

Women in Services Trade: An overview of female participation and ownership in Sub-Saharan Africa for 2022

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ABSTRACT

Trade is an integral part of the engine of economic growth. Services trade has the potential to form an increasingly important role in trade within Africa and for Africa trading with the rest of the world. Trade in services comprises the supply of a service through one of four modes: 1) cross-border, 2) consumption abroad, 3) commercial presence, and 4) the presence of natural persons. Given the latest product and service export data from the ITC Trade Map, it is clear that service exports are considerably lower than products. Although there was an increasing trend for service exports in Africa, this was severely constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic. An approximate 34% decline in service exports from Africa between 2019 and 2020 was registered.

If women are excluded from the services economy, then a potential 50% of the available workforce is excluded with all the negative impacts on labour force productivity and drivers of change within the economy. There are many factors which could potentially hamper female participation. These include a lack of access to education, cultural norms, and a lack of economic activity diversity. As social and economic activities increase, overall economic efficiency increases which decreases gender gaps in terms of human capital. This directly leads to higher productivity of women in the labour force and will increase the sectoral share of female participation across the different sectors of the economy.

About the Author

GAVIN VAN DER NEST holds an MSc Economics (University of Edinburgh). His interests lie in time series econometrics focusing on forecasting as well as in trade, environmental and natural resource economics. He has worked in economic research and most recently serves as an econometrician specialising in developing macroeconomic models for a variety of African countries.

Women in Services Trade: An overview of female participation and ownership in Sub-Saharan Africa for 2022

By Gavin van der Nest

1. Introduction

Trade is an integral part of the engine of economic growth. Services trade has the potential to form an increasingly important role in trade within Africa and for Africa trading with the rest of the world. Trade in services comprises the supply of a service through one of four modes: 1) cross-border, 2) consumption abroad, 3) commercial presence, and 4) the presence of natural persons. Given the latest product and service export data from Trade Map (ITC, 2022), it is clear that service exports are considerably lower than products (**Figure 1**). Although there was an increasing trend for service exports in Africa, this was severely constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic. An approximate 34% decline in service exports from Africa between 2019 and 2020 was registered.

