



Beyond Moments: Advancing Gender Equity Across the Whole Life Cycle of Women and Girls

Leading with courage in an era of uncertainty



We write this annual reflection at a moment of profound global uncertainty. The development landscape is growing more complex by the day: rising authoritarianism, geopolitical tensions, shrinking aid budgets, and an intensifying backlash against gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and diversity, equity and inclusion. For organizations with a singular mission like ICRW Africa, these pressures present existential challenges. Yet they also underscore the urgency and relevance of our work. The question before us is not only how to endure this moment, but how to lead through it – with clarity, courage, and conviction.

Over the past year, ICRW's decentralization journey has continued to reshape who we are and how we work. As a regional hub within a global network, ICRW Africa stands at the forefront of this transformation.

Decentralization has formalized and deepened our alignment with the communities we serve, strengthening our ability to design context-specific solutions and respond with agility to rapidly changing realities. We are increasingly defined by a powerful dual identity: an African-led institution grounded in local ownership, and a globally credible voice advancing rigorous evidence for gender equity. This positioning is not accidental; it is our strategic advantage.

Our greatest lever for change remains partnership. In 2025, collaboration enabled us to reach historic milestones that demonstrate what is possible when research, advocacy, and coalition-building align. Kenya's first-ever National Care Policy – approved by Cabinet in December 2025 and the first of its kind in Africa – sets a regional precedent for recognizing and redistributing care work. Our co-hosting of Kenya's inaugural



Stakeholders come together to celebrate the validation of the final draft of the National Care Policy, setting the stage for a future where care work is recognised, valued, and supported.

Menopause Conference elevated a long-neglected issue into national conversations around policy, healthcare, and community wellbeing. These achievements are more than isolated successes; they exemplify ICRW Africa's role as a convener that translates evidence into action and catalyzes systemic change.

Internally, we sharpened our Theory of Change to ensure our strategies remain resilient and transformative in an ever-changing world. We also reimagined our digital presence to reflect who we are becoming: an agile, African-led catalyst for gender justice and social progress. These shifts signal an organization that is not standing still, but evolving with purpose.

Mette Kinoti,
Board chairperson

In an increasingly polarized world, ICRW Africa offers something rare: proximity to communities, intellectual rigor, and principled leadership. We sincerely thank all our partners, funders, and allies for your continued support and invite you to deepen your investment in this work. The future of gender equity in Africa must be driven by African voices, evidence, and solutions. Together, we can ensure that this future is not only imagined, but realized.



We are increasingly defined by a powerful dual identity: an African-led institution grounded in local ownership, and a globally credible voice advancing rigorous evidence for gender equity” —Mette Kinoti.

Our whole life cycle approach to advancing women's equity at every stage



Gender equity is not won in moments. It is built across a woman's lifetime, and our work is engineered to deliver at every step."

