



SpeakUpAfrica.

## *Advancing Gender Equity for inclusive health and sanitation policies and programs*

### *About Speak Up Africa*

We are an African-led, Africa-based organization working with leaders and change-makers in Africa and beyond to solve our continent's pressing sustainable development challenges. We convene, enable and advocate. Focusing on strategic communications, policy and advocacy, we are dedicated to supporting African leaders and citizens to take an active role in identifying and developing solutions to tackle the challenges facing our continent — including malaria, NTDs, immunization, sanitation, gender equity and global health research and development (GHRD).

### *Gender*

In the global pursuit of reducing gender inequalities and fostering social inclusion, several development programs have been implemented, including the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the World Summit for Social Development, and the Beijing Platform for Action. However, there is still a long way to go in ensuring the full realization of women's and girls' fundamental rights, such as bodily autonomy and access to healthcare and sanitation services. In West Africa, some countries have made progress through legislative measures and increased women's representation in decision-making positions. Efforts are also underway to address harmful practices like female genital mutilation.

Gender equity serves as a powerful social indicator for assessing health and sanitation risks, outcomes, and consequences. Within households, healthcare needs are often determined by the person holding power and control over their own well-being. Similarly, gender-balanced representation at all levels of decision-making significantly influences the development of equitable policies and programs. Despite the clear linkages between gender, health and sanitation outcomes, many programs (malaria, Neglected Tropical Diseases, HIV, and tuberculosis) continue to overlook the gender dimension, resulting in negative impacts on exposure, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. However, growing awareness driven by global, regional, and national movements is increasingly accelerating the integration of gender perspectives and social inclusion within development institutions and the implementation of their programs. It is essential to continue these efforts to ensure equitable and inclusive development outcomes.

# Gender Equality is in our DNA

Speak Up Africa recognizes the paramount importance of gender equity in achieving sustainable development. We align with the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in prioritizing gender integration. At an institutional level, we underline the significance of gender through a comprehensive gender strategy. We acknowledge the challenges faced by women in healthcare access and decision-making power and have developed a gender and social inclusion strategy to ensure equitable solutions and foster a fairer and more equal world. This strategy encompasses objectives, principles, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, gender- and age-disaggregated data, gender markers, specific indicators, risk assessments, accountability mechanisms, capacity building, and budget allocation. Through our commitment to gender mainstreaming, we aim to promote gender equity and equity in both our operations and interventions. We conduct gender analyses, engage diverse stakeholders, and utilize the findings to inform partnerships, design, and implementation. By implementing these measures, Speak Up Africa strives to foster a supportive organizational culture, allocate dedicated resources, and effectively monitor progress towards gender equity.

## Our impact at a glance

- ▶ Developed a series of markers to further mainstream gender into our policies and programming.
- ▶ Launched the Voix EssentiELLES initiative in 2021 in Senegal, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, to strengthen the voice of women and girls and thus promote their involvement in the processes and decision-making spaces that influence health policies and programs.
  - ▷ Strengthened the capacities of 187 Voix EssentiELLES in leadership to prepare them to advocate for gender equity in decision-making positions and positively influence the discourse on women and girls in health decision-making spaces while disbursing over 300,000 USD in small grants to the 34 women and girls grassroots organizations partaking in the initiative.
  - ▷ Engaged 3 participants from Voix EssentiELLES in high-level decision-making spaces to shape more transformative gender-responsive health policies, including at the Parliament in Burkina Faso.
  - ▷ In 2022, mobilized 40 media outlets to cover the Voix EssentiELLES initiative, including Jeune Afrique, El País, Le Monde Afrique, and RFI and reached over 10 million people with the #VoixEssentiELLES hashtag in 2022.
- ▶ Together with IFPMA, launched the **Women Innovators Incubator** to address gaps in female-led innovation in Africa.
- ▶ Trained over **70 Special Olympics athletes** on menstrual hygiene in 2019 and distributed over **1500 sanitary pads** to their athletes in 2021.
- ▶ Filled the knowledge gap on sanitation and gender by producing a case on gender and sanitation shared during the **9th World Water Forum in Dakar in March 2022**.
- ▶ In collaboration with Africa CDC, launched the **African Women in Digital Health (AWiDH) movement** in December 2022, bringing together stakeholders from various sectors, including digital, gender equity, and global health, to bridge the gender digital divide and enhance women's leadership and participation in the field of digital health. This movement is now part of the 8 flagship programs of Africa CDC.
- ▶ Launched the "**Teaming up: African LeadHERs meet BAL4HER**" mentorship program alongside the Basketball Africa League to advance gender equity and increase women leadership and employability in the sports industry in Africa.

