

Celebrating
20 *Years*
of
SOAWR

SOAWR Journal

5th Edition

**SOLIDARITY FOR
AFRICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

A force for freedom



**MOUVEMENT DE SOLIDARITÉ
POUR LES DROITS
DES FEMMES AFRICAINES**

Une force pour la liberté

Acknowledgments

Edited by Grace Marwa-Pattison of Make Every Woman Count with support from Elizabeth Alukudo, Gicuku Karugu and Esther Waweru of Equality Now.



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Foreword

It's the 20th Anniversary of the SOAWR Coalition! In September 2004, several women's rights organisations in Africa formally came together in solidarity to advocate for the adoption, ratification, domestication and implementation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol). We are thrilled to share our journey in this 5th Edition of the SOAWR Journal in which we celebrate the Coalition's growth, and forecast the future- A feminist imaging: SOAWR at 40.



This fifth edition provides an overview of the implementation of the Maputo Protocol, which was adopted by the African Union, 21 years ago. It is an anchor upon which the voices of millions of girls and women in Africa are amplified and where the voices of those who tirelessly fight for gender equality are raised and intensified. It is a space where we celebrate achievements, recognise struggles, and engage in thought-provoking conversations that inspire change.

This edition is as inspiring as the preceding editions, raising the bar on the fantastic work that our members put in in 2024 to take the women's rights cause to the next level. It highlights the members' celebration of the SOAWR Coalition's 20 years of existence and African women's rights issues and gives an overview of the achievements and challenges experienced in 2024. For this reason, I extend my warm gratitude to all the SOAWR members, whose work plays a pivotal role in shaping the narrative and inspiring change.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of past SOAWR members who planted and watered the seed of the Coalition over the last 20 years - those that have passed away, those that have moved on from active advocacy into the donor world or into government positions, and those that continue to hold spaces for the women and girls of Africa in diverse ways. The successes we celebrate today bear your fingerprints and the marks of your contribution in ensuring that the Maputo Protocol remains a force for freedom for African women and girls. We are especially grateful to our donors and other partners who have believed in and supported the work of the Coalition over the years. Thank you!

As you read this special edition of the SOAWR Journal, you will equip yourself with knowledge on women's rights, understand more about the SOAWR Coalition and the work of our members, and stand alongside those advocating for the Maputo Protocol. With each page, this Journal will inspire and energise you anew. Together, we can build a world where gender equality is an ideal and lived reality. True equality requires us to confront not only gender imbalances but also the broader social, economic, and cultural inequalities that shape our society. Let's unite to challenge entrenched gender-discriminatory norms, break down systemic barriers, and create a future where everyone has the freedom and opportunity to flourish.

Faiza Jama Mohamed
Director - Africa Office, Equality Now,
SOAWR Secretariat



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Acronyms

ACDHRS	African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
AEFL	Association of Egyptian Female Lawyers
AJS	Association des Juristes Sénégalaises
AMPI	All for Maputo Protocol Initiative
AU	African Union
AUCEVAWG	African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
AUC	African Union Commission
AWLN	African Women Leaders Network
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHR	Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria
COVAW	Coalition on Violence Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FEMNET	African Women's Development and Communications Network
FIDA	International Federation of Women Lawyers
FLAG	Female Lawyers Association of The Gambia
GAMCOTRAP	The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GLIHD	Great Lakes Initiative for Human Rights and Development
ICJ	International Commission of Jurists
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGED-Africa	Initiative for Gender Equality and Development in Africa
MEKI	Monitoring, Evaluation, Knowledge, and Information
MEWC	Make Every Woman Count
MYDO	Malusi Youth Development Organisation
NIGAWD	New Generation Girls and Women Development Initiative
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SAAF	Safe Abortion Action Fund
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
Sida	Swedish Development Cooperation

SIHA Network	Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa Network
SOAWR	Solidarity for African Women's Rights
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
SR RWA	Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa
UN	United Nations
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VAPP	Violence Against Persons Prohibition
WILDAF	Women in Law and Development in Africa
WLM	Women Lead Movement
WLSA	Women and Law in Southern Africa
WONGOSOL	Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia
WOJE	Women Organisation for Justice and Equality
WRAPA	Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative
YALI	Young African Leaders Initiative

About SOAWR

The Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) Coalition is a regional membership-based network of more than 70 organisations based in over 30 countries working to advance women's rights in Africa. SOAWR works to ensure that African States ratify, domesticate, and implement the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). SOAWR's strategic goals are:

- i) Domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol by states in order to transform women's lived realities in Africa.
- ii) Ratification of the Maputo Protocol in 13 African states thereby ensuring universal ratification.
- iii) Enhanced state accountability to ensure fulfilment of state obligations under the Maputo Protocol.
- iv) Popularisation and utilisation of the Maputo Protocol.
- v) Strengthened SOAWR Coalition.

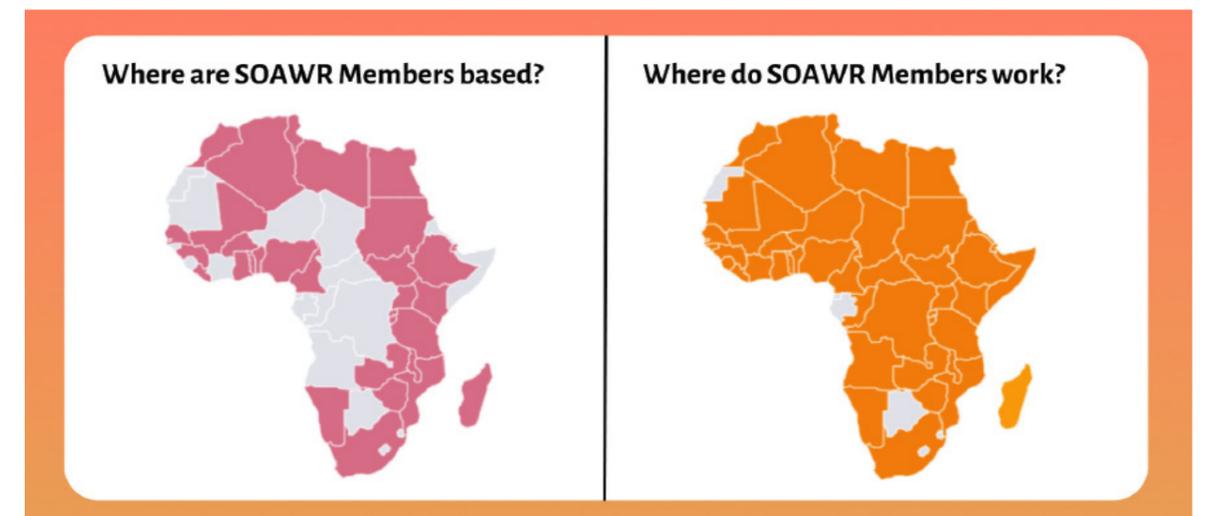
SOAWR Vision

African women fully enjoy their rights as provided for under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

SOAWR Mission

Hold African Union Member States accountable and enhance partnership to fulfil their obligations under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; and encourage other stakeholders to actively apply the Protocol for the promotion and protection of the rights of women.

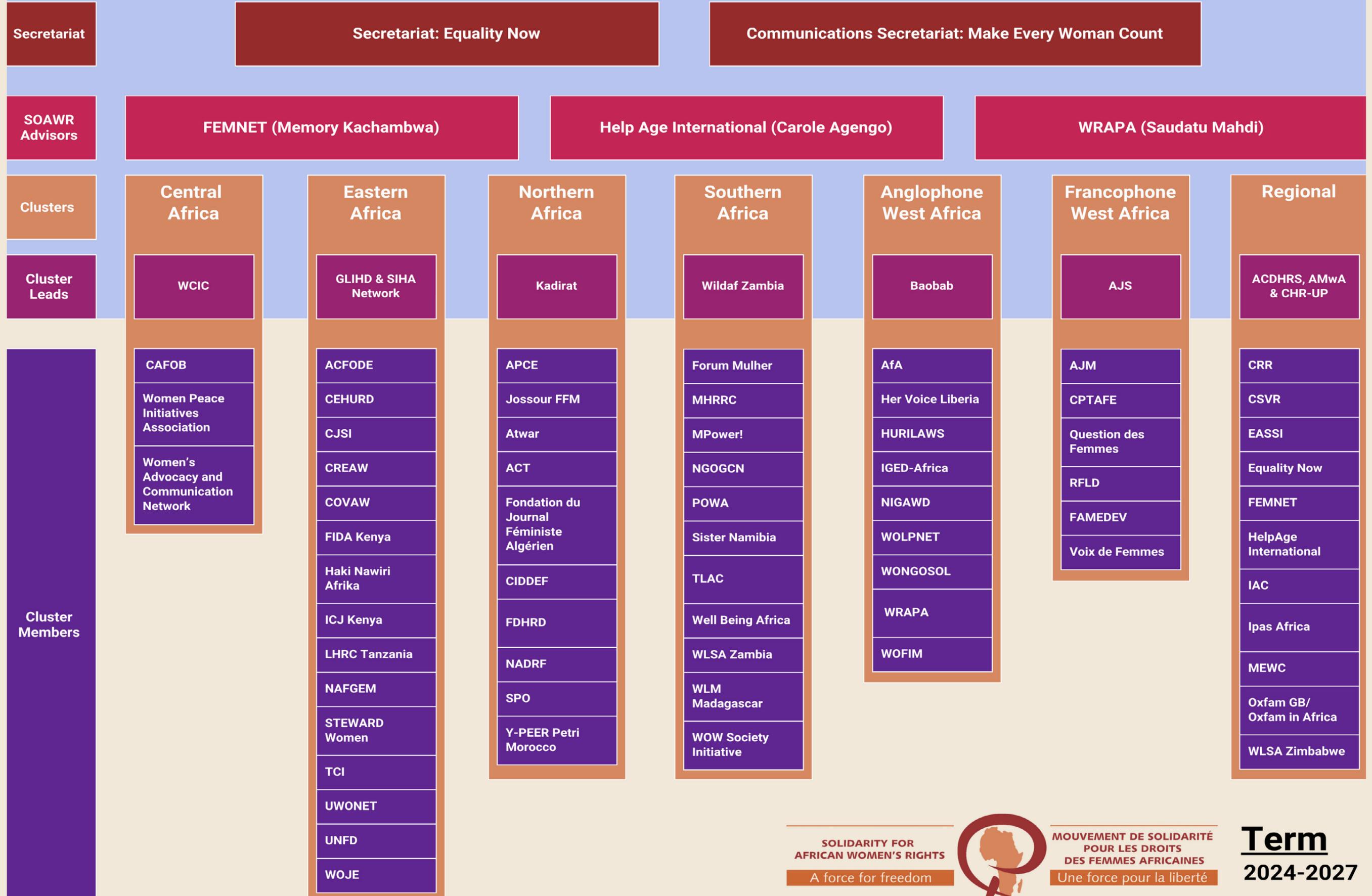
SOAWR's Presence & Reach



SOAWR member organisations' offices are based in 33 AU Member States and operate on the ground in 45. In the future, we hope to broaden our reach to the remaining 10: Botswana, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Gabon, Lesotho, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, São Tomé and Príncipe and Seychelles. See our [members directory](#) for more information.

