

THE LIST

**Forbes**<sup>AFRICA</sup>  
**50**  
**OVER**  
**50**  
• **Success At Every Age** •

INTRODUCING FORBES AFRICA'S 50 OVER 50 LIST - OUR FIRST-EVER COMPILATION OF 50 WOMEN OVER THE AGE OF 50 SCALING NEWER HEIGHTS AND INSPIRING THE NEXT CADRE OF LEADERSHIP ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT. AGE IS JUST A NUMBER FOR THEM AND RETIREMENT NOT AN OPTION OR THE END OF THE ROAD, AS THEY CONTINUE TO POWER THEIR WAY INTO HISTORY BOOKS AND THE HEARTS OF AFRICANS, FROM BUSINESS TYCOONS TO TECHNOCRATS, FOUNDERS TO C-SUITE EXECUTIVES, AND ACTIVISTS TO ENTERTAINERS, THEY HAVE BROKEN BARRIERS THROUGHOUT THEIR IMPACTFUL CAREERS, AND TAKEN UP SPACES TO ENSURE OTHERS HAVE A VOICE IN THOSE VERY SPACES AND BEYOND. READ ON: THE SENIOR-MOST CHANGE-MAKER ON THIS LIST IS 98 AND STILL UNSTOPPABLE!

By Chanel Retief, Lillian Roberts and Marie Shabaya  
- With inputs from West Africa by Peace Hyde

**W**e are in 2023 talking about mainstreaming electric cars, virtual reality, drone deliveries and space travel.

Sure, NASA is talking about landing a woman on the moon by 2024, but back on earth, gender disparity is still a norm, a discussion point, an unfinished business. As it has been for a long time And sadly, as reports suggest, as it will remain.

The World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2022* states that the gender gap globally has been closed by 68.1%, but at the current rate of progress, it will take another 132 years to reach full parity.

The statistics speak. But so do generations of women wanting the needle to move, faster.

Although no country has yet achieved full gender parity, the top 10 economies have closed at least 80% of their gender gaps, with Iceland (90.8%) leading the global ranking. The only sub-Saharan African countries to make the top 10 in narrowing the gender gap are Rwanda (81.1%, 6th) and Namibia (80.7%, 8th).

In an analysis by the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), their gender parity index (GPI) report showed that 30 (66.67%) countries have increased gender parity while 15 (33.33%) have decreased gender parity. For ACCORD, this is an average increase for the continent when comparing the gender gap between 2013 and 2021.

But even with these figures, the reality is that women in Africa make a sizeable contribution to

the continent's informal and formal economies. The African Development Bank (AfDB) in its *Empowering African Women* report states that women on the continent are “more economically active as farmers and entrepreneurs than women in any other region of the world. It is the women who grow most of Africa's food, and who own one-third of all businesses”.

But yet, the well-entrenched stereotypes and conditioning have been hard to break.

Says Nonkululeko Gobodo, Chief Executive Officer at AWAKENED Global and better known as South Africa's first black female chartered accountant, in an interview with FORBES AFRICA: “Because these topics [racial and gender inequalities] are so embedded in history, we are so confused by this history that has defined who black people are and who women are that we've been unable to break free from [them]. I call them myths, because whatever people believe about women or black people are just really myths that were created.”

Milestones were hard won, particularly for this generation that had to also look past historical hardships, as they powered on.

“My parents lost everything, including all their life savings because they were on the Biafran side,” Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the first woman and first African to lead the World Trade Organization as Director-General, said in FORBES AFRICA's December 2020-January 2021 issue when she won African of the Year. “I was eating one meal a day and children were dying. So, I learned to live very frugally. I often say I can sleep on a mud floor as well as a feathered bed and be very comfortable. It has made me someone who can do without things in life because of what we went through.”

The AfDB report shows that while African women work 50% longer hours than men, the pay gap between men and women is still very wide.

But this has not swayed the fairer sex to give up on their goals.

“I am in full of admiration for women all over the African continent,” Okonjo-Iweala said at the 2021 FORBES WOMAN AFRICA Leading Women Summit for the closing keynote address. “Our priorities for African governments make sure girls are in school getting an education.”

Winnie Byanyima, the Executive Director of UNAIDS and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, wrote in her column for FORBES

AFRICA's 10th anniversary issue in 2021: “Woman leaders, particularly young women, when given space to share their creativity, will show how to build societies able to overcome any crisis and to unleash the potential of all.”

“I've always viewed myself not as a woman but as a human being,” Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim, renowned South African AIDS researcher, tells us. “And what is it that I want to contribute to leaving the world as a better place. And what is it that I can do to enhance our lives and ensure a sustainable future.”

