



ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE AS SUSTAINABILITY SOLUTION FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN WEST AFRICA

Sophia Abiri-Franklin

Ph.D., College of Law, Caleb University, Nigeria
✉ Sophia.abiri-franklin@calebuniversity.edu.ng
ORCID ID / 0000-0001-8937-6933

Olaekan Moyosore Lalude

Ph.D., Faculty of Law, Wisconsin International University College, Ghana
✉ olalude@wiuc-ghana.edu.gh
ORCID ID / 0000-0003-1603-163X

Olusola Adesina Akinsanya

Ph.D., School of Law & Security Studies, Babcock University, Nigeria
✉ akinsanyaolusola916@gmail.com
ORCID ID / 0009-0001-8525-0716

Elisabeta Smaranda Olarinde

College of Law, Afe Babalola University, Nigeria
✉ esolarinde@abuad.edu.ng
ORCID ID / 0000-0003-2228-5556

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received 10.01.2025
Accepted 4.03.2025
Published 31.03.2025

Keywords:

Sustainability, ESG, Women's Rights, Corporate Sector, West Africa

In the West African corporate sector, the engagement of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles is becoming the trend and could be a transformative strategy for advancing women's rights in West Africa. This paper examined the ESG framework as potential to act as a catalyst for sustainability especially in the context of gender equality in West Africa. By examining case studies, we show how ESG-focused policies can result in improved outcomes for women, including significant workplace equality, more representation in female leadership, and greater economic empowerment. Furthermore, we provided strategies for ESG principles in the context of West African legal structures. Our findings suggest that a primed ESG approach, tailored to the unique regional dynamics, can contribute significantly to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the empowerment of women in the corporate sector. This study provides actionable insights for policymakers, corporate leaders, and stakeholders aiming to leverage ESG for social change and gender parity in West Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the introduction of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the sustainability discourse has kept expanding into various spheres of social endeavors. From gender equality to poverty reduction, there have been attempts to create credible solutions to social problems in a way that would bring a better balance in social processes. Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles are concepts that are about consideration for the environment, social issues such as the rights and safety of workers and the community, and good management practices of the firm. The practice of ESG principles in firms, positions the corporate sector to be actively involved in the advancement of women's rights. This is because ESG principles address factors that influence the realization of women's rights such as climate change, workplace power dynamics, and community engagement.

Cardoso et al. argue that companies with elevated ESG ratings show stronger performance in gender metrics and display increased transparency. This connection is especially noticeable among firms that excel in the social aspects of ESG assessment. However, Cardoso et al., noted that despite these firms being known for their commitment to sustainability, women still encounter obstacles such as underrepresentation and lower pay within these organizations.¹ They seemed to suggest that there is more to the realization of women's rights at the workplace than the implementation of ESG principles. Even at the smaller business level, the exclusion of women can prove to be fatal as it was found that the failure to include women in succession planning was a prevalent cause for the lack of sustainability in family businesses.² Without a doubt, discrimination is a threat to the realization of human rights.³

As it has been defined, gender inclusion in-

- 1 Cardoso, M.D., Fernandes, G.A., Teixeira, M. A. (2023). Women Leaders and ESG Performance: Exploring Gender Equality in Global South Companies. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 15(2), pp. 64-83.
- 2 Abiri-Franklin, S., Olugasa, O. (2022). Succession Planning and Women Inclusion in Family Businesses. *Business Perspective Review*, 4(1).
- 3 Lalude, O.M. (2023). If I Ran the Zoo: Protecting the Rights of Black African Minorities. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 31(1), pp. 29-50.

volves incorporating women into the operations, management, and leadership roles within companies and organizations, with a particular emphasis on family businesses.⁴ Gender inclusion would further mean dismantling stereotypes that restrict women and that often put them at risk in countries where they might be domiciled.⁵ This gender inclusion is a particularly strong concept within the universalist conception of human rights, which Lalude has argued has a better operational value for the practice of human rights.⁶

It has been found by Salazar and Moline, that a higher female representation in leadership roles is associated with the engagement of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards, resulting in better business outcomes and engendering inclusive economic advancement. Despite this, substantial gender inequality persists in corporate leadership. Worldwide, women occupy merely 19.7 percent of board seats, 6.7 percent of board chair positions, 5 percent of Chief Executive Officer roles, and 15.7 percent of Chief Financial Officer positions. Factors such as unconscious biases, cultural norms, limited opportunities, and various workforce obstacles were noted to potentially constrain women's career ambitions and restrict their paths to leadership positions.⁷ However any organization aims to ensure that it preserves itself.⁸ The only way this can happen is to embrace ESG practices.

