

# Voix Essentielles

## Background

Research has shown that women's engagement in social and political processes leads to increased transparency in government decision-making, increased budget allocations for services that benefit women, and greater personal safety and social protection for women. However, it has been estimated that based on current progress, women will not achieve pay or leadership equality with men for at least another 135.6 years.

Historically, women and girls have been excluded from leadership positions and decision-making spaces. This is particularly prominent in francophone Western and Central Africa, where the region is rife with persistent social, economic, and political gender inequalities. As such, there needs to be more institutional structures and opportunities to enable the female 'voice' to become influential. To be truly equitable, we must ensure that women are empowered and supported to play a role in the decision-making process.

## About

Voix EssentiELLES aims to strengthen women and girls, in all of their diversity, by meaningfully engaging them in decision-making processes and spaces that influence health policies and programs.

Managed by the Dakar-based policy and advocacy tank Speak Up Africa, and strategically supported and co-funded by Fondation CHANEL and The Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and malaria, Voix EssentiELLES will channel small funds through a dedicated fund and invest in the capacities of community based -based, grassroots organizations, groups and networks as well as their leaders.

## Objectives

- To enable the participation of women and girls' community-based and grassroots organizations, networks and leaders in decision-making platforms at different levels relevant for their health outcomes.
- To strengthen their capacities and skills to influence policies, laws and programs that affect their health and well-being.

## Approach

Voix EssentiELLES will support women and girls' organizations and networks in Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Senegal with small grants of up to XOF 5 million to enable them to participate in and inform health programs and policies in their countries.

Voix EssentiELLES was launched in July 2021 with plans to expand to additional countries in the Western and Central Africa region over the next three years.

Through the project, Speak Up Africa will develop a personalized training program, "Université de l'ExcELLEnce", that will allow women and girls' organizations across Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Senegal to reinforce their organizational, leadership, advocacy and communications skills. Training modules, tailored to the needs of the selected organizations based on the capacity assessment as well as each country's national context, will be dispensed in the three countries.

Coupled with the "Université de l'ExcELLEnce", Speak Up Africa will organize, in each country, advocacy meetings with key stakeholders and selected women and girls' organizations, to strengthen and increase their meaningful engagement and inclusion into national coalitions and decision-making spaces and processes.

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You can also message us on WhatsApp  
[+221 77 187 76 94](tel:+221771877694).

