

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

Country-level Assessment: South Africa

RISA Programme Overview

Research and Innovation Systems for Africa (RISA) is a programme funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) that aims to strengthen research and innovation (R&I) ecosystems in Africa. The RISA Fund is jointly funded by two separate FCDO programmes – Strengthening Research Institutions in Africa (SRIA) for research ecosystems and Africa Technology and Innovation Partnerships (ATIP) for innovation ecosystems. The intended impact of the RISA Fund is to strengthen national research and innovation systems in target countries; this in turn will contribute to economic growth and development. The RISA fund has three core objectives, 1) to support research organisations to have the capabilities necessary to produce relevant, high-quality research, 2) to create an enabling environment for researchers and research organisations, and 3) to strengthen the enablers for scaling of new and emerging technologies with high potential for poverty reduction and inclusive growth.

Addressing GESI in R&I Ecosystems

In the interest of ensuring that R&I ecosystems are intentionally gender equitable and socially inclusive, the RISA programme is committed to understanding and addressing the various GESI gaps and barriers that arise within such ecosystems. Drawing on the International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA) framework, which articulates nine key Ecosystem Strengthening Goals, ‘equitable and inclusive participation’ (Goal #7) has been identified as a critical element to be addressed in the process of strengthening R&I ecosystems.¹ This goal explicitly recognizes the existing inequities and patterns of social exclusion that unfold in R&I spaces, and emphasizes the need for being more intentional about assessing how innovation is applied, in order to ensure that the inequalities of established systems are not reproduced.

Some of the key GESI challenges in research and innovation include:

- Underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups within R&I talent pools
- Ecosystem strengthening efforts that often do not address, and can even exacerbate, existing inequalities and patterns of social exclusion
- Lack of gender equality and social inclusion in research

The GESI country-level assessments undertaken for priority countries during the programme inception period (Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa) will serve to illustrate some of the key GESI gaps and barriers within each country’s unique context, as well as to illuminate the broader, overarching challenges that may also cut across countries. Country-level GESI assessments are informed by existing research and evidence, as well as key stakeholder interviews with different actors from typically excluded groups within the R&I space for each country. These assessments will help guide RISA in its efforts to provide targeted GESI support to country-level projects funded by RISA as well as shape and inform a high-level GESI strategy for the RISA programme, with the intention of strengthening the broader R&I ecosystems within each country in line with the nine Ecosystem Strengthening Goals.

¹ Strengthening Innovation Ecosystems; IDIA, November 2021.

Country Overview

South Africa is a majority black, multiracial country of nearly 60 million people, and has one of the continent's largest and most developed economies.² The country is located at the southern-most tip of the African continent, bordered by Namibia to the northwest, Botswana and Zimbabwe to the north, Mozambique to the northeast and Swaziland to the east. Lesotho, an independent country entirely surrounded by South African territory, is located in the eastern part of the republic.³ South Africa is a constitutional democracy. Despite its comparative economic and political successes, the country has suffered years of low growth and is fraught with deeply embedded socioeconomic inequalities and racial divisions, a powerful legacy of its colonial history and the institution of apartheid.⁴

Under the apartheid regime, the South African state invented five arbitrary racial categories in order to justify the systematic exclusion of all non-white racial communities; the aftermath of the apartheid regime is still keenly felt today, with distinct racial delineations observed in the country's economic and social development patterns.⁵ Before 1994, a series of different statutes enacted between 1948 and 1974 formally institutionalized racial discrimination, classifying the people of South Africa into either White, Colored, Asian or Indian, and Black (African) racial categories, in that order of importance and accordingly the allocation of benefits within the apartheid system.⁶ The structures and rules of the apartheid system specified where and how each of the different "races" could live, travel, work, be educated, get married, and socialize. Due to the profound social and economic influence of 46 long years of apartheid in the country, South Africans today still experience severe and persistent inequalities in terms of type of housing, employment opportunities, education, medical care, and other public services, despite the fact that this system of segregation officially came to an end in 1994.

After the fall of apartheid, South Africa came to be regarded around the world as a champion of human rights and was often considered a leader on the African continent in this regard.⁷ The country's dominant political party is the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC has held a parliamentary majority since 1994, but in recent years has been accused of undermining state institutions and strategically protecting corrupt officials to preserve its own power at all costs, even as its support base begins to wane considerably. In the last general elections held in May 2019, the party earned 57.5 percent of the vote—its lowest margin ever.⁸

South Africa has the most diversified and financially integrated economy in Africa, and is the second most-favoured investment destination on the continent after Egypt.⁹ It has been classified as an upper middle-income country with a GNI per capita of USD \$12,600 as of 2019. The country has a National Research and Development Strategy (established 2002), which acknowledges racial and gender gaps in science, engineering and technology and the importance of investment in human capital and innovation for economic growth.¹⁰ South Africa also has a National Advisory Council on Innovation, and recently invested in the development of a Decadal Plan for Science, Technology and Innovation (2021-2031).¹¹ The country was ranked 61st out of the 132 economies included in the Global Innovation Index (GII) for 2021, a one-point drop from 2020 but still an improvement from 2019, where the country ranked 60th and 63rd, respectively.¹² Among the 27 economies in sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa ranks second. The country performs above the regional average across all seven GI pillars: human capital and research,

² [South Africa Country Profile](#); BBC, May 2019.

³ [South Africa](#); Britannica, March 2022.

⁴ [South Africa: Current Issues, Economy and U.S. Relations](#); Congressional Research Service, September 2020.

⁵ [Description of the South African Context: The Codes of the Street in Risky Neighbourhoods](#); Howell, S., May 2019.

⁶ [Affirmative Action in South Africa: Are We Creating New Casualties?](#); Archibald, U. and Adejumo, O., 2013.

⁷ [South Africa](#); Freedom House, 2022.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ [UN South Africa Common Country Analysis](#); United Nations, 2019-2020.

¹⁰ [South Africa's National Research and Development Strategy](#); The Government of the Republic of South Africa, August 2002.

¹¹ [Framework for the Science, Technology and Innovation Decadal Plan](#); Department of Science and Innovation, Republic of South Africa, June 2019.

¹² [South Africa: Global Innovation Index 2021](#); World Intellectual Property Organization, 2022.

infrastructure, knowledge and technology outputs, creative outputs, business sophistication, market sophistication and institutions. South Africa performs best in the category of market sophistication, with its weakest performance in infrastructure¹³

Policy, Strategy and Institutional Environment in Relation to GESI

1996 Constitution: The South African Constitution, adopted in May 1996, champions the achievement of equality throughout its provisions, and guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to all people under the law.¹⁴ The Bill of Rights prohibits direct or indirect discrimination against any individual on the grounds of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.¹⁵ Section 9 of the Constitution denotes obligations for the public and private sector as well as civil society to mitigate and eliminate gender, racial and social inequalities. The Constitution also explicitly prohibits hate speech based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and formally establishes the Commission for Gender Equality. It also provides for legislative and other measures that are designed to protect or advance persons or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination.

National Development Plan (NDP) 2030: NDP 2030 is South Africa's current high-level country strategy for achieving social and economic growth and development.¹⁶ The NDP's primary objective is to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030, by drawing on the energy of South Africa's people, strengthening an inclusive economy, building capabilities, enhancing the capacity of the state, and promoting leadership and partnerships throughout society. The Plan focuses on the development of new infrastructure to support the economy, environmental sustainability and transitioning to a low-carbon economy, fostering a more inclusive rural economy, improving education, training and innovation, and addressing issues of safety and social protection. The promotion of gender equality and expanding opportunities for youth are key themes of the Plan throughout. The Plan also takes into account other factors of exclusion, including race, disability and geographical location, and includes tax incentives for hiring young people.

Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD): South Africa's DWYPD, formerly the Department of Women, was renamed the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities in June 2019 and sits within the Office of the Presidency.¹⁷ The primary mission of the Department is to accelerate socioeconomic transformation and support the empowerment and participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities across the country's national development objectives, through oversight, monitoring, evaluation and influencing policy.

Commission for Gender Equality (CGE): Established as an independent statutory body in Section 187 of the Constitution, the CGE is tasked with promoting respect for gender equality and the protection, development and attainment of gender equality in South Africa.¹⁸ The CGE's mission is to promote, protect, monitor and evaluate gender equality through research, public education, policy development, legislative initiatives, effective monitoring and litigation.¹⁹ The CGE also offers a public hotline for citizens to report gender discrimination and violence and receive support and guidance for proceeding with litigation against individuals or organizations who may be violating the country's laws related to gender equality and non-discrimination.

National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality: Also referred to as the National Gender Policy Framework, South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality is a cross-sectoral, overarching, guiding policy framework to secure gender equality

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ [Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996](#); The Government of the Republic of South Africa.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ [National Development Plan, 2030](#); National Planning Commission, Government of the Republic of South Africa.

¹⁷ [Overview](#); Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, 2022.

¹⁸ [Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996](#); The Government of the Republic of South Africa. Overview; [Commission for Gender Equality](#), 2022.