ESG principles can transform the promotion of women's rights because they heighten the consciousness of the firm to its social issues. Muñoz showed that black women faced entrenched ob-

- 4 Abiri-Franklin, S., Olugasa, O. (2022). Transplanting Corporate Sustainability into the Code of Conduct for Public Officers: A Nigerian Perspective. *Current Trends in Humanities and Law Research*, 1(2), p. 24.
- 5 Lalude, O.M. (2024). Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the African Continental Free Trade Area: The Balance between Gender Inclusivity and Cultural Challenges. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, aop, pp. 1-19.
- 6 Lalude, O. M., & Udombana, N. J. (2022). Universality and Particularity: Why Universalism Should be the Standard for Human Rights. *Legal Issues Journal*, 9(1).
- 7 Salazar, L., Moline, A. (2023). Increasing Women's Representation in Business Leadership. *World Bank Group Gender Thematic Policy Notes Series: Evidence and Practice Note*. Washington DC: World Bank.
- 8 Abiri-Franklin, S., Olugasa, O. (2022). Transplanting Corporate Sustainability into the Code of Conduct for Public Officers: A Nigerian Perspective. *Current Trends in Humanities and Law Research*, 1(2), p. 24.

stacles stemming from both gender and racial discrimination, as well as the intersections of these identities, within the workplace. These barriers often hindered their ability to access leadership roles and resulted in unequal career progression. He further emphasized the critical need for tailored efforts in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. These initiatives should include specific support measures like mentorship programs, flexible work options, and acknowledging the valuable contributions of transformational leadership demonstrated by black women.⁹ Beyond this is the acknowledgment of how ESG principles can transform the perception of women in the workplace and beyond the workplace.

The argument supporting gender equality is more compelling than ever, encompassing not just ethical principles but also investment and economic considerations. Nonetheless, advancements are sluggish and inconsistent, mirroring the gradual pace seen in addressing other types of inequality. This slow progress can be attributed to the entrenched resistance of the powerful elite, who seldom relinquish their positions without resistance. Nevertheless, this resistance is gradually proving futile in the long run.¹⁰ The push for gender equality as one of the sustainable development goals and the promotion of women's rights has consistently met with challenges, and these challenges are the usual suspects. Lack of political will and the non-prioritization by legislators of the need to protect women's rights despite the urgent need for the protection of women's rights in Africa are challenges that have greatly undermined the realization of women's rights in the region. Unfortunately, while the realization of women's rights would make for sustainable economies in West Africa, women have been left to the crushing weight of asymmetric power in the corporate sector.

It is undeniable that Nigerian women face significant vulnerability, even though Nigeria has ratified various international standards that condemn gender discrimination and inequality. These standards include the Universal Declaration of Hu-

man Rights (UDHR), the International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China.¹¹ Even within the corporate sector, women in Nigeria have often faced discrimination and harassment. Adisa et al., have noted that Nigeria stands out for its pronounced bias towards males in the workplace, leading to significant career obstacles that highlight the deeply ingrained and systemic prevalence of male authority within Nigerian institutions. This phenomenon is expressed in the notion of the "hypermasculine organization", which exhibits amplified male privilege, an affinity for gender-based exploitation and mistreatment, and a rationale rooted in strictly enforced gender norms. These hindrances experienced by women in organizational settings could hold significance for other nations in the global south.¹²

Sexual harassment of women in Nigerian firms, which threatens women's autonomy over their bodies is significant, and Akpambang has observed that the issue of workplace sexual harassment has garnered significant attention both domestically and internationally from researchers and organizations. Available data indicates that this reprehensible behavior occurs in both public and private settings and has substantial detrimental impacts on employers, as well as on the health and psychological well-being of employees. Akpambang found that, unlike certain other countries, Nigeria lacks specific legislation targeting sexual harassment, and the existing national legislative frameworks addressing sexual offenses are insufficient to effectively tackle the problem.¹³

Furthermore, the marginalization of women in economic, social, and political realms is a global issue, but it is particularly severe in developing

9 Muñoz, B.R. (2024). *Empowering Voices: Exploring the Career Trajectories of Women of Color HR Professionals amid Disruptive Change*. Dallas: Abilene Christian University.

