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Article

Patriarchy in Southern Africa and war in West Africa: Twin impediments to sustainable social development in Africa

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Abstract: Close to 4 decades post-publishing of the Brundtland Report, a global blueprint that emphasised multilateralism and interdependence of nations as the basis for a tenable sustainable development, gender inequalities and untenable development persist in Africa. There is a need to continuously redefine the pathways for eliminating poverty and gender inequalities as the basis for sustainability. A better understanding of the causes of gender inequality as well as an acknowledgement of the fact that gender equality and sustainable development are inseparable is also imperative. This review study, through a desk review of available literature, explored three central issues: why gender inequality and sustainable development must be addressed together in everyday theory and practice, how patriarchy and war cause gender inequalities and untenable sustainability in Africa, and how these twin pandemics must be confronted to ensure achievement of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and their 86 targets, drawing from case studies of Southern and West Africa. Focusing on a number of social determinants of well-being, including good health for all, sexual and reproductive health services, education for all, quality of employment, gender rights, and basic requirements such as food and portable water, the review study argues that development efforts in Africa have proved gender unequal and thus unsustainable. The review study advanced arguments for a holistic view of sustainable social development, contending that market-focused indicators of development that disregard social determinants of well-being misrepresent reality. Market-focused neo-liberal patterns of growth neglect human needs and compound poverty and undergrowth. On the other hand, integrating a people centred approach to growth helps understand the connections, ruptures, and trade-offs between dimensions of gender equality and sustainability in a way that facilitates holistic growth.

Keywords: gender equality; social sustainability; SDGs; Southern Africa; West Africa

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and theoretical underpinnings

This review study utilised a gender critique of patriarchy and war as a policy entry point for addressing the agenda of social sustainability in Africa, based on a qualitative case analysis of two sub-regions, Southern Africa and West Africa. The case analysis looked beyond mere macroeconomic stability and growth as indicators for social sustainability, arguing that economic growth is indeed a critical but insufficient component of holistic sustainable social development. Adding social economic indicators to the matrix makes an analysis of sustainable social development complete. In this review study, I asked questions on the impacts of patriarchy and gender discrimination on gender relations, as well as on the gendered impacts of war on women and girls. Advancing a pro-marginalised policy agenda, I argued that a sustainable society is not one where the poor work and live a general life, but one that

is able to address the often neglected and subtle, yet so determining social risks to which African people, especially women and girls, are exposed. The said social risks include exclusion, gender-based violence, displacement, poverty, unemployment, poor health outcomes, and poor education outcomes—which are underlining factors for gender inequality. I utilised a gender lens to my research task, focusing squarely on the plight of women and girls in patriarchal Southern Africa and in war-stricken West Africa. I identified patriarchy and conflict as twin pandemics that disproportionately affect women than men, giving poverty, disease, and human rights violations a feminine face.

Understanding the overlays between gender equality and sustainable social development requires, first and foremost, both a theoretical and practical understanding of the moral, ethical, and practical reasons why gender equality must be integral to sustainable development [1]. For this reason, I advance critical feminist theory, a tenet that interprets social development in terms of the social relations of power between women and men [2] as a suitable conceptual framework for addressing the intersections, ruptures, and trade-offs between gender equality and sustainable social development. I ask questions that are pertinent to the development of a gender-sensitive discourse on a possible inclusive and sustainable social development culture in Africa, and these are: How does patriarchy fuel gender inequality and poverty in Southern Africa? How does violent war fuel gender discrimination and poverty in West Africa? Is sustainable social development possible in the presence of patriarchy and war in Southern Africa and West Africa? How can policymakers redirect their focus for sustainable social development in Southern Africa and West Africa?

I identify patriarchy as a producer of negative masculinities, which impose passive femininities on women and further shape the characteristics and discourse of war, and war, on the other hand, as a reproducer of patriarchal violence, further holding both patriarchy and war accountable for gender inequalities, poverty, and related factors that delay achievement of the sustainable social development agenda. Feminist theories of patriarchy and war in relation to social development enrich the discourse by taking the analysis away from the patriarchal notions of men as aggressively strong and of women as passively peaceful and towards a more nuanced understanding of patriarchy and war as anchored on a dynamic that privileges the elite at the expense of the less powerful. Such a power analysis anchors gender analysis on historical realities of how colonialism aggravated gendered patriarchal elations in Africa by promoting a system that privileged men over women in terms of access to resources, information, and opportunities for empowerment. In the aftermath of colonialism, men remain more powerful than women based not only on patriarchal notions of weak femininities and strong masculinities but also on a legacy of a colonial system that systemically privileged men over women. Critical feminist theory further advances the possibility for social relations to change through education and awareness through 'de-socialisation.' [3–5]. This review study has the potential to inform high-level policy advancement on confronting patriarchy and war as pre-requisites for sustainable social development.

