

McKinsey Technology

Closing the loop: The quest for gender parity in African tech

Africa leads in women's participation in tech, but more work is needed to close the gender gap. Tackling drop-offs at three key stages of women's professional journeys can help level up the sector.

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A thriving technology sector,¹ built on accessible and safe digital ecosystems, is widely acknowledged as a bedrock of economic transformation and growth.² However, a fundamental challenge remains: Can the transformative potential of the digital economy be fully realized without addressing persistent gender disparities within the tech sector?

Despite progress in women's participation in the workforce, women remain underrepresented in tech globally, comprising only 28.2 percent of global STEM careers.³ Additionally, while women's representation has increased at the entry level over the past decade, the "glass ceiling" effect is still evident, with significant barriers hindering women seeking advancement into STEM C-suite roles. Women make up a quarter of non-STEM leaders, but only one-tenth in STEM.⁴

In sub-Saharan Africa, as much as 30 percent of roles in STEM sectors are held by women, according to some assessments, putting the region marginally ahead of the global average.⁵ Africa as a whole also boasts the largest share of women graduates in STEM subjects in the world.⁶ However, the struggle for adequate representation, especially in the C-suite, remains a significant challenge, with fewer African women making it into top roles than in other regions. Women also remain starkly underfunded when it comes to start-up financing.

This article draws on feedback from women working in tech across Africa to explore what's preventing more women from entering the sector

and reaching the top (see sidebar "About the research"). The analysis takes a close-up view of three critical career stages—leaving education and entering the workplace, progression in the formal workplace, and start-up financing—which could be the focus of renewed efforts to increase access and participation by women in tech.

One step ahead: Africa performing well relative to other regions in women in tech and entrepreneurship

Economies in sub-Saharan Africa have made some progress toward gender parity in recent years, improving their score on the Global Gender Gap Index by 5.6 percentage points since 2006, with 68.4 percent of the gender gap closed in 2025.⁷ However, the region still ranks among the lowest in the world, with parity an estimated 107 years away.⁸ By contrast, when it comes to parity in tech, sub-Saharan Africa has pulled slightly ahead of global averages, with better levels of representation across several critical indicators, including the number of women STEM graduates, the share of women in tech roles, and the number of women entrepreneurs.

Almost half of all STEM graduates in Africa are women

With 47 percent of all STEM graduates from African universities being women, Africa has a higher share of women STEM graduates than Europe (42 percent), Asia (41 percent), South America (41 percent), North America (39 percent), and Oceania (38 percent) (Exhibit 1).⁹

¹ In this article, the technology sector is defined by industries focused on the creation and application of technology-based goods and services, a subset of the broader STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines.

² Nagdalini Kitirila, "Technology and innovation in global economic development," *Journal of Global Economics*, 2023, Volume 11.

³ Kusum Kali Pal et al., *Global gender gap report 2024*, World Economic Forum, June 11, 2024.

⁴ Kusum Kali Pal et al., *Global gender gap report 2024*, World Economic Forum, June 11, 2024.

⁵ "Creating a level playing field for women in technology in Africa," United Nations Development Programme Africa, January 31, 2019.

⁶ *Gender equality: How global universities are performing: Part 1*, UNESCO and *Times Higher Education*, 2022. Note: numbers for Africa in this research are based on institutions that participated in and reported on UN Social Development Goal 5, of which there are only 49 represented in Africa.

⁷ *Global gender gap report 2025*, World Economic Forum, June 11, 2024.

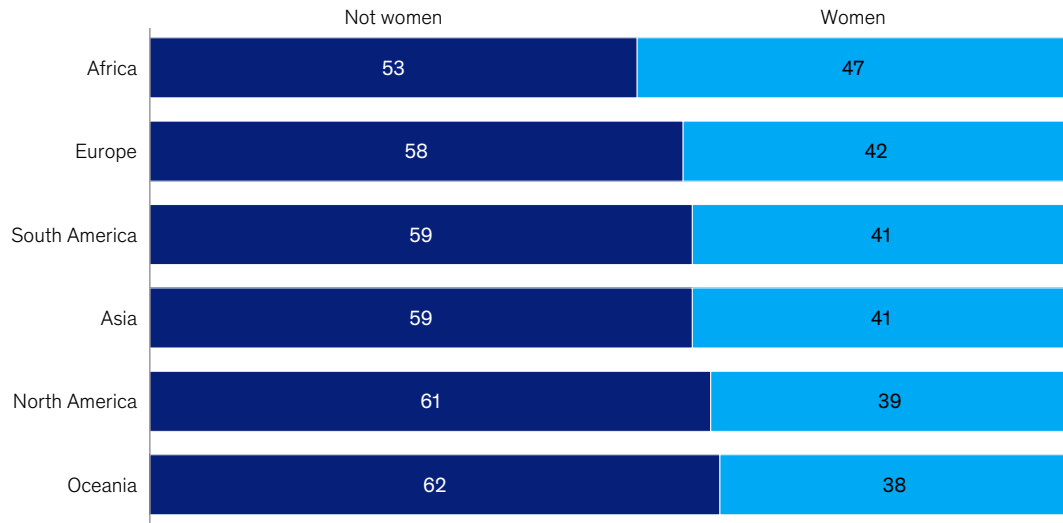
⁸ *Global gender gap report 2025*, World Economic Forum, June 11, 2024.