10 Gorte, J. (2019). *The Investment Case for Gender Equality*. Investments & Wealth Monitor.

11 Obaoye, J. K., & Shouping, L. (2021). Gender discrimination against women and discriminatory law in Nigeria. *Journal of Law and Research*, 7(6).

12 Adisa, T.A., Mordi, C., Simpson, R., Iwowo, V. (2021). Social Dominance, Hypermasculinity, and Career Barriers in Nigeria. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(1), pp. 175-194.

13 Akpambang, E.M. (2022). *Sexual Harassment of Female Employees in the Workplace: Imperative for Stringent Legal and Policy Frameworks in Nigeria*. *Pancasila and Law Review*, 3(1), pp. 69-94.

nations. In Nigeria, despite the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1985 and the implementation of similar local policies like the National Gender Policy of 2006, inequality persists due to various cultural and structural barriers. These challenges have limited women's involvement across all aspects of life, with significant repercussions for human resource development, economic progress, and the overall status of gender equality within the country.¹⁴

In further examining the problem of marginalization of women in West Africa, Asiedu et al., have found that gender inequality was identified across various domains such as labor and industrialization, population dynamics and reproduction, agricultural output, water and sanitation, and energy provision, among others. Significant factors driving these inequalities include issues relating to access to social protection, economic opportunities, and legal rights. Also, obstacles to gender equality and sustainable development include unequal distribution of the burdens of poverty, educational differences, skill gaps, and entrenched gender stereotypes. Proposed solutions include empowering women, who constitute a significant portion of marginalized populations, by enhancing their development and ensuring equitable access to education and leadership roles. Addressing discriminatory cultural norms against women is also highlighted as crucial for progress.¹⁵

One of the strategies that have rarely been examined in the promotion of women's rights in West Africa, specifically Nigeria and Ghana is the implementation of environmental, social, and governance principles in firms in Nigerian where this could help in re-positioning a firm's priorities especially as it concerns its internal engagement of its female workforce and in the communities where they operate. The question that is rarely asked further is the role of West African firms in promoting women's rights. There is a consideration in many literatures on the role of women board members

in the prioritization of ESG principles, but this hardly reflects the firm's inclination to promote women's rights. As it was noted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development female members of corporate boards consistently emphasize environmental, social, and governance concerns, which encompass issues related to climate change and sustainability.¹⁶

ESG and the Right to Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination

In the West African region, significant gender inequalities and discrimination remain prevalent. Women and girls face widespread disadvantages across various domains, lacking the opportunities afforded to men. This disparity is evident in nearly every public domain, including access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and utilities, as well as property rights and representation in the labor market and public arenas. While legal frameworks and policies addressing these issues are scarce, they do exist. Since the early 2000s, nearly all nations in West Africa have established national gender policies or strategies. Despite these efforts, gender considerations are often relegated to a secondary status, and the implementation of gender policies frequently lacks effectiveness.¹⁷ In examining ESG principles as a catalyst for gender equality and the promotion of women's rights, there is the necessity to see the West African firm as a starting point of reference and its transformative capacities when it engages ESG principles.

Women's rights, specifically the right to gender equality and non-discrimination have been undermined in West Africa, despite the political lip service that has been paid to the prioritization of these rights and the fact that countries like Nigeria and Ghana, where women are still experiencing marginalization, have signed and ratified the

14 Bako, M.J., Syed, J. (2018). Women's Marginalization in Nigeria and the Way Forward. *Human Resource Development International*, 21, pp. 425-443.

15 Aseidu, E., Boakye, A.N., Amoako, G.K., Malcalm, E. (2023). *Gender and Sustainability in Africa*. Corporate Sustainability in Africa. New York City: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 319-345.

