

## Recognizing the Value of African Women



Dear Students,

Dear Community of the Pan African University,

On July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025, Africa joins the rest of the global community to mark the African Women's Day. This gives us an opportunity to reflect on the condition of women across the continent, in line with the theme *"Advancing Social and Economic Justice for African Women through Reparations."*

What do we actually celebrate? This question dramatically takes us back to the life journeys of our ancestors, our mothers, our wives, our sisters, and our friends, which has been marked by suffering, violence, sacrifices, and struggles.

51 years after this day was formally established, great strides have been made, gradually erasing the traumatic narrative often associated with African women.

With governments, partners and civil society organisations working collaboratively, the female literacy rate in Africa has risen to 57%. Economically, our mothers are a pillar of wealth production and added value: they represent approximately 50% of the agricultural workforce and produce up to 70% of the food for household consumption and local sale. In 2018, the WIA Philanthropy Foundation revealed that 24% of working-age women are entrepreneurs, the highest rate in the world.

However outstanding these figures may be, they hardly conceal the persistent inequalities that limit women's potential and impede their participation in our continent's growth. In higher education, the enrollment rate of African women is below 10%. According to UNESCO, they represent only 30% in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); while only 20% of the approximately 30% of graduates from higher education engineering programs in sub-Saharan

Africa are female engineers.

This situation is largely attributable to cultural norms, financial barriers, security conflicts, violence against women and girls... just to name these few.

It clearly demonstrates that the social and economic condition of women is yet to be achieved. It is therefore critical to undertake actions at all levels, to do justice to these unknown heroines whose intrinsic value is hardly recognized.

Since 2012, the Pan African University is definitely engaged on this track. Our leaders understood that our continent must strengthen the quality of its human resources and facilitate women's contribution to the implementation of Agenda 2063. This is why in awarding scholarships, we put an emphasis on gender equality. Thanks to this policy, the proportion of female students at the Pan African University has doubled, rising from 21% to 41% between 2012 and now. To date, we have awarded scholarships to more than 1,000 girls and women, while approximately 900 students have graduated.

Of course, we will continue our efforts to improve African women's access to higher education, with the support of the African Union Member States.

I therefore urge all our female graduates and students to be role models and ambassadors for the empowerment of African women within their communities. Men, too, must be part in this collective endeavour, because positive masculinity will gradually help us elevate the status of women.

Together, let's commit to opening new pathways for African women, so that, as concentric circles, their influence extends beyond the domestic sphere and impact millions of young girls.

*Professor Jean Kouliqiaté*

Rector of the Pan-African University