

Women of Africa: Changing lifestyles, unchanged (core) values



By [Ndeye Diagne](#), issued by [Kantar](#)

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African women are attractive. As consumers.

An increasing number of brand campaigns are displaying powerful taglines, featuring women of Africa as the future of the continent. Music to my ears, indeed! However, this story may be only half true. Yes, African women are indeed reshaping Africa in many ways. No, they are not doing it alone nor are they willing to do it alone. Men are a central component to success.

I can sense feminists making faces at this line. Understandable. The feminist inside me equally frowns. Yet, the story is thoroughly told in our [Africa Life](#) study: African women are financially contributing more to their households; they are evolving towards more independence and seeking more fulfilling lifestyles. At the same time, traditional values around marriage and children still hold strong and nestle at the heart of their aspirations; religion continues to rise as a core value. Some call these dynamics a balance between modernity and tradition. I say *tradition is the new modernity*.



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Knocking taboos off

There's no arguing about the spur of a new generation of women across Africa over the past 10 years. Access to (better) education, longer studies, tech, and numerous women empowerment initiatives in a continent on the move, has all contributed to building a multidimensional and ever-evolving new race of African women: ambitious, unambiguous, active and activists.

The visible part of the iceberg is a form of rising assertiveness and self-confidence. We see new cohorts of strong women, across many countries, who've grown comfortable to tackle uncomfortable situations, who speak their truths and voice their desires. The massive success of the [Senegalese version of 'Sex & the City'](#), as *The New York Times* has called it, is telling evidence. Despite all the controversy around the show, 'Mistress of a Married Man' has now established rock-solid popularity among a broad audience, across genders and age groups. The TV series addresses the taboos of the Senegalese society, many of which are equally taboo in other African societies. Collapsing old patterns, nuancing the African culture of discretion with a culture of curiosity and willpower, the series provides women with a new voice. The voice of liberation.



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'Coming out': An energy called liberation

Being oneself. Living life at its fullest. This is it. This is what the new generation of women want. In Kenya for example, 63% of women report that getting the best out of life is one of their top priorities – a proportion that is significantly higher than

among men. It's not only urban Kenyan women who record high levels of freedom and self-actualisation aspirations. The dynamic is consistent across other African cities.

This energy materialises in and through a desire to be financially independent and liberated from previous models where women would rely on men for their own sustenance. Today's women want to achieve financial success: this is the new standard, a priority goal for most women, especially in Anglophone markets.



Money is de-tabooed. It is set as a central ingredient to a happy life, an enabler of self-actualised aspirations. This dynamic translates into high levels of enthusiasm for entrepreneurship for example, also a result of growing self-belief and self-confidence levels among women. In Ghana and Kenya, women outweigh men in self-confidence especially around their perceived ability to set their own businesses. Entrepreneurship is the “African new deal” in my views, hence a terrific opportunity for brands as they promote and partner more with the many promising initiatives. [Don't skip my project](#) is a one of these: launched by Société Générale in partnership with [Women in Africa](#), the initiative promotes women's entrepreneurship through visibility and funding.

Connectivity creates possibilities

As is often the case, technology is an enabler and/or accelerator. Not only to help make entrepreneur ambitions a reality - it's deeper and broader than that. The internet offers the possibility to write new pages of women's journeys, the journeys they've decided for themselves. It is a lift towards more self-expression, independence, freedom and connections.

We see a significant rise in terms of internet usage over the past two years despite women being consistently less connected than their male counterparts in all the countries we surveyed. In Senegal for example, internet usage among women has increased from 41% connected urban women in 2017 to 59% in 2019. When they are connected, women are intense social media users: almost all connected use Facebook and WhatsApp. They consistently use Snapchat more than men in all countries. In Nigeria, they are much bigger users of Instagram than their male counterparts.



Tradition is the new modernity

With such an opening to the world and the rising values around determination, self-belief and freedom (social and economic), one could expect new dynamics or patterns in the network of relationships. Not so much. The archetype of the African woman as the nurturer seems timeless and continues to be at the centre of women's landscape of ideals. Most women acknowledge that husband and home are critical elements to their success and happiness equations. Marriage ranks impressively high as a major family value in West Africa, much less in Kenya and Cameroon. Children drive consensus across all countries. In a word, traditional values around family remain core to African women and this is not about to go out of fashion any time soon. Family is *the* core pillar around which the changing lifestyles evolve. What does tend to change is the dynamics within the relationships. Space for self-expression and space for self-actualisation emerge as unavoidable terms for enduring relationships.

Spiritual beings

Among the set of conservative values that stay unchanged, religion also stands out as the biggest value to transfer to families. It's interesting to note how fast religion has risen in the past few years and established itself as a compelling source of spirituality. This transpires across both major religions. Church visits are reportedly on the increase in Ghana; and more broadly across the region, we see a growing popularity of the gospel genre. In Senegal, it's almost impossible to not notice the increasing number of women wearing the hijab in their own stylish fashion!



What African women want?

To win their hearts, brands must understand how women are evolving: what they are leaving behind, what they are changing and what they are holding firm to. In this sense, the key learnings from our [What Women Want](#) report remain incredibly valid within the African context. Women want financial autonomy. They want freedom of thought and expression. They want visibility. They want networks.

In Africa, we'll add family and spirituality as essential currencies that they won't want to trade. These are values that define who they are and who they want to be; values that are the foundations for their other aspirations to materialise: equality, respect, self-expression, success. It is the understanding of these ambitions and a promotion thereof that will resonate with African women, this generation of women more than ever determined to make a change out of Africa and out in the world. This is the energy that's positively impacting the continent, the new sense of purpose that indeed is reshaping the continent and changing it for the better. Purpose is feminine. No provocation here, just a data point!

#AfricaLife



Data from Africa Life Study – 5,000 interviews across six countries in sub-Saharan markets. 2019



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