¹⁹ Overview; [Commission for Gender Equality](#), 2022.

and ensure the inclusion and empowerment of women across the country.²⁰ The Framework is issue driven rather than sector-specific and promotes a cooperative approach among sectors towards achieving gender equality both within and across sectors. The policy considers that each sector has unique issues to address, and in turn, these sector issues have unique gender implications, thus the National Gender Policy Framework provides the guidelines which various sectors can use to issue more detailed policy documents that are sector-specific. The Framework is human rights-based and acknowledges that women themselves are not a homogenous group, emphasizing the need to address race, class, sexuality, disability, age and other variables to ensure that inclusion and empowerment is holistic and equitable, especially in light of the country's unique history with discrimination and segregation.

South Africa Human Rights Commission (SAHRC): Established in 1995 as mandated by the Constitution, the SAHRC is the supreme national independent human rights institution of South Africa. The Commission is guided by five strategic objectives; to promote compliance with international and regional human rights related treaties, advance the realization of human rights, deepen the understanding of human rights to entrench a human rights culture, ensure the fulfilment of constitutional and legislative mandates, and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Commission to support its delivery of the mandate. The SAHRC also receives formal complaints from citizens related to human rights violations. Some of their key focus areas include the rights of children, people with disabilities (PWD) and the elderly.

National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD): The NCPD primary objective is to make South Africa a country where PWD have access to equal opportunities and rights.²¹ Their activities include advocating for and facilitating inclusion, access and economic empowerment, contributing to and influencing Government policies, and changing social attitudes about disability through sensitization and awareness programs. The NCPD also engages in different large-scale fundraising campaigns to help meet the everyday needs of children and people with disabilities.

National Youth Policy, 2020-2030 (NYP): South Africa's NYP is an in-depth, comprehensive guiding framework for youth inclusion and empowerment, focusing on five key areas: quality education, skills and second chances, economic transformation, entrepreneurship and job creation, physical and mental health promotion, social cohesion and nation building, and effective and responsive youth development machinery.²² Similar to the National Gender Policy Framework's approach with women, the NYP recognizes that 'youth' are not a homogeneous group, and advocates for targeted interventions according to age cohorts (i.e. adolescents vs. older youth), racial group, gender, disability status, geographical location, educational status, sexual orientation, vulnerability and other risks. Gender-responsiveness is one of the guiding principles of the policy, along with accessibility, diversity and transparency. Further, the policy explicitly acknowledges the importance of the inclusion of rural youth and other marginalized groups within the youth category, with an emphasis on digital inclusion and technology. The NYP and its five key focal areas are operationalized through the Integrated Youth Development Strategy (IYDS), with specific action plans for target sectors and goals.²³

National Youth Development Agency (NYDA): The NYDA was established by South Africa's Parliament in 2008, and is a single, unitary structure addressing youth development issues at national, provincial and local government level across the country. The focal areas of the NYDA include economic development through youth entrepreneurship, decent employment and job creation, social cohesion and economic emancipation through the National Youth Service, and the monitoring and evaluation of the IYDS.

Employment Equality Act (1998) and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (2003): One of the South African governments' primary efforts to address the legacy of apartheid is broadly known as

²⁰ [South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality](#); The Office on the Status of Women, 2002.

²¹ [About the NCPD](#); National Council of and for Persons With Disabilities, 2022.

²² [National Youth Policy 2020-2030](#); Department for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, 2020.

²³ [Integrated Youth Development Strategy](#); National Youth Development Agency, 2021.

‘affirmative action’ and encompasses key aspects of the Employment Equality Act (EEA) as well as the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (B-BBEE).²⁴ Affirmative action was established early on to help mitigate the significant economic inequalities in terms of race, gender and other metrics that were a consequence of the apartheid regime. Specific social groups were listed as ‘designated groups’ in Section 1 of the Employment Equity Act, with the intention of ensuring that these excluded groups would be able to reap the benefits and opportunities guaranteed to them in the country’s post-apartheid Constitution. The official beneficiaries of affirmative action include “Black People” – a broad term which refers to Africans, Indians, Colored (persons of mixed-race descent), and ethnic Chinese, as well as all women regardless of race, youth, people with disabilities and rural communities.²⁵ The EEA, the B-BBEE and the series of amendments thereafter provide the main legal frameworks for the implementation of affirmative action in South Africa.²⁶

Under this framework, the government incentivizes different actors in the economy to use black-owned businesses as suppliers, through preferential contract awarding to B-BBEE-compliant businesses (including government tenders) and tax incentives; entities with higher B-BBEE compliance scores are more competitive in terms of government favour for accessing business resources and opportunities.²⁷ Businesses earn B-BBEE ‘points’ on a scorecard by meeting specific criteria that support and promote marginalized groups across ownership, management, skills development, enterprise development and socioeconomic development. Companies that want to conduct any business with a government department, government-owned enterprise or similar must be compliant with B-BBEE criteria; this affects a wide range of business needs and activities, including applying for licenses or concessions from the government, tendering for government-issued work and purchase orders, entering into any public-private relationships, and purchasing any state-owned enterprises. The EEA and B-BBEE play a unique and critical role in the gender and social inclusion context of South Africa.

The Gender Context of South Africa

South Africa is arguably considered one of the most liberal and progressive countries on the African continent when it comes to human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women. Despite this reputation, gender inequality and violence remain fairly widespread throughout the country, and policy and legislative advancements have not produced the results intended.²⁸ From the perspective of norms, the country has been steeped in patriarchal customs and traditions for many years, and cultural, religious and social practices and attitudes have often been openly hostile to the notion or practice of gender equality.²⁹ The gender norms and customs of South Africa as a whole have historically defined women as inferior to men and as such assigned to them the position of minors in both public and private spheres of life.³⁰ While gains have been made in some key realms, including legal rights, education and political participation, barriers persist in other facets, including the country’s ongoing epidemic of sexual and gender-based violence and femicide.

Over the last 20 years, South Africa has often been referred to as ‘the rape capital of the world’ due to its incredibly high rates of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which have persisted for many years.³¹ According to recent annual crime statistics released by the South African Police Service (SAPS), the number of reported sexual offences in the country increased from 52,420 in 2018/19 to 53,293 in 2019/20. Of these reported offences committed in 2019/20, rape accounted for 42,289 cases, nearly 80 percent of all sexual offences. This translates to an average of 116 rapes reported to the SAPS every

²⁴ [Affirmative Action in South Africa: Are We Creating New Casualties?](#); Archibong, U. and Adejumo, O., 2013. [Employment Equity Act](#); The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 1998.

²⁵ [Affirmative Action in South Africa: Are We Creating New Casualties?](#); Archibong, U. and Adejumo, O., 2013. [Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act: Act 53 of 2003 as amended by Act 46 of 2013](#); B-BBEE Commission, 2016.

²⁶ [Affirmative Action in South Africa: Are We Creating New Casualties?](#); Archibong, U. and Adejumo, O., 2013.

²⁷ [A Guide to BBBEE for Business Owners in South Africa](#); Funding Hub, February 2022.

²⁸ [Despite progressive laws, barriers to full gender equality persist in South Africa](#); Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 324, October 2019.

²⁹ [20 Years of Gender on the Agenda: Reviewing the Work and Contribution of the Commission for Gender Equality in South Africa](#); CGE, 2017.

³⁰ [South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality](#); The Office on the Status of Women, 2002.

³¹ [One step forward, one step backwards: Assessing Current Government's Responses and Interventions to Combat Gender-Based Violence and Femicide In South Africa](#); CGE, 2021. [Serial Rape in South Africa: A report by AfriForum](#); AfriForum, December 2020.

single day.³² A 2016 study by the University of the Witwatersrand and Sonke Gender Justice found that 56 percent of 2,600 Diepsloot men interviewed (aged 18-40) admitted to having raped or beaten a woman in the previous twelve months. However, according to the same study, SAPS crime statistics indicate that rape cases reported at the Diepsloot police station averaged only 128 per annum in the five years preceding the release of the study, highlighting a trend of substantial under-reporting of cases. Victims range in age from infants to the elderly, and are primarily assaulted in their homes (64 percent of cases), public spaces (28 percent) and at their educational institutions. Perpetrators of sexual violence are rarely strangers, and most often relatives, teachers and even police officers. Evidence from around the world as well as the South African context indicates that patriarchal gender norms are the primary driver of SGBV, and myths related to the 'healing power' of very young virgins to cure HIV/AIDS further contribute to SGBV committed against girls and children, including infants.³³

In 2019, the country held its first ever Presidential Summit on Gender-based Violence and Femicide (GBVF), where President Cyril Ramaphosa signed and launched a declaration listing a number of key commitments to tackle the problem, including the establishment of a multi-sectoral national coordinating structure on GBV and the development of an accompanying National Strategic Plan. However, organizing and establishing the national coordinating structure to take this work forward has reportedly been fraught with confusion, lack of transparency, consistent delays and lack of accountability. While the National Gender-based Violence and Femicide Strategic Plan was shared in draft form in 2020, the multi-sectoral national coordinating structure on GBV to lead on the implementation of the Plan and the presidential commitments had still not been set up at the time of publishing of CGE's latest report on the matter (2021).³⁴

With regard to women's economic participation in South Africa, evidence is mixed in terms of positive progress. The country has suffered from persistent low growth rates for many years, with an 11-year average GDP annual growth rate of just 0.98 percent.³⁵ The Covid pandemic hit South Africa particularly hard; the country has the highest Covid-19 caseload on the continent, which has devastated the economy and exacerbated other critical development challenges facing the government.³⁶ Women's participation in the labour force sits at 54 percent, compared with 66 percent for men.³⁷ While South Africa has shown improvement in some areas related to women's entrepreneurship, including the degree of marginalization that women experience in terms of financial access and tertiary education, only 19 percent of all businesses in the country are owned by women.³⁸ Women also represent 53 percent of professional and technical workers in the country, compared with men at 46 percent.³⁹ However, the Covid pandemic has played a major role in diminishing women's gains in the area of economic participation and entrepreneurship and exacerbating gender barriers in this regard. Recent surveys indicate that women business owners' ability to generate income and resume business operations in the wake of the Covid outbreak have been disproportionately affected compared to their male counterparts; these trends hold true in both informal retail economies as well as within the service sector, such as catering and domestic services.⁴⁰

Women experience a significant gender wage gap in the South African context, as well. While both male and female-headed households in the country have experienced a reduction in poverty since the end of apartheid, women are still more likely than men to be poor, and remain underrepresented in the formal economy.⁴¹ Black women employees tend to earn less than any other racial group of women, with most low-paying occupations taken up by Black and Coloured female workers. Social and gender norms that

³² [Serial Rape in South Africa: A report by AfriForum](#); AfriForum, December 2020.