The SOAWR Coalition

Steering Committee



SOLIDARITY FOR AFRICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS

A force for freedom



MOUVEMENT DE SOLIDARITÉ POUR LES DROITS DES FEMMES AFRICAINES

Une force pour la liberté

Term
2024-2027

SOAWR turns 20!

September 2024 marked the significant 20th Anniversary of the SOAWR Coalition. In addition to our ongoing activities, much of SOAWR's 2024 initiatives, communications and events revolved around celebrating the momentous milestone. Here we take a moment to reflect on how SOAWR began and our journey until now, hearing from our diverse members, both old and new.

Where it all began

We sat down with Saudatu Mahdi, Secretary General of SOAWR member organisation Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), and one of the founding members of the SOAWR Coalition, for her reflections on the Coalition, 20 years on.

What was the African women's rights landscape like when SOAWR was established in 2004, and what challenges did you face in forming the Coalition?

Recalling the SOAWR beginnings it is apt to see a vindication in the motivational quote that says: "The only limit to our realisation of tomorrow will be our doubts of today."

In the days and months of the struggle for the adoption of the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) by the African Heads of governments, this quote was lived and pursued with such vigour, purpose and conviction that it will one day happen. It did in July 2003. African Women never doubted that progressively, international laws and treaties will come to respond to and affirm their rights to dignity and protection from prevailing systemic abuse, discrimination and exclusion in public and private spaces.



Key challenges included the limitations in regional organising given the loose connections that drove women's advocacy for adoption. In-country knowledge and advocacy limitations proved arduous, affecting governments delayed actions to lift reservations and bring the law into force.

How has the founding vision of SOAWR evolved over the past 20 years and what are your favourite memories of SOAWR?

Once the euphoria of adoption died, work began ably led by Equality Now.

Forming a Coalition to move beyond adoption of the Treaty was logical but had no prior plans. The founding vision of SOAWR, though deliberate, took time to crystallise. Chip after chip, the landscape for a platform to hold and provide leadership emerged. The past 20 years have been marked by faith, conviction and resilience resulting in a strong cohesive movement to take forward the mission.

My favourite memories include the regional and global celebration of the adoption of the Protocol in July 2003. It was the first time WRAPA had contributed to a successful women's movement intervention.

January 2005 was another favourite memory, when as the 7th State party, Nigeria deposited its instrument of ratification. Thereafter, Nigeria also successfully hosted the African Union mid-term Summit at which a well-designed and executed colour-coded campaign impacted countries and secured more critical ratifications thereby fast tracking the coming into force of the Protocol [25th November 2005].

As your legacy continues to inspire new generations in fulfilling SOAWR's mission, what is one piece of advice you would offer?

My singular advice to upcoming and promising female advocates is to remain focused and alert to achieve universal ratification, sustain influence for country level domestication and implementation. This is what will fulfil the SOAWR mission.

With opportunities in technology, and more structured relationships, new generations should have no doubts. They must not be limited by doubts today, or ever.



Some of the founding members of SOAWR pictured in 2005. From left to right: Firoze Manji (Fahamu), Faiza Mohamed (Equality Now), Mama Koite (FEMNET), Saudatu Mahdi (WRAPA) and Mary Wandia (FEMNET)

The Road to 20

Prepared by founding member and secretariat Equality Now

2003

The African Union (AU) adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa **on 11 July 2003** in Maputo, Mozambique¹. The Protocol, which is commonly known as the Maputo Protocol, offers significant potential to guarantee the rights of women, but it needed at least 15 countries to ratify it to come into force. The Comoros became the first country to ratify it 9 months after its adoption. On 26th October 2005, Togo became the 15th country to ratify the Maputo Protocol, thereby ushering its entry into force on 25th November 2005.

The adoption of the Protocol was made possible by the efforts of several women's rights organisations that later formed the SOAWR Coalition. These organisations played a pivotal role in getting the strong language in the Maputo Protocol, reviewed various drafts; mobilised states, Women's Rights organisations, and legal experts to review and strengthen the various drafts of the Maputo Protocol prior to its adoption by the AU Assembly.

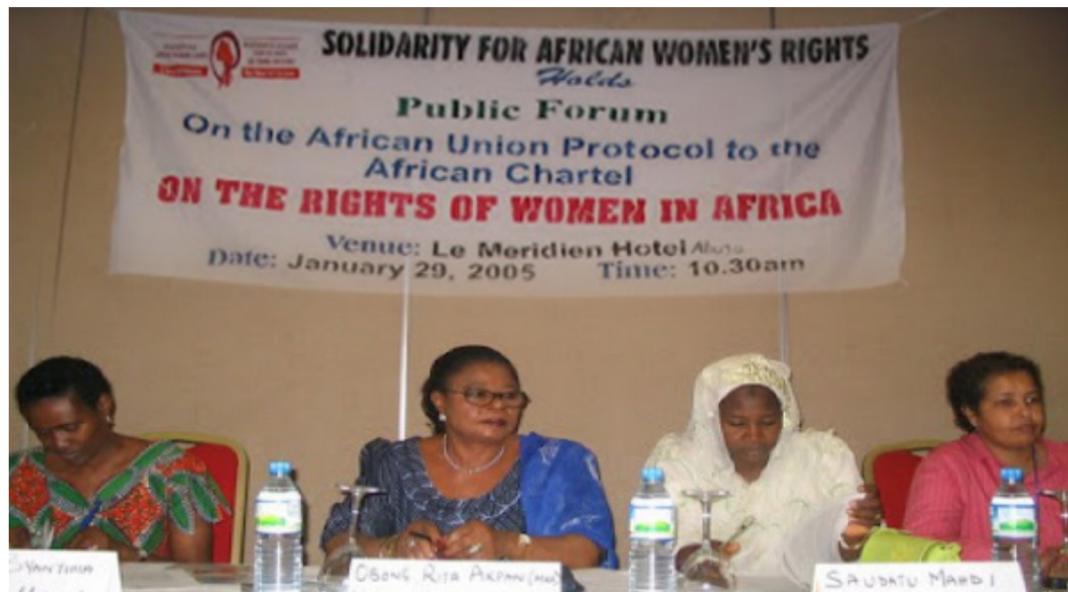
¹ https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-treaty-charter_on_rights_of_women_in_africa.pdf

2004

In **September 2004**, the Solidarity for African Women's Rights Coalition (SOAWR) was established to ensure that policymakers on the African continent prioritise the rights of girls and women substantially articulated in the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. SOAWR was instrumental in mobilising CSO action to rally governments to ratify the Maputo Protocol, making it the fastest Human Rights instrument to enter into force.

2005

On **26 October 2005**, the Maputo Protocol secured 15 ratifications by AU Member states. Hence, the Protocol entered into force on 25 November 2005 (the first day of the 16 Days of Activism), 28 months after its adoption, becoming the fastest human rights treaty to come into force in the history of OAU/AU. Burkina Faso, Seychelles, and Zambia ratified the Maputo Protocol in 2006, increasing the number of states that had ratified it.



SOAWR Public Forum (2005)

2007

By **2007**, over 23 countries out of the 55 AU member states had signed and ratified the Protocol: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Comoros, Lesotho, Libya, Namibia, Djibouti, The Gambia, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Mauritania, Nigeria, Ghana, Seychelles, Tanzania, Zambia, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, and Togo.

2008

In **2008** Equality Now, in partnership with SOAWR, published 'A Guide to Using the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa for Legal Action,' available in Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese. This resource was widely distributed and applied in technical training offered to legal practitioners across 31 member countries, notably Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Lesotho, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Mauritania, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. An additional 3 countries ratified the Protocol during this phase: Guinea Bissau, Liberia, and Zimbabwe bringing the total number to 26 countries.

As more African states ratified the Maputo Protocol, SOAWR in partnership with UNIFEM (now UN Women) and African Union Commission initiated introduction of a Multi-Sectoral Approach (MSA) to state parties as a means to fast-track fulfilment of their obligation under the Maputo Protocol. Hence, 23 member states, along with SOAWR members, and UN/AU staff, benefited from the first MSA training held in Kigali, Rwanda in **June 2008**.

2010

The AU officially launched the African Women's Decade (AWD) 2010-2020 on the International Day for Rural Women on **October 15, 2010**, to advance gender equality by accelerating the implementation of the Dakar Platform for Action, Beijing Platform for Action, and the AU Assembly Decisions on gender equality and women's empowerment. The same year, Kenya and Uganda joined the list of countries that are state parties to the Maputo Protocol. MEWC, the SOAWR Communication Secretariat, launched an independent review of the AWD and published annual reports that captured progress or the lack of progress that African countries were making in advancing women's rights.

2011

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) adopted reporting guidelines on the Maputo Protocol in **2011**. SOAWR, through its member Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria (CHR-UP), supports the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in developing reporting guidelines on measures to advance the Protocol at a country level and provided extensive training on reporting to both members and CSOs resulting in an increase in the number of state parties fulfilling their reporting obligations.

2012

SOAWR partnered with the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa to offer training on guidelines for reporting on the Protocol and disseminate copies of the guidelines to the AU in 2012. In **April 2012**, the second training on the Multi-Sectoral Approach was convened for additional state parties. This was a joint initiative of SOAWR, UNIFEM/UN Women, and the African Union Commission's Women, Gender, Development Directorate (now known as the African Union Commission's Women, Gender, Development and Youth Directorate).

2013

By the 10th anniversary of the Protocol in **2013**, 36 out of 54 member states of the African Union (AU) had ratified it, a clear victory for SOAWR, which had tirelessly mobilised and worked to achieve this goal over the years.

2015/16

The African Union declared **2015** the "Year of Women's Empowerment and Development Towards Africa's Agenda 2063". SOAWR used this opportunity to advocate for more countries to ratify the Protocol and urged state parties to implement it and submit their progress reports to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights as mandated under the Maputo Protocol. **The year 2016** was the second consecutive year in which the African Union declared "the Africa Year of Human Rights, with a focus on the Rights of Women," offering SOAWR more opportunities to engage with member states on ratification, implementation, and reporting on the Maputo Protocol.

2017

By **2017**, 36 countries had ratified the Protocol, with West Africa leading with only one country remaining to ratify the Protocol (i.e., Niger). The East and North Africa regions remained the last in the line as several countries from these regions were yet to ratify the Maputo Protocol (namely in the East: Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan; and in the North region: Egypt, Morocco, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and Tunisia).

2018

In **2018**, the AU Women and Gender Development Directorate, in partnership with the SOAWR Coalition jointly developed and launched the AU All for Maputo Protocol Programme (AMPP), a 10-year programme aimed at accelerating the ratification, domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol. The SOAWR Coalition started developing its 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, positioning itself to contribute to the realisation of the objectives of the AU AMPP.

2019

In **2019**, out of the 55 member countries in the African Union, 49 had signed the Protocol, and 42 ratified and deposited their instruments (Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Kenya, Mali, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Mauritania, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome & Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

The AU's aspirations for universal ratification of the Maputo Protocol by all 55 Member States is fast-tracked with 13 countries (namely: Botswana, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Morocco, Niger, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan) yet to ratify the treaty in 2020, and the majority of the state parties yet to domesticate the Protocol. The AU also introduced the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index to monitor the implementation of Women's Rights commitments among AU member states.

In 2020, the SOAWR Coalition held a members' meeting in Nairobi and this was the birthplace of the internal regional cluster structure that contributed to strengthening the coalition.