16 Strumskyte, S., Magaña, S.R., Bendig, H. (2022). *Women's Leadership in Environmental Action*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development.

17 OECD. (2016). *Gender Equality in West Africa*. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/swac/topics/gender.htm> [Last seen: 09.04.2024].

United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979 (CERD). Article 11 of the Convention, provides that States Parties are obligated to implement all necessary actions to eradicate discrimination against women in employment, aiming to guarantee equal rights for men and women, especially in this regard.¹⁸ However there is yet to be significant progress in the realization of this provision as it was found that in Nigeria gender equality policies in employment have not been effectively implemented, as women continue to experience marginalization both in the private and public sectors.¹⁹

Ghana is no different as there has been the persistence of widespread gender inequality, leading to the ongoing marginalization of women across the social, economic, and political spheres.²⁰ Article 10(c) of the CERD provides that removing stereotypical ideas about the roles of men and women across all educational levels and formats, through promoting coeducation and other educational approaches. This includes revising textbooks and school curricula and adjusting teaching methods to support this goal. Gender inequality in Ghana is anchored on social perception, and social perception is driven by stereotypes drawn from cultural norms. These stereotypes pervade even workplace politics limiting opportunities for women in the corporate space and the community.

Coleman argues that while the interest of foreign aid and human rights communities has borne the weight of promoting women's empowerment in developing countries, firms have the financial capacity and the social influence to promote women's rights.²¹ Firms are in the position to ensure economic justice as they provide economic opportunities and can target women as economically and socially vulnerable groups in communities for

empowerment. Lalude and Fatehinse have defined economic justice as a concept that entails the fair allocation of economic resources and goods.²² For women in West Africa to benefit from ESG principles they must have economic justice as a realization from firms embracing ESG principles.

Women empowerment is an essential objective of gender equality, and in the promotion of women's rights, there must be a women empowerment agenda. ESG principles are standard for firms in the sustainable development era, and it is through ESG principles that firms can promote women's rights meaningfully by prioritizing gender equality either within the firm or outside it. Women continue to face challenges in achieving equality and active involvement in West Africa. They frequently are confronted by inequality in healthcare, education, employment, and political entitlements, often receiving a smaller portion compared to men. Despite this, women contribute significantly to societal roles that are typically not undertaken by men. The obstacles encountered by women exist on personal, organizational, and cultural dimensions.²³

Through community engagement, firms can be involved in the realization of economic justice in the communities where they are situated. Community engagement could mean that firms could provide scholarships for the girl child, closing up the gender gaps in many West African communities. Supporting initiatives geared at promoting women in various industries in the community that they are located in. Firms could support women within their systems to reach management levels for the sustainable development of both the firm and the community. Furthermore, the inclusion of women in management positions demonstrates a beneficial influence on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality.²⁴

18 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. (1979).

19 Bako, M.J., Syed, J. (2018). Women's Marginalization in Nigeria and the Way Forward. *Human Resource Development International*, 21, pp. 425-443.

20 Krawczyk, K.A., King, B.A. (2023). Introduction: A Dichotomy of Development—Women's Empowerment and Women's Inequality. *Women's Contributions to Development in West Africa*. New York City: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 1-27.

21 Coleman, I. (2010). The Global Glass Ceiling: Why Empowering Women is Good for Business. *Foreign Affairs*, 89, p. 13.

22 Lalude, O.M., Fatehinse, A. (2020). Economic Justice and Judicial Structure: Realizing Economic Growth in Nigeria. *Society & Sustainability*, 2(1), pp. 25-34.

23 Bature, E.A., Edoje, G.D. (2023). Globalization and Women in Governance in Nigeria: 2015-2022. *NG Journal of Social Development*, 11(1).

24 Celis, I.L.-R., Velasco-Balmaseda, E., Bobadilla, S.F., Alonso-Almeida, M.D., Intxaurburu-Clemente, G. (2014). Does Having Women Managers Lead to Increased Gender Equality Practices in Corporate Social Responsibility? *Business Ethics: the Environment & Responsibility*, 24(1), pp. 91-110.