³³ [Serial Rape in South Africa: A report by AfriForum](#); AfriForum, December 2020. Masculine Norms and Violence: Making the Connections; Promundo, 2018.

³⁴ [One step forward, one step backwards: Assessing Current Government's Responses and Interventions to Combat Gender-Based Violence and Femicide In South Africa](#); CGE, 2021

³⁵ GDP annual growth rate, South Africa, 2010-2020 inclusive; World Bank DataBank, 2022.

³⁶ [South Africa: Current Issues, Economy and U.S. Relations](#); Congressional Research Service, September 2020.

³⁷ [Global Gender Gap Report: Insight Report](#); World Economic Forum, March 2021.

³⁸ [The MasterCard Index of Women Entrepreneurs](#); MasterCard Foundation, 2020.

³⁹ [Global Gender Gap Report: Insight Report](#); World Economic Forum, March 2021.

⁴⁰ [The MasterCard Index of Women Entrepreneurs](#); MasterCard Foundation, 2020.

⁴¹ [Gender Pay Gap Pilot Report](#); National Business Initiative, University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg, 2021.

influence access, behaviours and attitudes from a very young age play a key role in driving the gender pay gap in South Africa. Other drivers include religion, education, underrepresentation in the workplace and discriminatory organizational cultures. Sexual harassment is another form of gender-based violence common in the workplace, and also serves to prevent women from advancing. One in 10 women in South African companies has experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, and only 24 percent said they would report the harassment.⁴² In addition, the ‘motherhood penalty’ continues to be a major driver of the gender pay gap, perpetuated by maternal bias and gender norms that place the bulk of childcare responsibilities on women. The fundamental assumption behind the motherhood penalty is that working mothers are not as competent as men, or women who do not have children.⁴³ Studies on the topic indicate that visibly pregnant women managers are often perceived as being less committed to their jobs, less dependable, less influential, and more emotional and irrational than women who are not pregnant. The result of this bias is that mothers are often paid less and promoted with less frequency.

Domestic responsibilities, childcare and the gender norms surrounding them present additional barriers for women. Even for those women who do have the support of a co-parent, further disadvantages present themselves through legislation that perpetuates harmful, unequal gender roles and discriminates against same-sex couples.⁴⁴ Under South African labour law, paternity leave is only 10 days while maternity leave is four months. This significant imbalance reinforces the gendered expectation that children are the primary responsibility of women and mothers. As a result, it is mainly women who are forced to make the greatest sacrifices to their professional careers, since the consistent demands of childcare and the household mean they are unable to spend as much time as men at work. In South Africa, working women on average spend more than double the time on unpaid housework than working men – in addition to working a full-time job.

This overall domestic burden on women is broadly referred to as unpaid care work (UCW), and is one of the most persistent barriers that women in South Africa and elsewhere face – a barrier which has a direct and substantial impact on their economic and political participation. UCW refers to the often-invisible household, care and domestic work that largely falls on women and girls.⁴⁵ It involves all aspects of domestic and care work, including cooking, cleaning, all facets of childcare, fetching water and firewood, and caring for other family members, including the sick and elderly. It is largely invisible, unvalued and unremunerated labour, and has been well documented in terms of the impact it has on perpetuating women’s poverty and gender inequality.⁴⁶ Before the Covid pandemic, women and girls were already spending 12.5 billion hours globally on unpaid care work every day. This amounts to a contribution of at least \$10.8 trillion annually – three times that of the global tech industry.⁴⁷ Data indicate that men in South Africa spend very limited time on UCW at any age, while women spend 71 percent of their productive time on household work at every age.⁴⁸ The Covid pandemic has worsened the situation in South Africa due to school closures and women being expected to care for children while working from home; women facing these issues have even been hospitalized due to the extreme strain this burden has put on their mental health and well-being.⁴⁹ Academic researchers in South Africa have made several recommendations to policy makers to address the persistent problem of UCW, including the need to acknowledge the everyday contributions of South Africa’s women to the nation’s well-being and total production, to foster a national conversation on norms around gender roles, and to support market-provided childcare for women.⁵⁰

In the realm of education, South Africa has made considerable strides in recent years. Enrolment rates for girls and boys in primary and secondary education are now on par, with girls sometimes exceeding

⁴² [Gender Equity in the Workplace](#); National Business Initiative, University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg, 2019.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ [Addressing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work for a Gender-Equal and Inclusive Kenya](#); Care, April 2021.

⁴⁶ [Building Back Better for Women and Girls](#); Report of the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council, 2021.

⁴⁷ [Addressing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work for a Gender-Equal and Inclusive Kenya](#); Care, April 2021.

⁴⁸ [Counting Women’s Work](#); Poverty & Inequality Initiative, University of Cape Town, September 2019.

⁴⁹ [Impact on Women and Gender Equality: Exacerbated Burdens of Unpaid Work](#); Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2022.

⁵⁰ [Counting Women’s Work](#); Poverty & Inequality Initiative, University of Cape Town, September 2019.

enrolment rates for boys.⁵¹ At secondary level, data indicate that girls tend to repeat grades more often than boys. At tertiary level, enrolment rates are higher for women than they are for men, at 28 percent for women and 19 percent for men, as of 2019. However, gender disparities are still prevalent in public higher education institutions in terms of progression and completion rates, areas of study and enrollment in postgraduate studies.⁵² Further, enrollment rates can be deceiving at first glance, and often gloss over the significant racial disparities that arise. Black South African girls and women face significant disadvantages in terms of access to quality education, compared with other racial groups, particularly white South Africans. High rates of HIV/AIDS as well as SGBV further compromises the educational experiences of girls and women. At 7.8 million people, South Africa has the highest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world; girls and women make up roughly 64 percent of the total population living with HIV/AIDS, which can lead to school dropout or prevent school attendance or enrolment entirely.⁵³ At the same time, SGBV in schools is widespread and often severe; girls face sexual harassment, coercion and abuse from fellow students as well as teachers, which affects their levels of comfort in the classroom, their physical and mental health and well-being, and the overall quality of their education.⁵⁴ Female students who are victimized at school often demonstrate poor academic performance, high rates of school absenteeism, anxiety and depression, drug and alcohol abuse, psychological trauma, and even dropping out of school.⁵⁵ Geographical location also plays a role in gender disparities related to education. Millions of South Africans live in townships outside of urban centres, which have high rates of crime and SGBV. Children often have to walk long distances to attend school, putting girls at additional risk of violence on the journey to and from campus.⁵⁶

South Africa has generally had a positive reputation for women's political participation, based on high numbers on women in parliament and other key roles of political leadership. Women currently hold 46 percent of seats in the country's parliament, and 36 percent of seats in the National Council of Provinces.⁵⁷ South Africa recently made history by having 50 percent of its cabinet ministers as women for the first time. However, the number of women premiers has reduced dramatically, now at just 22 percent down from a high of 55 percent in 2009. Electoral law in South Africa stipulates that political parties must seek to ensure 50 percent of candidates on party lists are women, though there are no legal sanctions for non-compliance with this quota.⁵⁸ At the sub-national level, there are legislated quotas for women's participation; the Municipal Structures Act of 1998 stipulates that parties must "seek to ensure that 50 percent of the candidates on the party list are women, and that women and men candidates are evenly distributed though the list".⁵⁹ Since 2009, the ANC as the ruling party has had a 50 percent gender quota for both local and national elections. However, quotas that are voluntary only among political parties, particularly within the ruling ANC, mean that women's political participation could backslide in the future, if and when the ANC is no longer the dominant party in South Africa's parliament. Additional studies on such quotas indicate a direct correlation between countries with high levels of women's representation and ruling parties adopting voluntary quotas; the top five countries (South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Cameroon) where ruling parties have adopted a quota are also in the top ten African countries with the highest levels of women's representation in parliament.⁶⁰ In sharp contrast, the ANC Women's League has lost much of its credibility with the women's movement in recent years, playing a role in reinforcing gender stereotypes and undermining women's leadership, while staunchly defending former president Jacob Zuma when he was accused of rape, rather than standing with his accuser in a country rife with GBV.⁶¹ However, in 2015, the League made steps towards redeeming itself by allowing transgender women to join its membership ranks, and in 2020 launched a newly established LGBTQ+ desk to support the fight to end GBV in the country.