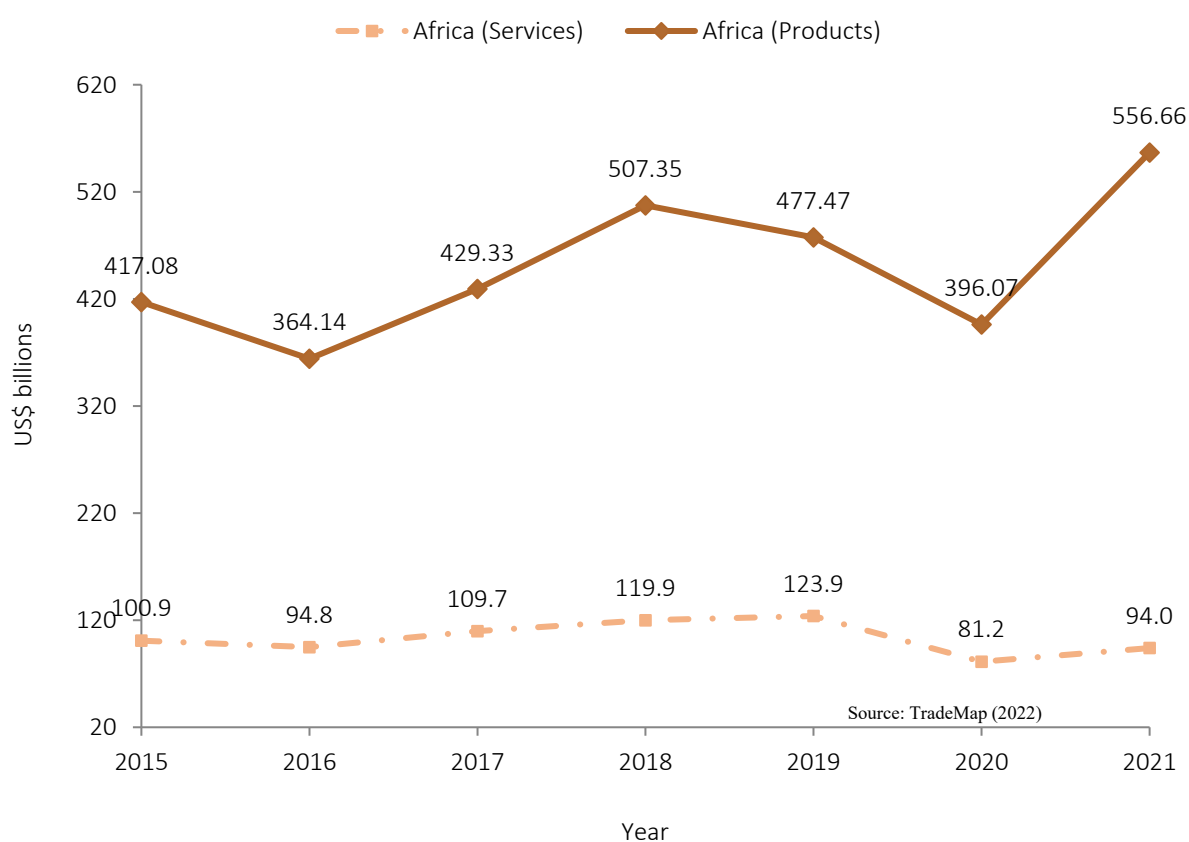
The adoption of new technologies has made it increasingly easier to trade services as producers and consumers do not need to be within physical distance of each other. However, much red tape still exists which hinders the potential of such trade. Moreover, there is great promise for women to directly benefit from trade in services. Unfortunately, women are mostly underrepresented in the services trade sector. Women's employment is usually concentrated in the least traded sectors such as education, health, and social services, although women are also traditionally active in the wholesale and retail trade sectors. Women are also underrepresented in ownership of service export firms (Brenton et al., 2013).

Trade in services, as with trade in products, leads to welfare gains within society. It allows for a better allocation of resources and economies of scale. Moreover, services trade expansion leads to an increase in the range of services consumers and producers can access and facilitates the expansion of more productive services firms. Further, expansion in infrastructure-related services such as transport,

telecommunications, finance, and water and power distribution play critical roles in the functioning and expansion of entire economies. The productivity of a country's labour force (a key factor of production) is directly related to the quality of the education and health services provided. This is a key point.

If women are excluded from the services economy, then a potential 50% of the available workforce is excluded with all the negative impacts on labour force productivity and drivers of change within the economy. There are many factors which could potentially hamper female participation. These include a lack of access to education, cultural norms, and a lack of economic activity diversity. As social and economic activities increase, overall economic efficiency increases which decreases gender gaps in terms of human capital. This directly leads to higher productivity of women in the labour force and will increase the sectoral share of female participation across the different sectors of the economy (Thaddeus et al., 2022).

Figure 1: Product and services exports aggregated for Africa in US\$ billions



Source: ITC (2022)

The latest *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2022* report shows that women within the global labour market have been amongst the worst affected and slowest to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, females see on average lower remuneration for the same job as well as sticky disparities in job quality, which is generally poorer compared to males (ILO, 2022). Shockingly, an analysis by United Nations (UN) Women and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) finds that as a result of the pandemic, approximately 435 million women and girls will be living on less than US\$1.90 per day. Further, 47 million women will fall back into poverty. This analysis does not take into account the global disruption in energy markets as a consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. One can surely expect such a disruption to affect an additional considerable amount of people. The *World Energy Outlook 2022* (IEA, 2022) finds that as a result of the pandemic and the energy crisis, over 75 million people can no longer pay for extended electricity services and 100 million no longer can afford clean cooking solutions. Although the poorest households in emerging and developing economies consume nine times less energy than the wealthiest, they tend to spend a much larger proportion of their income on energy. Any price rises here could offset any gains made in poverty reduction and gender equality.

