing a similar situation, the consequences of climate change are worse in Africa. There is usually slow or no government response to such disasters. Provisions of relief materials are often inadequate. Finally, participants argued that it is necessary to implement policies favoring the access of women to sanitary products and to improve the public hygiene and cleanliness.

**Healthcare services and infrastructure**. Regarding healthcare, participants referred to several *positive initiatives* in some African countries such as services for the HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment (e.g., Botswana, Eswatini); health and wellness programs (e.g., Kenya, Nigeria); and promotion of access to health care services (e.g., Rwanda, Mauritius). Participants also considered that *globalization and technology* play a positive role. Globalization, which interconnects the world in health services and equipment transference, is able to promote good health and well-being in Africa. An example is the increasing global attention and funding towards health issues in Africa, such as HIV/AIDS and malaria. In addition, mobile technology is improving access to health information and services.

However, participants also mentioned a number of *negative issues*: there is a *low investment* in services and infrastructure; *insufficient access to clean water and sanitation*, leading to health issues; lack of healthcare infrastructure to prevent infectious diseases; and poor technical facilities in hospitals limit effective patient care. The process of *urbanization accentuates this negative scenario*. The urban centers in African countries are growing, but governments cannot provide adequate infrastructure resulting in slum settlements in urban

areas. Lack of access to clean water and sanitation facilities in slum settlements increases the spread of diseases.

Finally, the participants stressed the *disparities* existing in Africa. The unavailability of universal health care across the African region creates an unequal distribution of health resources in the territories. For example, in some countries there is a lack of access to health care (e.g., Mozambique, Mali, Sierra Leone). Disparities in healthcare infrastructure also exist between urban and rural areas within the same countries, with limited access to healthcare facilities, particularly in remote regions.

**Environmental impact**. Participants pointed out that Africa has rich natural resources that can contribute to good health and well-being, if utilized properly. However, the increasing economic activity, at least in some countries, is creating *environmental challenges that affect health and well-being*. In fact, North African countries suffer air pollution in urban areas, particularly from industrial activities and vehicle emissions, contributing to respiratory diseases. Water scarcity, droughts, and inadequate sanitation infrastructure can also lead to waterborne diseases and hygiene-related health issues in these countries.

### 4.3 Gender equality


**Social Factors**. Participants mentioned *social good practices* in some African countries: women empowerment to achieve leadership positions (e.g., Rwanda, Uganda) and programs for the reduction of gender-based violence (e.g., Kenya). However, they also referred to *cultural issues* that hinder gender equality, shared with other regions of the world. In general, citizens from Africa still believe that some professions should be male-dominated while others should be female-dominated. This cultural norm and attitude demotivate women to achieve professional careers and high-paying occupations. Beliefs about men vs. women lead to *discriminatory practices* against women such as sexual harassment; unequal pay and compensation in the workplace; limited representation of women in leadership positions, focusing more on taking care of family and children; limited participation in the decision-making; and obstacles in the access to education, financial resources, and social status.

**African cultural and traditional factors**. Participants mentioned the existence of traditional cultural factors, more specific from Africa, that also hinder gender equality. The majority of rural society is usually based on *hierarchical structures and traditional lineages* that are related with the *agrarian systems*, which implicitly favor the discrimination against women. In fact, this promotes *discriminatory practices and violence against women:* early

marriage among girls (for instance, in rural areas of Ethiopia), affecting their physical health and psychosocial well-being, genital mutilation, and sustained disparity in support for teenage pregnancies (i.e., men are still excused, favored, and protected by society whereas women tend to be shunned, shamed, and blamed, and left without proper care).

**Political factors**. Despite the obstacles related to gender equality, participants mentioned *positive practices or realities* emerging in Africa (at least in some countries). In general, they considered that women are getting more involved in politics by putting themselves forward for political primaries nomination and participating in civil society advocacy. An increasing number of women are also getting involved in political and leadership positions, including judiciary roles and community leadership, although these women are not commonly favorably viewed, due to cultural norms that look on such women as brash, controlling, aggressive, etc. Finally, there are specific public policies for gender equity in some African countries, for example in employment equality (e.g., Uganda, Ghana).