⁹ *Gender equality: How global universities are performing: Part 1*, UNESCO and *Times Higher Education*, 2022.

Exhibit 1

Africa has the highest proportion of women STEM university graduates in the world.

Share of women STEM graduates by region, %



Source: Gender equality: How global universities are performing: Part 1, UNESCO and Times Higher Education, 2022

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About the research

To understand how women working in tech experience their careers, we surveyed 220 women across key African economies: Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Africa. Almost 30 percent of participants worked in midsize private organizations with 51 to 250 employees, and 43 percent worked in start-ups with 50 employees or fewer. Fourteen percent worked in large enterprises (more than 250 employees).

The majority of survey respondents were aged 36 or older and worked in senior roles. Respondents were asked a variety of questions, including how happy they felt with their career, what

kind of barriers to career advancement they had experienced (if any), and what improvements they would like to see in the tech industry to encourage more women to enter such careers. We also asked them if they had ever left the tech workforce. These insights were further enhanced with one-on-one interviews with experts.

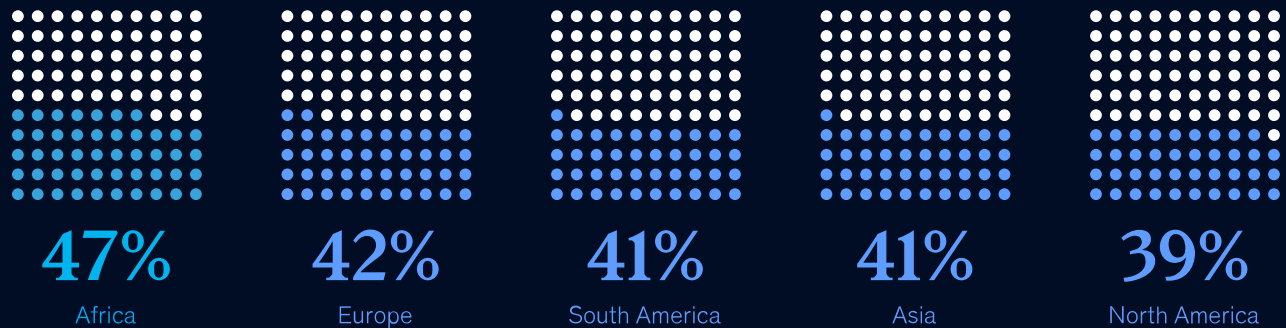
To gain clarity on the numbers of women in tech leadership roles, we analyzed data from 1,173 listed companies across 18 African countries (Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and

Zimbabwe). This survey was conducted in August 2024 and refreshed in November 2024. About 62 percent of companies did not have a C-suite tech role, so they were excluded from the original sample, leaving us with 443 listed companies. Data for this work was drawn from the S&P Capital IQ database and the Who Owns Whom research platform, which provides independent research on African companies.

In this research, we defined the C-suite tech roles as chief digital officers, chief information officers, chief technology officers, and chief operating officers or shared-services roles.

Women in tech: Africa performs well on key metrics relative to other regions

Share of women STEM graduates¹

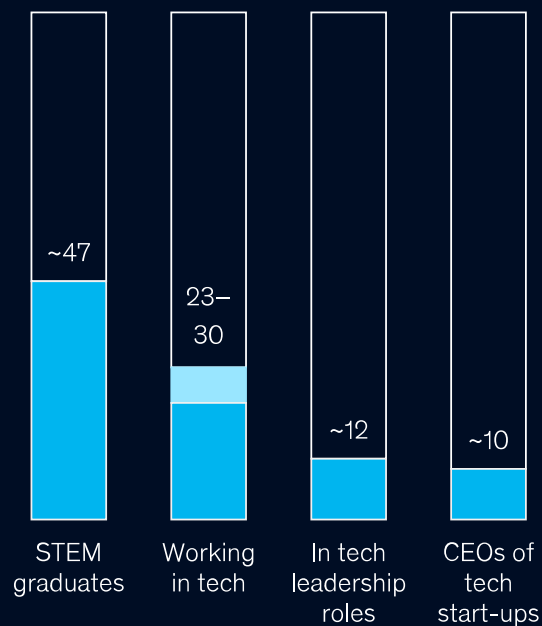


Share of women in tech roles²



But the struggle for adequate representation remains

The “drop to the top”: Share of women in Africa from education to tech leadership roles, ³ %



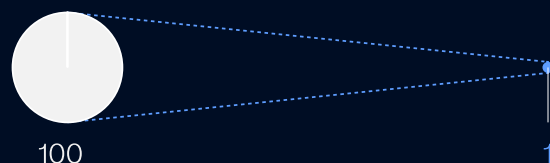
Women are 6× more likely to experience discrimination in the workplace than men⁴



25% of women feel opportunities are limited⁵



Women founders receive 100× less funding than men⁶



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Leveling up

Three areas of focus to boost inclusion and parity in tech



Plug the “school-to-work” leak

Build innovative recruitment strategies



Change attitudes and mindsets in the workplace

Get the right policies, training, and mentorship in place to ensure women advance



Tip the scales toward financing woman-led start-ups

Create the funds, networks, and exposure to boost women's access to resources and funding