Women also had a disproportionate share of household care burdens during the pandemic, exacerbated by lockdowns keeping men from work and children home from school (ILO, 2022). In developing countries, women are more likely to depend on employment directly or indirectly linked to supply chains, which were considerably disrupted. Moreover, women are more likely than men to spend resources on supporting their families and communities, and thus, any adverse effect on their employment status would have a precipitous effect on their households, communities and economies (ILO, 2022).

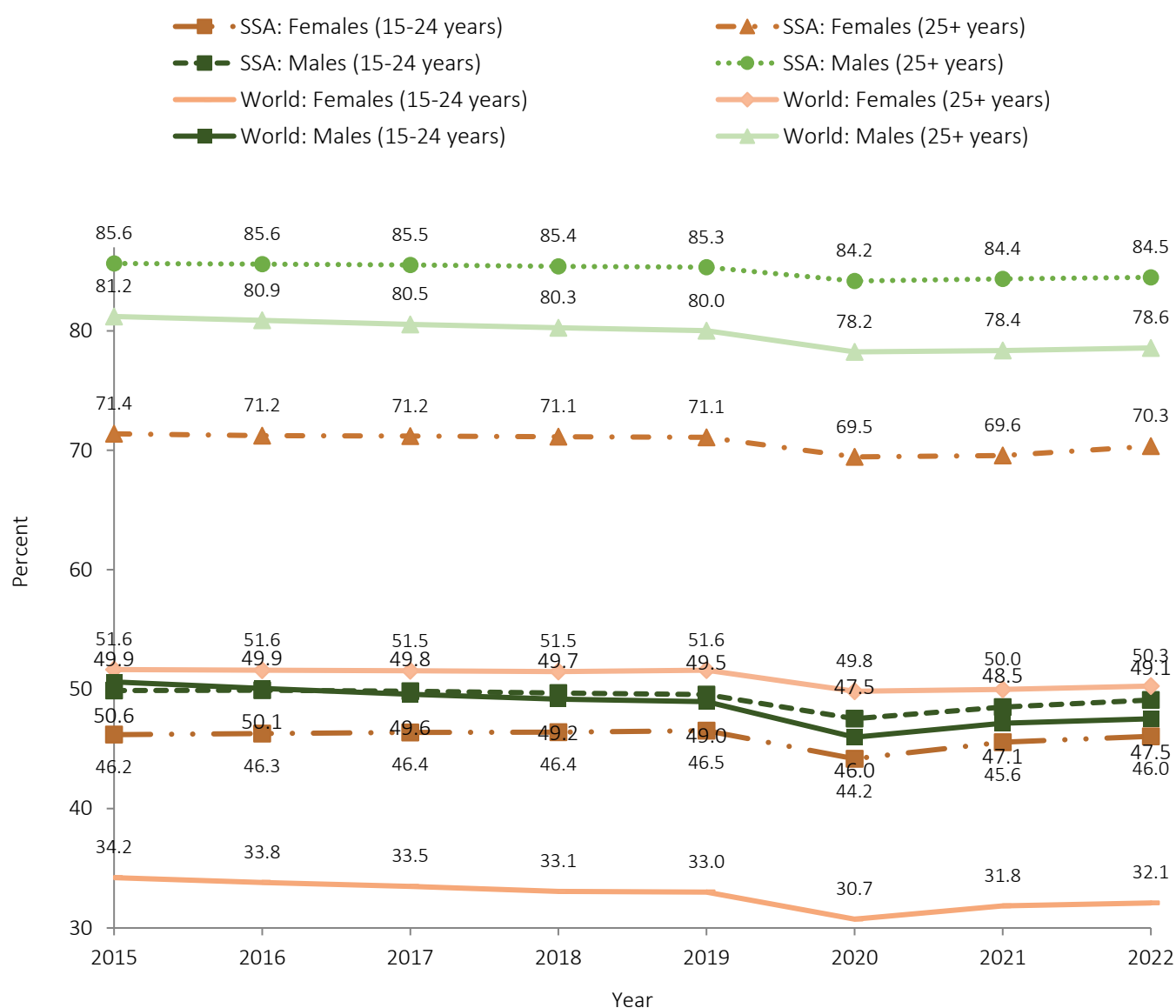
This paper will investigate the representation of women in the economic sectors, with an emphasis on services, focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa. Data disaggregated by gender remain sparse for the region. Where available, and where possible, data were disaggregated and compiled from a variety of sources to better understand the gender in services environment for Sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Sub-Saharan Africa – Participation in the economy by gender