SOAWR Coalition Meeting (2020)

2020

2022

In 2022, the ACHPR adopted Guidelines on Shadow Reports of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (Shadow Reporting Guidelines), co-developed by the AU SRRWA, the ACHPR and three SOAWR members (CHR-UP, Equality Now & ICJ Kenya) equipping civil society organisations with an important resource.

2023

In 2023, the African Union, in partnership with the Kenyan Government, SOAWR and other stakeholders, commemorated the Maputo Protocol's 20th Anniversary with a retrospective of the journey towards promoting women's rights in Africa. This year saw two countries, South Sudan and Botswana, ratify the Maputo Protocol.

2024

The SOAWR Coalition marked its 20th anniversary in 2024. On this anniversary, SOAWR members from different regions celebrated SOAWR's work to ensure full ratification, domestication, and implementation of the Maputo Protocol in 55 member states. The effort by SOAWR members has seen an increase in the number of member states that have ratified the Maputo Protocol, bringing the number currently to 45 states out of 55. The Coalition currently boasts of 77 member organisations, based in 33 African countries and representing all African regions.

On this anniversary, SOAWR members from different regions celebrated SOAWR's work to ensure full ratification, domestication, and implementation of the Maputo Protocol in 55 member states.



Spotlight on SOAWR's youngest member organisation

Women Lead Movement (WLM) Madagascar is SOAWR's youngest member organisation, having been the most recent to join the Coalition, in 2022. The SOAWR Journal is pleased to spotlight their work and experience since joining us.

Can you tell us about the origins of Women Lead Movement Madagascar? What were the motivations behind establishing the organisation?

Women Lead Movement (WLM) Madagascar was born out of the Mandela Washington Fellowship under the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). During the programme, Mrs Melene Rossouw—founder and Executive Director of Women Lead Movement South Africa—met Mrs Rasamimanana Riambelo Onjaniaina, who would become the future Country Director of WLM Madagascar. The two women formed a close friendship, bonded by a shared vision for African women and a mutual commitment to advancing equality, empowering women and combating gender-based violence.



Mrs Rasamimanana Riambelo Onjaniaina, WLM Madagascar Country Director

Rather than establishing a separate organisation in Madagascar, they chose to expand the mission of Women Lead Movement into a pan-African platform. In 2020, WLM Madagascar was officially launched with a founding team of ten members and has operated since then through self-funding from its members. Despite limited resources, this all-female-led organisation has carried out awareness campaigns, collaborated with other civil society organisations, and engaged in advocacy for Malagasy women's rights—demonstrating that passion and determination are powerful drivers of change.

WLM Madagascar promotes gender equality at the community level, along with active and participatory citizenship—essential for good governance, democracy, and social justice. We align our work with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 5, 10, and 16, and uphold the principles of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). We are also engaged in the fight against human trafficking, a serious issue in Madagascar. Our core strategy is to emancipate women and girls through economic empowerment and provision of psychosocial support, especially to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

The ratification of the Maputo Protocol remains central to our advocacy. We currently have around 50 women ambassadors for ratification across three regions of the country and continue to mobilise grassroots communities. We believe that ratifying the Protocol would represent a historic step forward for Malagasy women. However, for this to happen, it is vital that people understand the issues and the positive impact it could have on their everyday lives.

What is the women's rights landscape like in Madagascar? How is the journey towards ratifying the Maputo Protocol going?

Gender inequality in Madagascar is deeply entrenched, affecting women's safety, economic inclusion, and access to resources:

- Gender-based violence is widespread. Over a third of Malagasy women experience such violence, and nearly 20% of women aged 15 to 49 have been victims of sexual violence. More than 30% have suffered physical violence since the age of 15, and around one in four women has experienced domestic violence at the hands of a partner.
- Child marriage and early unions remain prevalent, particularly in regions where cultural norms reinforce such practices. In areas like Atsimo Atsinanana, Atsimo Andrefana, Melaky, Betsiboka, and Sofia, child marriage rates are as high as 66%.
- Maternal health is another serious concern, with ten women dying every day from pregnancy- or childbirth-related complications. Alarming, 40% of these women are under the age of 24, and three daily deaths involve adolescents under 19.
- Economically, women face higher unemployment rates than men, and young women are disproportionately affected. The employment rate for women is 82% compared to 88% for men, and women earn, on average, 37% less than their male counterparts. Although 73% of women work in agriculture—compared to 77% of men—they face barriers to accessing agricultural resources and services.
- Women's access to land and inheritance rights also remains limited. While women frequent land offices more than men, land is often registered solely in the husband's name. Of land parcels declared by couples, 82% are certified under the husband's name. Only 12% are registered to women, and just 5% are jointly held. When it comes to inheritance, only 30.5% of women inherit family assets, compared to 65% of men. Widows, especially in rural areas, often struggle to claim rights to land registered in their late husband's name.

These statistics highlight the pressing need for reforms to protect women from violence, improve economic inclusion, and ensure equitable land and inheritance rights.

Madagascar signed the Maputo Protocol on 28 February 2004, but has yet to ratify it. Without ratification, the country is not legally bound to implement its provisions. The Protocol is a critical instrument for advancing women's rights in Africa, and while civil society, NGOs, and even elected officials have undertaken advocacy efforts for its ratification, the goal remains unmet. The journey has been difficult, but we remain committed.

Why did WLM want to join SOAWR and what has been your experience since joining?

Joining the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) Coalition has had a significant impact on WLM Madagascar. It has strengthened our advocacy and provided us with a broader network of support. SOAWR's expertise in promoting the Maputo Protocol has enabled us to develop more effective strategies for engaging policymakers and holding them accountable for their commitments to gender equality.

Being part of SOAWR has created a strong sense of solidarity. We understand that collective effort is essential to overcome entrenched social norms and legal barriers. SOAWR has also equipped us with vital resources, tools, and training. Legal manuals and capacity-building programmes have helped us navigate complex legal systems, apply the Protocol effectively, and build impactful campaigns.

Since joining SOAWR, we have found true allies. This partnership has amplified our voice and expanded our reach. It has also enabled us to connect with regional and international forums, enhancing collaboration with other member organisations. Together, we are working towards the universal ratification and implementation of the Maputo Protocol, uniting our efforts to create lasting change.

As SOAWR's youngest member organisation, what unique insights or attributes do you bring to the Coalition and its vision?

As the youngest member of SOAWR, we bring fresh energy and a generational perspective that complements the wisdom and achievements of long-standing members. We are honoured to contribute to the Coalition's vision and inspired by the trailblazing work of those who came before us.

Our insights are grounded in grassroots engagement with young women and communities. We are committed to listening to voices that are often marginalised—especially those of the youth—and to building intergenerational bridges. Our work centres on community empowerment, and we believe this approach can help broaden the Coalition's impact.

While we are still growing, we see our humility and adaptability as strengths. We approach this work with respect, a desire to learn, and a readiness to contribute fresh ideas. We hope to amplify SOAWR's mission by engaging new audiences and offering innovative and sustainable strategies to achieve our shared goals.

What are your hopes for WLM and SOAWR in another 20 years' time (in 2044)?

We hope to see even more organisations and individuals join SOAWR. One of our core beliefs is that collaboration among development actors is far more effective than competition. Every day, we witness women and men standing side by side for human rights and social justice, and we believe this spirit of solidarity will drive lasting change.



In 20 years' time, we hope to look back and see a continent where women are empowered and free from violence and discrimination, and where more men are embracing positive masculinity. We envision a strong, united movement that has made the promise of equality a reality for all African women.

Celebrations Marked with Meaning

With support from a special 'SOAWR at 20' sub-committee, our seven clusters each commemorated SOAWR's anniversary through a variety of activities characterised by joy, reflection and advocacy.

Eastern African Cluster: "Streaming Solidarity": SOAWR at 20 – A Cross-regional Virtual Commemoration

Co-Leads: SIHA Network & GLIHD

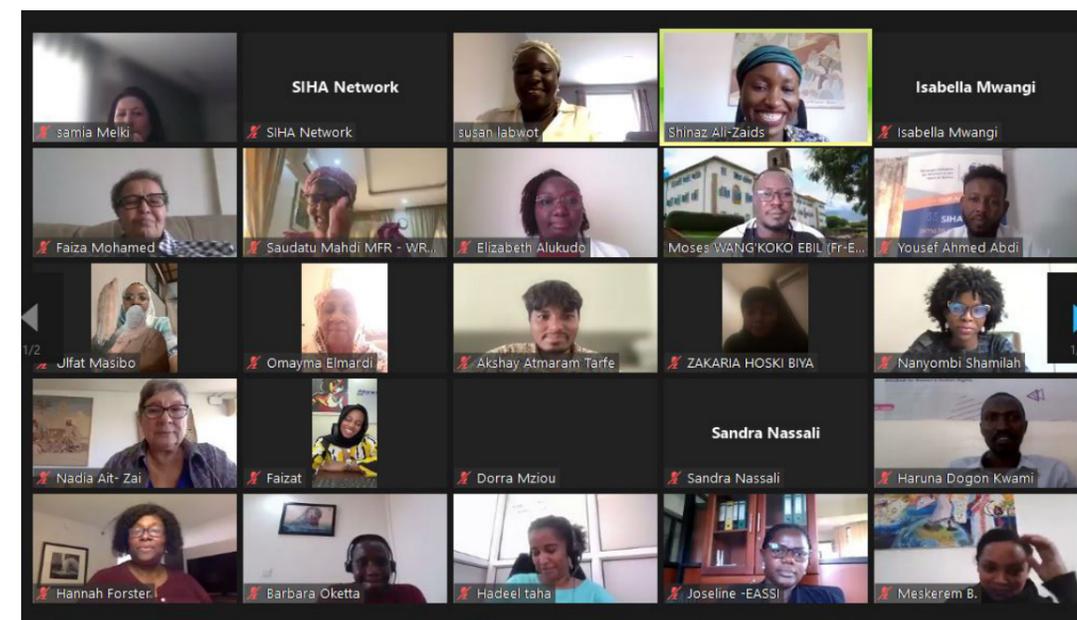
The SIHA Network, in collaboration with the Equality Now Secretariat, successfully hosted a webinar to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the SOAWR Coalition on the 26th of September 2024. This collaborative event was a significant gathering, bringing together 140 representatives of the SOAWR Network from across the region. The webinar featured interpretations in both French and Arabic, ensuring accessibility for all participants. The celebration commenced with inspiring welcoming remarks from Faizat Badmus Busari of SIHA, followed by insightful presentations from Faiza Mohamed of Equality Now and Haj. Saudatu Mahdi of the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative. They took attendees on a meaningful journey through the achievements and milestones of SOAWR over the past two decades. This event served as a valuable opportunity to reflect on the progress made and the significance of the countries that have signed and ratified the Maputo Protocol, highlighting the collective efforts toward advancing women's rights in the region.

Zabib Loro from Women for Justice and Equality (WOJE) in South Sudan shared valuable insights regarding the country's journey in ratifying the Maputo Protocol and addressing accountability issues. She highlighted the power of solidarity and the significant role of women's agency in collective advocacy efforts. Zabib pointed out the transformative impact of the women's movement in these initiatives, especially given that South Sudan is the most recent country to ratify the Protocol. Although she acknowledged that challenges remain, she expressed her optimism and belief in the determination of the movement in South Sudan to drive the effective implementation of the Protocol.