The Brundtland Report [6] defined sustainable social development as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The World Bank's ethos of social

sustainability relates to "putting people first in development processes by empowering people, building cohesive and resilient societies and making institutions accessible and accountable to citizens" [7]. The two definitions concur that current needs of the populace can only be met when social policies, institutions, mechanisms, and operational regulations are made cohesive and resilient to disasters and can deliver social goods and services for all in a manner that empowers the poor and marginalised for sustainable production beyond the present consumption needs. Ridding the environment and institutions of all factors that lead to inequality and poverty enhances the achievement of sustainable social development. A better method of proffering policy-level recommendations on ending patriarchy and war starts with understanding how these twin scourges intersect to generate retrogressive and untenable development processes.

1.2. Theoretical concerns—Nexus between gender equality and sustainable social development

Concerns over the relationship between sustainable social development, patriarchy, and war stretch as far back as the World War I period. Postwar 20th-century feminist critique understood the impact of World War I on the lives of marginalised populations, especially women, as evidence of how globalising capitalism and patriarchal culture was detrimental to development [8–11]. To date, arguments of the relationship between gender equality and sustainable development have sustained, from the publication of the Brundtland Report (1987) through the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals agenda in 2000 to the Sustainable 2030 Agenda and its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2015. Within the SDGs implementation strategy, Goal 5, 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls', has been identified as a cross-cutting issue that advances concerns of gender-based discrimination such as unpaid work, sexual and reproductive rights, and gender-based violence, and these are all critical aspects to economic growth and sustainability [12]. Achieving SDG5 is a priority that contributes to the increase in global well-being. A thorough analysis of the 9 targets set by SDG Goal 5 on gender equality arguably reveals the centrality of this goal to sustainable development and that its concerns touch on aspects of many other SGDs, if not on all aspects of the 17. In view of all this, conjecturing the link between patriarchy and war in eroding the hopes for gender equality becomes unavoidable. Key to the 2030 Agenda is the recognition of how prospects for achievement of all SDGs relate to eradicating discrimination, all forms of inequalities, poverty, human and terrestrial prosperity, promoting freedom, and universal peace and security [13]. Likewise, Goals 5.1 to 5.6 address this aspect of eradication inequalities, while another set of goals, 5.a to 5.c, further seek to ensure gender equality by specifically addressing the following: 5.a: "Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws"; 5.b: "Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women"; and 5.c: "Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of

gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels." [13].

Patriarchy, a power-based system that produces and reproduces gendered inequalities, manifests in subtle, dynamic, and flexible ways as a gimmick to normalise and perpetuate its presence. Patriarchal relations, principles, and ideals are systemically entrenched in the political, social, and economic crevices of society as the basis upon which inequality between men and women is defined in both the public and private realms [14]. Patriarchy, working in favour of men, determines who controls and who has access to what resources, as well as who makes what decisions and to what effect in the social, economic, environmental, and political spheres. As noted above, a class and power analysis of patriarchy extends patriarchal relations above anatomical differences towards class and power differences. Linkages to people and positions of power produce and reproduce patriarchal characteristics or masculine attributes in certain women, who in turn exert patriarchal power and control over less powerful women and men. As earlier noted, feminist critical theory historically conjectures how patriarchy has sustained its ugly presence in capitalism, colonialism, nationalism, globalisation, neoliberalism, post-colonialism, and imperialism [15–20]. Feminist scholarship thusly argues that patriarchy, like feminisms, cannot be a monolith belief system but various strands of patriarchal belief systems that reinforce each other to subordinate the less powerful in a pattern that reproduces geographies of insecurity and unsustainability. Global patriarchy, for example, has implications for economic and political global hegemonies that manifest in the manner in which global decisions and policies are made in a top-down manner with negative ramifications for the well-being of the less powerful regions, continents, and citizens. These dynamics have likewise negative ramifications for the social sustainable development of less powerful continents, regions, and nations. In short, patriarchy is an ideology for abuse of power and control of the less powerful. The paradoxical nature of patriarchy is its ability to create conditions of the normalisation of subservience not only by those who reap benefits from the system but by the victims of the system as well [15]. As an ideology of subordination, patriarchy creates and recreates violence in both the public and private spheres to instill and perpetuate fear and control, hence its linkages with war and violence.