However for the inclusion of women to be possible within the West African firm, ESG principles have to be incorporated into organizational processes. ESG principles could be made mandatory through regulatory frameworks as a national effort to push sustainability within the private sector and ensure that there is a contributory effort by the private sector in the promotion of women's rights.

ESG-Focused Policies and Improved Outcomes for Women in West Africa

The literature on ESG principles often makes it appear that the concept of ESG has a greater purpose than the elements that it focuses on. They are mostly driven by the idea that gender equality could promote ESG practice amongst firms but do not reflect on the objectives of ESG practice. There is no doubt that ESG principles are beneficial to the promotion of women's rights both within the firm and outside the firm. One of the major ways in which ESG principles can promote women's rights is that the incentivization of ESG investing, which is the determination of a company's sustainability by investors as profitable for investment, can inspire equal pay for women within the firm and an inclination for gender diversity on its board. However, ESG principles cannot by themselves incentivize a firm to promote women's rights but the leverage can be created by investors who insist on ESG investing. The macro implication is that regulators in West Africa are then motivated to ensure that firms comply with ESG principles to attract foreign investment and inadvertently boost sustainability practices that will benefit women.

ESG principles give purpose and help in the clarification of a firm's impact in the community where it is located. Apart from the incentive of investment, there is the sharpening of a firm's interests when it engages ESG principles. For instance, ESG principles can help a firm have a good grasp of its intended impact in the community where it operates. Coleman asserts that some firms already support women's rights in the developed world, taking that as a niche corporate social responsibility and creating a public image that supports

sustainability.²⁵ In the context of states like Nigeria and Ghana, firms adopting women-centric values could help in the promotion of women's rights and contribute to the efforts of non-governmental organizations and external political influence from developed countries. It is essential to think of what ESG-focused policies of firms would incline them to do in their engagement with host communities. Apart from the social focus of ESG principles, the environmental and corporate governance elements are beneficial to women's rights in host communities. This is because women are heavily impacted by climate change.²⁶

The engagement of ESG-focused firms therefore would catalyze the advancement of women's rights and would help address issues that affect women's livelihoods and capacities in West Africa. Within the firm, ESG-focused policies can help a firm develop a positive attitude towards gender equality and can drive investor confidence. Publicly traded companies are experiencing mounting investor demands to enhance diversity within their board memberships, highlighting a significant recognition of the importance of addressing environmental, social, and governance (ESG) concerns. Investors are progressively using evaluations of companies' gender diversity and inclusivity practices to measure their responsiveness to ESG-related risks and opportunities. These companies are encountering external pressures from institutional investors, activist shareholders, and potential employees and customers to increase the presence of women in boardrooms, C-suite positions, and throughout executive leadership roles, as well as to ensure equitable compensation and advancement opportunities for women and individuals from diverse racial backgrounds. Such pressures can significantly influence the extent and manner in which companies worldwide tackle issues related to diversity, inclusion, and gender disparity.²⁷

25 Coleman, I. (2010). *The Global Glass Ceiling: Why Empowering Women is Good for Business*. *Foreign Affairs*, 89, p. 13.

26 UNFCCC Secretariat. (2022). *Dimensions and Examples of the Gender-differentiated Impacts of Climate Change, the Role of Women as Agents of Change and Opportunities for Women*. Synthesis report by the secretariat. Bonn: United Nations.

27 S&P Global. (2020). *How Gender Fits into ESG?* New York City: S&P Global.

Case Studies on ESG-Focused Policies and Benefits for Women in West Africa

Luh et al., have argued that in the consideration of the current business landscape, characterized by a strong focus on eco-friendly practices, socially responsible investment, and impact investment from diverse stakeholders, it becomes evident that banks in Ghana should prioritize enhancing the presence of women in leadership roles. This strategic move can positively influence the ESG performance of banks in Ghana, thereby bolstering their capacity to appeal to a wider range of investors.²⁸ This would mean that the consideration for the female workforce is incentivized by the focus on ESG principles and that firms are driven to ensure that their policies are conscious of ESG outcomes. Beyond the firm is the impact of the consideration of ESG principles on legislation in countries like Ghana.