Nevertheless, obstacles are persistent. *Underrepresentation* of women in elective political and appointive public service positions is still present, achieving lower socio-political and decision-making power positions compared to their male counterparts. For example, the National Gender Policy in Nigeria recommended 35 percent affirmative action for women in elective and appointive positions in government. Despite this declaration, the number of women in government is below 15 percent. Similar situations can be found in most African countries.

Women are also usually *victims of wars and conflicts* (e.g., in Northern Nigeria). Terrorists and assailants often attack different villages, abducting women and girls. Most of them experience rapes, torture and other de-humanizing conditions while they are in captivity.

**Educational and Health-related Factors**. In general, participants indicated that the *situation of women is better now* than before in Africa. More women are getting access to education compared to previous times. The gender wage gap is also reducing, helping to break the cycle of poverty and improve health outcomes for women and their families. In addition, there are specific programs in some African countries devoted to enhancing the education and the development of skills among women (e.g., Namibia, Botswana).

Nevertheless, the *differences between men and women are still important*. Participants reported a lower possibility of higher *education* for young girls compared to their male counterparts (i.e., this is primarily due to personal gender factors such as teenage pregnancies, belief in girls belonging at home, and even skipping school during their menstrual cycle).

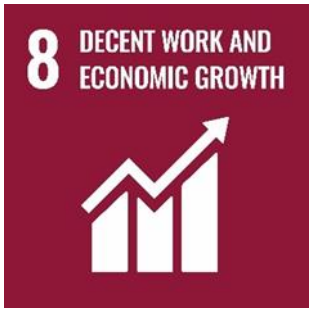
Gender disparities in education, including limited access of women to high-quality education, early dropout rates, and gender-based discrimination within educational institutions, can impede women's empowerment and hinder progress towards gender equality. Access to *health* services is also limited for women, although services such as reproductive health, family planning, and maternal healthcare are crucial for their well-being and empowerment.

**Legal factors**. Participants indicated that at least some countries in Africa have *implemented regulations* to promote gender equality. For instance, Tunisia has made significant progress in terms of legal and policy frameworks, developing a national strategy for gender equality for the period 2018-2023 and taken steps to address gender-based violence in educational institutions. However, *legal protection* against discrimination and violence towards women is *still weak*. In addition, women predominate in the informal economy, in activities such as street vendors, petty goods traders and subsistence agriculture. *Labor laws offer no protection from working in this informal economy*, and as a result women are more likely to suffer lack of social benefits such as pensions, health insurance or paid sick leave. These types of activities also increase the risk of sexual harassment.

**Economic and employment factors**. Participants recognize the *increasing number of initiatives and programs aimed at empowering women economically* as well as specific programs in some countries (e.g., Mauritius) devoted to *improving workplace flexibility* and *work-life balance*. However, an important number of countries often face *barriers* such as limited access to economic resources, gender wage gaps, occupational segregation, and biases in recruitment and promotion against women.

**Violence**. According to participants, the prevalence of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, pose significant challenges to gender equality in Africa.

### 4.4 Decent work




**Economic factors**. Participants pointed out that the *economic growth* of Africa is an opportunity for decent work. The increasing economic activity (i.e., most African countries are expected to achieve economic growth between 3-10% in 2023-2024) is stimulating consumption and the creation of formal jobs. These formal jobs are more protected and regulated and they will enjoy better labor conditions and wages. Economic *diversification* was also mentioned by participants as a positive aspect. This includes the development of sectors with high labor intensity, which can help to generate more decent jobs and reduce vulnerability to external

shocks. Finally, participants indicated the existence of initiatives to promote *entrepreneurship* and *skills development* among youth.