This is what spells success for these 50 powerhouses on our 50 Over 50 list.

Each of them has taken the time to ensure a foundation has already been built for their successors to further build on.

In 2020, at the helm of a new decade, FORBES WOMAN AFRICA ran a list of Africa's 50 Most Powerful Women; those challenging the status quo and paving the way where there was none.

There are many formidable personalities from that list you will find on these pages too; from Wendy Luhabe to Wendy Appelbaum to Wendy Ackerman and Angélique Kidjo to Arunma Oteh to Amina J Mohammed, you will find them here, amongst several new names too from across the African continent.

“There is no force equal to a woman determined to rise,” says Louisa Mojela, the CEO of WIPHOLD in South Africa, aptly.

No matter their work in entrepreneurship, entertainment, investment, activism or philanthropy, this 2023 edition is a befitting list of respected change-makers to honor International Woman's Day on March 8 (which is also when the eighth instalment of the FORBES WOMAN AFRICA Leading Women Summit will be held in Pretoria, South Africa).

“I think everyday should be a day celebrating women and what women achieve,” says Wendy Ackerman, Founder and Honorary Life President of Pick n Pay Stores.

“Because everyday is a miracle what we do achieve. I watch my daughters and I watch the other women around me. In the company, I've watched how women have risen through the ranks, and educated themselves while working. I really believe that we should all celebrate women, and protect them.”

Here's presenting Africa's inter-generational female champions. **P**

*(Editor's Note: The list follows no particular order)*

**“ I FEEL IT’S A NICE POINT FOR SOMEONE WHO IS 63. ”**



## Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim

63 | PRESIDENT, UNESCO-TWAS, PROFESSOR IN CLINICAL EPIDEMIOLOGY, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AND VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR AFRICAN HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL | SOUTH AFRICA

Last year, world-leading AIDS researcher, South African Quarraisha Abdool Karim, was elected to serve as the seventh President of The World Academy of Sciences (UNESCO-TWAS) for the advancement of science in developing countries. This made her the first woman to head TWAS. She now co-chairs a 10-member technical facilitation mechanism group set up by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, and speaks to FORBES AFRICA from New York:

**Q. From when you started in the health sector, how has your career trajectory been?**

A. I think it's gone amazingly well, we're talking about almost 35 years in public health. I've been a scientist and biomedical scientist since 1982. It's a long time and my career has taken different paths to get to this point – 35 years ago, I just focused on HIV, and then more recently, with Covid-19, was able to pivot to respond to that, because of my background.

So, I feel it's a nice point for someone who is 63 (laughs). Public health, particularly, is about populations, and how we enhance health. Our biggest threats in Africa for most of the 1990s and early 2000s and [even now] continue to be HIV infections, which disproportionately impacts young women. So, it's been a real privilege, I think, to have that opportunity to use science to address that challenge. And then now to have the opportunity, again, to use science to enhance the lives of people, particularly the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

**Q. Women have shown for a while now that they can take up any space, in any industry and field. However, gender disparity is still very prevalent. How can we close the gender gap, especially in the health sector?**

A. Interestingly in health, from medical school and university, we have more and more women coming into the space. But the difference, I think, is in leadership positions... Women still feel like they are imposters. If you have earned your place, especially if you've got your degrees or you've earned whatever position you have, you shouldn't feel like imposters, this is your space, so occupy it with the passion that brought you to this point. And do not let glass ceilings over your peers or others shape and undermine your ownership of that space.

## Angélique Kidjo

62 | FIVE-TIME GRAMMY WINNER, SINGER-SONGWRITER, ACTRESS AND ACTIVIST | BENIN

When Angélique Kidjo took home a fifth Grammy award last year, she became the artist with the most Grammy gongs on the continent.

“I did not expect to win, even though I was nominated three times in that category [Best Global Music for *Mother Nature*],” Kidjo said for the August-September 2022 cover story of FORBES AFRICA. “Because the competition was tough, being nominated is already a great honor. For me, each nomination is [proof] my work is out there. People are paying attention to what I do. When I won, I was humbled and didn't know what to do.”

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Having been in the industry since the 1980s, Kidjo told FORBES AFRICA that she is impressed by how young people in the music and entertainment industry know how to conduct business today.

“What I learned from them is their professionalism – it's mind-blowing... I had waited for this day... And on top of being artists, these are entrepreneurs, they understand they have to be free. [In my time], I had to sign a contract for 10 years... These kids have the right to do whatever they want. They sat back and learned from my experience, and the experiences of Youssou N'Dour, and Salif Keita... They want to be free in their own right and they are right to be free!”