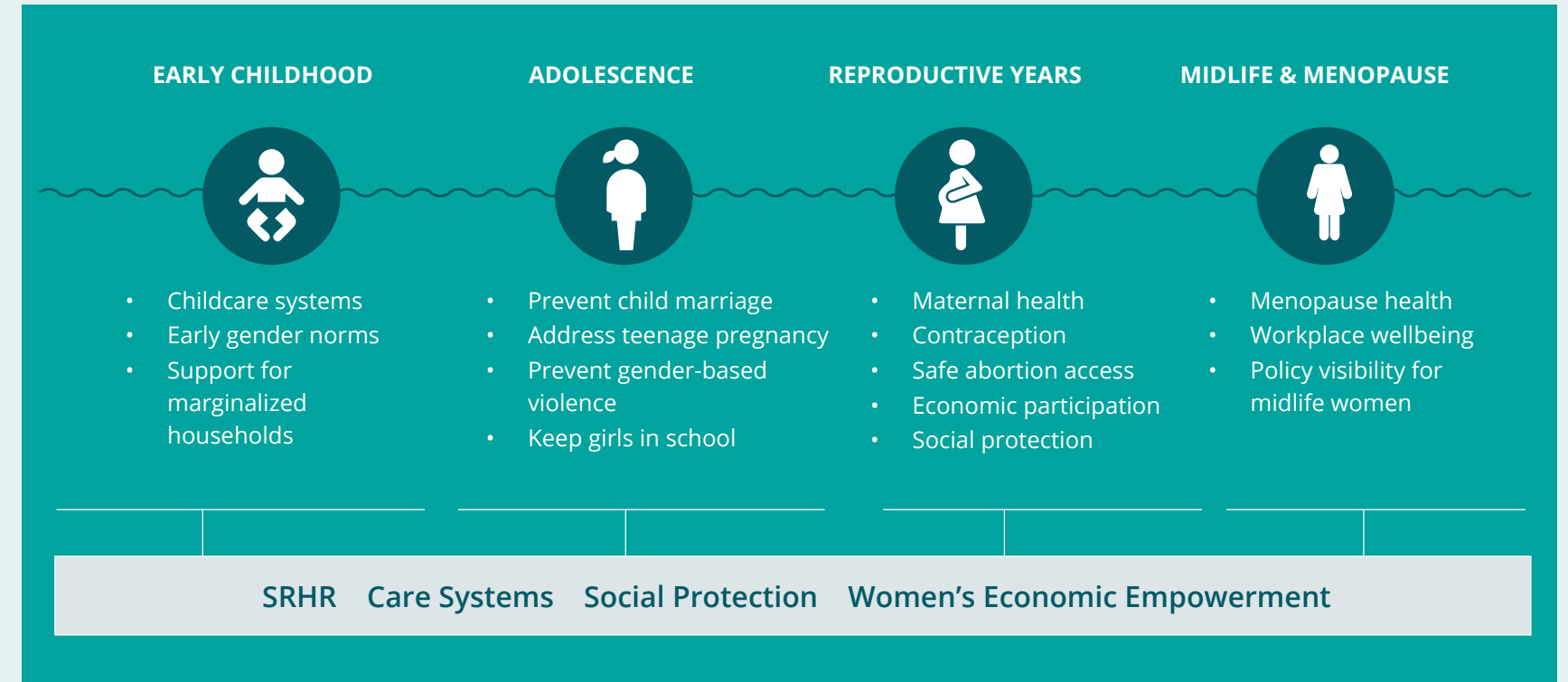
At ICRW Africa, gender equity is not a single intervention, it is a continuum that must keep pace with the realities of women's lives. From early childhood through adolescence, the reproductive years, and into menopause, women's needs, risks, and opportunities evolve. Our work is intentionally designed to move in step with these transitions, aligning evidence, policy influence, and implementation support so progress is sustained at every life stage.

We start early by generating evidence on childcare systems and the pressures facing marginalized households, recognizing that the foundations of equity are laid in the earliest years. We work to interrupt harmful norms before they harden, addressing the structural drivers of child marriage and advancing more equitable caregiving roles within families and communities. During adolescence, we confront the intersecting

challenges of teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence knowing full well that these moments often determine whether girls remain on pathways to education and opportunity.

In adulthood, we strengthen sexual and reproductive health and rights – supporting maternal health, safe abortion access, and contraception – while advancing policy innovation in social protection and care systems that expand women's economic participation. Critically, we do not allow women's health to disappear from the agenda at midlife. Our pioneering work on menopause is closing a long-standing evidence and policy gap, ensuring women's wellbeing, productivity, and dignity remain visible and supported across the full lifespan.

What distinguishes ICRW Africa is the precision of our ecosystem approach. We



connect sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR), care policy, social protection, and women's economic power through the cross-cutting lenses of norms, power, and systems performance. The result is not isolated wins but coordinated progress

that holds together across sectors and over time.

Equity is not achieved in fragments. It is built deliberately, stage by stage, policy by policy, system by system. ICRW Africa is helping shape environments where

women and girls are supported not at one moment, but across their whole lives — because durable progress depends on systems that work as reliably and continuously as the lives they are meant to serve.

PROGRAM UPDATES

1 Historic conference breaks the **silence on menopause**

ICRW Africa and partners co-hosted Kenya's first-ever National Conference on Menopause, a landmark moment that elevated women's midlife health onto the national policy agenda, on August 20, 2025. For decades, menopause has remained stigmatized and largely invisible despite affecting half the population and carrying significant health, social, and economic consequences.

The conference catalyzed a decisive shift in national discourse. It also repositioned menopause from a private concern to a legitimate public health and policy issue by convening government leaders, health professionals, researchers, employers, media, and women with lived experience.

A key outcome was formal

recognition by Ministry of Health Kenya that menopause is a neglected public health priority. The ministry committed to establishing a national menopause taskforce — an unprecedented step towards integrating menopause into policy, clinical guidance and health system practice.

Building on this momentum, ICRW Africa joined the global Power in Menopause campaign, helping ensure African perspectives shape international advocacy.