In our contemporary world, gender inequality is still part and parcel of modern labour markets. However, such inequality is not equally spread throughout the real economy, or indeed the world. Some sectors in Africa, particularly the informal sector see a much higher rate of female participation.

The labour force participation rate, which is the labour force as a percent of the working-age population, for the world and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is given in **Figure 2**. Three observations must be noted. Firstly, on average, the labour force participation rate for males is considerably higher than for females. Secondly, female participation in the labour force in Sub-Saharan Africa is considerably higher than the world average. This stands in contrast to male labour force participation which sees similar rates in Sub-Saharan Africa compared to the world. Finally, the labour force participation rate saw a decline in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), but there has been a quick recovery, although as of 2022 is still slightly below pre-2020 levels for all sexes.

Figure 2: Labour force participation rate by sex



Source: ILO (2022)

Table 1 provides a summary of the composite rate of labour underutilization by sex and age for Sub-Saharan Africa and the world as a whole from ILOSTATS estimates. Labour underutilization includes those in the extended labour force who are unemployed, underemployed (e.g. part-time employed), and those who can work but have given up looking for a job. On average, labour underutilization is considerably higher in Sub-Saharan Africa for both sexes in the 25+ years bracket compared to the world average. The labour underutilization differences are also starkest between the sexes in Sub-Saharan

Africa with females on average seeing higher underutilization rates (+/- 4 percentage points). Such underutilization not only affects welfare gains but the productive capacity and potential growth of the economy.

Table 1: Composite rate of labour underutilization (LU4)¹ by sex and age

2019	Female	Male
Sub-Saharan Africa (25+ years)	20.4%	16.4%
Sub-Saharan Africa (15-24 years)	30.1%	26%
World (25+ years)	12.6%	9.6%
World (15-24 years)	27.7%	26%

Source: ILO modelled estimates (2022)

2.1 Female participation in economic sectors

This section will give an overview of female participation in various economic sectors. It will consider the structure of female employment², as well as further insights into female participation in the services sector.