From Somalia we heard from Yousef Ahmed, SIHA's Somalia/ Somaliland Country Coordinator who spoke on the importance of building solidarity and advocating for the ratification of the Maputo Protocol in Somalia, which has not yet ratified it. Yousef highlighted specific cases that have emerged and explained the opportunities the Protocol could provide. An important session was led by Isabella Mwangi from CREAM, who presented a detailed breakdown of the Protocol for the participants and outlined ways they can engage with it. She discussed the reservations that various states have regarding the Protocol and encouraged members to challenge these reservations. Additionally, she shared recommendations for collective action.

Grace Marwa-Pattison showcased videos of members sharing uplifting messages for the coalition, which contributed to a positive atmosphere. During the closing remarks, Samia Melki, Chairperson of the SOAWR at 20 sub-committee, and Susan Labwot from the SIHA Network emphasised the significance of the event and the Protocol.

The webinar was a valuable experience, guiding participants through SOAWR's 20-year journey. Attendees gained insights from countries that have successfully implemented the Protocol, as well as from those still in the ratification process. Importantly, the knowledge session on the Protocol provided essential tools for participants and members, empowering them to develop effective strategies and integrate the Protocol into their ongoing work.



Virtual SOAWR at 20 Celebration Participants

Anglophone West African Cluster: Commemorations, Campaigns and Capacity-building

Lead: Baobab for Women's Human Rights

Baobab for Women's Human Rights, Nigeria, organised a series of advocacy events, including a live X Space. The event featured other cluster members from The New Generation Girls And Women Development Initiative, (NIGAWD) and Alliances for Africa, who discussed key aspects of the Maputo Protocol, including Articles 9 and 19 on women's political participation and sustainable development rights. Major outcomes of this session included the identification of strategies to boost media partnerships, public awareness, and mobilisation efforts. The session emphasised the critical need to bridge the gap between policy and practice through continued collaboration among civil society organisations and political leaders. Baobab also released a commemorative video with reflections from team members on SOAWR's achievements, showcasing a commitment to advancing women's rights.

In Ghana, Initiative for Gender Equality and Development in Africa, IGED-Africa and The New Generation Girls And Women Development Initiative (NIGAWD), Nigeria honoured SOAWR's legacy through a social media campaign featuring e-flyers and articles, demonstrating the value of digital platforms in advocacy and awareness-building for women's rights.

Nigeria's Alliances for Africa celebrated by hosting a one-day training on the Maputo Protocol for key stakeholders from FIDA, the Nigerian Bar Association, and the Ministry of Justice in Imo and Abia states. This training underscored the importance of domesticating the Protocol within Nigeria's legal framework and resulted in a strengthened commitment from participants to support SOAWR's mission.

In Liberia, the Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) led a capacity-building workshop for over 30 women-led organisations, emphasising the need to eradicate violence against women and eliminate harmful practices like FGM. This workshop, conducted in collaboration with ActionAid Liberia, provided participants with the tools to engage state actors

effectively. A key outcome was the creation of a strategic roadmap to hold Liberia's government accountable to its Protocol commitments. WONGOSOL's Executive Director called on the government to ensure these rights are emphasising the Protocol's significance in safeguarding women's rights.

Key Outcomes Across the Region included:

- **Strengthened Commitment to Advocacy:** Civil society organisations pledged ongoing efforts to bridge the gap between policy and practice for the Maputo Protocol, particularly in challenging contexts.
- **Increased Awareness Through Digital Campaigns:** IGED-Africa's digital advocacy highlighted the effectiveness of social media in promoting SOAWR's mission.
- **Collaborative Action Plans for Protocol Domestication:** Nigerian and Liberian stakeholders developed actionable strategies to advocate for domesticating the Maputo Protocol, bolstering its integration into national legal systems.
- **Strategic Roadmap for Advocacy in Liberia:** WONGOSOL and partner organisations crafted a roadmap to engage Liberia's government on Protocol commitments, with a focus on eliminating harmful practices like FGM.

These outcomes not only celebrated SOAWR's achievements over the past 20 years but also set the stage for sustained, impactful advocacy toward gender equality across Africa.



WONGOSOL, Liberia

Francophone West African Cluster: A Splendid Symposium

Lead: Association des Juristes Sénégalaises (Association of Senegalese Women Lawyers (AJS))

The twentieth anniversary of the Maputo Protocol was celebrated in conjunction with the fiftieth anniversary of the Association of Senegalese Women Lawyers (AJS). To mark these two major events in style, the AJS organised a three-day symposium in Dakar on the theme: 'Environment and security: two challenges for women's and children's rights', inviting member organisations of the cluster and other sister associations in Senegal that campaign for the promotion and protection of women's and girls' rights.

This unifying approach enabled various organisations working to protect and promote women's rights, particularly those in the Francophone West African cluster, to exchange experiences and best practices on the ratification, domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol.

This major event, which aimed to take stock of the situation of women's and children's rights and contribute to improving the legal framework for these rights at the national, sub-regional and regional levels, was chaired by the Minister of Justice and brought together representatives from ministries, parliament, sub-regional organisations such as ECOWAS, civil society organisations, technical and financial partners and senior Senegalese officials.

The various topics discussed provided an opportunity to explore in depth the rights of women enshrined in the Maputo Protocol, identifying achievements and remaining challenges, and formulating recommendations and prospects for the future.



Symposium Attendees in Senegal



Members of the Francophone West African Cluster

Southern Africa Cluster: Powering Change from Pretoria to Lusaka

The symposium held on 11 September 2024 in Malusi, South Africa, was a key event in celebrating 20 years of the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) Coalition and its ongoing commitment to advancing women's rights across the continent. Organised by South African SOAWR members—Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, Women on the Watch Initiatives and Well Being Africa—in partnership with the Malusi Youth Development Organisation (MYDO), the symposium brought together 81 participants from community-based organisations (CBOs), local leaders, and government representatives. It focused on equipping communities with practical tools to apply the Maputo Protocol, particularly in promoting gender equality, women's inheritance rights, and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). Expert-led sessions highlighted the Protocol's unique, Africa-centred provisions, such as the right to medical abortion and the recognition of unpaid domestic work.

The event was both a learning space and a celebration, honouring two decades of SOAWR's transformative advocacy through engaging presentations, discussions, and a symbolic cake-cutting ceremony. Participants left inspired and empowered, with many expressing renewed motivation to champion women's rights in their communities. The symposium also fostered critical dialogue on challenges such as misinformation, customary norms, and access to legal recourse, encouraging collaborative efforts among CBOs, parents, schools, and religious leaders. Funded by the African Women Development Fund through Equality Now/SOAWR, the event marked a significant step forward in localising the Maputo Protocol and sustaining SOAWR's legacy of feminist movement building in Africa.

Building on the momentum of the Malusi symposium in South Africa, SOAWR members in Zambia marked the anniversary with an equally impactful event. On 17 September 2024, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) and Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) hosted a Fireside Chat Panel Discussion in Lusaka to reflect on the strides Zambia has made in advancing women's and girls' rights since the domestication of the Maputo Protocol in 2015. The event brought together stakeholders from government, civil society organisations, and young women's rights advocates to assess progress and deepen collaboration.

The panel featured renowned feminist and women's rights activist Ms Sara Hlupekile Longwe, lawyer and advocate Ms Daisy Ng'ambi, and Ms Emma Phiri from the Gender Division under the Office of the President. Discussions highlighted Zambia's achievements, including the enactment of the Gender Equity and Equality Act No. 22 of 2015, consistent state reporting on the Protocol, and strong collaboration between government and civil society in shaping national gender agendas. The Fireside Chat, like the Malusi symposium, reinforced the importance of collective feminist action, legal implementation, and community engagement in realising the Maputo Protocol's vision for African women and girls.



Participants at the Fireside Chat

Northern African Cluster: Strategic Celebrations

The Northern African Cluster continued the celebrations into 2025 with a lively celebration held in April in Egypt. This was attended by the Cluster's member organisations as well as representatives of relevant Egyptian CSOs and representatives from 15 media outlets who amplified the event, the Coalition's legacy and why Egypt should ratify the Maputo Protocol.



SOAWR North African Members in Egypt

Additionally in May 2025, Kadirat held an importantly-timed anniversary celebration in Tunisia, which was attended by a number of activists and experts in the field of women's rights, along with representatives of civil society and media.

This celebration occurred amid growing challenges facing women in many African countries. The President of Kadirat and the Northern African Cluster lead, Samia Melki, affirmed that this occasion was an opportunity to renew the commitment to defending women's rights and enhance their status in society. Participants also emphasised the importance of the Maputo Protocol, describing it as one of the most significant regional mechanisms for defending women's rights in Africa, and called for its broader implementation to ensure greater protection for women and girls.

Rachida Slaouti, a member of Kadirat, and a university professor, stated that the main goal of the event was "to achieve at least a minimum level of improvement in the status of women in society, especially in light of the current threats and setbacks they are facing regarding their rights and achievements."



SOAWR at 20 celebrations in Tunisia

Regional African Cluster: Fostering Intergenerational Dialogue to Continue SOAWR's Work

The Regional Cluster celebrated the 20th anniversary of SOAWR on the side-lines of the 83rd session of the ACHPR discussing 'the role of SOAWR amidst the ongoing backlash on women's rights in Africa' on 5 May, 2025. Panellists included representatives from African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, Akina Mama wa Afrika, the Centre for Reproductive Rights, Equality Now, and the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa.

The discussion centred on the role of SOAWR in addressing the shrinking civic space, strategies to amplify the voices of youth in efforts to counter the backlash, navigating regressive legal developments, and leveraging relationships and partnerships within continental bodies to push for accountability under the Maputo Protocol. And lessons learned from the past 20 years that SOAWR can carry into the next decade.

During the side event, participants strongly emphasised the need to shift advocacy efforts beyond the ratification and domestication of the Maputo Protocol, toward demanding concrete accountability from member states that have already taken these steps. There was a call to pose critical, yet straightforward questions: How far have these states progressed with actual implementation? What has worked well, and what indicators are being used to measure success? What obstacles remain, and what strategies are in place to accelerate progress? It was noted that the absence of a clear accountability framework, complete with progress-tracking mechanisms, defined benchmarks, and consequences for non-compliance, has severely hindered efforts to hold governments accountable. Additionally, participants expressed concern over the lack of a visible and intentional feminist lens within the African Union (AU) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), which undermines the credibility and effectiveness of institutional efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls.

Another key reflection centred on the need for feminist organisations and movements to deliberately cultivate and protect space for young feminists. Some participants observed that certain movements have lost visibility and momentum due to internal power struggles, which in some cases have led to their collapse. This highlights the critical importance of engaging in honest, courageous conversations about how power is held and shared within feminist spaces. The discussion emphasised that sustained intergenerational collaboration which is rooted in trust, mutual respect, and shared leadership is not only desirable but essential for the longevity and impact of feminist advocacy across the continent. Empowering emerging feminists and integrating them meaningfully into leadership and decision-making processes will be crucial in safeguarding the future of the movement.



Another key reflection centred on the need for feminist organisations and movements to deliberately cultivate and protect space for young feminists.