¹Gender equality: How global universities are performing: Part 1, UNESCO and Times Higher Education, 2022. ²Kusum Kali Pal et al., Global gender gap report 2024, World Economic Forum, June 11, 2024; “Creating a level playing field for women in technology in Africa,” United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Africa, January 31, 2019. ³The “drop to the top” is the falling proportion of women from STEM education and into tech roles. Kouassi Yeboua and Jakkie Cilliers, “Gender Education,” ISS African Futures, February 5, 2025; Gender equality: How global universities are performing: Part 1, UNESCO and Times Higher Education, 2022; Sophia Fernholz, “Fixing the gender divide in Africa’s tech sector,” Women’s Media Center, April 1, 2025; “Creating a level playing field for women in technology in Africa,” UNDP Africa, January 31, 2019; Ellen Flannery, “Women in South Africa’s technology sector,” Intelligent health.tech, November 11, 2024; Annette Mutuku, “Unlocking she-STEM potential for a sustainable and inclusive tech-driven economy in Africa,” Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, April 25, 2024. ⁴McKinsey Women in Tech in Africa Survey 2024, respondents from Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Africa (n = 220). ⁵McKinsey Women in Tech in Africa Survey 2024, respondents from Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Africa (n = 220). ⁶Africa: The Big Deal, “2024: It’s a man’s man’s man’s world,” blog entry by Max Cuvellier Giacomelli, January 14, 2025.

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Relatively high educational success in STEM across Africa is supported by a variety of factors, including an increase in policies and institutions supporting women and girls across the continent, as well as targeted interventions to lay the groundwork for a more inclusive and innovative tech industry. For instance, Africa Code Week has reached more than 17 million young people since 2015, and almost half of participants in 2023 were girls.¹⁰ She Code

Africa, which empowers young women and girls with coding skills and resources, including coding boot camps and community events, had benefited more than 40,000 individuals by the end of 2023.¹¹ Another notable initiative, Women Techsters, aims to empower five million girls and women across Africa with digital and tech skills to bridge the digital gender gap in low-income African communities.¹²

¹⁰“Africa Code Week and partners equip 17 million youth with digital skills,” SAP, April 15, 2024.

¹¹She Code Africa website, accessed August 15, 2025.

¹²Women Techsters website, accessed March 10, 2025.

Additionally, as economies in the region shift toward technology and innovation and demand for STEM skills increases, research has found that women and girls may be aspiring to these fields as a path to access better job opportunities, achieve financial stability, and future-proof their careers.¹³ The rise of AI may offer an opportunity to further boost this trend: Between 2018 and 2025, an increase in women AI talent listed on LinkedIn narrowed the STEM gender gap in 74 of 75 economies, including some in Africa, and underreporting could hint at an even larger emerging AI talent pool of women.¹⁴

Despite a greater proportion of women in Africa's tech workforce than in the rest of the world, less than 20 percent of top roles are held by women

Global data highlights that Africa has a marginally higher representation of women in the STEM workplace than the global average (30 percent versus 28 percent).¹⁵ However, there remains a significant opportunity to grow, especially at the leadership level.

Our research found that less than 20 percent of publicly listed companies in Africa with C-suite tech roles had a woman in that role. Furthermore, just 3 percent of companies with revenues that exceeded \$1 billion had women in top tech leadership roles. By comparison, the number of women in senior management roles in the world's top five big tech companies ranges from 21.1 percent to 35.5 percent.¹⁶

At a country level, South Africa and Nigeria emerged as leaders, with the greatest number of listed companies with women occupying C-suite tech roles between them. In South Africa, 20 out of 116

of these companies (17 percent) are led by women; in Nigeria, it's 15 out of 75 companies (20 percent). Egypt, Tanzania, and Namibia, by contrast, had the lowest proportion of women-led companies with women in leadership roles, at 4 percent, 9 percent, and 10 percent, respectively, while Botswana, Malawi, Seychelles, Sudan, and Uganda had no women in these roles at women-led companies (Exhibit 2).

About two-thirds of companies in our analysis that had women in tech leadership positions were concentrated in just three sectors—financial services, consumer goods and retail, and energy and materials—with financial services having the highest share of representation of women in C-suite tech roles (roughly 20 percent), followed by consumer goods and retail (14 percent), automobiles and transportation (11 percent), and energy and materials (9 percent).

A high proportion of entrepreneurs in Africa are women, but only about 10 percent of tech start-ups are led by women

Africa boasts a higher share of women entrepreneurs than the rest of the world, with approximately 26 percent of businesses in Africa founded by women.¹⁷ This is more than double the proportion of businesses created by women in Europe (12 percent) and significantly higher than in the Asia-Pacific region (16 percent).¹⁸ However, only about 20 percent of tech start-ups in Africa have at least one woman cofounder, and about 10 percent have a woman CEO. In Ethiopia, men founders outnumber women founders by approximately two to one (Exhibit 3).

¹³ Nasikiliza, "From the horse's mouth: Technical education is a changer for girls interested in STEM," blog entry by Alice Amegah et al., World Bank Blogs, January 22, 2024.

¹⁴ *Gender parity in the intelligent age*, World Economic Forum, March 25, 2025.

¹⁵ Kusum Kali Pal et al., *Global gender gap report 2024*, World Economic Forum, June 11, 2024; "Creating a level playing field for women in technology in Africa," United Nations Development Programme Africa, January 31, 2019.

¹⁶ "Women representation in big tech companies in 2021," GlobalData, August 2022.