Violence as an ideology of patriarchy is a systemic strategy for obtaining and maintaining patriarchal control. In Africa, traditional pre-colonial perceptions of women as substandard, aggravated by colonial policies that devalue women, have normalised perceptions of women as less powerful and men as the more rationale species. This belief plays out beyond mere social relations, influencing the patterns in which resources and opportunities are deployed and accessed in the economic, environmental, and political arenas. Control and fear are also characteristics of war. Patriarchy determines how wars are planned and carried out and how people of different classes and genders are affected by the consequences of war, such as conflict-related sexual violence, displacement, disease, and poverty. In the absence of direct war in most Southern African countries, women bear the consequences of stigma and discrimination emanating from patriarchal systems on both the private and public fronts. They have less access to resources and less access to positions of influence in politics and development issues, leading to less decision-making power as humans. The fundamentally gendered nature of direct war exacerbates pre-existing patriarchal

norms within society, further increasing risks for violence, discrimination, hunger, and displacement for marginalised groups, especially women. In conflict-ridden West Africa, women and girls are the most affected. They suffer the brunt of poverty and hunger and are subjected to sexual exploitation, harassment, rape, and abuse at the mercy of terrorist insurgencies. War therefore plays out as part of a broader set of cultural understandings and practices and a manifestation of patriarchal violence.

This research answers specific research gaps. While much has been documented on gender equality and on sustainable social development as separate topics, a research gap exists in studies that analyse sustainable social development jointly with gender equality in Africa. Assessing gender equality and sustainable development on a continuum enables a reflection on their mutual dependence in development theory and practice. There cannot be sustainable development without gender equality, and vice versa. Excluding a gender equality analysis in the sustainable social development discourse is similar to creating a sustainable development pathway that excludes 51 percent of the continent's population. A second research gap is that dominant existing literature on the sustainable social development agenda has a propensity to measure social development in terms of gross domestic product, available natural resources, infrastructure, and employment rate, overlooking the role of social determinants of growth and sustainability such as gender equality and equity across all pillars of sustainable development, which can be achieved when patriarchy and war are eradicated. Thusly, this review study takes gender equality as an important category of analysis in the sustainable social development discourse. Thirdly, little documented evidence pays attention to the gender dimensions of the human capital value that is destroyed by war. The lives, integrity, and worth of women and girls are lost when they are used as collateral damage in conflict, as victims of sexual and gender-based violence, displacement, poverty, and hunger. This review study confronts these identified problems by underlining firstly that the human factor is as equally important as the wealth factor in enabling sustainable development. Secondly, I argue that gender equality is a basic requirement for sustainable social development, yet both patriarchy and war erode its benefits. Finally, I emphasise that patriarchy and war produce and reproduce each other with serious negative ramifications for gender equality, hence the need for policy actions to focus on eliminating both pandemics to enable a sustainable social development practice. Patriarchy and war fragment the polity along gender and power lines, but the Social Sustainability agenda inclusively attends to the need to "put people first" in development processes. It promotes social inclusion of the poor and vulnerable by empowering people, building cohesive and resilient societies, and making institutions accessible and accountable to citizens [21].

1.3. Delimitation of the study

Southern Africa and West Africa were purposively chosen as typical representations of how prospects for gender equality are constantly eroded by patriarchy and war. Southern Africa, which has fewer direct wars, was chosen as an archetype of how patriarchy produces and reproduces inequalities, while West Africa, a modern prototype of coups and political strife in Africa, demonstrated the gendered effects of war and violence.

2. Methodology

Data gathering and data analysis methods

The review study achieved its goal through a rigorous desk review of available literature on gender equality and sustainable social development, as well as on the implications of patriarchy and war for the sustainable social development agenda in Southern Africa and West Africa. In total, 120 online articles, journals, books, research papers, reports, and reviews were identified online using a computer key word search. A thorough audit of the identified resources was undertaken by reading through the abstracts, introductions, and conclusions to ascertain their relevance to the topic under study. A total of 45 resources were discarded for irrelevance, while the retained 75 articles were thoroughly reviewed to gather secondary data for the study.

A thematic content analysis of the secondary data accumulated from reading the 75 resources was undertaken. The first stage entailed generating key themes for the study. NVivo was then used to break down and organise the rest of the data under the key themes that were generated from the study topic, intermingling it with formulated hunches to produce coherent arguments as findings for the revised study.

3. Results

3.1. The case studies: Introduction

Attaining gender equality is a crucial human rights concern embedded across all the SDG goals and targets [22]. Patriarchy accounts for gendered inequalities across all fronts of life, majorly manifesting as gender-based violence and feminised poverty, further causing untenable development. Gender inequalities traverse other inequalities—across all SDG thematic areas. Gender inequalities further intersect power imbalance and discriminatory practices, unequivocally serving as the means for combating challenges to sustainable social development [23]. Although gender equality/inequality issues extend beyond SDG5 and require to be addressed within all the 17 SDG sectors and 86 SDG targets, the limited scope of this study confined the discussion to a few selected SGDs and/or SDG targets [24,25]. The four selected targets include education, employment/unemployment rates, inequalities in quality of employment, and education. With the intention of raising the awareness of policymakers on the importance of prioritising SDG5, I assess how regional governments focus development priorities on SDG targets to enable women to access resources while affording them choices to effectively participate and make decisions at all development levels for the attainment of gender equality [26,27].