⁵¹ Primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment rates (% gross), female and male, 2015-2019; World Bank Databank, 2022.

⁵² [Affirmative Action for Gender Justice in South African and Kenyan Education Systems](#); Akala B.M., January 2019.

⁵³ [Country Fact Sheet: South Africa](#); UNAIDS, 2020. [10 Facts About Girls' Education in South Africa](#); The Borgen Project, 2022.

⁵⁴ [Why South Africa's Girls Continue to Experience Violence at School](#); Global Citizen, April 2021.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ [10 Facts About Girls' Education in South Africa](#); The Borgen Project, 2022.

⁵⁷ [South Africa: Gender and Elections](#); Gender Links, 2020.

⁵⁸ [Barriers to Women Entering Parliament and Local Government](#); Institute for Policy Research, October 2018.

⁵⁹ [Women's Political Participation: Africa Barometer 2021](#); International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021.

⁶⁰ [Women's Political Participation: Africa Barometer 2021](#); International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

While South Africa has made significant progress in some metrics of political participation for women, barriers remain. Though women register and turn out to vote in higher numbers in national, provincial, and local elections compared with men, their representation at the level of local government is much lower.⁶² The local level is reportedly the most difficult level for women to participate in politically, due to patriarchal attitudes and sexism, as well as sexual harassment. It is challenging for women to engage at this level, or to make a difference once elected by prioritizing issues of great concern for women. A key barrier at the local level are the internal practices of political parties, and how these practices reflect the dominant patriarchal values and attitudes of the community, which make it more difficult for women to win positions or nominations.⁶³ Local party structures that vet candidates still tend to be dominated by men, particularly powerful, well-connected men, who make it difficult for women to break through. In addition, women in politics at all levels are often held to a much higher standard than their male counterparts when it comes to tackling social issues and gender equality, a double-standard that only serves to further reinforce inequality and gender bias rather than address or transform it.

While gender barriers play a cross-cutting role in all facets of life, gender norms further intersect with other social variables to compound the marginalization that individual women and girls face. Not all women and girls experience the same disadvantages and marginalization; while gender discrimination and violence can and does impact the lives of women and girls from all walks of life, the nature, frequency and severity of these experiences varies based on other variables of life circumstance and identity, including age, disability, sexual orientation, geographic location, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, religion and culture, among others.

The Social Inclusion Context of South Africa

Social inclusion is a broad term that can refer to any number of social groups that may experience systematic discrimination and thus exclusion from social, political and economic life.⁶⁴ This assessment focuses on how social exclusion creates barriers for individuals to access, participate in and benefit from R&I ecosystems within their country context. Factors such as poverty, rural / urban divides, age, disability and sexual orientation and gender identity play a key role in this regard, diminishing certain groups' and individuals' access to opportunities, resources and support.

Poverty is a primary driver of social exclusion, while social exclusion in turn worsens poverty.⁶⁵ Those who are socially excluded are often denied access to resources and opportunities available to others to increase their income and develop their households and communities by their own efforts. While the economy may grow and broader income levels may rise over time, socially excluded people are likely to be left behind, and make up an increasing proportion of those who remain in poverty despite improved overall growth levels.

Social inclusion or exclusion in South Africa is heavily influenced by a complex kaleidoscope of factors, due to the country's distinct history of state-sanctioned racial segregation under apartheid, which further exacerbated other forms of exclusion related to education, geography, income, gender and age, among others. Many of South Africa's post-apartheid policies and programmes have aimed to correct historical injustices responsible for social exclusion, yet inequalities remain rampant.⁶⁶

In terms of poverty and inequality, South Africa has seen years of sluggish economic growth that has affected its development overall. Although the country has made some progress in reducing poverty since 1994, this trajectory was actually reversed between 2011 and 2015, threatening to roll back some of the

⁶² [Women in South Africa's local government elections: Equality and representation lessons for 2021/22](#); Smout, J., August 2021.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ [Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion](#): A DFID policy paper; DFID, 2005.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ [Poverty, inequality and social exclusion in South Africa: a systematic assessment of key policies, strategies and flagship programmes](#); Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg, October 2019.

gains made since the fall of apartheid.⁶⁷ Roughly 55 percent of the population, or about 30.3 million people, are living in poverty at the national upper poverty line, while a total of 13.8 million people (about 25 percent of the population) are experiencing food poverty. In addition, South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with high, persistent levels of inequality that have increased since 1994. Income polarization is severe and manifests itself in very high levels of chronic poverty, with just a few high-income earners and a relatively small middle class.⁶⁸ The top 10 percent own 86 percent of aggregate wealth and the top 0.1 percent close to one-third.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, the top 0.01 percent of the distribution (3,500 individuals) represent 15 percent of household net worth, more than the bottom 90 percent as a whole. This extreme inequality can be accounted for in all forms of assets, including housing, pension funds, and financial assets. Discouragingly, there has been no sign of decreasing inequality since the end of apartheid.

South Africa is also characterized by extreme wage inequality across the board; a large proportion of the working population is employed in very low paid jobs, while the proportion of workers with highly skilled jobs is low.⁷⁰ For example, high-skill jobs earn nearly five times the average wage for low-skill jobs yet represent less than 20 percent of the total working population. Numerous different factors contribute to these dynamics, including the fact that labour markets have been driven primarily by a growth path that relies heavily on skills and capital, which reinforces this polarization between a rather small proportion of high-paying jobs in large companies in the formal sector, contrasted with a much greater number of insecure and poorly paid jobs clustered in the informal sector.

Another aspect of exclusion is disadvantage on the basis of where individuals live, known as 'spatial' exclusion.⁷¹ People who live in rural or remote/isolated areas are often prevented from fully participating in wider economic and social life, and faced with the additional constraints of poverty, can be systematically left behind in a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle. Lack of access to electricity and internet connectivity compound the exclusion that poor, rural individuals and communities face, in particular economic exclusion. People living in rural areas of South Africa are some of the most vulnerable to conditions of poverty.⁷² Rural areas also experience higher school dropout rates, due to poor educational resources and limited learning and recreational facilities. Other critical infrastructure is lacking in rural communities as well, including safely managed drinking water services, with only 66 percent of the population in rural municipalities of the country having access to such services, versus 87 percent in urban municipalities. Further, labour and land requirements enforced by the Apartheid regime have constrained the development of a Black rural middle class able to grow food and expand rural-urban linkages for economic growth.⁷³ In terms of racial divides, Black South Africans consistently exhibit the highest poverty rates, and unemployment rates for Black South Africans are 2-3 times higher than those of White South Africans.⁷⁴

With regard to PWD, the prevalence rate of disability in the South African context ranges from 7.5 percent to 12.2 percent, depending on how disability is defined.⁷⁵ Overall, women are more likely to be disabled than men, at 58 percent of the total population of PWD compared with 42 percent for men. Disability has a significant impact on both income and productivity, and PWD are more likely to be living below the food poverty line. Children with disabilities in South Africa are less likely to attend school than their non-disabled counterparts, and are at higher risk of living in informal settlements, or in households without adequate access to water and sanitation.⁷⁶ Furthermore, women with disabled children are particularly vulnerable to becoming single parents because of the stigma around disability and tend to face exclusion

⁶⁷ [Poverty & Equity Brief: South Africa](#); World Bank, 2020.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ [Wealth Inequality in South Africa, 1993–2017](#); Chatterjee, A., et al., World Bank Economic Review, July 2021.

⁷⁰ [Poverty, inequality and social exclusion in South Africa: a systematic assessment of key policies, strategies and flagship programmes](#); Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg, October 2019.

⁷¹ [Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion](#): A DFID policy paper; DFID, 2005.

⁷² [UN South Africa Common Country Analysis](#); United Nations, 2019-2020.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ [Overcoming Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: An Assessment of Drivers, Constraints and Opportunities](#); World Bank, 2018.

⁷⁵ [Social Protection and Disability in South Africa](#); Kidd, S., et al., Development Pathways, July 2018.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

from social and economic activities that could provide needed support. Studies from the South African context indicate that social stigma associated with disability drives depression and low self-esteem among PWD, and lack of employment and education opportunities further compounds these negative mental health impacts and the overall exclusion that PWD face.⁷⁷ The Government of South Africa has set up social assistance schemes to support PWD throughout an individual's life cycle, including the Care Dependency Grant for children with disabilities, a Disability Grant for those between 18 and 59 years of age, and an old age pension for those aged 60 years and above.⁷⁸ Despite these measures, data indicate that there are still around 35 percent of persons with a severe functional limitation not in receipt of a social grant, and many of those excluded live in extreme poverty. Although the country adopted a White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2015, to date no specific disability rights legislation has yet been put in place. While the Constitution does protect the rights of PWD and mandates that national legislation should not unfairly discriminate against them, the gap in legislation directly addressing disability rights means that the implementation and monitoring of inclusive legislation remains fairly weak.⁷⁹