SOAWR Regional Cluster Panellists in Banjul, The Gambia

Central African Cluster: Gathering with a Mission

To conclude our commemoration of SOAWR's 20th Anniversary, the Central Africa Cluster will undertake a high-level ratification mission in Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR), on 24–25 June 2025. This mission, organised in partnership with the NGO CIAF Centrafrique (National Section of the Inter-African Committee for the Fight Against Harmful Traditional Practices and Violence Against Women and Children) and a member of the Catherine Samba-Panza Foundation for Women (FCSP), reflects the Cluster's firm commitment to SOAWR's core objective: ensuring that African States sign, ratify, domesticate, and implement the Maputo Protocol as a key instrument for advancing the rights of women and girls across the continent.

Although the Central African Republic ratified the Maputo Protocol in 2012, the process remains incomplete, as the instruments of ratification have yet to be formally deposited with the African Union. The upcoming mission will serve as a strategic follow-up, engaging government officials to support the finalisation of this process.

Representatives of all Central African Cluster member organisations will participate in this mission, accompanied by a member of the SOAWR Steering Committee, underscoring the significance of this milestone moment in the Coalition's two-decade journey. The Central Africa Cluster expresses its sincere appreciation to the Ministry for the Promotion of Gender, the Protection of Women, Family, and Children of the Central African Republic for its vital collaboration and commitment to making this mission a success.

A feminist imagining: SOAWR at 40

In 2004, the same year that SOAWR was founded, Kenyan activist Wangari Maathai gave her Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, declaring "In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground. A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now."

The SOAWR Coalition has sought to embody this hope over the past 20 years, and looking ahead at the next 20 years, we recognise that maintaining a transformative vision remains just as important. We

asked our members to share their imaginings of what SOAWR will look like and have achieved in 2044, when SOAWR will be celebrating 40 years:

Anticipated Achievements

By 2044, all African Union member states will have ratified the Maputo Protocol, with all reservations lifted. At least 70% of national laws will be harmonised with the Protocol's provisions, and implementation will be firmly underway, supported by strong evaluation mechanisms and regular reporting by 90% of states. The Protocol will not only be ratified - it will be a lived reality, integrated into national legal systems and actively shaping women's lives.

Violence and discrimination against women and girls will have significantly declined - 80% eradicated in some contexts - while equality between women and men becomes a shared social norm, not an aspiration.

Contributions to the African Women's Rights Movement

SOAWR will be recognised as a pillar of the African women's rights movement, having:

- Facilitated universal ratification and meaningful implementation of the Protocol.
- Developed learning tools for engagement, campaign strategies for accountability, and solidarity networks across the continent.
- Played a pivotal role in nurturing feminist leadership, especially among young, vibrant activists who now lead member organisations and drive the movement forward.
- Enabled local women's rights organisations to flourish as rights defenders at national and grassroots levels.

SOAWR's synergy and cohesion will be a model of Pan-African feminist collaboration.

Priorities in 2044

The Coalition's key priorities will include:

- Economic empowerment of women
- Eradicating gender-based violence
- Ensuring access to education and health
- Monitoring and enforcing equality and non-discrimination provisions
- Supporting domestication and localisation of the Protocol through national and customary legal reform.

Institutional Evolution

SOAWR may evolve into an independent organisation with its own Board of Directors, supported by multi-year, diverse donor funding. Its structure will allow it to deepen its strategic interventions, scale campaigns, and amplify its impact across Africa.

The Journey Ahead

By 2044, we will be far along the path of making the Maputo Protocol a lived reality - not just in law, but in practice. Yet our journey will continue as we ensure that rights recognised become rights realised - for every African woman and girl, in every country and community.

African Women's Rights Issues: An Overview of Some Achievements and Challenges Throughout 2024

Sound the Alarm: Violence Against Women (VAW)

2024 was a year marked by VAW in all regions of the continent. SOAWR Members have been active in reporting, lobbying and fighting against these scourges.

Sexual Harassment in the African Union (AU)

In October 2024, SOAWR issued a [press release](#) condemning the alleged sexual harassment of the Bilingual Secretary of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) by the former President of PAP, and the institution's failure to act—highlighting persistent concerns about sexual harassment within African Union (AU) bodies.

The statement came amid renewed scrutiny of AU institutions, including the African Union Commission (AUC), where similar allegations surfaced in 2018. Despite the adoption of the AU Harassment Policy (AUC/AD/2016/06), the Coalition noted with concern that there has been little progress in enforcement, and survivors continue to face impunity and a lack of institutional support.

We reiterated the obligation of the AU to provide safe, harassment-free work environments for women, in line with Article 13(c) of the Maputo Protocol and CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19. The Coalition called on the AUC to:

- Fully implement existing anti-harassment policies
- Establish a robust grievance and protection mechanism
- Hold all responsible parties accountable
- Release the full 2018 High Level Committee report on sexual harassment within AU institutions

SOAWR echoed the statement of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa and urged decisive, transparent action to ensure justice and protection for all AU staff, especially women. SOAWR was happy to learn from the survivor that she received the justice she sought.

Relevant Article of the Protocol: 13(c)

Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War in Sudan

In the second year of the war, women in Sudan continue to experience multiple forms of violence exacerbated by the conflict. SIHA Network's [statement](#) at the 79th Ordinary session of the ACHPR reported that “over the course of this war, violence against women has proliferated, perpetuated by all armed parties. Moreover, the RSF has used rape as a weapon of war and a means of controlling the population. In addition, there has been a steep increase in the number of women abducted as part of this war—these abductions count as enforced disappearances in many cases, with many of these women also forced into slavery during their imprisonment, since they were expected to provide domestic labour for their captors and at times, even have sex with them. There have also been high profile cases of femicide, as well as many women who have died as a result of injuries inflicted as part of rapes and sexual assaults.”

Relevant Articles of the Protocol: 4, 10, 11

Alarming Rates of Femicide in Kenya

2024 saw multiple youth-led protests against femicide, marking a pivotal moment in the nation's fight against gender-based violence. Galvanised by the alarming statistic of [at least 97 women killed between August and October](#), predominantly by intimate partners, the country's young activists—particularly from Generation Z—organised mass demonstrations across major cities, including Nairobi, Mombasa, and Lodwar, also attended by SOAWR's Kenyan member organisations. Utilising social media platforms and hashtags like [#EndFemicideKe](#) and [#TotalShutdownKenya](#), they mobilised thousands to demand justice for victims and call for systemic reforms. The protests, most notably on [January 27](#) and [December 10](#), were met with heavy police resistance, including the use of tear gas and arrests of demonstrators. Despite the government's allocation of over [\\$700,000 to combat femicide](#) and establishment of a Technical Working Group on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Femicide, activists criticised the lack of tangible progress and continued to advocate for the legal recognition of femicide as a distinct crime, improved law enforcement accountability, and comprehensive support for survivors.

Relevant Articles of the Protocol: 4 & 8

Documented increase in GBV in Somalia

The [Somalia 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan](#) indicates a disturbing increase in rape and domestic violence prevalence, which rose from an estimated 37% in 2022 to 52% in 2023, while rape increased from 11% in 2022 to 15% in 2023. Since the beginning of 2024, Somalia has witnessed a troubling rise in domestic violence, emphasising the necessity for collective action to confront this humanitarian crisis. For example, in [February 2024](#), three women were tragically killed by their spouses within a single week, with two of them being pregnant.

Relevant Article of the Protocol: 4

Fighting Against Repeals to Women's and Girls' Legal Protections from GBV

The Gambia

SOAWR member the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) played a pivotal role in safeguarding the Women's (Amendment) Act of 2015 in The Gambia by mobilising civil society, engaging policymakers, and raising public awareness about the dangers of repealing the law. Through strategic advocacy, including dialogue with religious leaders, community groups, and legislators, ACDHRS helped build broad-based support for the law's protections against harmful practices like FGM. Their efforts contributed to countering misinformation, protecting activists from intimidation, and reinforcing the demand for full implementation and enforcement of the Act, ultimately influencing the National Assembly's decision to reject the repeal bill in July 2024.

Also key to this outcome were the actions of SOAWR member Equality Now. Working with local partners, they conducted a comprehensive media advocacy campaign in The Gambia to counter proposed amendments that would weaken protections against FGM, amplifying survivor voices across traditional and social media to highlight the real-life harms of the practice. They provided technical support to local civil society organisations, including GAMCOTRAP, The Association of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Gambia (TANGO) and the Network Against Gender-Based Violence, to strengthen legal advocacy efforts and present a compelling human rights-based case to Members of Parliament.

Additionally, Equality Now raised the issue in international forums, co-hosting a side event at the June–July 2024 UN Human Rights Council session, where Dr Isatou Touray (former Vice-President of The Gambia) called for global solidarity to uphold The Gambia's anti-FGM law. Unfortunately, after the Gambian Parliament decided to uphold the Women's (Amendment) Act 2015, a case was brought to the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the Act. The Supreme Court affirmed its jurisdiction to hear the constitutional challenge of the anti-FGM law in April 2025. With the hearing scheduled for July 2025, the anti-FGM law in The Gambia, successfully defended from repeal in 2024, is once again under threat. Equality Now continues to work closely with Gambian CSOs including the Female Lawyers

Association of The Gambia (FLAG) to support them to put forward the best possible case and ensure that the law is once again upheld.

Relevant Article of the Protocol: 5(b)

Nigeria

SOAWR's members in Nigeria led the campaign to strongly opposed the [proposed repeal](#) of Nigeria's landmark 2015 Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act at the 81st ACHPR session, [warning](#) that repealing this vital law would undermine years of progress in combating gender-based violence, threaten the rights and safety of women and children, and reverse gains made at both federal and state levels. We called for transparent stakeholder dialogue and urged the African Commission to press Nigeria to preserve, strengthen, and fully implement the VAPP Act. Thanks to advocacy efforts including SOAWR's members, the repeal did not proceed, though challenges remain in enforcement and awareness of the law.

Relevant Article of the Protocol: 4(2)(a)

New African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AUCEVAWG)

Following commitments made by governments at the African Union Summit in 2023, the new [Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls](#) was drafted and negotiated throughout 2024 and officially adopted at the 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in February 2025. Alongside a Citizen Engagement Platform, in developing the Convention, the AU held consultations with Women's Rights Organisations, Traditional Leaders, the Private Sector, Academia, and Youth.

The Convention is aligned with some of the obligations already found in the Maputo Protocol, but the AU found that *“Despite the progress and concerted programmes undertaken at different levels, violence against women and girls remains a devastating vice that threatens women and girls' lives and national developments. This demands accelerated action to galvanise all sectors of society to actively participate in efforts towards eradicating the scourge.”* Thus, the Convention's nexus with the Maputo Protocol creates additional opportunities for the SOAWR Coalition to explore in regards to our mission to actively apply the Protocol for the promotion and protection of the rights of women.

Relevant Article of the Protocol: 4

New Partnership with UN Women - ACT to End Violence Against Women Programme

SOAWR is pleased to have partnered with UN Women under the [ACT to End Violence Against Women Programme](#). Through ACT, led by our Secretariat, Equality Now, we are driving impact-focused initiatives to end violence against women and girls (EVAWG) in the Eastern and Southern African regions. Our efforts include strengthening annual accountability reviews, monitoring and reporting on regional EVAWG commitments, and empowering non-traditional actors as advocates for change.

Through this project Equality Now and SOAWR have successfully trained journalists from Eastern and Southern Africa on Violence Against Women and Girls statistics and legislation, as well as on gender sensitive journalism, to not only build the capacity and increase the interest of journalists



in reporting on violence against women and girls, but also to ensure that they rely on data driven reporting. The use of data driven reporting is essentially in engaging in effective advocacy to state and other relevant stakeholders.