3.1.1. Gender inequality in employment levels

Patriarchy is one of the biggest challenges in Southern African countries, amongst other challenges like post-election violence, traces of civil wars, terrorist insurgencies [28–30] and pervasive state corruption [31]. Patriarchal standards in the region are visible, for example, through the female-to-male employment ratio. In the Seychelles, for example, the existing statistics of the female to male share of employment in middle management and senior management positions for 2009 to 2019 have a gender gradient that is tilted against women. This in turn translates to a

gendered gradient of feminised poverty, an economic form of violence.

Figure 1 shows an average female unemployment rate of 3.85 percent for women in the Seychelles from 2009 to 2019, meaning that 96.15 percent are formally employed. Out of the 96.15 percent of women who are employed, only 35.2 percent are in middle to senior management levels, and 64.8 percent are in lower-level employment status. The other side of the coin is that 64.8 men are in middle- to senior-management positions, while only 35.2 percent are in lower-level employment. These patterns show gross inequalities skewed against women. Seychelles is indeed a microcosm of the global patterns in employment. For instance, the global labour force participation rate for women is approximately 38 percent for women and 72 percent for men in middle to senior management positions [32,33]. This inequality gap applies both in the private and public spheres, including for women employed in formal politics and in key decision-making positions such as cabinet, parliament, and the judiciary. During the period from 1997–2005, the African Union's (AU) set target for 30 percent women in politics and decision-making was missed, and only three countries—Mozambique, South Africa, and the United Republic of Tanzania—had reached the target in parliament, at 34.8 percent, 32.8 percent, and 30.4 percent, respectively [34]. In line with Agenda 2030, the AU revised the target to 50:50 by 2030, and to date, only South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique are closest to realising the target, at 45.8 percent, 44.2 percent, and 42.4 percent, respectively [34].

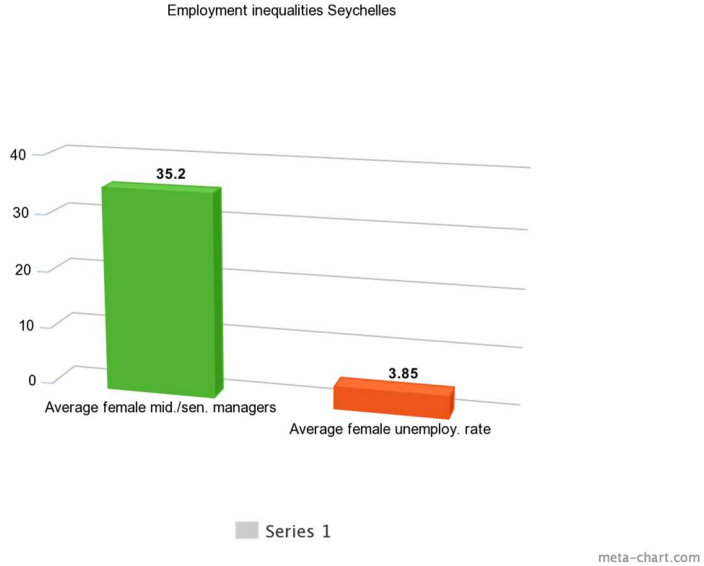

Figure 1. Employment inequalities Seychelles.

Clear arguments for both the economic and social benefits of achieving gender equality in the employment sector have been advanced for a long time. McKinsey & Company [35] argue that the most gender diverse companies are 25 percent more likely to experience above-average profitability, while the Grant Thornton report [36] establishes that having women on the board of a company boosts productivity. Yet to date, existing evidence in the area indicates a lack of progress, with the global gender gap report [37] showing that, at the current rate of progress, it will still take another 131 years to reach gender parity. Globally, only 26 percent of women in the private sector hold a C-suite position, and of those in four female C-suite executives, only one

in twenty is a woman of colour [35]. Another report shows that, globally, only 24 percent of CEOs/MDs are women, 37 percent of CFOs, and 24 percent are CMOs, and that companies with female chairs have 60 percent of women in leadership positions, compared to 27 percent in companies with male chairs [36–38]. Gender equality has been on the agenda for decades, and reports speculate that achieving it could add as much as $12 trillion to the global economy, yet no country has yet achieved complete gender parity [39].

3.1.2. Poverty and its feminised face

The Southern African region is endowed with natural resources [32,33]. Many countries in the region have high gross domestic products (GDP), an indicator of domestic wealth, as indicated in **Figure 2**. In 2019, for example, South Africa and Angola retained the prime regional economies at US$503.7 billion and US$138.8 billion, respectively, while Tanzania, the DRC, Zambia, Mozambique, and Botswana followed with GDPs ranging between US$60 billion and US$23 billion [39]. Seychelles and Comoros, on the other hand, had the lowest GDP economies of 1.4 billion and 1.6 billion, respectively.