In Ghana, there seems to be a significant difference in the reporting of sustainability initiatives between local mining firms and their foreign-owned equivalents. Hinson et al. found that even regardless of size, foreign-owned mining companies are more likely to make and report sustainability initiatives, especially in environmental sustainability. This difference implies that local firms may be more in the early stages of adoption when it comes to the incorporation of Environmental, Social, and Governance principles in their reporting practices. Therefore, Hinson et al., emphasized local mining firms' need to follow standardized reporting policies when discussing their sustainability initiatives, implying that a lot more development is necessary.²⁹ For local Ghanaian firms, the reality is a slow adaptation to ESG practices and this has significant implications for the role of these firms in the promotion of women's rights and gender equality. The low exposure to investor-influenced behavior

by local Ghanaian firms could be attributed to the nature of equity holdings in these firms which are largely indigenous.

The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited

For more than twenty-five years before 2005, Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited (SPDC) has entered into Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with communities in the Niger Delta area. Thus, from 1980 to 2005, SPDC had entered into MoUs with more than one thousand individual communities in the region, over bilateral agreements. More than that, the communities were actively trying to make relevant their demands or needs of the social value by engaging through MoUs with SPDC. Under the MoUs, many capital-intensive infrastructure projects, such as roads, health centers, and schools, continued existing or focusing on some short-term and limited activities largely unrelated to the development needs of the communities.³⁰ However, many communities remained dissatisfied with SPDC. For the company, the MoUs took a significant number of resources and time to manage, especially because the projects were implemented through SPDC's internal networks.³¹ Unfortunately, in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, women are underrepresented at many levels and suffer access to amenities and good education but are less impacted by the corporate social responsibility drives of the multinational oil companies in the region like SPDC.

According to research, Multinational Oil Companies' (MOCs) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives have helped rural women in their communities overcome cultural and practical obstacles to pursuing postsecondary education. Though these interventions have generally been successful in supporting education initiatives, none of the scholarships are specifically directed toward women. As a result, there is still a human capital gap between men and women in rural ar-

28 Luh, P.K., Arthur, M., Fiador, V., Kusi, B.A. (2024). Gender of Firm Leadership and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Reporting: Evidence from Banks Listed on Ghana Stock Exchange. *Gender in Management*, aop.

29 Hinson, R.E., Renner, A., Kosiba, J.P., Asiedu, F.O. (2018). Mining Firms and Sustainability Reporting in Ghana. In *Innovation Management, Entrepreneurship and Sustainability (IMES 2018)*. Prague: Vysoká škola ekonomická v Praze, p. 10.

30 Isike, C. (2016). Women, Inclusiveness and Participatory Governance in Nigeria's. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 49(3), pp. 205-214.

31 Ibid.

eas. This shows that CSR interventions may prolong barriers to women's participation in economic, political, and social development if they do not place equal emphasis on gender diversity and economic opportunities for women in addition to education. This could therefore impede the Niger Delta region's efforts to reduce poverty and fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).³²

Tullow Oil Ghana

Tullow Oil in Ghana started a program for young women, to cover the gender gap in the technology sector in 2017, and this was to eradicate barriers that prevented more women in STEM fields in Ghana. Some of the barriers include social norms, prejudiced teaching strategies, girls' lack of confidence, and fear. This program tagged, "Educate to Innovate with STEM" was intended to reach as far as communities in Ghana lack access to good educational resources.³³

Despite these obstacles, Ghana is home to some encouraging projects that aim to buck the trend. Tullow Oil's "Educate to Innovate with STEM Project" is one such program that was initiated to be executed in six coastal districts of the Western Region of Ghana. The project has prioritized the advancement of women in STEM education since its founding in 2017. There has been a steady rise in the number of women pursuing STEM fields, with numbers jumping from 335 in 2017–2018 and up to as high as 787 in 2021.³⁴

One of the young women impacted by the program is Emmanuella Blay Andoh. Despite being physically challenged and hailing from a financially disadvantaged community in the Western Region of Ghana. She was able to get into university aided by the program, as a computer engineer-

ing student at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), supported by a full scholarship through the MasterCard Scholars Program.³⁵ The contribution of Tullow Oil towards the realization of gender equality is a concerted one that represents the consciousness of foreign firms in Ghana towards ESG principles, as against their local counterparts. From the case studies, there is no doubt that ESG principles are beneficial on the whole, as they help in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the consciousness of ESG principles can help in the realization of gender equality and the promotion of women's rights both within the firm and outside the firm. However, ESG principles must be well integrated into regulatory structures, considering the regional developmental needs in West Africa.