Equality Now and SOAWR seek to build networks and strengthen collaboration and joint efforts towards ending violence against women and girls. To achieve this, a meeting of feminist networks in East Africa was held in April 2025 to discuss the shrinking civic space and increasing backlash against women's rights in the regions. The meeting aimed to support in building connections between these networks, and developing effective joint strategies to tackle backlash on women's rights in the region such as conducting environmental scans and monitoring the anti-rights narratives in order to pre-empt responses to pushback against them. A similar meeting will be replicated in the Southern Africa region in 2026.

Through the project, Equality Now and SOAWR will engage with a wide range of stakeholders including social media influencers, and traditional and religious leaders to increase advocacy on women's rights and increase pressure on Eastern and Southern African States to ratify, domesticate and implement the Maputo Protocol. For example, in July 2025, we will hold a consultative meeting with traditional and religious leaders in Eastern and Southern Africa on their advocacy on ending violence against women and girls, and how CSOs and leaders can better collaborate in the fight to end VAWG.

Relevant Article of the Protocol: 4

Resisting the Backlash Against Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights

On September 28 2024, SOAWR and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), through its Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa (SRRWA) marked the Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion by publishing a [joint statement](#).

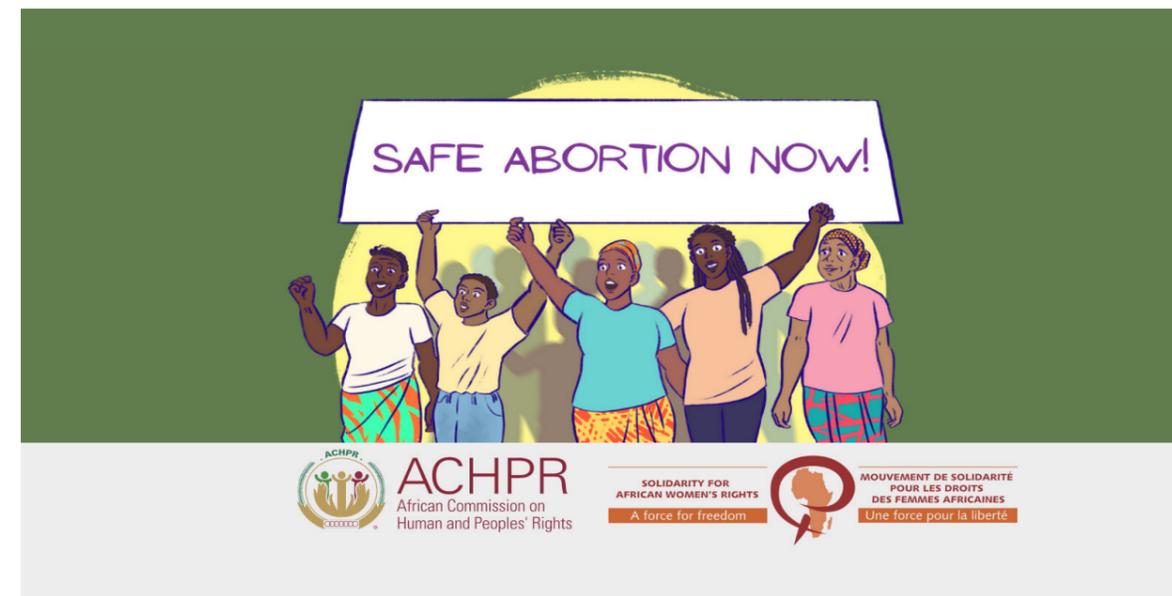
We highlighted the surge in anti-rights movements around SRHR, with increasing legal restrictions, disinformation campaigns, and conservative pushbacks on reproductive autonomy across several African nations. Such trends threaten decades of progress in gender equality and reproductive health. Compounded by inadequate funding and weak implementation of existing protocols, these challenges create additional barriers for women and girls to accessing safe abortion services.

Correspondingly, we jointly advocated for the following actions:

- All Member States are urged to establish laws and policies and allocate resources that facilitate affordable, accessible, and safe abortion, aligning with Articles 2 and 14 (2) of the Maputo Protocol and lifting any reservations on Article 14 (2).
- We implore all actors, including Judiciaries, Parliaments, National Human Rights Institutions, religious and community leaders, and politicians, to leverage their authority to uphold women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to safe and legal abortion.
- State Parties should ensure the availability, accessibility, and affordability of sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion, for all women and girls, irrespective of their socio-economic status.
- Emphasising the need to prioritise socio-economic rights, State Parties must enhance women's access to sexual and reproductive services.
- State Parties are urged to engage with all stakeholders through the exchange of information and best practices to ensure that no obstacles impede women's access to safe and legal abortion.

Positively, later in the year, in a case brought by SOAWR member Women in Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) and Talent Forget, with support from Afya Na Haki's LIRA Programme, the High Court of Zimbabwe issued a landmark ruling on 22 November 2024 declaring Section 2(1) of the Termination of Pregnancy Act unconstitutional for excluding victims of marital rape and girls under 18 from accessing legal abortion services. The Court found this omission violated constitutional rights to dignity, equal protection, and freedom from cruel treatment, and it emphasised the state's duty to protect children under Section 81 of the Constitution. As a result, the court "read in" marital rape and statutory rape as grounds for legal abortion and post-abortion care. The decision, which aims to reduce unsafe abortions and expand reproductive justice in Zimbabwe, is pending confirmation by the Constitutional Court.

Relevant Articles of the Protocol: 2 & 14



Graphic by SAAF Fund

Capacitating the Next Generation of Gender Equality Legal Advocates

The SOAWR Coalition, in collaboration with Equality Now and Kenyatta University School of Law, hosted the 3rd edition of [the Africa Gender Equality Moot Court Competition \(AGEMCC\)](#) from July 2024 to December 2024. This continent-wide competition, conducted in French and English, seeks to nurture the interest of the next generation of lawyers in women's and girls' rights in Africa, emphasising the role of continental and international human rights instruments.

The Competition challenged students to engage in comparative research on legal standards and develop arguments on the intersection between women's and girls' rights in Africa and international law, leveraging their country's legal and social contexts to address challenges in promoting and protecting women's and girls' rights. The 3rd AGEMCC spotlighted the legal complexities of commercial surrogacy in Africa, a practice facilitated by scientific and technological progress and exacerbated by the lack of comprehensive national legal frameworks governing surrogacy arrangements in Africa, where it is currently in its infancy stage.

This year's Competition took on a hybrid format, blending tech enabled innovation for the virtual preliminary and quarter finals with an in-person convening in Kenyatta University School of Law for the semi-finals and finals in early December 2024. Garnering attention from across the continent, the competition received 450+ responses from 100 universities across 24 countries.

The University of Nairobi, represented by Mwebia Dickson Gitonga and Mwiti Edna Nkirote from Kenya emerged as the best overall Anglophone team, while the title of best overall Francophone team was taken by Joël Minani and Nyabintu Zigabe Sarah of Université Officielle de Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Relevant Article of the Protocol: 8



Fierce legal debates were heard by panels of distinguished jurists from all regions of Africa



AGEMCC 2024 Semi-finalists in Nairobi, December 2024

African Women in Leadership Positions

2024 saw a number of African women elected or appointed to senior leadership and decision-making positions at national, regional and international levels. These include but are not limited to:

- **Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda**, the 2023 Winner of SOAWR's SGBV, VAWG & Ending Harmful Practices Award, was appointed Deputy Executive Director at UN Women.
- **Judith Suminwa** was appointed as the first female Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo in April 2024.
- **Yassine Fall** was appointed as Senegal's Minister of Foreign Affairs in April 2024.
- **Hadja Mémounatou Ibrahima** became the first female Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament in May 2024.
- **Thandi Moraka** was appointed as South Africa's Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation in July 2024.
- **Mandisa Maya** was appointed as South Africa's first female Chief Justice, with her term starting on 1 September 2024.
- **Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah** was elected as Namibia's first female president in December 2024, marking a significant milestone in the country's history. The country also achieved 50% female representation in its National Assembly, facilitated by voluntary gender quotas implemented by political parties.
- **Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang** was elected as Ghana's first female Vice President in December 2024.
- In August 2024, nine women chairpersons of electoral management bodies from various African countries established a continental women's leadership network to promote women's participation in electoral management.

Further, **Carole Ageng'o**, SOAWR Advisor, was appointed Co-Chair of the United Nations' Civil Society Conference in Support of the Summit of the Future. The SOAWR Coalition is proud to celebrate such a significant achievement of one of our SOAWR members.

Relevant Article of the Protocol: 9

Overview of the Implementation of the Maputo Protocol in 2024

#MaputoAt21

The Maputo Protocol turned 21 on July 11 2024. The SOAWR Coalition members jointly developed a commemorative campaign [#MaputoAt21: Building Futures, Honouring Legacies](#), spotlighting Article 21 of the treaty on women's inheritance rights. Members amplified the messages through blogs, social media and traditional media campaigns. Below are some of the major takeaways from exploring this rights area.

Positively, the majority of AU Member States have legislated for equal rights to inheritance. SOAWR's [analysis](#) of data from Women, Business & Law (2024) has found that so far:

- 34 AU Member States have legislated for equality in asset inheritance between male and female surviving spouses.
- 36 AU Member States have legislated for equality in asset inheritance between sons and daughters.
- 43 AU Member States have legislated for equality in administrative power and ownership rights to immovable property, including land, between men and women.

However, whilst inheritance laws have progressed since the adoption of the Maputo Protocol 21 years ago, as exemplified in Eswatini's State Report on the Protocol, "redress for widows is limited by the high costs of legal representation, if they were to contest the distribution of the estate. The majority of them cannot afford legal representation and in the absence of a legal aid system, there can be very little recourse to justice."² Other persisting challenges include:

- Dual legal systems and firmly held social and cultural beliefs and practices inhibit effective implementation and enforcement of laws. For example, in Benin, Mozambique and Tanzania, customary laws contradict civil laws on matters of inheritance and property rights for women. As a result, women have less access to and control over property and land than men.
- Awareness measures to improve women's access to their rights are few and far between – with only the governments of Botswana, Rwanda & Uganda facilitating any within the past two decades.
- Sex-disaggregated data on property ownership is also scarce – only the governments of Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia and South Africa have published such data.
- 62% of AU Member States do not have policies to encourage women to register immovable property (including joint titling), limiting the efficacy of legislated rights.
- Ethiopia maintains its reservation on Article 21(1) and 10 AU Member States are yet to fully ratify the Protocol.

² Kingdom of Eswatini (2020) COMBINED 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th AND 9th PERIODIC REPORT ON THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES RIGHTS AND INITIAL REPORT TO THE PROTOCOL TO THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA COUNTRY: KINGDOM OF ESWATINI FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE "KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND, page 214.



Article 21: Right to Inheritance

1. A **widow** shall:
 - have the right to an equitable share in the inheritance of the property of her husband.
 - have the right to continue to live in the matrimonial house. In case of remarriage, she shall retain this right if the house belongs to her or she has inherited it.
2. **Women and men** shall have the right to inherit, in equitable shares, their parents' properties.