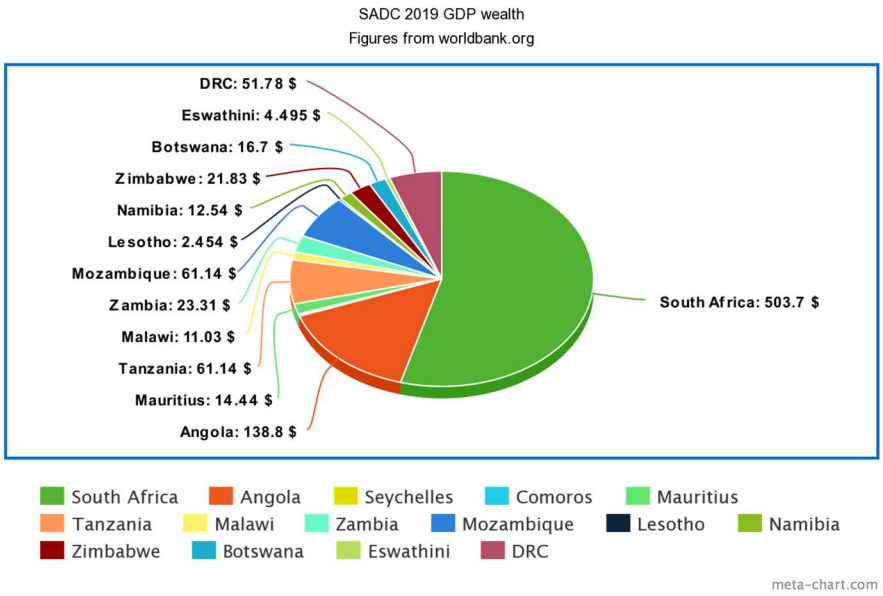

Figure 2. SADC 2019 GDP wealth.

The paradox for the region is that despite the evidence of material resource wealth and high GDP wealth, citizens experience obnoxious high levels of gendered inequalities on all fronts. **Figure 3** highlights GDP per capita wealth figures for the SADC region as at 2019. More than 60 percent of the population in Southern Africa lack access to an adequate supply of safe water, a third of the SADC population lives in abject poverty and about 40 percent of the labour force is either unemployed or underemployed [40,41]. Poverty thus, is not conceptualised through objective social indicators like income levels, consumption expenditures and infrastructural standards only, but also through subjective social indicators like a levelled playing field where citizens of all genders, classes and creeds are able to access the social determinants of well-being in an equal manner [42].

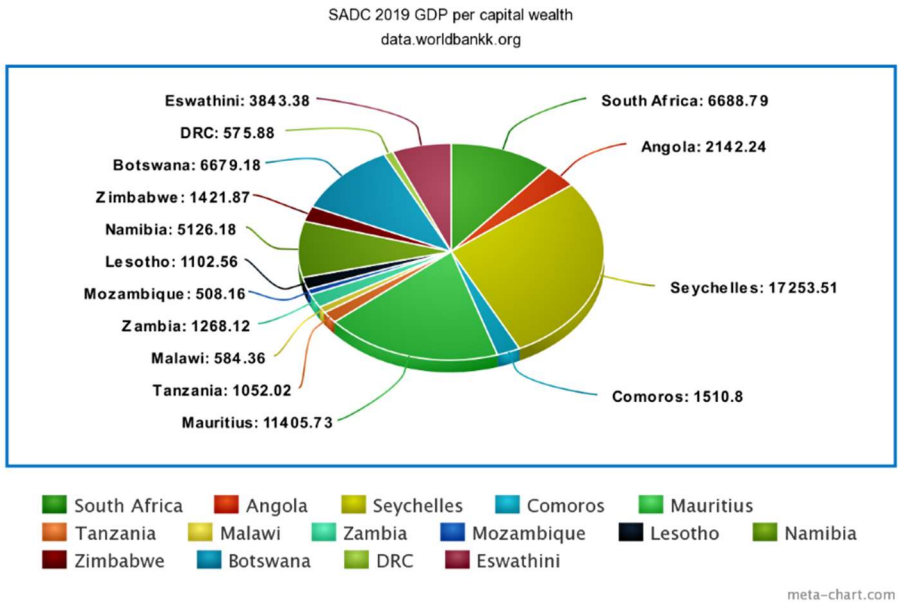

Figure 3. SADC 2019 GDP per capita wealth.