Strategies to Ensure Compliance with ESG Principles

Policymakers

In Nigeria and Ghana, the government has the most capacity to ensure compliance with ESG principles. This is because whether or not investment could be an incentive for the integration of ESG principles into the activities of a firm, ESG principles are beneficial for the growth of firms and will aid in the promotion of women's rights. Another reason why ESG principles should be taken seriously by regulators is that it will help ensure the sustainability of an economy through the benefits that will arise from ESG practice. Therefore, regulatory consideration for ESG principles could come through Corporate Governance codes that will embrace ESG principles, and governments in West Africa could provide annual evaluations of the activities of firms, giving percentage cuts on taxes for best performers.

Corporate leaders, and stakeholders

ESG principles are beneficial for the interest of corporate leaders and shareholders. Apart from the social impact of ESG, there is the cost-efficiency of the firm's operations that is enabled by ESG considerations. Research has shown that when businesses demonstrate strong ESG performance,

32 Uduji, J.I., Okolo-Obasi, E.N., Asongu, S.A. (2020). The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility Interventions on Female Education Development in the Rural Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. *Progress in Development Studies*, 20(1), pp. 45-64.

33 Youth Bridge Foundation. (2022). Tullow Oil Enabling Stem Education Progression for Young Females in Deprived Communities in Ghana. Available at: <https://www.youthbridgefoundation.org/tullow-oil-enabling-stem-education-progression-for-young-females-in-deprived-communities-in-ghana/> [Last seen: 01.01.2023].

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

it has the potential to mitigate financial risks and improve the stability of business operations. (Liu, 2024) Corporate leaders can influence corporate policy towards ESG considerations, following up on human resources, procurement, corporate social responsibility, and culture. This would ramp up sustainability for the firm and would save on resources for the firm while maximizing its human resources through its implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

potential outcomes for women such as workplace equality, greater gender diversity in senior management, and economic wellbeing. Furthermore, the incorporation of ESG principles in West Africa's legal fabric can significantly contribute to sustainability and gender equality. The results have focused attention on the importance of region-specific Customized ESG strategies in West Africa, with primed ESG approaches helping to accomplish the United Nations Sustainable development goals and empower women.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Environmental, Social, and Governance principles in the corporate sector of West Africa is a promising step toward women's rights and gender equality. We investigated the significance of ESG-related policies in promoting

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Abiri-Franklin, S., Olugasa, O. (2022). Transplanting Corporate Sustainability into the Code of Conduct for Public Officers: A Nigerian Perspective. *Current Trends in Humanities and Law Research*, 1(2).
2. Abiri-Franklin, S., Olugasa, O. (2022). Succession Planning and Women Inclusion in Family Businesses. *Business Perspective Review*, 4(1).
3. Adisa, T.A., Mordi, C., Simpson, R., Iwowo, V. (2021). Social Dominance, Hypermasculinity, and Career Barriers in Nigeria. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(1).
4. Bako, M.J., Syed, J. (2018). Women's Marginalization in Nigeria and the Way Forward. *Human Resource Development International*, 21, pp. 425-443.
5. Akpambang, E.M. (2022). Sexual Harassment of Female Employees in the Workplace: Imperative for Stringent Legal and Policy Frameworks in Nigeria. *Pancasila and Law Review*, 3(1).
6. Aseidu, E., Boakye, A.N., Amoako, G.K., Malcalm, E. (2023). *Gender and Sustainability in Africa. Corporate Sustainability in Africa*. New York City: Palgrave MacMillan.
7. Bature, E.A., Edoeje, G.D. (2023). Globalization and Women in Governance in Nigeria: 2015-2022. *NG Journal of Social Development*, 11(1).
8. Cardoso, M.D., Fernandes, G.A., Teixeira, M. A. (2023). Women Leaders and ESG Performance: Exploring Gender Equality in Global South Companies. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 15(2).
9. Celis, I.L.-R., Velasco-Balmaseda, E., Bobadilla, S.F., Alonso-Almeida, M.D., Intxaurburu-Clemente, G. (2014). Does Having Women Managers Lead to Increased Gender Equality Practices in Corporate Social Responsibility? *Business Ethics: the Environment & Responsibility*, 24(1).
10. Coleman, I. (2010). The Global Glass Ceiling: Why Empowering Women is Good for Business. *Foreign Affairs*, 89.
11. Gorte, J. (2019). The Investment Case for Gender Equality. *Investments & Wealth Monitor*.
12. Hinson, R.E., Renner, A., Kosiba, J.P., Asiedu, F.O. (2018). Mining Firms and Sustainability Reporting in Ghana. In *Innovation Management, Entrepreneurship and Sustainability (IMES 2018)*. Prague: Vysoká škola ekonomická v Praze.
13. Isike, C. (2016). Women, Inclusiveness and Participatory Governance in Nigeria's. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 49(3).
14. Krawczyk, K.A., King, B.A. (2023). Introduction: A Dichotomy of Development—Women's Empowerment and