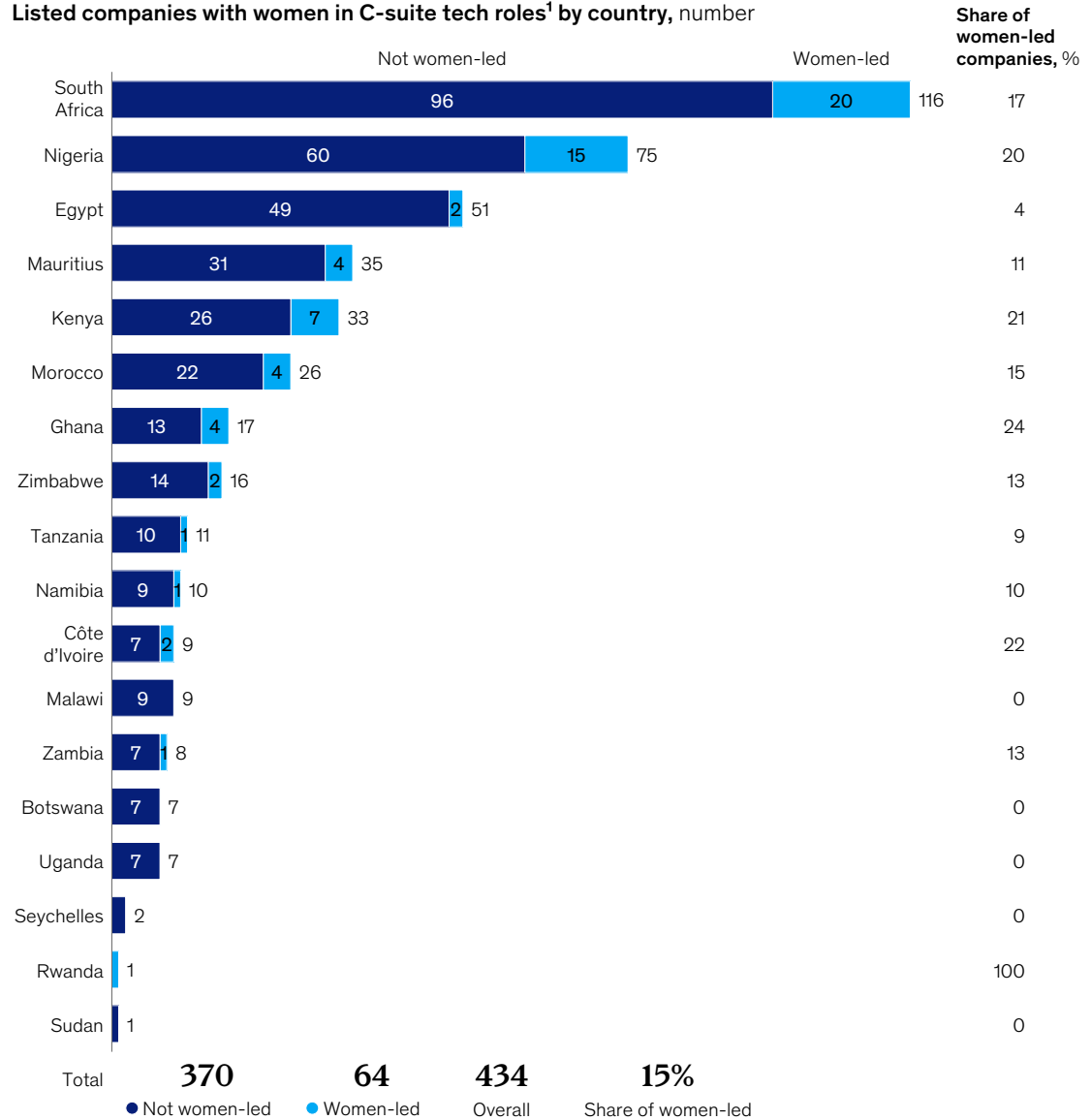
¹⁷ McKinsey analysis based on the share of women-owned businesses in 18 African countries with listed stock exchanges. The share of women-owned businesses in each country comes from *The Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs*, Mastercard, March 2022; World Bank data; Global Entrepreneurship Monitor data; African Development Bank Group data; and Disrupt Africa data. The regional average was applied to countries with unavailable data.

¹⁸ McKinsey analysis based on the share of women-owned businesses in 20 European countries and 15 Asia-Pacific countries with listed stock exchanges. The share of women-owned businesses in each country comes from *The Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs*, Mastercard, March 2022; World Bank data; Global Entrepreneurship Monitor data; African Development Bank Group data; and Disrupt Africa data.

Exhibit 2

More than half of companies with women in tech leadership roles are concentrated in Nigeria and South Africa.

Listed companies with women in C-suite tech roles¹ by country, number



Note: n = 443, including companies where the gender of the C-suite tech roles was inconclusive.

¹Chief digital officers, chief information officers, chief technology officers, and chief operating officers or shared-services roles for listed companies.