There is a need to transcend mere economic figures and statistics and focus on subjective social indicators and related social determinants of health as the measure for ascertaining a country's economic balance. For example, the Seychelles, a country with the second-lowest GDP of 1.6 billion, has the largest GDP per capita wealth, an indication that this country is striving towards sustainable social development than the rest of the countries, albeit at the most simplistic level. On the other hand, Seychelles' tallies with Mauritius as most developed nations, with a recorded human development index (HDI) ranking of 0.80. The GDP per capita and HDI of the Seychelles prove that the system therein ensures fundamental rights and adequate standards of living for its population. However, despite the projected wealth, women and children in this country are vulnerable to serious risks such as sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, child marriage, and child labour. Children who are exploited in labour have no access to better education, good health, or prospects for better employment. Likewise, victims of child marriages, rape, and sexual exploitation discontinue their education and lack access to better employment opportunities, further failing to contribute to their countries' GDPs. Rather, they depend more on government spending for social services, which is a huge barrier to sustainable development.

3.1.3. Gender-based violence and sustainable development

While projecting a high GDP and GDP per capita as noted above, Seychelles does not have available data on child marriages, which is an indication of huge gaps in the area of attainment of children's sexual rights. Seychelles ratified the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, including Article 6, which sets the minimum age for marriage as 18. Yet, the country's Civil Status Act (1980) has the minimum legal age of marriage at 15 years for girls and 18 years for boys, further allowing girls to marry even before the age of 15 in the event of consent from a minister [43]. The vague legislation presents huge risks for safety and protection of children's rights in matters of sex and marriage, further defeating the country's commitment to SDG target 5.3 of ending child marriages by 2030 [44,45].

Passing girls into adulthood at the age of 12 to 15 years has further implications for child labour, as these children are forced to assume adulthood and work to fend for families at that childhood level. The fact that Seychelles is ranked in the highest HDI when it has huge legal anomalies in the area of its legislative frameworks for child marriages is indicative of the fact that global methods and standards of ascertaining development metrics still do not encompass subjective indicators, especially those relating to gender equality and the rights of women and girls. Child marriage and child prostitution have huge consequences for both human and economic development. They lead to unwanted pregnancies, births, diseases, infant mortality, and maternal deaths; add on to negative population growth and place the care burden on the central governments.

The scourge of gender-based violence (GBV) is not unique to the Seychelles alone but a grim reality in the whole Southern African region. The extent of this scourge has compelled African Hedas of State and Government to adopt the Kinshasa Declaration in 2021, a concern for the increase in violence against women and girls in Africa, as well as committed actions to address it [41,42]. The ferocity of GBV in Southern Africa has overtaken all efforts from governments, non-government organizations, development partners, and donors to combat it, and there remains no evidence or indicators to suggest that GBV statistics have dissipated. On the contrary, the advent of civil wars and political unrest, COVID-19, and ICT usage appallingly heightened cases of GBV. In South Africa, for example, more than 23 000 teenagers were impregnated during lockdown, including 934 girls aged between 10–14 years old [43]. The Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey [44] and other prevalence studies indicate that the most prevalent form of GBV is intimate partner violence among women aged between 15–49 years. About 35 percent of women in this age group have experienced physical violence since age 15; 14 percent have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime; and 32 percent of ever-married women have experienced spousal emotional violence in their lifetime. GBV presents a major obstacle to gender equality and sustainability, with devastating consequences like HIV, unwanted pregnancies, stress, and depression, leading to suicides. GBV, especially child marriage, has dire human and economic costs on the girl child, families, communities, and the state.

The inequalities in employment levels, child marriage, and child labour challenges highlighted above and their impacts on sustainability indicate that achievement of substantive gender equality is still a long way off in Southern Africa.

3.2. War and sustainable social development in West Africa

West Africa is endowed with minerals, diamonds, and oil reserves, yet the region has huge poverty and inequality levels amongst its people. This is caused by the background of pandemics, violent conflicts, *coups d'état* and violent extremism, among other negative dynamics. Patriarchy and war dictate the pace at which women have access to decision-making processes that avail resources and opportunities to them. Countries in West Africa have suffered prolonged conflict dynamics, causing the region to be characterised by poverty and very low Human Development Index scores. As a result, people face a lack of basic services such as "… health care, portable

drinking water, education, and electricity, underpinned by governance deficits and the exclusion and marginalisation of certain segments of the population, especially women and youth" [46]. Women experience a double measure of these challenges owing to gender discrimination and prescribed gender roles. West Africa trails behind in fulfilling the requirements of SDG 4 on quality education for all, further revealing a lack of commitment to avail equal opportunities for education to all. For example, women from rich families in Mali are 15 times more likely to have received a secondary education than those from poor families [47]. Likewise, in Niger, approximately 70 percent of the poorest girls have never attended primary school. Among those who have attended, only one in two girls goes to primary school, one in 10 to secondary school, and one in 50 to high school. The average length of schooling is just 18 months, far way behind world standards [46].