Women's Inequality. Women's Contributions to Development in West Africa. New York City: Palgrave MacMillan.

15. Lalude, O.M. (2023). If I Ran the Zoo: Protecting the Rights of Black African Minorities. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 31(1).
16. Lalude, O.M. (2024). Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the African Continental Free Trade Area: The Balance between Gender Inclusivity and Cultural Challenges. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, aop.
17. Lalude, O.M., Fatehinse, A. (2020). Economic Justice and Judicial Structure: Realizing Economic Growth in Nigeria. *Society & Sustainability*, 2(1).
18. Lalude, O. M., & Udombana, N. J. (2022). Universality and Particularity: Why Universalism Should be the Standard for Human Rights. *Legal Issues Journal*, 9(1).
19. Liu, T.-K. (2024). ESG, corporate social responsibility and business effectiveness in Taiwan's banking industry: Cost and risk perspectives. *Asian Economic and Financial Review*, 14(1), 12-28.
20. Luh, P.K., Arthur, M., Fiador, V., Kusi, B.A. (2024). Gender of Firm Leadership and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Reporting: Evidence from Banks Listed on Ghana Stock Exchange. *Gender in Management*, aop.
21. Muñoz, B.R. (2024). Empowering Voices: Exploring the Career Trajectories of Women of Color HR Professionals amid Disruptive Change. Dallas: Abilene Christian University.
22. Obaoye, J. K., & Shouping, L. (2021). Gender discrimination against women and discriminatory law in Nigeria. *Journal of Law and Research*, 7(6), 54-79.
23. OECD. (2016). Gender Equality in West Africa. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/swac/topics/gender.htm> (Retrieved on: 09.04.2024).
24. S&P Global. (2020). How Gender Fits into ESG? New York City: S&P Global.
25. Salazar, L., Moline, A. (2023). Increasing Women's Representation in Business Leadership. World Bank Group Gender Thematic Policy Notes Series: Evidence and Practice Note. Washington DC: World Bank.
26. Strumskyte, S., Magaña, S.R., Bendig, H. (2022). Women's Leadership in Environmental Action. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development.
27. Uduji, J.I., Okolo-Obasi, E.N., Asongu, S.A. (2020). The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility Interventions on Female Education Development in the Rural Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. *Progress in Development Studies*, 20(1).
28. UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. (1979).
29. UNFCCC Secretariat. (2022). Dimensions and Examples of the Gender-differentiated Impacts of Climate Change, the Role of Women as Agents of Change and Opportunities for Women. Synthesis report by the secretariat. Bonn: United Nations.
30. Youth Bridge Foundation. (2022). Tullow Oil Enabling Stem Education Progression for Young Females in Deprived Communities in Ghana. Available at: <https://www.youthbridgefoundation.org/tullow-oil-enabling-stem-education-progression-for-young-females-in-deprived-communities-in-ghana/> (Retrieved on: 01.01.2023).