## Samples of our work

### AFRICAN LEADHERS

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE MOVEMENT FOR WOMEN

Speak Up Africa successfully organized the inaugural African LeadHERs Forum, bringing together 26 experts and gender equity champions with over 260 participants from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal. The event marked International Women's Day 2022 and showcased our commitment to building a stronger, fairer, and more inclusive world. We launched our gender and social inclusion strategy, highlighting four strategic directions and eight operational standards to address critical challenges in achieving gender equity. Additionally, we celebrated the launch of our podcast series in collaboration with Entre-Elles, featuring inspiring stories from beneficiaries of our Voix EssentiELLES initiative. The initiative was supported by Ysaora Thibus, a French fencer and silver Olympic winner in Tokyo and Diandra Tchatchouang, a retired French professional basketball player. In the second edition of the African LeadHERs Forum, a series of webinars called the "Webinars of Equality" was organized. With 114 participants from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, France, and Senegal, these virtual meetings brought together speakers from various sectors to discuss important topics. The webinars explored the power of sports in achieving gender equity, emphasizing the need to address digital access inequalities and gender stereotypes in sports.

In 2023, Speak Up Africa and the Basketball Africa League (BAL) have launched "Teaming Up: African LeadHERs meet BAL4HER", a mentorship program to advance gender equity and women's leadership in the African sports industry. The program pairs six young women from Senegal, Egypt, and Rwanda with experienced women leaders in the sports industry for mentorship over six months. It aims to address gender imbalances and empower women in decision-making roles. This initiative strengthens the partnership between Speak Up Africa and the BAL, extending beyond gender equity to include collaborative efforts in fighting neglected tropical diseases. The mentorship program, aligned with the African Union's Agenda 2063, recognizes the importance of young Africans, particularly women, as catalysts for change.



#### AMPLIFYING VOICES, TRANSFORMING LIVES

Speak Up Africa has achieved significant milestones through its Voix EssentiELLES program. In 2022, five Voix EssentiELLES representatives participated in regional and international meetings and forums, including AFRAVIH and AIDS2022, to support the efforts of replenishing the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Their active engagement and advocacy contributed to raising awareness and mobilizing resources for global health initiatives. The program also made a notable impact through media publications. A total of 40 media contents were published at national, regional, and global levels, including opinion articles in Jeune Afrique and El Pais, as well as interviews in Le Monde Afrique and RFI. These platforms provided an avenue for Voix EssentiELLES to share their perspectives, experiences, and expertise, amplifying their voices and influencing discussions on important health issues. Furthermore, Speak Up Africa effectively utilized social media platforms to disseminate information and engage with a wide audience. The social media content reached an impressive 4,273,361 online users. This digital outreach played a vital role in raising awareness, educating the public, and fostering dialogue on gender equity and health-related matters.

In addition, Speak Up Africa developed a compelling public service message for Voix EssentiELLES, which was broadcasted more than 60 times on Canal+ Afrique channels throughout March. This activation was part of the "One Month, One Cause" campaign, reaching over 60 million viewers. The widespread exposure of this message helped to generate public support, promote inclusivity, and drive positive change in society.



## **BREAKING TABOOS, EMPOWERING WOMEN, CIRCULATING INFORMATION IN MENSTRUAL HYGIENE FOR EQUALITY**

Ensuring women's fundamental right to menstrual hygiene remains a challenge for millions in Africa. Speak Up Africa and KITAMBAA address this issue through their collaborative project, "Menstrual Hygiene Management: From Taboo to Economic Empowerment." The initiative aims to empower women and girls, advocating for policies that address their specific menstrual hygiene needs. Notable achievements include the formation of the Etü Jiggenü Jeggem (EJJ) group, providing support to approximately thirty women. On International Women's Day 2023, Speak Up Africa and Kitambaa solidified their commitment with a three-year partnership agreement, furthering their joint efforts to enhance access to menstrual health services and promote gender equity.



### **THE WOMEN INNOVATORS INCUBATOR**

#### **CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH INNOVATION BY PROVIDING SUPPORT AND RESOURCES FOR THEIR ENTREPRENEURIAL ENDEAVORS**

In its pursuit of gender equity, Speak Up Africa recognized a gender imbalance in applications for the Africa Young Innovators for Health Award, with only 21% from women. To rectify this, Speak Up Africa partnered with IFPMA to establish the Women Innovators Incubator Award, focusing on supporting women in Africa's health innovation landscape. This initiative empowers female health entrepreneurs, offering resources such as a US\$5,000 grant, a three-month business mentoring program, media skills training, intellectual property protection advice, and access to a network of experts. The inaugural cohort saw three winners from Uganda and Rwanda benefitting from these opportunities, highlighting Speak Up Africa's commitment to fostering gender equity in the health innovation sector and supporting women's contributions to addressing healthcare challenges in Africa.

### **AFRICAN WOMEN IN DIGITAL HEALTH (AWIDH)**

#### **DRIVING CHANGE, STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN DIGITAL HEALTH**

The African Women in Digital Health (AWiDH) movement, a key initiative under the Africa CDC's Digital Transformation Strategy, was launched at the December 2022 Conference on Public Health in Africa in Kigali. AWiDH, led by the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Speak Up Africa, and partners, advocates for gender equality in health technology, aiming to narrow the digital gender gap in Africa. Member states are supported in developing gender-inclusive digital health strategies with set targets for measuring impact. AWiDH focuses on achieving equal gender representation in incubators and accelerators across both public and private sectors. Beyond representation, AWiDH sustains partnerships investing in the skills and executive training of women already active in digital health.

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