Despite a fairly progressive legal landscape surrounding sexual minorities, and courts that have upheld the rights of transgender adults, LGBTQ+ South Africans experience considerable barriers to social and economic inclusion based upon a range of different factors, including race, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression.⁸⁰ In 1998, laws prohibiting sexual behavior between same-sex individuals were deemed unconstitutional, yet public attitudes towards homosexuality and gender nonconformity (i.e. expressions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' that diverge from stereotypical expectations) remain largely negative and even openly hostile. According to a 2016 survey of 3,000 South Africans with the choice of eight different languages, seven out of ten people interviewed felt strongly that homosexual sex and breaking gender norms in terms of dress and appearance were simply 'wrong' and/or 'disgusting'.⁸¹ At the same time, roughly 51 percent of the population feel that LGBTQ+ individuals should have the same human rights as other citizens, even if they feel that LGBTQ+ expressions of gender or sexuality are 'morally wrong'. The impact of this stigma and exclusion can be felt across many different areas of daily life, including employment, wages, healthcare, education and safety.⁸²

Some members of the LGBTQ+ community in South Africa report avoiding seeking healthcare services or disclosing their identities to healthcare providers for fear of discrimination or verbal assault from such providers, while 44 percent of gender non-conforming LGBTQ+ individuals have reported trying to hide a health concern related to their sexual orientation or gender identity from a healthcare provider.⁸³ LGBTQ+ communities in South Africa also face violence, particularly sexual violence, driven by social stigma and discrimination, and further compounded by other factors such as race; rates of verbal, physical, and sexual violence experienced by Black lesbian women and Black gay men were notably higher than among White lesbian women and White gay men in the country. In terms of verbal harassment, 73 percent of LGBTQ+ community members have experienced verbal harassment due to their real or perceived gender identity or sexual orientation, while 48 percent are survivors of sexual violence; rates of sexual violence are even higher for those individuals whose outward physical appearance does not conform to expected or normative gender stereotypes.⁸⁴ In terms of economic participation, gender non-conforming heterosexual and lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals are less likely to be employed than gender conforming heterosexual individuals (33.8 percent and 14.9 percent versus 46.4 percent employed, respectively).⁸⁵ Gender non-conforming LGB individuals are the least likely to be participating within the paid labor force, while the monthly income of gender non-

⁷⁷ [Stigma of persons with disabilities in South Africa: Uncovering pathways from discrimination to depression and low self-esteem](#); Trani, J.F. et al, November 2020.

⁷⁸ [Social Protection and Disability in South Africa](#); Kidd, S., et al., Development Pathways, July 2018.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ [The Economic Cost of LGBT Stigma and Discrimination in South Africa](#); School of Law, Williams Institute, UCLA, December 2019.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² [Progressive Prudes: A Survey of Attitudes Towards Homosexuality and Gender Non-conformity in South Africa](#); The Other Foundation and the Human Sciences Research Council, 2016.

⁸³ [Are we doing alright? Realities of violence, mental health, and access to healthcare related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in South Africa: Research report based on a community-led study in nine countries](#); Müller, A., Daskilewicz, K. and the Southern and East African Research Collective on Health, 2019.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ [The Economic Cost of LGBT Stigma and Discrimination in South Africa](#); School of Law, Williams Institute, UCLA, December 2019.

conforming heterosexuals and gay or bisexual (GB) men is 30 percent lower on average than that of gender conforming heterosexual men, accounting for socio-demographic characteristics and job type. The annual economic costs of LGBTQ+ stigma and discrimination are significant; targeted studies estimate losses of US\$ 316.8 million due to wage discrimination and underemployment related to sexual orientation and gender expression, and between US\$ 3.2 billion and US\$ 19.5 billion due to health disparities disproportionately experienced by LGBTQ+ adults.⁸⁶ Further, between US\$ 10.5 million and US\$ 64.8 million is lost due to sexual assault that LGBTQ+ adults disproportionately experience each year.

Like many other countries on the continent, South Africa is experiencing a 'youth bulge'. Youth aged 15-34 years make up roughly 37 percent of the country's total population, while 29 percent of the population are below 15 years of age.⁸⁷ Countries with high numbers of youth who cannot find paid work or employment as they age into the labour market can face social, political and economic instability. Unemployment rates for youth in South Africa are far higher than for other key population demographics; unemployment for those aged 15-24 is 88.6 percent, while for those aged 25-34, unemployment sits at 43.8 percent.⁸⁸ Youth in South Africa face numerous barriers that cut across education, employment / entrepreneurship and other key areas of life, and which serve to drive their exclusion.⁸⁹ Young people, particularly those in rural areas, often face challenges in accessing education due to long distances between home and school, as well as safety concerns and the cost of transportation. Access to higher education has a strong correlation with entrepreneurial activity; young people in South Africa with tertiary level education are much more likely to feel confident in their knowledge and skills to start a business, compared with those who have completed secondary school only.⁹⁰ It's important to also note that youth are not a homogeneous group; girls and young women face uniquely different barriers than boys and young men, barriers which must be factored in to any efforts meant to engage and support young people. Young women tend to have less time, more caring responsibilities, less access to money for needs like mobile data and transport, and less time available to volunteer and network. They also face additional risks related to sexual harassment, violence and exploitation, both at work and at school, compounding their marginalization and exclusion from key opportunities, resources and decision-making spaces.⁹¹

Key GESI Gaps and Barriers in Research and Innovation

Across South Africa's R&I ecosystem, a range of gaps and barriers persist when it comes to the equitable participation of women, youth and other marginalized groups. Available research and evidence in this area has been further supplemented by in-depth interviews with a diverse range of key stakeholders within the country's R&I ecosystem.

In South Africa, women face numerous barriers in terms of their ability to access, participate in and benefit from R&I ecosystems on par with men and others in positions of social privilege. Stakeholders in the South African context report a diverse range of gaps and barriers in this regard, including concerns around safety and violence (both within, and traveling to and from, the workplace), gender pay gaps, persistent social and racial inequalities, gender-based barriers to internal promotion and career progression, workplace discrimination, and the considerable burden of unpaid care work that reduces the amount of time and energy women have available to invest in and grow their careers. In addition, low levels of knowledge and capacity related to gender equality and proactive inclusion mean that many institutions

⁸⁶ [The Economic Cost of LGBT Stigma and Discrimination in South Africa](#); School of Law, Williams Institute, UCLA, December 2019.

⁸⁷ [Mid-year Population Estimates 2020](#); Department of Statistics South Africa, 2020.

⁸⁸ [Quarterly Labour Force Survey \(QLFS\), 3rd Quarter 2021](#); Department of Statistics South Africa, November 2021.

⁸⁹ [Understanding Barriers to Youth Skills Development and Employment in South Africa](#); Lolwana, P. and Ngcwangu, S., Centre for Researching Education and Labour, April 2016.

⁹⁰ [Obstacles and Opportunities for Youth Entrepreneurship A Co-ordinated Approach Critical to Promote Youth Entrepreneurship](#); Kew, J., Auwal Socio-Economic Research Institute, 2016.

⁹¹ [Africa: In the search for work, barriers for young women are higher & harder to overcome](#); The Africa Report, March 2022. [Gender-Based Violence at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa](#); Safer Spaces, 2019.

are neither aware of, nor intentionally focusing on, addressing these gaps and barriers within their organizations or approaches to their work.⁹²

Despite some progress made in gender equality in recent decades, South Africa is a country with patriarchal roots and customs that continue to shape social, political and economic realities for women in present day. Access to quality education is a prerequisite for effective inclusion in research and innovation, and girls and women in South Africa face barriers in this regard, particularly when it comes to their participation in higher education and STEM fields. Non-White girls and women face additional barriers related to race, intergenerational poverty and geographical barriers, among others; this is especially true for Black African women and girls. Women make up 43 percent of all academic staff at tertiary levels of education in South Africa, but can often be clustered in positions of lower rank.⁹³ Only five of the country's 26 university vice chancellors are women, and insights from some of the country's top women in the sector shine a light on the disincentives women face in competing for higher level positions, including the fact that appearing to be ambitious and openly competitive with other candidates tends to be seen as an unflattering and 'unfeminine' characteristic for women.⁹⁴ Stakeholders also report that there is a significant gap when it comes to research being conducted directly with women and other marginalized communities; there is a tendency to adopt a more prescriptive, Western approach to research rather than allowing target communities to shape and inform the research process itself in a truly participatory and inclusive manner, which affects how knowledge is produced as well as how it is both used and valued.⁹⁵

In terms of women's participation in STEM, South Africa has made improvements though numbers still remain relatively low compared to men, and there are significant racial disparities in this regard, as well; for example, more girls than boys took the Grade 12 examinations in maths and physical science in 2021, but boys outperformed girls in both subjects, perpetuating a long-term education trend.⁹⁶ The gender gap in STEM widens further in post-school education and training, with just 28.5 percent of women graduating in STEM-related careers. Women currently account for 23 percent of STEM professionals in South Africa, and only 17 percent of these are in leadership positions. Further, while only 8 percent of South Africans are White, 78 percent of the most visible scientists in the country are currently White, and 63 percent of these are men.⁹⁷ Evidence reveals that a lack of career support, such as female mentors, networks and professional development opportunities, along with cultural and societal barriers, tend to discourage young women from pursuing a future in the sciences.