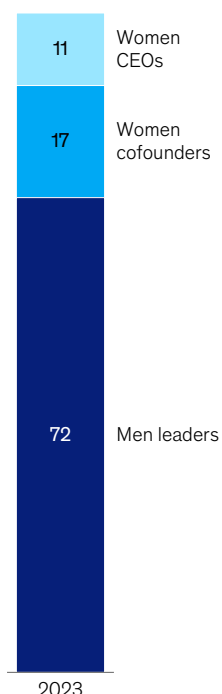
Source: S&P Capital IQ; Who Owns Whom

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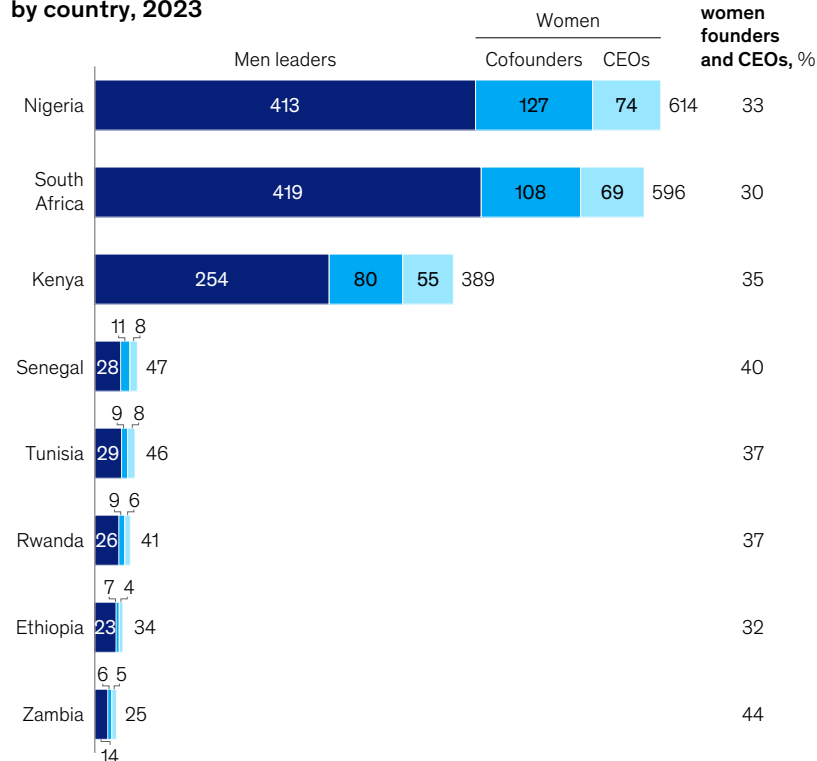
Exhibit 3

Around 20 percent of tech start-ups in Africa have at least one woman cofounder, and about 10 percent have a woman as CEO.

Gender breakdown of leadership in tech start-ups in Africa, %



Number of tech start-ups by gender makeup of leadership, by country, 2023



Source: Disrupt Africa (n = 2,786 African tech start-ups)

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Plugging the leaks: Three key stages eroding women's representation in tech

Despite Africa's relatively strong performance when it comes to women's representation in the tech workforce and its robust share of STEM graduates and women entrepreneurs, significant gender disparities in tech persist across the continent, particularly in leadership. What is hindering the progression of women STEM workers across their professional lives? Our analysis has identified three primary points of challenge: the "school to work" transition, the rise to industry leadership, and financial support for women tech entrepreneurs.

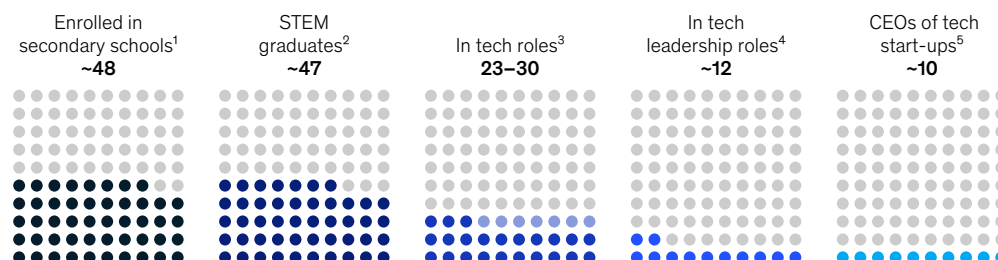
There is a steep drop-off in women's representation from higher education to leadership roles in the tech workforce

Our research highlights a marked decline in the representation of women in Africa from secondary education through to executive leadership roles in the tech industry. While women account for approximately 48 percent of secondary school enrollments and 47 percent of STEM graduates, their participation drops to between 23 to 30 percent in tech roles. This downward trend continues into leadership, with less than 12 percent of tech leadership positions and just 10 percent of CEO roles in tech start-ups in Africa held by women (Exhibit 4). Women's underrepresentation

Exhibit 4

The ‘drop to the top’ in Africa’s tech sector is significant, with less than a third of women graduates making it into tech leadership roles.