By bringing menopause into Kenya's health and policy discourse, this work has expanded the debate and created space for recognition. Kenya's leadership now feeds directly into the global conversation, shaping momentum toward a clear international position on menopause.



Dr Edward Serem, Head of the Division of Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health in the Ministry of Health, was a key speaker.

Follow the campaign on LinkedIn and Instagram:

▶ <https://www.powerinmenopause.org/#sign>

▶ <https://www.linkedin.com/company/power-in-menopause/posts/?feedView=all>

▶ <https://www.instagram.com/powerinmenopause/>



Supreme Court Judge Lady Justice Njoki Ndung'u (right), Amref University Vice-Chancellor Prof Joachim Osur and ICRW Africa Board Chairperson Mette Kinoti arrive for the Menopause Conference on August 20, 2025.



National Assembly Minority Whip Millie Odhiambo delivers a point during a panel discussion. On the far left is Dr. Josephine Kibaru, a health systems expert, alongside Betty Maina and Prof. Owor. Olungah from the University of Nairobi.

Prof. Lukoye Atwoli and Prof. Anne Kihara, were among key speakers at the conference.

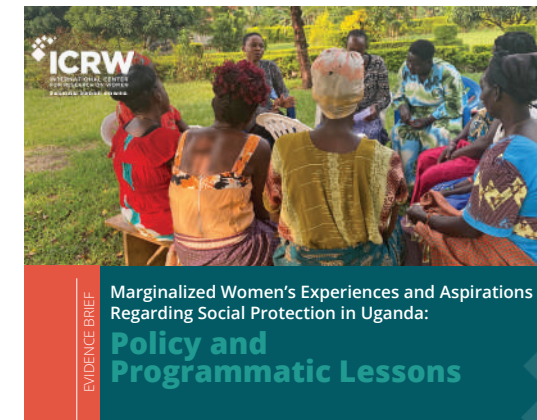
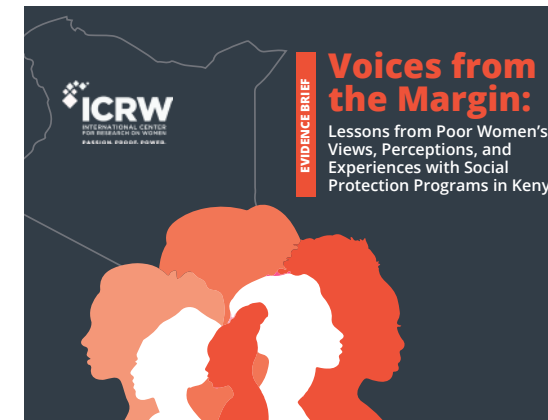


2 Putting caregivers at the heart of Kenya's social protection reform

Social protection is about ensuring dignity, equity, and resilience for individuals and households, especially women and marginalized groups who disproportionately absorb crises through unpaid care work. Yet across Africa, debt distress, aid cuts, and fiscal austerity continue to erode the fiscal space needed to sustain social protection.

Many countries now spend more on debt servicing than on health or education, while declining donor support has weakened the capacity of states to deliver essential services. The dominance of informal labour also makes contributory schemes difficult to expand, while weak administrative systems limit effective targeting and delivery.

Against this backdrop, ICRW Africa works to ensure reforms are grounded in lived realities. In Kenya, we contributed to strengthening the social protection



system by placing women's experiences and care responsibilities at the centre of the Social Protection Act, 2025.

Through evidence-based advocacy and collaboration with Parliament, the State Department for Social Protection, and UNICEF, we developed operational guidelines that make benefits fairer, more predictable, and easier to access.

In Uganda, our research on vulnerable women's experiences revealed how exclusion, informal work, and caregiving responsibilities shape access to benefits.

This evidence has informed policy dialogue and efforts to strengthen coverage, targeting, and financing for a more inclusive social protection system.

3 Driving global care solutions from Kenya to Africa and beyond

ICRW Africa has solidified its role as a national anchor, regional connector, and global convener on care, turning Kenya's policy wins into learning and action across Africa and beyond.

We provided thought leadership and technical stewardship that advanced the National Care Policy to finalization and cabinet endorsement, creating a credible framework for coordinated action, county-level rollout, and financing conversations anchored in the urgency of valuing the care economy.

Regionally, participation in the 1st Africa Childcare Forum in Kigali amplified Kenya's progress while advancing a continental learning agenda on quality, affordability, workforce conditions, and inclusive access to childcare.