According to UNESCO data, roughly 45 percent of all researchers in South Africa are women, a near-parity figure achieved since 2015.⁹⁸ However, while more women than men tend to enrol in university, women's participation is affected by a range of unique gender barriers that significantly impacts the quality of their education, including the pandemic of SGBV in the country. Students at higher education institutions in South Africa have been protesting the high prevalence of SGBV on school campus since at least the 1980s, and these protests flared again in 2016.⁹⁹ SGBV at higher learning institutions includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation for academic credit, rape and homophobic bullying, among others. Studies indicate that gender norms related to male superiority and male sexual entitlement play a key role in driving high rates of SGBV on campus, as well as the lack of effective institutional policies and structures to prevent and respond to SGBV; male professors who exploit female students with threats of failing them out of classes unless sex is provided in exchange for good grades are adept at keeping their victims silent, and survivors of such sexual exploitation tend to blame themselves. For female students, the experience of SGBV can result in decreased class participation,

⁹² Stakeholder interviews, South Africa, January 2022.

⁹³ [Tertiary education, academic staff \(percent female\)](#); World Bank Databank, 2019. [Universities body to probe gender imbalance at the top](#); Naidu, E., University World News, July 2018.

⁹⁴ [Universities body to probe gender imbalance at the top](#); Naidu, E., University World News, July 2018.

⁹⁵ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa, January 2022.

⁹⁶ [STEM unlocking the potential of rural South African girls in aviation and space technology](#); UNICEF South Africa, January 2022.

⁹⁷ [In the footsteps of Einstein, Sagan and Barnard: Identifying South Africa's most visible scientists](#); Joubert, M. and Guenther, L., July 2017.

⁹⁸ [One in three researchers is a woman](#); UNESCO, 2021.

⁹⁹ [Gender-Based Violence at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa](#); Safer Spaces, 2019.

decreased concentration during lectures and even dropping out of courses, as well as severe emotional and psychological impacts, including post-traumatic stress disorder. The negative repercussions of SGBV on students' ability to learn has a detrimental effect on their academic performance and career potential, as well as a negative impact on the university itself and more broadly on South African society, through lost potential and earnings.¹⁰⁰ Yet, given the powerful historical inequities across the country, stakeholders in South Africa's research and innovation ecosystem report that education is a critical gateway out of poverty and exclusion for many communities, especially those living in townships away from the urban centres where resources and opportunities are concentrated.¹⁰¹

Stakeholders from the South African context repeatedly emphasized the role that fear of violence and lack of safety plays in women's daily lives, particularly when it comes to being able to travel from one place to another to access resources and opportunities.¹⁰² The country's high rates of SGBV and femicide affect whether or not, and how, girls and women can access research and innovation spaces in urban areas, on par with men and boys in the country. Further, under the apartheid regime, people of colour were forcibly removed to the outskirts of urban areas, to what are now known as townships.¹⁰³ In practical terms, townships were never designed to be independent economic hubs, but rather to operate as feeder areas of labour for urban centres. Women entrepreneurs in South Africa's townships face a wide array of barriers resulting from the challenges inherent within townships themselves, as well as from the realities of doing business as a woman in a patriarchal society. These barriers include lack of access or unreliable access to affordable and stable internet and mobile data services, lack of sufficient infrastructure in terms of electricity, water, sanitation and postal services, elevated crime rates that undermine women's physical safety, and significant constraints to business growth due to limited access to suitable financial services or government support.¹⁰⁴

In addition to these challenges, women innovators and entrepreneurs in all parts of the country face barriers related to gendered expectations around appropriate roles for women within family and society, primarily as wives and mothers. These expectations diminish women's sense of self-confidence and also significantly limit the time they are able to invest in training programs and developing their businesses.¹⁰⁵ Stakeholders report that women entrepreneurs also tend to avoid taking financial and other risks while growing their businesses, due to the risk of possible failure as an entrepreneur and the pressure they face to ensure that their children and families are taken care of. Stakeholders report that despite some progress made around women's economic participation, women continue to carry the majority of the burden of domestic work and childcare in South Africa, even if they are active in high-powered industries and managerial roles where they are working long hours, including weekends, and are extremely constrained in terms of the free time they have to devote to UCW.¹⁰⁶ Even for those women who are in a financial position to be able to hire housekeepers and other forms of domestic support, they are still expected to organize and manage those domestic workers, and 'have dinner on the table every night'. One key stakeholder summed up the considerable domestic gender divide with the statement, "*men don't focus on those things; they just wait for food to be on the table, and they don't bother with anything else.*"¹⁰⁷ Studies on the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in South Africa further reflect and confirm these same issues.¹⁰⁸

In addition to these persistent gender barriers in the home and community, women in South Africa's R&I ecosystem face sexism and gender stereotypes in the workplace, as well as a significant gender pay gap. Stakeholders report that research and innovation spaces remain male-dominated, particularly in the area

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

¹⁰² Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

¹⁰³ [Building Women's Businesses in South African Township Economies](#); Value for Women & Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, November 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

¹⁰⁵ [Building Women's Businesses in South African Township Economies](#); Value for Women & Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, November 2021. Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

¹⁰⁸ [Documenting financial inclusion best practices: Experiences of 60 Women Entrepreneurs in South Africa and Zambia](#); African Women's Development Fund, August 2021.

of technology and innovation.¹⁰⁹ Only 21 percent of executives in the IT sector are women, while gender stereotypes and discrimination in the sector have led to high unemployment rates of women IT graduates.¹¹⁰ Women constitute only 20 percent of the total labour force in South Africa's technology sector, and the low representation of women in the sector further demotivates other women from pursuing careers in technology and innovation. Stakeholders working in innovation and technology in South Africa report not being taken seriously as women in the sector, with male colleagues often questioning their capabilities and credentials. Discriminatory attitudes about pregnant women also play a role, with colleagues and clients questioning whether women can perform well if they are pregnant or become pregnant.¹¹¹ Stakeholders report that gendered expectations related to physical beauty and appearance also play a key role in women's inclusion, promotion and overall advancement in the South African context, particularly in male-dominated sectors.¹¹² Other barriers for women in the R&I ecosystem include limited access to start-up capital and finance for business development. Some of the challenges in this regard are low levels of financial literacy, unsupportive attitudes of banks towards increasing their share of women business owners, lack of awareness of the availability of development finance, low levels of self-confidence, lengthy turnaround times for loan applications, and a preference among banks and other financial institutions to invest primarily in tech businesses.¹¹³ In a positive direction, South Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Decadal Plan makes specific reference to the need to invest greater resources in programming and support to increase the number of women studying and entering employment in STEM-related fields, and further notes that funding structures for such initiatives should take into account the impact of childcare responsibilities on women in STEM, in order to ensure their equitable promotion and improved research ratings.¹¹⁴

In terms of the gender pay gap, recent studies indicate there are significant disparities in the South African context, across all sectors; South African women are consistently paid less than men, and there is no industry in the country where women are paid more than men.¹¹⁵ Men in healthcare are paid roughly 28.1 percent more than women, and 25.1 percent more in media and general retailers. Meanwhile, men are paid 22.9 percent more than women in South Africa's technology industry, and 21.8 percent more in the financial sector. In terms of top leadership, only 3.3 percent of the companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) have female chief executive officers (CEOs), and racial disparities are also prevalent here, as elsewhere; 85.9 percent of CEOs of listed South African companies are White, followed by 10.2 percent Black and 2.2 percent Indian or Asian.¹¹⁶ National policies and legislation related to affirmative action and closing historical gaps in terms of gender, race and disability in business and employment have not yet produced the concrete results hoped for. Stakeholders report that these efforts at inclusion through affirmative action approaches are often not well thought out in practice and tend to lack strategies and targets at a firm level; as such, they can often result in tokenistic outcomes that do not really address embedded inequalities and are instead used as a channel for the business itself to win government favour in procuring tenders and contracts.¹¹⁷

When it comes to fostering innovation for growth and social impact, stakeholders report that technology and innovation hubs tend to fall into a few distinct clusters within the country; the first tend to be male-dominated tech hubs that often consider or project themselves the 'Silicon Valley' of Africa, followed by social impact hubs that focus more on historical inequities but often miss the mark in terms of real inclusion, and lastly what are sometimes known as 'lipstick hubs' or 'girl boss' hubs that promote women in innovation and entrepreneurship without really addressing the root causes of some of the greatest gender barriers that women are facing in the sector. In particular, hubs focused on women's

¹⁰⁹ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

¹¹⁰ [A Study on the Gender Digital Divide: Overcoming the Under-Representation of South African Women in the IT Sector](#); Mamba T.N. et al., Macrothink Institute, December 2018.

¹¹¹ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

¹¹² Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

¹¹³ [Access to finance for women entrepreneurs in South Africa: Challenges and opportunities](#); FinMark Trust, November 2006. [Documenting financial inclusion best practices: Experiences of 60 Women Entrepreneurs in South Africa and Zambia](#); African Women's Development Fund, August 2021.

¹¹⁴ [Framework for the Science, Technology and Innovation Decadal Plan](#); Department of Science and Innovation, Republic of South Africa, June 2019.

¹¹⁵ [Practices and remuneration trends report: Executive directors, 13th edition, South Africa](#); PwC, 2021.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

entrepreneurship tend to benefit more elite women, and prefer to avoid challenging the status quo in terms of power and privilege, as well as deeper structural inequalities. Overall, stakeholders report that most actors in South Africa's R&I ecosystem are not yet knowledgeable enough or well-equipped to be able to effectively respond to the GESI gaps in their work areas, and capacity building is required for making progress in this regard.¹¹⁸

Looking at social inclusion beyond gender, targeted and supportive efforts are somewhat limited within South Africa's R&I ecosystem, not unlike many other countries on the continent. Stakeholders report that gender issues and women's inclusion are generally more visible across the ecosystem, whereas efforts to consider, engage or include PWD, youth, LGBTQ+ communities or poor, rural communities are fairly limited in terms of availability as well as impact.