However, important obstacles also remain regarding the economic factors in Africa. Again, the high rates of *unemployment* hinder the achievement of decent work. This creates poor wages, precarious work arrangements, abuse, and dehumanizing working conditions because workers do not want to lose, once they get it, a job that is scarce. This is especially evident among youth. Between 50 and 80% of youths are unemployed in most of the countries. For example, according to Ugandan national Planning Authority (NPA), approximately 40,000 Ugandan graduates enter the job market annually and only about 90,000 out of a total of 700,000 graduates are employed. The remaining 610,000 are considered unemployed or underemployed as of 2022. The bargaining power of workers is reduced because of fewer job opportunities. In this context, decent work in Africa is aspirational and not a human right assured by labor market regulations. The pervasiveness of *informal jobs and casualization of employment* (i.e., casual, temporary, or part-time jobs are more encouraged than stable, full-time employment) are crucial obstacles in achieving decent work. In fact, the informal sector often lacks labor rights, social security, and access to decent working conditions, contributing to persistent decent work deficits. Finally, the *lack of a diversified economy* (mainly based on agriculture) and the *absence of industrial bases* also make the achievement of decent work in Africa difficult.

**Digital and mobile technology**. The growth of digital and mobile technology is seen as an opportunity for decent work. High mobile phone penetration has contributed to the increase of decent work by providing technological tools that can facilitate new entrepreneurship ventures and enable participants in the informal sector to reach more customers through social media platforms. The growth in the mobile economy is providing Governments across the continent required resources to promote decent work.

**Legislation**. Most countries in Africa have *limited labor law enforcement capability* due to the big size of the informal economy. Proper regulation enforcement of the labor market requires huge financial and workforce resources, which most countries cannot afford due to the existence of other competing priorities. Other factors also produce obstacles in achieving and implementing adequate regulation devoted to enhancing decent work: low quality of labor laws, absence of consistent legal minimum wage, low legal/union representation for salaried and private workers, weakness of public policies and regulations in the informal sector which favors inequalities in the treatment and protection of workers, limited social security coverage, and inadequate mechanisms for addressing labor disputes.

**Education**. Participants indicated that access to education is a way to enhance decent work because this allows people to achieve better jobs. However, their opinions about education in Africa were somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, there is *increasing access to higher education programs*. On the other hand, *obstacles persist* in a number of countries (e.g., Niger, Chad, Somalia, Mozambique). In addition, participants reported the existence of a *mismatch between the skills possessed by the workforce and the requirements of the labor market* in some countries. Limited access to quality education and training, as well as outdated curricula, can result in a skills gap that hampers the ability of individuals to find decent work.

**Social factors**. Participants indicated the existence of social factors in some countries that promote decent work, such as *social dialogue* about workers' rights (e.g., Ghana, Senegal). However, social obstacles related to *inequalities and migration processes* are persistent and hinder the achievement of decent work.

### 4.5 Innovation


**Investment.** According to the participants, there are positive aspects related to the investment that facilitate innovation such as increasing efforts in *infrastructures and modernization of construction techniques* (e.g., more highways and interchanges). However, one important obstacle hindering innovation is related to the lack of sufficient investment in different areas, such as:

The low investment in *education and social capital* contributes to a mismatch between education and skills required in the workplaces. On average, African countries invest about 5% of their annual budgets in education, which is insufficient to improve education quality due to years of underinvestment. Furthermore, although an increasing number of youths are tertiary educated, they lack the skills required to foster innovation in the workplace or entrepreneurship.

Investment is also low in *research and development*. Low tax revenues, competing priorities, and other socio-economic factors impact the Government's investments in research and development across the 55countries that are members of the African Union. For example, African Union members spent 1% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on research and development in 2006. However, the continent's funding dropped to 0.42% in 2019 whereas the global average was 1.7%.

More investment in innovation in *crucial sectors, such agriculture and digital technology*, is also missed. For example, in Ghana the government regulation demands that

cocoa farmers sell only to the government, therefore eliminating any competitive pricing that would allow farmers to earn enough to invest and grow their agricultural pursuits. In addition, there is low internet penetration and high cost of data subscription resulting in low quality of innovation in the digital technology sector.

Investment in innovation is also hindered due to *obstacles in the access to funding*. Access to funding, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises and innovative start-ups, is crucial for fostering innovation. Limited access to financing options, such as venture capital, angel investment, and loans, can impede the growth of innovative businesses. Developing mechanisms to improve access to funding for innovative ventures can support the innovation ecosystem.