In May 2024, Equality Now also published a timely study on how legal frameworks and customary practices in 20 African countries have fuelled discrimination in marriage, divorce, custody and property rights. The report, [Gender Inequality In Family Laws In Africa: An Overview Of Key Trends In Select Countries](#), which highlights discriminatory family laws in 20 African countries, discusses how customary and religious laws in countries like Algeria, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria undermine women and girls in matters of inheritance, as they receive less than men and boys.

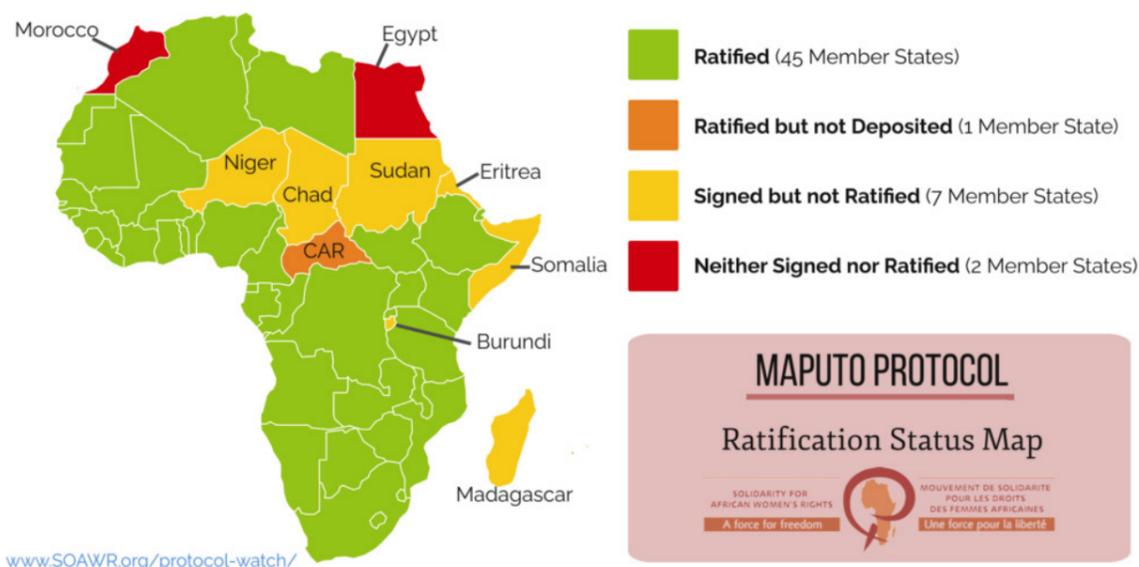
Additionally, to celebrate International Women's Day, the SOAWR Communications Secretariat launched SOAWR's first ever podcast : [All Things Maputo Protocol](#), available on Spotify and the SOAWR website. The first series *Invest in the Maputo Protocol: Accelerate Progress* echoed the IWD 2024 theme and the necessity of resourcing if we are to see any positive change. The episodes featured different SOAWR member guests who helped host Grace Marwa-Pattison to explore various articles of the Maputo Protocol and where investment is most needed to see them realised. Stay tuned for Series 2 in 2025!



The following sections explore the status update on the key processes of the full realisation of the Maputo Protocol: ratification/accession, domestication and implementation, and reporting.

Ratification/Accession

SOAWR continues to map the status of ratification via [Protocol Watch](#). Unfortunately, there were no new ratifications/accessions to the Maputo Protocol in 2024; as of the 31st of December, 2024, 45 AU Member States have ratified the Maputo Protocol, one has ratified but not yet deposited (Central African Republic), seven have signed but not yet ratified (Burundi, Chad, Eritrea, Madagascar, Niger, Somalia and Sudan) and two are yet to sign the treaty: Egypt and Morocco.



Ratification & Advocacy Missions

One of SOAWR's Strategic Plan's key result areas is to ensure ratification of the remaining AU member states that have not ratified the Maputo Protocol. Subsequently, SOAWR members conducted the following ratification and advocacy missions:

- In February 2024, SOAWR members Jossour FFM, Kadirat and Equality Now conducted a multi-faceted mission in Morocco:
 - ◆ They had a meaningful discussion on Morocco's standing on the #MaputoProtocol with Hon Mohamed Nabil Benabdallah, Secretary General of the Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme (Party of Progress and Socialism), at his office in Rabat. He committed to support efforts towards ratification.
 - ◆ A fruitful exchange was shared with Carmen Morte, the Head of the Council of Europe Office in Rabat, and her team on the Maputo Protocol and the Istanbul Convention, charting out a collaborative pathway including joint advocacy action for the Maputo Protocol and the Istanbul Convention.
 - ◆ The SOAWR delegation also deliberated with representatives of Morocco's National Human Rights Commission at their office in Rabat. SOAWR had a fruitful discussion with Hon Saadia Wadah, President of the Regional Council for Human Rights of Casablanca who facilitated the engagement with the women's organisations who were not familiar with the Maputo Protocol.



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- At the Global Learning Workshop co-hosted by The Aga Khan Foundation and Global Affairs Canada, SOAWR Member FEMNET called on Madagascar to ratify the Maputo Protocol with immediate effect.



Memory Kachambwa, FEMNET

- On 28th November 2024, a SOAWR delegation from Equality Now and HelpAge International met with the Ambassador of Niger to Ethiopia, His Excellency Mr. Amadou HASSANE MAI DABOUA. His Excellency reassured SOAWR that the Government of Niger is committed to promoting the rights of women in the country, and to ratify the Maputo Protocol. SOAWR will continue to work with H.E Ambassador DABOUA, government and civil society to support the ratification process.



SOAWR Members with Ambassador of Niger to Ethiopia, His Excellency Mr. Amadou HASSANE MAI DABOUA

Domestication & Implementation

Regarding tangible domestication and implementation of the Protocol, there were a number of documented developments by AU Member States:

- Nigerian leaders called for the actualisation of the Maputo Protocol at the [launch of the National Scorecard](#) for the implementation of the women's rights treaty, with a focus on Articles 12 (Education) and 14 (SRHR).
- According to their state report,³ from January - March 2024, Mauritius' government carried out 21 campaigns against Gender Based Violence under the 'Interfaith Forum programme' and 'Awareness Programme on the Shared Understanding on GBV', as well as communication campaigns to encourage victims to report and deter acts of violence through social and mass media.
- A [survey](#) conducted by the Ministry for Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups in all 31 regions of Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar between March and June of 2024 found that for girls aged 13-24, since 2009, sexual violence has decreased from 33 percent to 11 percent, physical violence has decreased from 76 percent to 24 percent, and emotional violence has decreased from 25 percent to 22 percent.
- Additionally, in November 2024, the Tanzanian Union Government [amended its Labour Laws](#) to increase paid employment leave for parents of premature babies: maternity leave was extended to 40 weeks for such mothers and paternity leave was also increased to 7 days for fathers of premature infants.
- On the 2nd of July 2024, President Maada Bio of Sierra Leone signed The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024 into law. The [new law](#) will provide much-needed protection for children, mostly girls, whose rights are violated through child marriage. This follows work from Equality Now and its partners, Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society (WAVES) and Defence for Children International Sierra Leone (DCI-Sierra Leone) advocating for an unequivocal law banning child marriage and female genital mutilation in Sierra Leone as barriers to girls' right to bodily integrity, right to education, and to enjoy their childhood.
- South Sudan launched the [Women's Charter](#), empowering women and girls to engage with the Reconstituted National Constitutional Review Commission and articulate their concerns in the Permanent Constitution-making process.
- The Galmudug State of Somalia became [the first Federal Member State to ban all forms of Female Genital Mutilation \(FGM\)](#). The law now serves as a blueprint for other regions, showing that legal reform is achievable.
- As of the 31st of December 2024, Zimbabwe enacted the Death Penalty Abolition Act, also involving the amendment of related laws and procedures; previously women who had committed certain offences were eligible to receive the death penalty.

New legal resource:

In November 2024, Equality Now launched its new Case Digest: [Breathing Life into the Maputo Protocol: Jurisprudence on the Rights of Women and Girls in Africa—2nd Edition](#). This is a resource for legal practitioners looking to apply the Maputo Protocol in strategic litigation in national and regional courts, to enhance

³ Republic of Mauritius: 11th Periodic Report, 2019 - 2024, submitted in 2025

the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls in Africa. It follows the first edition released in 2018.

The second edition includes:

- Analysis of 26 judgments and decisions from courts across Africa and regional human rights mechanisms that referred to or implemented the Maputo Protocol between 2019 and 2024. It provides an authoritative reference point for supporting legal action in similar cases in the future.
- The digest covers 11 countries: The Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.
- Some of the decisions highlight existing gaps in the interpretation and protection of women's rights and provide the necessary evidence to support advocacy and other actions to address these gaps.

“One of the most significant ways in which judicial decisions have impacted the Maputo Protocol’s implementation is by setting precedents that influence not only national legal systems but also inspire cross-border judicial dialogue.”

JUSTICE PROF. LILLIAN TIBATEMWA, JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT OF UGANDA

BREATHING LIFE INTO THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL:
JURISPRUDENCE ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AFRICA (2ND EDITION)

equalitynow.org/maputocasedigest

Lifting of Reservations

SOAWR continues to advocate for the lifting of reservations on the Maputo Protocol for the full implementation of the treaty:

- SOAWR member COVAW developed [two key resources](#) regarding Kenya's reservations under Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol on Health and Reproductive Rights: i) a study exploring the impact of the reservations on Kenyan women's autonomy, and ii) a policy brief proposing key recommendations to address these challenges.

EVIDENCE BRIEF DECEMBER 2023

ADDRESSING LEGAL AND HEALTHCARE CHALLENGES ARISING FROM KENYA'S RESERVATIONS UNDER ARTICLE 14(2)(C) OF THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL

The Right to Choose:
A Report on the Impact of Government Reservations on Reproductive Rights under the Maputo Protocol in Kenya

- In October 2024, SOAWR members and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa convened experts for a workshop focused on the withdrawal of reservations to the Maputo Protocol. The aim of the workshop was for the women's rights experts to share their experiences, challenges and best practices in engaging AU Member States to withdraw the reservations to the Maputo Protocol; and develop recommendations for NGOs and CSOs in their advocacy for withdrawing reservations to the Maputo Protocol. The feedback from the engagement was also critical for the SRRWA as she is currently developing a draft Advocacy Framework for the Withdrawal of Reservations to the Maputo Protocol in collaboration with stakeholders such as Equality Now and SOAWR.

Equality Now Africa @EqualityNow_AF · Dec 16, 2024

The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, with @EqualityNow_AF and @SOAWR convened experts for a workshop focused on the Withdrawal of Reservations to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.



Experts at the Reservations Workshop

Reporting

State Reports

In 2024, there were three new state reports submitted to the ACHPR: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Mauritius. However, only Burkina Faso and Ethiopia fulfilled the ACHPR State Reporting Guidelines on the Maputo Protocol; whilst Mauritius mentioned the treaty and the status of women's rights according to Article 18 of the AU Charter, it did not report on its implementation of the Maputo Protocol. According to SOAWR's analysis (as of 31 December 2024), using the [ACHPR State Reporting Guidelines](#) to assess AU Member States' reporting compliance, this brings the total of submitted initial reports on the Maputo Protocol to 20⁴, five of which⁵ have also submitted subsequent reports, since the Maputo Protocol entered into force in 2005.