Evidence indicates that PWD in South Africa have been largely excluded from most aspects of social, political and economic life. Due to historical inequities as well as present-day stigma and discrimination, PWD face disproportionately high levels of unemployment, tend to be employed in low status jobs, or receive lower than average remuneration.¹¹⁹ Stakeholders in the South African context report that very few R&I initiatives are either inclusive of, or meant to benefit, PWD. Of those that do exist, insights from stakeholders feel that this is often done to score points for 'affirmative action' and that actors attempting to engage PWD can sometimes have good intentions without proper follow through or direct input from target groups themselves.¹²⁰ Data also indicates that the problem of inaccessibility continues to hinder PWD's access to workplace environments of all kinds. Under South African law, whenever someone is employed, reasonable accommodation must be provided to cater for their needs, yet progress in this respect had been extremely slow to date for PWD. In addition, the South African government still tends to employ PWD primarily at entry level, a trend that further impedes transformation of the economy overall to be meaningfully inclusive of PWD.¹²¹

Stakeholders working on social impact and inclusion in South Africa further report that tokenistic efforts to engage PWD are often considered as 'good enough' in terms of representation for marginalized groups.¹²² Despite this slow progress, there are some notable efforts to address disability inclusion in R&I, primarily through assistive technology initiatives as well as generating improved awareness and understanding of economic participation needs and barriers for PWD, through organizations like the Global Disability Innovation Hub and others.¹²³ The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) is also a member of ADIRA, the Advancing Disability Inclusive Research in Africa Network, which aims to increase innovative and high quality research in Africa, led by African researchers, in order to improve the lives of PWD in Africa.¹²⁴ In addition, under South Africa's B-BBEE framework, companies are incentivized to hire and develop the skills and capacity of Black employees with disabilities.¹²⁵ However, disability inclusion in the South African context appears to focus more on research, technology and innovation to support PWD in their daily lives, rather than considering or including PWD as individuals with the capacity to be researchers, innovators or business owners themselves.

For those in the LGBTQ+ community, barriers towards inclusion in R&I may be some of the most severe among marginalized groups. Despite progressive legislation and specific protections in the Equality Employment Act, members of the LGBTQ+ community in South Africa face persistent discrimination and exclusion, including limited access to employment, as well as refusal of employment, dismissals, or denial of training opportunities and promotions.¹²⁶ There is also evidence of a significant pay gap between

¹¹⁸ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022.

¹¹⁹ [Research Brief on Disability and Inequality in South Africa, 2013-2017](#); South African Human Rights Commission, 2018.

¹²⁰ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022

¹²¹ [Research Brief on Disability and Inequality in South Africa, 2013-2017](#); South African Human Rights Commission, 2018.

¹²² Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022

¹²³ [Inclusive arts and crafts design: empowering people with disability to contribute to their community in Southern Africa](#); Global Disability Innovation Hub, 2021. [Q&A with Shonaquip: Innovation landscape for disability in South Africa](#); Centre for Health Market Innovations, 2015.

¹²⁴ [Advancing Disability Inclusive Research in Africa Network](#); SAMRC, 2022.

¹²⁵ [Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act: Act 53 of 2003 as amended by Act 46 of 2013](#); B-BBEE Commission, 2016.

¹²⁶ [What will it take to build LGBT inclusive workplaces in South Africa?](#); Benjamin, N., Labour Research Service, May 2019.

LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ employees, and same-sex partners rarely enjoy the same benefits as heterosexual married couples. Additional barriers include limited avenues for workplace dispute resolution related to harassment and bullying, as well as stigma and hostility from co-workers and supervisors, including verbal abuse and physical and sexual violence.¹²⁷ In terms of its impact on innovation and development, studies indicate that LGBTQ+ exclusion has a negative impact on innovation, while legal rights and protections afforded to LGBTQ+ individuals play an important role in fostering national innovative capacity, which is considered a key driver of sustained growth.¹²⁸ Stakeholders from the South African context report that openly identifying as LGBTQ+ is a risk in most environments, and that the majority of decision makers are reflective of hypermasculine patriarchal norms supported by the cultural context, which leave little room for variation or individualism in gender identity and expression or sexual orientation, including straight women who do not neatly align with stereotypical expectations of feminine appearance and behaviour. LGBTQ+ individuals often have to 'perform' a straight identity in the workplace, in order to manage any risks they might face; stakeholders shared insights around how this performative effort affects individuals' work: *"we don't speak enough about how having to contort myself to fit in affects the quality of my work, how I show up, my productivity – it affects me in a major way"*.¹²⁹ Some stakeholders report that certain environments in the South African context are now more LGBTQ+ inclusive than they used to be, such as Cape Town, but within the townships outside of such urban centres homophobia, violence and stigma against LGBTQ+ communities remains high. Organizations like Q Networq are making some positive headway in supporting queer communities in business and entrepreneurship; founded in 2018 and based in Johannesburg, the Q Networq is a business community working to advance African LGBTQ+ womxn and non-binary entrepreneurs through access to business networks, business coaching and funding.¹³⁰ However, despite the fact that same-sex marriage has been legal in South Africa since November of 2006, widespread efforts to ensure LGBTQ+ communities are equally participating in and benefitting from social, economic and political life, including research and innovation ecosystems, remain rather limited.¹³¹

South Africa's rural communities and peri-urban and rural townships also experience exclusion from R&I ecosystems in different ways. Evidence indicates that while the government has largely taken a 'pro-poor' focus in policy related to rural development and inclusion, this has not been translated effectively into action, and in practice, there appears to be a lack of clear understanding about the multifaceted dynamics of innovation.¹³² Despite these gaps between policy and practice, there is an acknowledgement within rural areas that a pro-poor focus to innovation is necessary, and existing evidence points to some of this work already being undertaken by local innovators in different forms. However, high poverty rates in rural areas and lack of access to critical infrastructure and quality education create significant hurdles for rural communities to be able to participate in R&I ecosystems on equal footing with their urban counterparts.¹³³ For example, whether a child lives in a township or rural area as opposed to an urban area contributes significantly to inequalities of access and opportunity, which have far-reaching consequences for their future participation in R&I spaces in the country. Townships themselves have a long and complicated history in South Africa; under apartheid, townships were forced to function outside of the mainstream economy, and the end of the apartheid regime did not resolve or transform the segregation and inequalities inherent within, and as a by-product of, the township system.¹³⁴ Townships suffer from chronically high unemployment rates, and most township businesses are necessity-based and unable to grow beyond a simple store front or small-scale operation. Most of these businesses are clustered in the informal economy with low financial and employment returns, and data indicate that only 15 percent of township enterprises are formally registered, compared with 30 percent of similar enterprises in urban

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ [Does LGBT inclusion promote national innovative capacity?](#); Vu, T. V., January 2021.

¹²⁹ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022

¹³⁰ [The Q Networq](#); LinkedIn, 2022.

¹³¹ [South Africa still hasn't won LGBTQ+ equality: Here are 5 reasons why](#); Pillay, R., World Economic Forum, November 2018. [Civil Union Act, 2006](#); Government of the Republic of South Africa.

¹³² [Promoting innovation for inclusive rural transformation in South Africa](#); Hart, T. et al., October 2014.

¹³³ [Poverty, inequality and social exclusion in South Africa: a systematic assessment of key policies, strategies and flagship programmes](#); Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg, October 2019.

¹³⁴ [Township Economies in South Africa](#); Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, November 2021.

areas. In addition, township businesses generally do not provide goods or services that reach larger markets or create quality jobs. In terms of exclusion from R&I ecosystems, stakeholders confirm that township populations and rural communities represent a significant demographic that is consistently left behind in the South African context.¹³⁵

Townships are also home to the highest density of unemployed youth.¹³⁶ While South Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Decadal Plan highlights the importance of including youth in research and innovation systems and processes, with an emphasis on establishing well-functioning and effective TVET colleges to address skills and education gaps for innovation, young people in the country continue to face significant barriers in this regard. Recent studies reveal that while 82 percent of organizations supporting township businesses report having specific programs for young entrepreneurs, youth entrepreneurship overall has been relatively stagnant for the last 10 years, with the youth entrepreneurship participation rate sitting at just 13 percent, the lowest on the continent.¹³⁷ In addition, youth business ownership has actually been declining since 2008 for the 18-24 age bracket. The youth population of South Africa still account for over half of the total unemployed population (59.5 percent) and a third of them are not engaging in any form of employment, education, or training. Data suggests that this points to a larger ecosystem challenge primarily related to a lack of entrepreneurial skills and education opportunities available for youth, especially those outside of metropolitan centres. Most initiatives to engage youth in innovation and entrepreneurship are concentrated in cities and urban areas, creating additional access and participation barriers for youth from townships, including challenges around transportation and infrastructure, as well as the costs associated with pursuing such opportunities.