**Infrastructure and penetration of technologies**. Participants had an ambivalent view about the role of infrastructure and technology in enhancing African innovation. On the one hand, positive aspects and practices exist. *Mobile technology* is spurring innovation and entrepreneurship in Africa. *Agricultural innovation* is also widespread thanks to technology. In Sudan, for example, satellite images are being used to gather information about crop performance, which are then shared with farmers through their mobile phones. Also, in Nigeria, drones are being used to map out areas for potential future rice cultivation. The emergence of *telecommunication companies* and positive efforts related to the *expansion of digital connectivity and infrastructure for information and communication technology* exist, at least in some countries (e.g., Kenya, Rwanda). There is also an emergent *innovation in the energy sector* (e.g., increased investment in solar power and electrical automotives).

On the other hand, important limitations and barriers exist. Participants indicated the existence of weak infrastructure. In addition to the *limited access to technology in a number of countries* (e.g., Malawi, Sierra Leone, Niger, Burkina Faso), one of the major factors that hinders innovation in African countries is the *lack of electricity* 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and *poor transportation network*.

**Governance and political instability**. Although some positive governmental initiatives exist (e.g., stimulation of *public-private partnership* in Ethiopia), participants had a negative general view about the impact of governments and perceived instability on innovation. Africa is *unfairly perceived as unstable by global investors*, which negatively impacts innovation. Out of 55 countries in Africa, only 9 experienced pockets of conflicts in 2021, and these conflicts are limited to certain sections of the country. For example, the Boko Haram conflict is limited to an area with about 5 million people. Whereas the remaining part of Nigeria, occupied by 215 million people, has been peaceful. Overgeneralization and sensationalist reporting by the Western media focusing on negative stories about Africa, and

ignoring the positive ones, create negative publicity about the continent and an uncertain environment in the mind of global entrepreneurs and innovators. This makes it harder for local entrepreneurs to collaborate and attract investments required for innovation.

Beyond information dissemination, participants reported that the political contexts are usually *corrupted* and reinforce *status quo* instead of innovation. In addition, an appropriate public policy oriented to protect *intellectual property rights* (IPR) is missed. Strong protection of IPR is crucial for encouraging innovation. Inadequate IPR legislation and enforcement can discourage investment in innovation, as it limits the potential for creators and innovators to reap the benefits of their work.

**Entrepreneurship and creativity**. Participants reported that people in Africa, given that they have to deal with survival needs in their daily lives, have developed a great capacity for creativity. This could be leveraged to stimulate innovation. In fact, good practices related with entrepreneurship and start-up culture exist in some countries (e.g., Uganda, Nigeria). However, a more generalized supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurship and start-ups, fostering innovation, is missed in the region.

**Culture and education**. In general, the participants considered the *expansion of education as an opportunity*. This creates a positive context for innovation, for example initiatives for education in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) in some countries such as Ghana and Senegal. However, this is not generalized. Quality of education is still a challenge in the region. *The participants missed an education based on problem-solving, STEM, and preparation for the digital economy*.

**Economic and institutional factors**. According to the participants, Africa is still based on a *subsistence economy*. There is a high level of economic deprivation which makes people's focus to be centered on the short-term outcomes rather than the long-term ones such as innovation. In addition, the *institutional structures are not centered on problem-solving* from which innovative ideas arise. Nevertheless, some *good practices* exist, for example the emergence of private and public loans-services and education to support farmers and increase agricultural productivity and development.

## 5-INITIAL CONCLUSION OF THE PROGRESS REPORT

In this progress report, we have provided the advances in the project "This works in my place" dedicated to Africa, regarding the identification and classification of contextual factors relevant to the following five UN Sustainable Development Goals: "no poverty," "good health and well-being," "gender equality," "decent work," and "innovation.". Considering

these factors through the participation of experts (in WOP) from Africa, allows us to capture the reality of the region. This is a contextualized perspective that avoids relying solely on the dominant view from economically developed countries. It is one of the first steps, based on the dialogue with experts from the region, that will allow us in a subsequent stage to identify and assess WOP practices and strategies for achieving the aforementioned goals, while considering the idiosyncrasies (contextual factors) of Africa.

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