Share of women in Africa from education to tech leadership roles, %



¹From 2019–21, World Bank and UNESCO data show that the women-to-men ratio in secondary school enrollment across Africa is approximately 0.92, meaning there are 92 girls enrolled for every 100 boys at the secondary level. ²Based on UNESCO and *Times Higher Education* data. ³Based on cross-referencing different sources based on data available for South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. ⁴McKinsey survey of listed companies in Africa with tech C-suite roles, n = 443. ⁵Based on Disrupt Africa data for tech start-ups in Africa.
Source: “Creating a level playing field for women in technology in Africa,” United Nations Development Programme Africa, January 31, 2019; Sophia Fernholz, “Fixing the gender divide in Africa’s tech sector,” Women’s Media Center, April 1, 2025; Disrupt Africa; Ellen Flannery, “Women in South Africa’s technology sector,” Intelligent Health.tech, November 11, 2024; *Gender equality: How global universities are performing: Part 1*, UNESCO and *Times Higher Education*, 2022; “Unlocking she-STEM potential for a sustainable and inclusive tech-driven economy in Africa,” Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, April 25, 2024; Kouassi Yeboua and Jakkie Cilliers, “Gender: Education,” ISS African Futures, February 5, 2025

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also varies by department, with the highest representation in product management roles (41 percent) and the lowest in software development (8 percent).¹⁹

This disconnect between academic achievement and professional opportunities for women is a global phenomenon,²⁰ but it is more pronounced in Africa, suggesting that systemic social and cultural barriers on the continent may be impeding the recruitment of women into technology roles. Research in South Africa found that ingrained societal views that the technology sector is inherently “masculine,” biases and stereotypes about women’s technical skills and leadership abilities, and limited social capital and mentorship networks for women all work to limit the participation of women in tech. These societal factors are compounded by institutional

factors, including limited entrepreneurial policies to boost the participation of women in tech and entrepreneurship.²¹

Women face more barriers to career progression

Once in the tech workforce, women report experiencing significant barriers to career progression despite enjoying high levels of job satisfaction.²² Nearly 90 percent of the women we surveyed across Africa reported they are happy or very satisfied with their careers, in line with studies in other regions, such as the United States.²³ However, about a quarter of respondents reported gender bias and limited opportunities for skills development as barriers to career advancement. Previous McKinsey research has found that, while women are less likely to be promoted across all industries and roles, the gender gap for women in

¹⁹ 2022 *State of product management in Africa report*, Practical Product, 2022; Kees Kranendonk, “Female developers in Africa are starting to catch up,” Tunga, March 10, 2021.

²⁰ For example, see “Table 322.20. Bachelor’s degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected academic years, 1976–77 through 2021–22,” National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; and “Annual estimates of the resident population by sex, race, and Hispanic origin for the United States: April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2024,” US Census Bureau, June 2025.

²¹ Salifu Yusuf, Matthew Abunyawah, and Michael Odei Erdiaw-Kwasie, “Challenges faced by minority technology entrepreneurs—women IT entrepreneurs in South Africa post-apartheid era,” *Journal of International Entrepreneurship*, 2024, Volume 22.

²² McKinsey Women in Tech in Africa Survey 2024, n = 220.

²³ “Women in technology: Key strategies to retain and attract diverse talent,” S&P Global, April 1, 2022.

tech roles is more pronounced, with only 52 women being promoted to manager for every 100 men promoted.²⁴

Also in line with global research, our survey finds that traditional gender roles and caregiving responsibilities fall mostly to women, creating additional burdens. For example, in the wake of the pandemic, McKinsey research found that mothers in North America were three times more likely than fathers to do most of the housework and caregiving.²⁵ Plus, limited mentorship and allyship in the workplace mean that clear paths toward advancement are scarce.²⁶

Only 10 percent of respondents in the McKinsey Women in Tech in Africa Survey reported that they

experienced no barriers to career advancement. In fact, the barriers faced by women in STEM careers can be so restrictive that they can ultimately push women out of the workforce. Twelve percent of respondents reported leaving the workforce prematurely. This is lower than the rates reported in other surveys for other regions. For example, in a 2023 survey, 19 percent of women living in the United States, the United Kingdom, and India reported planning to leave the tech workforce within the year.²⁷ In our survey, half of those who left had between six and ten years of experience, and the reasons for leaving included career development (21 percent), work environment (19 percent), work–life balance (16 percent), economic factors (16 percent), and family responsibilities (14 percent) (Exhibit 5).

²⁴ “Repairing the broken rung on the career ladder for women in technical roles,” McKinsey, March 1, 2022.

²⁵ Jess Huang, Alexis Krivkovich, Ishanaa Rambachan, and Lareina Yee, “For mothers in the workplace, a year (and counting) like no other,” McKinsey, May 5, 2021.

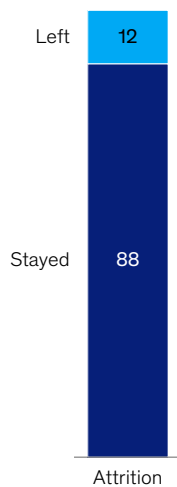
²⁶ Allyship refers to the actions, behaviors, and practices that leaders take to support, amplify, and advocate with others, especially with individuals who don’t belong to the same social identity groups as themselves.

²⁷ Meredith Graham, “Speak Up 2024: Amplifying women’s voices in our transformative tech era,” Ensono, 2024.

Exhibit 5

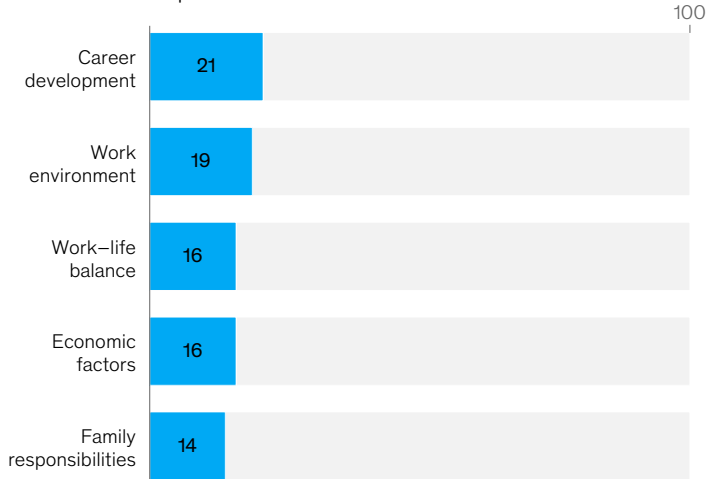
About 12 percent of women leave Africa’s tech workforce prematurely.