Though young men and young women face some of the same key barriers when it comes to entrepreneurship and innovation, particularly in rural areas, there are distinct gender differences. While girls' secondary education enrolment in the country is higher than that of boys, many of them dropout before completing their secondary education.¹³⁸ Further, of those who manage to complete secondary education, many of them graduate without the necessary competencies in numeracy and sciences, as well as the digital skills required to enrol and excel in STEM at the tertiary education level. In South Africa, 50.3 percent of girls compared to 58.6 percent boys achieved 30 percent or higher in Mathematics in the National Senior Certificate Examination. In addition, evidence reveals that sexual harassment, discriminatory gender norms, and harmful stereotypes around girls' and women's skills and abilities in STEM fields are factors which continue to drive their low representation, and often deter them from pursuing STEM careers at all, or even cause them to leave STEM careers once established.¹³⁹

Despite these considerable barriers for youth in general, and for girls and young women in particular, some actors in the South African context are making progressive strides towards gender equality and youth inclusion in innovation and technology, including organizations like Africa Teen Geeks, Project Thrive, Girl Code, Girl Hype and Code Space.¹⁴⁰ Africa Teen Geeks, founded by Lindiwe Matlali, is the largest computer science non-profit organization in Africa, dedicated to engaging youth in STEM fields in order to solve persistent and complex social and economic challenges on the continent.¹⁴¹ In addition, as one of the 'Smart Africa' member states, South Africa also competes in the Miss Geek Africa competition.¹⁴² Miss Geek Africa is an entrepreneurship competition that originated as Miss Geek Rwanda in 2014 but was renamed as Miss Geek Africa in 2017, and has since expanded to 22 countries across the continent. Girls and women between the ages of 13 and 21 submit applications that aim to solve problems through technological innovations. This capacity building experience provides all finalists the opportunity to compete and collaborate with their peers as well as to participate in the Transform Africa Summit (TAS) where they interact with industry leaders and their governments. The goal of the

¹³⁵ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022

¹³⁶ [Building Women's Businesses in South African Township Economies](#); Value for Women & Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, November 2021.

¹³⁷ [Township Economies in South Africa](#); Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, November 2021.

¹³⁸ [Let's accelerate the women in STEM agenda today; tomorrow will be too late!](#); Marie-Nelly, M.F., World Bank, April 2021.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ [10 SA Women in Tech to Watch](#); Xneelo, 2022.

¹⁴¹ [About the Founder](#); Africa Teen Geeks, 2022.

¹⁴² [Miss Geek Africa Competition 2020 for Young African Girls](#); Opportunities for Africans, February 2020.

competition is to inspire more girls and young women to take up STEM education and careers in order to meaningfully contribute to solving some of Africa's key development challenges using technology. Though some progress is being made, persistent low numbers of youth engaged in entrepreneurship reveal there is still much to be done, and stakeholders in South Africa feel that there is often a disconnect between what organizations think is needed, and what is actually happening on the ground in target communities that are often excluded; in particular, those living in rural communities tend to be the most left behind.¹⁴³

Summary & Recommendations

Evidence from the South African context illustrates that women and other marginalized groups face numerous barriers both within the broader social, economic and political landscape of the country, as well as within R&I ecosystems in particular. These barriers significantly influence how different social groups access, participate in and benefit from R&I processes and outcomes. Based on the findings of this assessment as well as suggestions and guidance provided directly by key stakeholders in South Africa, the following recommendations have been developed to address key GESI gaps and barriers in the country's R&I ecosystem.

- **Baseline capacity building for firms and institutions to better mainstream GESI into their work:** It is crucial for individuals, teams and organizations to have a more robust grasp and nuanced understanding of GESI gaps and barriers and the drivers of exclusion, in order for them to be able to respond intentionally and effectively within their work. Teams should also have their knowledge built around how GESI barriers directly impact their work in R&I, and how GESI barriers manifest themselves in different ways within the R&I ecosystem across different levels and pillars. This includes the development of strategies and action plans with concrete GESI targets and outcomes articulated, in order to foster accountability and normalize GESI as a priority issue over time, rather than an afterthought.
- **Coaching top leadership within R&I:** Engaging and coaching key leaders, influencers and decision makers within and across all pillars of the R&I ecosystem on GESI issues is a critical component for sustainable GESI transformation and inclusion. This enables top leadership to act as drivers of change and proactively foster enabling and inclusive environments within R&I spaces, including institutionalizing commitments to GESI awareness and mainstreaming through internal policies, strategies and practices within firms and other organizations. Stakeholders in South Africa indicate that these top leaders should also include financiers, banks and R&I hubs to change how GESI is perceived at critical touch points in the ecosystem.
- **Financial incentives to support, hire and promote more women:** Offering financial incentives to businesses, organizations and other initiatives to support, hire and promote women can help to increase women's quantifiable representation in spaces where they are often left behind. However, such incentives should be coupled with qualitative requirements, going beyond women's representation in numbers only and supporting firms to invest in other efforts that address critical capacity gaps in GESI mainstreaming knowledge and practice among staff and leadership, and provide targeted skills and career development support for women.
- **Convening events/spaces where different R&I actors can come together to normalize and mainstream GESI within the ecosystem:** Stakeholders in South Africa emphasized the lack of systematic and strategic coordination in the R&I ecosystem in general, and around GESI issues in particular, as well as the need for this gap to be intentionally addressed. Many actors in the ecosystem 'don't know what they don't know', and are often not aware of other key stakeholders or linkages that could be explored to deepen impact and strengthen synergies. Convening a diverse array of R&I actors as well as other key stakeholders in GESI offers a targeted and efficient

¹⁴³ Stakeholder interviews, South Africa; January 2022

way to foster collective knowledge and understanding around GESI issues and best practice approaches for GESI mainstreaming in the South African context. Such convening could take the form of a member-led, participatory, collaborative Community of Practice for research and innovation actors from all backgrounds. Convening also helps to normalize and mainstream conversations about GESI issues and move away from the perception that GESI is a 'fringe' issue that only certain actors or groups need to care about or engage in. Convening also creates intentional space for different actors and organizations to network, learn from one another and strategize around priority issues to improve how GESI is addressed and mainstreamed across different levels and pillars of the ecosystem, including areas such as access to finance. Stakeholders also report that convening and connecting with others in real time in the same room allows for historical patterns of power and privilege to be restructured and to ensure everyone has a seat at the table in a more intentional manner.

- **Improvements in how social innovation is funded and supported:** Stakeholders in South Africa feel there is a need for actors in the R&I ecosystem to reconsider how they evaluate the value of certain innovations compared with others. There is a distinct need to redistribute power with regard to how and what types of innovation are prioritized and funded, as well as reframing how small, informal entrepreneurs are viewed and valued within the ecosystem. In terms of GESI impact, stakeholders feel that recipients of R&I funding should be more rigorously vetted based on how well they prioritize and mainstream gender equality and the inclusion of marginalized groups. Investing in innovators who are paying attention to gender and social inclusion should be a priority for funders and other initiatives meant to support innovators and R&I more broadly. Stakeholders also flagged the need for more flexible entrepreneur-centered funding mechanisms, including better access to venture capital and greater availability of patient capital and grants, even if they are recoverable grants.
- **Establish women-friendly workplaces that consider the responsibilities of childcare:** Individual firms and organizations can vastly improve how they support women who choose to be mothers. Stakeholders report missing out on valuable career development and learning opportunities due to the demands of childcare. Supporting women in this regard could look like investing in childcare services on site or offering subsidized childcare services to women employees who are mothers, as well as offering private rooms for breastfeeding mothers to tend to their infants during breaks from work hours.
- **Mentoring and role models for women's career progression:** Putting in place mechanisms where women can engage with and learn from other women at different stages of their career growth provides support and solidarity for women pursuing careers in R&I, which are often male-dominated spaces. Such mentoring/role model engagement spaces could happen at a national or regional level, and/or within individual R&I institutions themselves. This approach could also be useful for connecting and supporting other excluded groups, such as adolescents/young people or people with disabilities.
- **Consult directly with women and marginalized groups to assess how best to respond to their needs and support their integration into R&I spaces:** Having intentional conversations with women and other excluded groups is key for ensuring that R&I actors and spaces are responding effectively to the unique needs and barriers that marginalized groups are facing, rather than assuming that they already know what different excluded groups will need. This is particularly important when it comes to the inclusion of youth in innovation, or people with disabilities. Participation is crucial for the process of inclusion to have impact and meaning, and excluded groups need to have a direct voice in the R&I ecosystems that are seeking to integrate and address GESI issues more proactively.

- **Targeted GESI capacity building for male leaders and allies:** In often male-dominated R&I spaces, it can be extremely helpful to have well-informed and supportive male leaders and allies who can help to change the status quo around GESI and normalize the importance of directly addressing these issues in R&I work. While engaging men in such activities and dialogues is a useful approach, it is important to ensure that existing systems of privilege and power are not further exacerbated by spotlighting men's voices only, which means ensuring that men's voices and views do not become centered and prioritized in GESI conversations at the very expense of the voices of women and other marginalized groups. Ensuring that male actors and leaders have a clear understanding of how to be effective allies without reproducing harmful GESI hierarchies is critical for this approach to result in positive, transformative change.
- **Policy advocacy around GESI issues in the wider country context:** There is a distinct need to address the normative belief systems and institutional structures that drive gender inequality and social exclusion to begin with. Despite a progressive national constitution in South Africa, the rights of certain groups often remain unrealized, including the LGBTQ+ community as well as youth and people with disabilities. R&I in South Africa could benefit from high level advocacy around closing the gaps between policy and practice, gaps which directly affect the ability of excluded groups to claim their rights and participate in all realms of life, including in R&I ecosystems.