Field-grounded insights from Kenya informed regional dialogue, strengthened cross-country partnerships, and shaped recommendations including strategic advocacy for governments to allocate 1.5–2.5% of national budgets to childcare and the development of an

African Care Compact for African Union endorsement. Globally, engagement in G20/W20 discussions in Johannesburg positioned care as essential economic infrastructure, linking services and decent paid care work to productivity, women's labor force participation, and inclusive growth.

Building on this momentum, ICRW Africa was invited to share Kenya's experience at the CELAC–Africa Forum March 2026 in Colombia, positioning the country's progress as a reference point for South–South learning.

Through these efforts, ICRW Africa is consistently recognized as a convener of the care ecosystem and a trusted translation partner, turning evidence into policy, policy into implementation, and national experience into regional and global learning.

This positions ICRW Africa to shape implementation and financing for Kenya's care reforms, curate cross-country learning on care systems, and influence global norms so that care is treated as a cornerstone of equitable development.



Gender Secretary Dr. Josephine Obonyo (right) and UN Women WEE Team Lead, Elizabeth Obanda (centre), lead participants in a lively energiser during the Stakeholder Validation Workshop on the National Care Policy.



Ms. Grace Wasike, Director of Socioeconomic Empowerment at State Department of Gender and Affirmative Action, addresses participants at the Stakeholder Validation Workshop on July 15, 2025, in Nairobi.



Antonia Gabala-Sodonon (left), UN Women County Representative, with IDRC Regional Director Kathryn Touré and Amar Nijhawan, Program Officer, IDRC, during celebrations to mark the International Day of Care and Support on October 29, 2025, in Nairobi.

A participant makes her wishes clear during celebrations to mark the International Day of Care and Support on October 29, 2025, in Nairobi.

4 Nurturing the next generation of gender researchers

ICRW Africa's Fellowship Programme is building a stronger pipeline of emerging women researchers across the continent by strengthening technical capacity, professional confidence, and research readiness. Since April 2024, the programme has delivered structured training and mentorship that participants report is already improving their ability to contribute to rigorous, policy-relevant research.

Participants demonstrate notable gains in core research competencies, particularly in qualitative and quantitative analysis, research ethics, and scoping review methods. These skills are widely viewed by fellows as directly applicable to their academic and professional trajectories.

The programme has also strengthened peer learning and cross-country

collaboration. Fellows consistently highlight networking across countries as a key benefit that is expanding their professional horizons.

Targeted trainings and supportive supervision have been critical enablers of progress, helping translate learning into practical research capability.

Importantly, the programme is contributing to efforts to address structural barriers that often limit young women's participation in research. The initiative is also shifting how participants understand evidence and influence.

Overall, early results indicate a cohort that is more technically skilled, better connected, and more confident in navigating research pathways, positioning them to contribute more effectively to evidence-informed policy and practice.



When I first joined, I was eager but unsure of what to expect. Fast forward to today, I have gained invaluable skills in both qualitative and quantitative analysis"

— Evelene Kalea.



Research Fellows share learnings during a training session in Nairobi, Kenya.



Research Fellows from Uganda with Country Advisory Group Members in Kampala..



I've worked alongside experienced mentors and learned the value of leadership and critical thinking"

—Veronica Juma, emphasizing the value of mentorship and exposure.

CASE STUDIES + IMPACTS

1 Big win for women as ICRW Africa helps deliver Kenya's first **National Care Policy**

ICRW Africa played a central role in shepherding Kenya's first-ever National Care Policy, guiding the process as a convener, technical expert, and evidence translator. Across Kenya, unpaid care burdens and uneven access to paid care services have constrained women's economic participation, girls' schooling, household wellbeing, and inclusion for persons with disabilities and older persons. Fragmented interventions across sectors and levels of government limited scale, financing, standards, and accountability, creating an urgent need for a coordinated national framework.

ICRW Africa convened government ministries, counties, development partners, civil society, private sector actors, unions, disability advocates, caregivers, and researchers to build shared understanding and alignment around a common reform

agenda. Technical stewardship ensured the policy reflected time poverty, labor market realities, service gaps and social inequality.

The result is a credible, Cabinet-endorsed policy that positions care as both economic and social infrastructure and a cross-sector national priority. It establishes coordinated action across ministries and counties and lays the foundation for financing, standards and scalable, equitable implementation.

As Kenya transitions into implementation, ICRW Africa will support rollout planning and county-level capacity strengthening, monitoring and learning.