There is a huge human development gap between women and men in West Africa United [48], with Cape Verde, Ghana, and Senegal falling into the lowest possible category on the UN's gender-based HDI [48]. West Africa has been ascribed an inequalities high crisis level [47], and the 2017 UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII) placed all West African countries at the bottom of the global GII rankings, between 131st and 158th out of the 158 classified countries [49,50]. Out of 162 countries classified in 2018, Senegal ranked 125th, Burkina Faso 147th, Niger 154th, and Mali 158 [49,50]. Disparities between men and women are most notable in the areas of health, education, and living standards. The Commitment to Reducing Inequality (2022) analysis revealed that West Africa is trailing behind five major economic blocs in Africa in the area of tackling inequality, further describing West African governments as half committed to reducing inequality when compared to their counterparts in Eastern and Southern Africa [51]. In the CRI, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau are ranked the lowest in efforts to reduce inequalities through social spending [51].

Nigeria, with an estimated GDP of $477 billion in 2022, stands out as the most powerful economy in West Africa [52]. Declining economic rudiments and related variables like corruption, mismanagement, natural disasters, pandemics, and civil wars landed the country's persistent inflation at a staggering 17-year high of 25.8 percent in August 2023, leaving Nigerians in poverty with a GDP per capita of USD 2513.00 [52]. Nigeria's glaring gender and class inequality levels are an impediment to sustainability. Five million Nigerians face hunger, yet the combined wealth of five richest men, $29.9 billion, could end extreme poverty at a national level, and the country's richest man would have to spend $1 million a day for 42 years to exhaust his fortune [52]. Women, who represent between 60 and 79 percent of Nigeria's rural labour force, are five times less likely to own their own land than men, and also less likely to have a decent education. 94 percent of women are illiterate, while over three-quarters of the poorest women in Nigeria have never been to school [52]. One of the most crucial social determinants of well-being is health, yet the majority of poor people in Nigeria lack basic health amenities and competent medical practitioners [53]. Nigeria's infant mortality rate is estimated at 99 per 1000 births, while the life expectancy of an average Nigerian at birth is lowly estimated at 47 years, a figure falling below that of Sub-Saharan Africa (51 years) [53].

There is a huge effect of disaggregated conflict on the poverty index and

indicators in Africa, showing conflict as having direct causal effects of poverty while worsening the standard of living along gender and class inequality lines [54]. Violent conflict destroys infrastructure and institutions, disturbs production, and leads to unemployment and inflation. Forced displacements destroy social cohesion, increasing violence against women, girls, and the marginalised and often causing unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, death, and injury [55-59]. Increasing political and military tensions have disturbed development pathways in Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, and Mali, while civil wars and tribal resource wars have also ravaged wealth and lives in Niger and Nigeria [60]. In Mali, more than 7.5 million people faced food shortages in the last 19 years, making the country a humanitarian crisis zone [60]. Women and girls, owing to gender expectations, bear the brunt of violence and hunger in the homes as they take care of children and the elderly, while men and boys flee from scenes of violence.

Another obvious consequence of armed conflict is sexual violence, which in most cases is targeted at women and girls owing to their anatomical nature and supposed weak positions in society. Islamist fundamentalist movements and militias deliberately target women as collateral damage for their war and terror tactics [61]. In north-east Nigeria, the presence of Boko Haram makes women and girls the victims of deliberate, systematic attacks and kidnappings where they are subjected to inhuman acts of sex slavery, rape, forced concubinage, abortion, and sterilisation among other forms of sexual violence [61]. Such violations have serious ramifications for their health and well-being. Girls face increased sexual and reproductive health challenges in the absence of the required health care and services; gender equality is delayed, economic growth is reversed, and prospects for better human capital results are abridged [62,63]. Thusly, war and fragility hold back women's economic empowerment and better human capital outcomes for the current generations and for posterity [61]. Health and education are the building blocks of sustainable social development because they empower people to build better lives [63,64]. Gender-based human fragility, like all other forms of human fragility, does not only affect the well-being, lives, and livelihoods of individual people but of households, communities, and societies [64]. "Investing in women's and girls' human capital should be seen as investing in coping capacities on a societal level, which helps to achieve sustainable development" [65].