Share of women who have left the tech workforce in Africa,¹ %



Reasons for leaving,²

% of women respondents who left the workforce



¹ Question: Have you ever left the workforce?

² Question: What were the top 2 reasons for leaving?

Source: McKinsey Women in Tech in Africa Survey 2024 (n = 220), respondents from Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Africa

Women-led start-ups attract significantly less funding

Entrepreneurial funding support for women in tech remains low, with little meaningful improvement in the past few years, and women-led tech start-ups enjoy substantially less access to funding than their men-led counterparts.

In 2024, women-led ventures received only 1.0 percent (\$21 million) of total funding for tech start-ups in Africa, about 100 times less than what start-ups founded by men received (94.0

percent, or \$2.1 billion). While mixed-gender teams secured a relatively higher share at 5.5 percent (\$123 million), the gap remains stark.²⁸

This is mirrored in previous years. In 2022, African women-led tech start-ups secured just 2 percent (\$115 million) of total funding, up slightly from 2021 but still 35 times less than men-led start-ups.²⁹ Additionally, funding for mixed-gender teams has experienced a downward trend, falling from 19 percent in 2019 to 14 percent in 2022, showing increased volatility for funding for women-led teams (Exhibit 6).

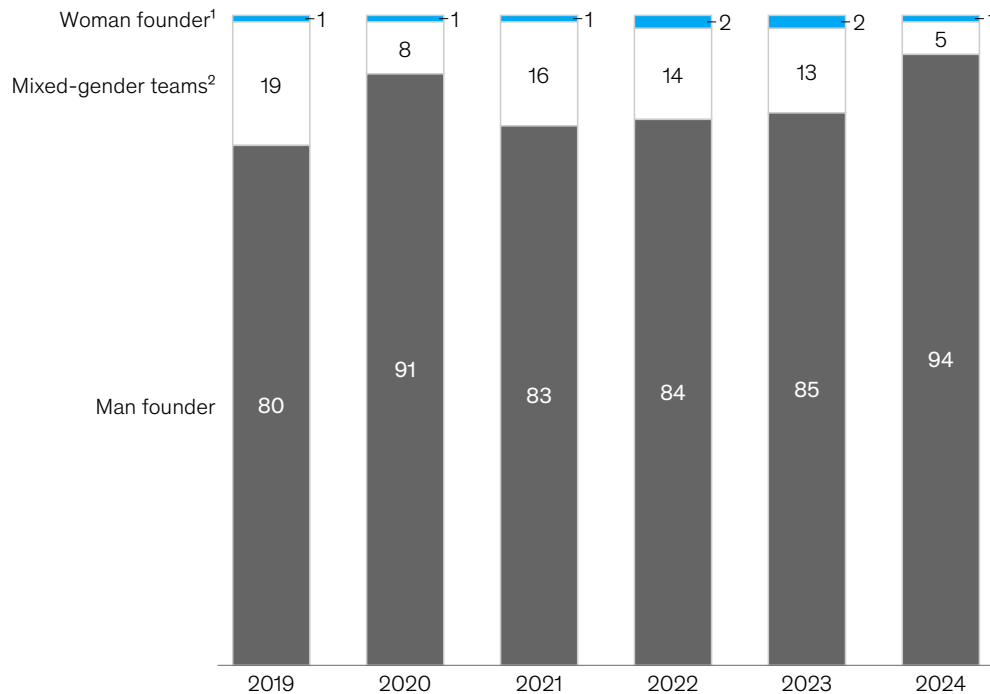
²⁸ *Africa: The Big Deal*, "2024: It's a man's man's man's world," blog entry by Max Cuvellier Giacomelli, January 14, 2025.

²⁹ *Africa: The Big Deal*, "2024: It's a man's man's man's world," blog entry by Max Cuvellier Giacomelli, January 14, 2025.

Exhibit 6

Funding for women founders as a share of total funding remained consistently low between 2019 and 2024.

Share of tech start-up funding in Africa, 2019–24, %



¹Includes single woman founders and all-women multifounder teams.

²Founding teams with at least 1 man and 1 woman.

Source: *Africa: The Big Deal*, "2024: It's a man's man's man's world," blog entry by Max Cuvellier Giacomelli, January 14, 2025

Leveling up: Three levers to drive greater inclusion of women in tech

Africa is ahead of the curve on key metrics when it comes to women in tech, but much work remains to close the loop and include more women in the sector. Based on insights from our research and drawing on our work across the continent, we have identified three primary areas of focus for African tech leaders to drive further inclusion and lay the foundations for more resilient, future-ready economies.