Linking evidence, policy, and practice, this work ensures Kenya's first care policy delivers sustainable, measurable impact, advancing economic empowerment, social inclusion, and dignity for women, caregivers, and marginalized populations.



ICRW Africa convened government ministries, counties, development partners, civil society, private sector actors, to build shared understanding around a common reform agenda

2 Tackling Tech-facilitated GBV **within** **a broader gender** justice agenda



Tech-facilitated GBV is widespread, normalized, and deeply harmful — especially to young women online. My biggest lesson from the BtS project is simple: awareness must lead to empathy, and empathy must change how we act in digital spaces”

— Edegeret Mokalent, Ethiopia.

Tech-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is emerging as a critical barrier to women’s full participation in Sub-Saharan Africa’s fast-growing creative economy. As music, film, fashion, and digital content creation increasingly depend on online visibility and engagement, young women creatives are facing persistent cyberbullying, image-based abuse, and coordinated misogynistic attacks. These harms are not only personal, they disrupt income streams, damage professional reputations, and push talented women out of digital spaces that are essential for career growth.

Current response systems remain uneven. Legal protections are often weak or poorly enforced, awareness of reporting and redress mechanisms is limited, and survivors frequently encounter dismissive or inadequate institutional responses. The result is a cycle in which online abuse translates into real economic exclusion,

undermining both gender equality goals and the broader promise of Africa’s creative industries.

ICRW Africa’s Behind the Scenes project is working to address this gap through targeted, evidence-driven action. The initiative has documented the lived experiences of young women creatives, highlighting how TFGBV directly contributes to lost opportunities and economic insecurity. Building on this evidence, ICRW Africa has convened industry stakeholders, policymakers, and justice actors to elevate TFGBV from a marginal concern to a recognized structural constraint on women’s economic empowerment.

The project is contributing to the development of stronger protective and accountability frameworks within the creative sector, while also supporting a pipeline of emerging African feminist researchers to sustain this work over time.



Working on the BTS project made it clear to me that tech-facilitated gender-based violence is not a virtual problem, it is real harm happening through digital spaces, disproportionately affecting women and marginalized groups. Addressing it demands education, stronger laws, responsible tech design, and a cultural shift toward respect online”

—Harriet Omuji, Ghana

Research Fellows Joseph Jasef and Agi Favour during a training in Nairobi.

4 Resilient in the face of **backlash**

Backlash against gender equity and SRHR intensified in 2025. The expanded Global Gag Rule — a U.S. policy that bars foreign organizations from receiving aid if they provide, counsel or discuss abortion or family planning — threatened to silence African voices and cut off critical funding for health and rights. With multiple governments reducing development aid, health and SRHR sectors faced mounting strain and shrinking lifelines.

Across Africa, new health cooperation agreements with the US government have raised alarms about sovereignty, data protection and rights based governance. Civil society mobilized and ICRW Africa joined hands with sister organizations to defend progress and protect hard won gains.

At the RHNK Pan African Adolescent and Youth SRHR 2025 Conference, ICRW Africa exposed how anti rights movements weaponize dis/misinformation and unstable political agendas to erode health rights. We offered evidence based counter strategies, showing that African led data is the strongest antidote to regression in the region.

ICRW Africa partnered with WomenLift Health and Legally Clueless Africa to amplify African feminist voices through podcasting, reframing SRHR as an Afro feminist struggle for justice, dignity and agency. Building on this, we partnered with Kenyan feminists to co create a radical space of reflection, care and intergenerational solidarity — reaffirming that the struggles women face, from



In a year of intensifying backlash, ICRW Africa stood with partners to defend hard-won SRHR gains using African-led evidence, feminist collaboration, and bold convening to keep women's health and bodily autonomy firmly on the policy agenda."

menstrual health to menopausal care, are bound together by gender inequality and the fight for bodily autonomy.

In Bangkok, at the convening titled Funding Freedom, Composting Aid, ICRW Africa joined global allies to confront the funding crisis, capturing the urgency of reimagining resourcing beyond traditional aid and advancing the call for movement sovereignty.

In 2025, ICRW Africa deepened its SRHR impact by continuing to disseminate our SRHR evidence briefs, hosting Kenya's first ever National Menopause Conference and pushing health into the heart of economic policy debates. From care policy discussions to broader economic forums, we made clear that reproductive justice is inseparable from economic justice, ensuring that the voices and realities of women across generations are not sidelined but centred in national policymaking.



