



#DíaInternacionalDeLaMujer  
#vocesfemeninasCA

## One (more) day to support African women.

This March 8th makes to remind us of all things that remains to be done in our communities, but also to congratulate us on the progress we have made and what we have learnt to practice “glocal” citizenship: men and women creating a better society, in order to establish networks of solidarity and mutual learning crossing boundaries and make communities and territories more resilient, fair and strong. In all these hope, the role of African women is central.

As general director of Casa Africa, I think today we have to congratulate ourselves particularly on the space that African women are conquering globally, something obvious when we see names like the Nigerian economist [Ngozi Okonjo Iweala](#), the recently appointed Managing Director of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Iweala has overcome different glass ceilings barriers: she has become the first African citizen and the first woman to hold this position and promises to become a catalyst in an organization that has traditionally defended the commercial interests of Western countries, with very little support to feminism. We also have to congratulate ourselves for everything we have learnt from African women and for everything we are building day by day, which also makes us Africans and places us in line with philosophies such as Ubuntu (promoted by [Nelson Mandela](#) and [Desmond Tutu](#) that speaks about the individual as a social being and the well-being of the community), focusing on shared and collaborative knowledge. Finally, we have to congratulate ourselves on the cross-border solidarity that we practice every day with our African colleagues, which circulates in both directions.

We are fortunate to work with African women every day throughout the year but on March 8th we take a break to evaluate what we have

achieved and project ourselves towards the future. Today we are claiming different aspects.

Today we have to repeat that African women do not make up a homogeneous group. Just as their continent, it is not a monolithic whole with a single face. In Africa we can find millions of people with different peculiarities, situations, expectations and dreams. Half of them are women. Africans do not respond to the cliché of passivity and helplessness that is sometimes transmitted by the news or from some NGOs. All African women do not fit the stereotype of an oppressed, child-laden, abused and dependent woman. This is an obvious reality but one that must be repeated continuously, and especially today.

According to a [video-infographic](#) that we have published on the matter, African women represent 90% of informal economy and 70% of agricultural labour force in their continent, where they produce 95% of food, directly support more than 40% of African families and are an essentially entrepreneurial group. If you take a look at global entrepreneurship statistics, you will always find African countries in the lead and their women in the front line.

Some data are not positive. The well-known Nigerian novelist [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#) reminds us that around 52% of the population is female, but most positions of prestige and power belong to men and she quotes [Wangari Maathai](#) when she confirms that "the higher you get, the fewer women you find." The Ugandan journalist [Rosebell Kagumire](#), with whom we have collaborated on different occasions, states that more than 49 million girls do not have access to either primary or secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa and 40% of girls get married before the age of 18. Child marriage - driven by social beliefs and economic vulnerability of many families - continues to drive girls out of the classroom. According to the UN, seven out of ten women in sub-Saharan Africa are of working age, although the majority have informal, low-paid and low-productive jobs. 76% of them work in the informal non-agricultural economy, compared to 59% of men. A 2018 World Economic Forum report indicated that sub-Saharan Africa could take up to 135 years to close the gender gap. Four African women have been awarded the Nobel Prize: Wangari Maathai, [Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](#) and [Leymah Roberta Gbowee](#), the Nobel Peace Prize, and [Nadine Gordimer](#) with the Nobel Prize for Literature. Of the

24 people born on the continent who were awarded a Nobel Prize, only these four are women.

Other data are better than those we have in the western world. African women make up 20% of the parliamentary representation of the continent, with countries like Rwanda with 58% of legislators being women, well above the average of many northern countries. More than 40% of members of the Parliament of Senegal, South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique are women. There are female spokespersons in a fifth of African parliamentary groups, African Ministers and female presidential candidates in African countries. Liberia, Central African Republic, Malawi, Ethiopia and Mauritius have had female presidents. In Ethiopia, the Prime Minister is a woman. Out of the 1.5 million Liberians who registered to vote in the country's first post-war elections, 51% were women. 80% of the Liberian vote led to the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the first female president of an African country. Women hold half of the positions on the African Union Commission, compared to the third held by women in the European Commission. [Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma](#) served as president of this agency for five years, when her European counterpart had always - and until very recently - been a man, when Ursula von der Leyen took office.

The Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, [Arancha González Laya](#), stated in her recent meeting with the ambassadors of Spain around the world that [Spanish foreign policy is a feminist policy](#). Casa África is part of Spanish foreign action in Africa and, therefore, must necessarily be feminist as well.

The minister began her speech by talking about feminizing the ministry and the foreign action, something I believe we are fulfilling at Casa África, with women as a Manager who is part of Casa África management team made up of three members, and three area managers in a team of five, with a mostly female staff, with whom today I have the honour to co-sign this article. Regarding the program, Casa África has made equality a flag and has assumed the mission of making African women visible either with specific initiatives - such as the program that we will deploy this March - or with their daily work. We are privileging African authors in our reading club (also mostly female) and our online campaigns include African women experts in response to inquiries received from the media and institutions. Publications such as "[Doce](#)

[relatos urbanos](#)” welcome more women than men on their pages, we strengthen relationships with groups such as the Association of African Women in the Canary Islands, we work on training initiatives addressed to women with Spanish women through associations with *Puertos de Las Palmas* or *Fundación Mujeres por Africa*.

We are aware that, if Africa is little listened to, seen and read in our corner of the world, African women are even less visible. This happens despite the fact that, for anyone who knows the continent minimally, women are its face, its spine, its limbs, the heart that pumps blood throughout the body and brain. For this reason, I would like to end this text with a quote which is a vote and a commitment. It was delivered by a great leader, [Thomas Sankara](#), who was also a great feminist:

*«May my eyes never see and my feet never lead me to a society in which half the people are silent.»*

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