1. Plugging the ‘school-to-work’ leak by building innovative recruitment strategies

Almost half of Africa's women STEM university graduates are not making it into the tech workforce. To plug this skills leak, companies can innovate to build the talent pipeline for women talent. A good place to start could be by partnering with universities and high schools to align curriculums with industry requirements and identify promising women and girls while they're still in school. Targeted scholarships, dedicated internships, and apprenticeships could help provide support, hands-on experience, and industry exposure to women students, and companies could engage directly with women through career events, workshops, or mentoring sessions. Internships can also help expose women who are considering a career in tech to women role models and mentors, who could offer valuable practical advice, inspiration, and support at this critical juncture.

Using data-driven insights to refine recruitment to identify high-demand skills and predict future needs could help organizations target the right candidates at the right time. The reality is that African businesses are competing globally for STEM talent, which is in short supply almost everywhere, so a focused and strategic approach is needed.³⁰ Building a compelling employee brand that understands what women talent may value, including flexible working opportunities and good

opportunities for career advancement, then, will likely be key.

2. Changing attitudes and mindsets toward gender in the workplace and getting the right policies and practices in place to support the advancement of women

Once women are in the tech workforce, companies can do more to keep them there by providing optimal working conditions and clear paths toward advancement. This starts with creating an inclusive workspace that supports gender equality and helps women balance their professional and personal commitments across different life stages, such as pregnancy and menopause. This could include, for example, structured return-to-work programs with personalized support or incorporating mentorship and upskilling opportunities, which have been shown to assist women reentering the workforce and reduce attrition after career breaks.³¹ Additionally, offering childcare assistance can ease burdens on working mothers.

McKinsey research has shown that even companies that are relatively diverse and inclusive can struggle to create bias- and discrimination-free work environments.³² Thus, African tech organizations could prioritize and train managers and hiring managers in bias awareness and best practices for recruiting and promoting talent, such as standardized interview guides and rubrics for assessment. Additionally, an annual gender pay equity audit, coupled with an aspiration to reduce disparities, could signal a commitment to fair compensation practices.

Further, organizations can nurture individual growth and create a strong pipeline of women leaders by promoting lifelong learning, mentorship, and sponsorship initiatives. For example, by assigning senior leaders as sponsors to high-potential women, companies can offer women invaluable hands-on experience and access to

³⁰ Timo Lehne, "What can employers do to combat STEM talent shortages?," World Economic Forum, May 21, 2024.

³¹ *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lighthouses 2024*, World Economic Forum, December 19, 2023.

³² "Diversity matters even more: The case for holistic impact," McKinsey, December 5, 2023.

C-suite networks to help ensure they can step into top jobs when the time is right. The World Economic Forum's *DEI Lighthouses* report finds that five common success factors define successful interventions to address parity in the workplace: a nuanced understanding of root causes, meaningful definitions of success, accountable and invested business leaders, context-appropriate solutions, and rigorous tracking and course correction.³³

3. Increase access to financial resources and funding for women founders and entrepreneurs

Global research has found that women-led start-ups do better along several dimensions, including job growth and revenue creation, than companies started by men.³⁴ Yet our analysis shows that women founders in Africa are 100 times less likely to raise financing for their businesses. To tip the scales so that more funding flows to women founders, stakeholders—including governments, investors, and the private sector—could step up to create more dedicated grant programs for women entrepreneurs and provide aspiring women entrepreneurs with mentorship opportunities to help them build relationships and better understand investor criteria to improve pitching. Efforts to raise awareness about women-led innovation, such as the Female Innovation Index, could also go a long way toward facilitating further action and investment.

The case for gender parity in the workplace is unambiguous. Diverse leadership has been shown to drive better, more innovative, and inclusive decisions, leading to broader product reach and better profits and share performance among other benefits, while diverse workforces have also been shown to be more adaptable and better positioned to lead transformations.³⁵ A strong, diverse talent base from entry-level to leadership is therefore likely to be vital in driving and sustaining tech-enabled economic growth in Africa. This is becoming ever more critical as AI reshapes economies and the tech talent gap widens.³⁶

Parity in tech is achievable in Africa based on the fundamentals, but much remains to be done to prevent women from “dropping off” at key stages in their professional journeys if the continent wants to reap the tech dividend. Proactive leadership that takes a focused, data-driven approach to tackle persistent inequality in the sector will be vital. Stakeholders can start by closing the loop in these three areas to address systemic inequalities and create the conditions for women to rise, thrive, and contribute more fully to the building of an equitable and prosperous Africa for everyone.

Mayowa Kuyoro is a partner in McKinsey's Lagos office, and **Umar Bagus** is a senior partner in the Johannesburg office, where **Krutika Dharmadhikary** is a director of product management.

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³³ *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lighthouses 2024*, World Economic Forum, December 19, 2023.

³⁴ Kumar Mehta, “Why women entrepreneurs outperform men,” *Forbes*, November 13, 2023.

³⁵ “Diversity matters even more: The case for holistic impact,” McKinsey, December 5, 2023; Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle, Kevin Dolan, Dame Vivian Hunt, and Sara Prince, “Diversity wins: How inclusion matters,” McKinsey, May 19, 2020; Stuart R. Levine, “Diversity confirmed to boost innovation and financial results,” *Forbes*, January 15, 2020; Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Melinda Marshall, and Laura Sherbin, “How diversity can drive innovation,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 2013.

³⁶ For more on the impact of AI in Africa, see Mayowa Kuyoro and Umar Bagus, with Anass Benshrir and Ziyaad Bobat, “Leading, not lagging: Africa's gen AI opportunity,” McKinsey, May 12, 2025.

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