Eszter Kismodi (left), Chief Executive of Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters, Dela Nai, Vice President for Africa Program at Ibis Reproductive Health and Evelyne Opondo, ICRW Africa Executive Director, take a break during the RHNK Pan African Adolescent and Youth SRHR 2025 Conference in Mombasa.

From the Executive Director



As we close this year, ICRW Africa stands ready to chart the next frontier of gender equity. Our journey has proven that African-led solutions are not only possible, they are powerful. In the years ahead, we will deepen our work on care policy, health equity and Afro-feminist research translation, while expanding into urgent and emerging areas such as digital safety and menopause — issues too long neglected in policy and practice, yet central to the dignity and wellbeing of women and girls.

ICRW Africa's strength lies in our proximity to communities and our ability to turn evidence into impact. Looking forward, our priority is to scale the breakthroughs we have achieved by embedding care policy into practice and reframing health systems to centre women at all stages of their lives and

ensuring feminist research drives continental and global agendas. We will also harness the power of Africa's youth—the largest generation in our history—as innovators, advocates, researchers and leaders of change, ensuring their energy and creativity shape the future of equity.

Our revamped theory of change equips us to respond to shifting landscapes, while our organizational transformation strengthens our visibility and accountability. The road ahead is demanding, but our resolve is clear: ICRW Africa will continue to lead with courage, creativity, and collaboration — turning feminist research into strategies that transform lives and futures across Africa.

Evelynne Opondo,
Executive Director



In the years ahead, we will deepen our work on care policy, health equity and Afro-feminist research translation, while expanding into urgent and emerging areas such as digital safety and menopause that have long been neglected in policy and practice, yet central to the dignity and wellbeing of women and girls."

This is What Impact Means to Us

Impact is not abstract.

*It's felt in the confidence of an adolescent mother
It's her dream – finally spoken out loud
It's policies influenced
Social norms challenged
New opportunities opened for those long left behind
It's women and girls – the pillars of our communities – standing taller because of the work we do
It's a daughter dreaming differently than her mother once dared to
It's financial integrity
Thoughtful planning
Gender-transforming ideas
It's knowing someone out there made it through – because we made it possible
It's changing how advocacy is done – not by shouting louder, but by proving what works
It's the power of care work finally seen as economic work
It's safeguarding the gender debate
It's our research being cited in rooms we'll never sit in
It's generating new knowledge
Elevating unheard voices
Sparkling ideas that lead to action
It's how we show up — not just in theory, but in the world
And it's the reminder that none of us live single-issue lives*

**This is ICRW Africa
This is impact. This is personal.**



Hon. Kizito Wamalwa, Director of Committees and Programmes, Council of Governors, delivers his remarks during the National Care Policy stakeholder validation workshop on July 15, 2025 in Nairobi.



ICRW Africa Senior Gender Specialist Chryspin Afifu calls delegates to order at the National Care Policy stakeholder validation workshop on July 25, 2025.

Uganda BtS Principal Investigator Suubi Kirabo (left) and ICRW Africa Research Scholar Matilda Sang (second from left) with Youth Researchers at the close of the data collection training on February 11, 2025.



(Left-Right) Dr. Mary Mbithi and Prof. Jack Odhiambo (University of Nairobi) with Gender Secretary Dr. Josephine Obonyo during celebrations to mark the International Day of Care and Support on October 29, 2025, in Nairobi.



Former Chairperson of Maendeleo ya Wanawake, Mrs Rukia Mwikali Muiu-HSC, contributes to discussions during the National Care Policy stakeholder validation workshop on July 15, 2025, in Nairobi.



(Left-Right) Robin Nyakundi, BtS CAG Member; Janet Machuka, Kenya BtS National Creative Ambassador; Dr. Linet Arisa, BtS Kenya Principal Investigator; and Spontaneous the Poet, BtS Country Advisory Group Member (CAG), during a stakeholder mapping workshop in Nairobi on June 11, 2025.

For over 30 years, we have delivered ground-breaking research and gender-transformative solutions in over 25 countries across sub-Saharan Africa.

9

Geographic Reach

Active in 9 countries with a footprint in eastern, southern & west Africa

60 + Publications

Africa-focused research outputs since 2015

50 + Partnerships and Alliances

50+ projects shaped by partnerships with governments, civil society, UN agencies and grassroots movements since 2015

100 + Next Generation Researchers

A growing alumni network of 100+ African gender fellows and researchers un



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