The political and war crisis has subjected Mali to a status of poverty among the countries in West Africa since 2012. The 2012 military coup d'état caused massive displacements of populations, creating a conducive environment for the rape of women and girls, including many other forms of gender-based violence [66.67]. GBV rose to 54 percent during COVID-19 compared to 43 percent before the pandemic, encouraged by school closures, food shortages, and financial difficulties that forced women and girls to cohabit with abusive men [68]. Post-Covid, GBV has become an everyday and near-normal occurrence for women and girls, firstly because the northern part of Mali has been under the control of armed groups, and secondly because the victims do not have an opportunity to seek help or report cases of violations [69,70]. While cases of rape, sexual assault and genital mutilation, physical violence, and forced marriage are still the most commonly reported in the northern and central regions, particularly in Menaka, Gourma, Timbuktu, Mopti, Socoura, and Kayes circles, the actual figures remain a mystery as very few cases are reported, and

little follow-up of reported cases is done [70]. UNFPA reports cases of deliberate denial of resources for livelihoods to women and girls, an aspect that compounds gender inequalities [68]. Traditional and religious beliefs are also major drivers of inequalities stemming from GBV in Mali. Close to 89 percent of Malian women aged 15–49 had undergone FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) nationwide and 91 percent in the capital city of Bamako. 76 percent of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) victims were less than 5 years old [67]. The number of FGM survivors remains high due to the persistence of the traditional idea that girls should have their sexual desire reduced at an early age. Young girls are also married off in the belief that marriage is the only way they can prevent having children out of wedlock and also as collateral for food security for their poor parents. As such, GBV is normalised and tolerated by communities, and efforts to report it are often met with impunity.

4. Discussions

This review study successfully establishes that the challenges of patriarchy and war in Southern Africa and West Africa, respectively, are a major catalyst for the ever-growing inequalities in education, health, employment, well-being, consumption, and production. Both patriarchy and war produce and reproduce gendered inequalities across the whole development spectrum. Development can never be sustainable without deliberately integrating gender equality in all these pillars and across all the 17 SDGs and their 86 targets. The discussions also identified COVID-19 as a major impediment to gender equality, both in peace and war zones, but especially in war-torn countries like Mali and Niger, to mention a few. Covid-19 causes inequalities across all the pillars discussed in this review study, including health, education, human rights, well-being, employment, and production. The review study further efficaciously interrogated and defined the associations between and among the various SGDs that were discussed regarding gender inequality, based on the reviewed literature explored in this study. Case studies across selected Southern African and West African countries were documented, revealing how failure to prioritise gender equality in development processes compounds grave inequalities that prevent women and girls from actualising their potential in the present and for future generations. The reviewed literature and the documented case studies all showed minimal progress in the implementation of SGD targets. Glaring inequality gaps were revealed between women and men across all human development sectors. The plight of women in both Southern Africa and West Africa demonstrated huge push backs in the area of gender and development since independence of Africa from colonial rule, further demonstrating synergies between the colonial political economy and the post-colonial political economy in relation to patriarchy, war, and gendered inequalities in Africa. These push backs likewise equate the push backs in sustainable social development. The review study also established that in Africa, war aggravates existing patriarchal structures, prying on the societal positions of women to compound domestic violence, rape, abductions, prostitution, child marriage, spousal violence, displacement, and human trafficking, which all lead to feminised poverty. Feminised poverty in turn debilitates the state because central government budgets get spent on mitigating the manifestations of inequality and poverty instead of uprooting the causes of poverty

and inequality. Finally, the review study identified a worrying rupture in the design of targeted policies and programmes, data collection on indicators, and in the defining of development priorities. The human development index and related metrics are set outside the considerations of the gender specific social determinants of well-being, to the extent that a country supposed to be in the highest level of HDI in Africa has no documented statistics on child marriages and child abuse and still tolerates a local law that allows girls to marry at the age of 15, further making it possible for them to be married off with a minister's consent even below the age of 15. On this note, the review study makes the following recommendations, which are imperative in efforts to make gender equality a central tenet of sustainable social development:

- World governments, development partners, and policymakers must give preeminence to mainstreaming gender in all development initiatives to ensure that all planet investments equate sustainable development to gender equality.
- Gender issues should be encompassed in formulae for data collection on indicators, taking into consideration the social dimensions of sustainable development.
- More attention should be given to peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives aimed at stopping wars across the regions, as well as to poverty alleviation.
- Increased capacity building and awareness among professionals involved in the design of policies, projects, and budgets for the implementation of the SDGs will better sensitise them on how gender is a central tenet without which development can ever be sustainable.
- Involving women in decision-making, design, and implementation of SGD goals has the potential to influence a gender sensitive culture across the whole spectrum because women have experiential knowledge and skills of surviving gendered processes.
- Gender-sensitive recruitment practice should be made a legal issue, and gender audits should be practised to ascertain adherence to gender-balanced recruitment policies.
- All forms of GBV in peacetime and wartime should be criminalised.
- Domesticating international protocols such as CEDAW may increase chances of prosecuting offenders.
- There is a need for a policy revamp in all areas of human development, as well as the need to set inclusive and realistic targets for development, including indicators that take gender equality and women's empowerment as key.
- There is also a need for Africa to speak with one voice in matters of GBV on all fronts of life.

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