In May 2024, the Minister of Gender, Family and Children of DR Congo, Mireille Masangu Bibi Muloko, [officially launched](#) the process of drafting the second state report on the implementation of the Maputo Protocol, with the support of SOAWR member Ipas. Dr. Jean-Claude Mulunda, Country Director of Ipas DR Congo, said, "we look forward to seeing in an official and documented way the progress made together with other technical and financial partners, civil society, women- and young-led organisations, people with reduced mobility organisations and journalists coalition. We will continue to work together to fully implement the Maputo Protocol and improve the living conditions of women and girls in our country."

Shadow Reports

Following Angola's submission of its *Report on the Implementation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (2016-2023), additional Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) (2016-2023) and the Kampala convention (initial)* in December 2023, [Angolan Human Rights Defenders and civil society prepared a shadow report](#) that was submitted in April 2024. It highlights contradictory data on the prevalence of child marriage and teenage pregnancy and condemns legal loopholes which enable these to continue to occur at high rates. It also discusses the "inaction of the Angolan ombudsperson on human rights violations" including regarding sexual violence.

Additionally, following the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's submission of its *Seventh to Tenth Periodic Country Reports (2015-2023) on the Implementation of The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and Initial Report on the Implementation of The Protocol on The Rights of Women (Maputo Protocol)*, Equality Now collaborated with women's rights organisations in Ethiopia including the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association to prepare a [shadow report](#) which was submitted in April 2024. The report highlights the progress made by the Government to promote the rights of women and girls, and also highlights the concerns that persists particularly in regards to the growing number of cases of conflict-related GBV, as well as the contradictory and conflicting laws and practices on marriage and the family within the different regions in Ethiopia. A summary of the report can be found on Equality Now's [website](#).

⁴ Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, DR Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe

⁵ Angola, Burkina Faso, Malawi, Namibia and Nigeria

Movement Building for Collaborative Advocacy on the Maputo Protocol

Under a grant from the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) to support the SOAWR Coalition's project on Movement Building for Collaborative Advocacy on the Maputo Protocol, our regional clusters implemented a diverse array of initiatives throughout 2024. They focused on strengthening collaboration among SOAWR members, movement building to promote the rights of African women and girls in all their diversity, and the ratification, domestication, and implementation of the Maputo Protocol.

Eastern African Cluster

The Eastern Africa cluster organised knowledge sessions for women's rights organisations (WROs) on the Maputo Protocol in Uganda, Somalia/Somaliland, Rwanda, and South Sudan. These sessions addressed various themes to increase awareness and understanding among WROs about the Protocol's provisions and its importance for advocacy

In Uganda, ACFODE hosted a session titled "Unlocking Potential, Advancing Rights: Exploring the Maputo Protocol for Women's Empowerment." The session brought together representatives from national women's rights organisations to deepen their understanding of the Protocol provisions, evaluate Uganda's progress on domestication, identify challenges, and strategize on raising public awareness about the Protocol and its implementation. With 27 participants, the session culminated in actionable commitments to promote the Protocol within their organisations, among their beneficiaries, and with other key stakeholders.

In Somalia/Somaliland, the knowledge-sharing session focused on raising awareness among WROs about the Protocol's key provisions and significance. This initiative aims to strengthen advocacy efforts for its ratification and implementation. The workshop, which included participants from both regions, fostered a collaborative approach to advancing women's rights. This cross-regional dialogue was a critical step in building unified advocacy efforts.

In Rwanda, GLIHD organised a knowledge-sharing session in Kigali with 25 representatives from women's rights organisations. The session enhanced participants' understanding of the Maputo Protocol's provisions and its advocacy potential. Key outcomes included strengthened capacity to champion women's and girls' rights, identification of implementation gaps, and prioritisation of strategies for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights reporting cycle. Collaborative discussions resulted in actionable strategies, such as fostering civil society-government partnerships and launching public awareness campaigns to tackle social barriers.

In South Sudan the session covered key provisions of the Maputo Protocol, which include Article 5: Harmful traditional practices, Article 14: Reproductive Health Rights, Article 9: Right to political participation and decision-making processes, and Article 13: Economic empowerment.

Central Africa

In Cameroon, SOAWR members held an advocacy campaign against femicide during the [16days of activism](#) together with other CSOs to discuss ways to combat femicide in view of the frightening statistics in Cameroon.

Northern Africa Cluster

The Northern Africa Cluster members in Egypt held three meetings to motivate the National Council for Women to discuss the Maputo Protocol and encourage the Egyptian government to ratify it. A total of 29 participants (23 women, 6 men) attended these meetings. One meeting was organised in Alexandria with NGOs; the second in Al-Qalyubia Governorate with male and female young leaders; and the third in Cairo with public figures.

SOAWR members also conducted a training workshop to strengthen the capacities of 26 participants (17 women, 9 men) from CSOs and NGOs on the Maputo Protocol as part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Following the workshop, six NGOs expressed interest in joining the SOAWR Egypt Coalition Network.

Regional Cluster

The Regional Cluster hosted a side event with the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa during the 81st Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) on October 19, 2024. Attended by 30 participants (23 women, 7 men), including lawyers, youth, activists, and journalists, it focused on strengthening the implementation of the Maputo Protocol on its 21st anniversary. Discussions addressed challenges from anti-rights movements, information sharing, and learning strategies. On November 20, 2024, in collaboration with the Anglophone West Africa Cluster, the continental cluster held a virtual meeting to review the ACHPR session outcomes. With 45 participants, the meeting produced recommendations for the 2025 work plan, such as engaging religious and cultural leaders, supporting the Special Rapporteur's campaign to lift reservations to the Maputo Protocol, and exploring the replication of South Africa's national sex offenders register in other countries.

Southern Africa Cluster

The Southern Africa Cluster partners hosted workshops and meetings to engage stakeholders. In Zambia, they organised a fireside chat with 19 participants (16 women, 3 men) including lawyers, activists, government officials, youth, and CSOs to celebrate 20 years of the SOAWR Coalition and advance implementation of the Maputo Protocol. A Stakeholder Dialogue on the Protocol brought together 27 participants (18 women, 9 men), including CSOs, Members of Parliament, government officials, and traditional leaders, to develop an Action Plan for its implementation. Additionally, the Action Group on the Implementation of the Maputo Protocol, formed in 2017 inactive since 2019, was revamped.

In South Africa, a symposium by cluster members educated 81 community participants on the Protocol's provisions, including gender equality, harmful traditional practices, and women's rights. Recommendations from reflection sessions included equipping community leaders with educational tools, creating a WhatsApp group for ongoing engagement, and supporting victims of women's rights violations through referrals and counselling. Enhancements for future symposiums include developing a participant database, showcasing services by relevant partners, and encouraging male participation. Potential collaborations with the Community Media Trust and the Outreach Foundation were identified to enhance community-level engagement on women's rights.

Anglophone West Africa Cluster

The Anglophone West Africa Cluster carried out activities in Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria, including capacity-building workshops, stakeholder dialogues, radio programs, IEC material distribution, and a publication on General Comments No. 6 of Article 7(d) of the Maputo Protocol. Additional efforts included conferences, strategic meetings, social media campaigns, X Space events, and webinars (report attached). These initiatives enhanced awareness and knowledge among media professionals, legal practitioners, CSOs, government representatives, students, and women's groups.

Francophone West African Cluster

The Francophone West African Cluster held a workshop in Togo for community and religious leaders, as well as journalists. The workshop brought together 25 participants, including four traditional chiefs from the Lomé area, representatives from the Gulf Prefecture (Lome) and Golfe 5 Town Hall, two pastors, two imams, a mosque representative, two priests, representatives from the Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Social Action, and 10 journalists. Themes covered include gender concepts, defending women's rights, the Maputo Protocol's legal implications, Solidarity and the Advancement of Women, and the Ministry for Social Action's experiences. The traditional chiefs invited SOAWR to conduct awareness-raising in their villages, while Ministry representatives gained familiarity with the Protocol, and SOAWR Cluster plans to produce IEC materials for dissemination to ministries, prefectures, and town halls.

In Burkina Faso, a workshop gathered 12 representatives from Francophone SOAWR member organisations (excluding Benin) to share experiences, challenges, and good practices in lobbying, advocacy, and awareness-raising for implementing the Maputo Protocol. The session facilitated collaboration among cluster members to discuss their respective concerns and strengthen their efforts for domesticating and implementing the Protocol.

In Mali, a training workshop was held for women's rights organisations, focusing on women's economic empowerment. The workshop aimed to foster discussions between women's rights activists and stakeholders, identify progress and challenges related to economic empowerment and leadership, and develop recommendations to strengthen women and girls' ownership of these issues.

In Senegal, members organised a training workshop for media, community leaders, and religious leaders to promote gender equality and deepen understanding of the Maputo Protocol. The workshop encouraged community leaders' involvement in gender-sensitive decision-making and enhanced journalists' awareness of gender issues. Key recommendations included creating dialogue spaces for gender-based violence survivors, training widows on their rights, and translating the Maputo Protocol and related legislative texts into national languages for wider accessibility. Following the workshop, cluster members committed to expanding training sessions to other regions, collaborating with local authorities, and establishing a grassroots awareness network.

A symposium in Dakar gathered participants from 14 African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Gabon, Rwanda, Morocco, Mauritania, Gambia, Mali, Togo, Tunisia, Congo, and Kenya), including academics, lawyers, policymakers, human rights activists, and civil society representatives. The symposium focused on strengthening the legal framework for women's and children's rights at national, sub-regional, and regional levels. Participants reviewed progress, shared experiences, formulated recommendations, and explored prospects for advancing women's rights. The event's regional scope fostered diverse perspectives and underscored its significance.

In Benin, SOAWR members held a workshop for media professionals, community leaders, and religious leaders to raise awareness about gender concepts and their important role in social and economic development. The workshop highlighted the Maputo Protocol's impact on women's rights in Africa and provided practical tools for integrating gender principles into media and community activities and encouraged exchanges between media players, community leaders and religious leaders to promote gender equality.

2025 Plans

In addition to the activities mentioned under the UN Women ACT grant, a number of SOAWR activities are planned for 2025, including:

- Participation in the 69th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
- Quarterly virtual Coalition meetings
- Participation in the ACHPR Ordinary Sessions in May and October/November
- Commemorating the 22nd Anniversary of the Maputo Protocol
- Ratification Missions to Egypt (April), Central African Republic (June) and embassy visits follow-up with the other eight remaining countries
- Conduct capacity-building sessions on access to SRHR services for state and non-state actors, including health-care practitioners, police, prosecutors, lawyers, magistrates, media practitioners, religious and traditional leaders in Uganda, Benin, Nigeria and Senegal.
- Conduct an in-person training for SOAWR members on advocacy strategies for improving implementation of SRHR laws and obligations, including a session on how to address backlash by the anti-SRHR movement (including the application of the Equality Now [Guide and Guidelines on the Protection of Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa](#) and establishing linkages with human rights defenders institutions such as Defend Defenders.
- Conduct desk research and disseminate its findings on the status of the Maputo Protocol in the target countries and an audit on harmonisation of national health and SRHR laws with Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol and other regional SRHR frameworks. The findings will be disseminated through media advocacy and short form content videos on social media.

SOAWR 2024 Funders

Thank you to our donors for supporting SOAWR's vision, mission and work throughout 2024!



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