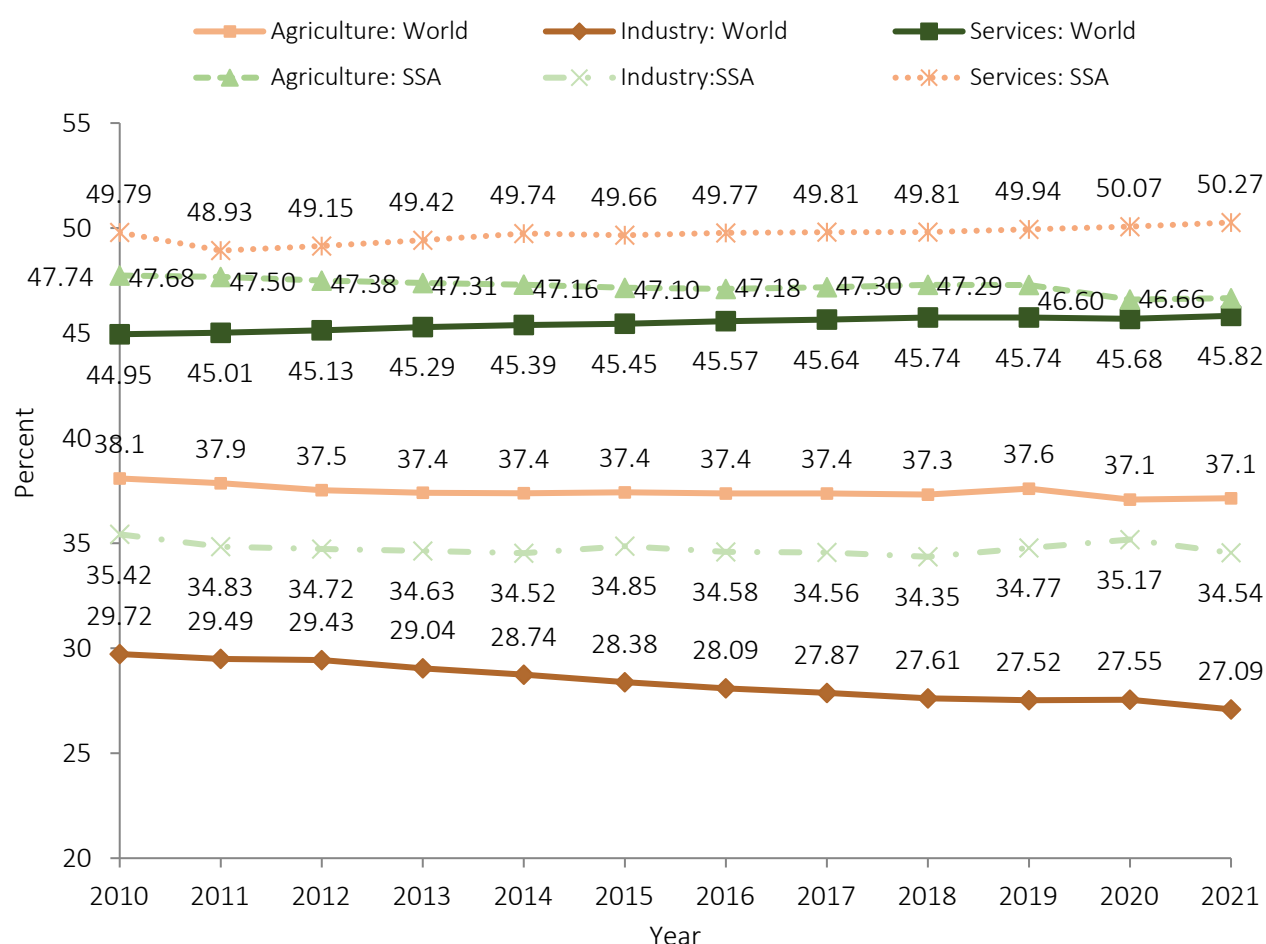
The percentage of total employed who are female by sector is displayed in **Figure 3**. Considering the female distribution across sectors in the world, the largest representation of females is in services (45.82% in 2021), followed by agriculture (37.1% in 2021), and finally by industry (27.09% in 2021). Female representation on the world scale has seen a slow decrease in agriculture with a slow increase in services and a marked decrease in industry. Focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa, females are most represented in services (50.27% in 2021), followed by agriculture (46.66% in 2021), and then by industry (34.54% in 2021). There are several interesting points to note. Firstly, female representation in the services sector in Sub-Saharan Africa has remained on average 5 percentage points higher than the

¹ LU4 is the share of the extended labour force which are unemployed, underemployed or the potential labour force.

² The employed comprise all persons of working age who, during a specified brief period, were in the following categories: a) paid employment (whether at work or with a job but not at work); or b) self-employment (whether at work or with an enterprise but not at work).

world average. Sub-Saharan Africa also sees a far higher proportion of females in agriculture and industry than the world average, of at least 10 and 5 percentage points respectively.

Figure 3: Percentage of total employed* who are female by sector

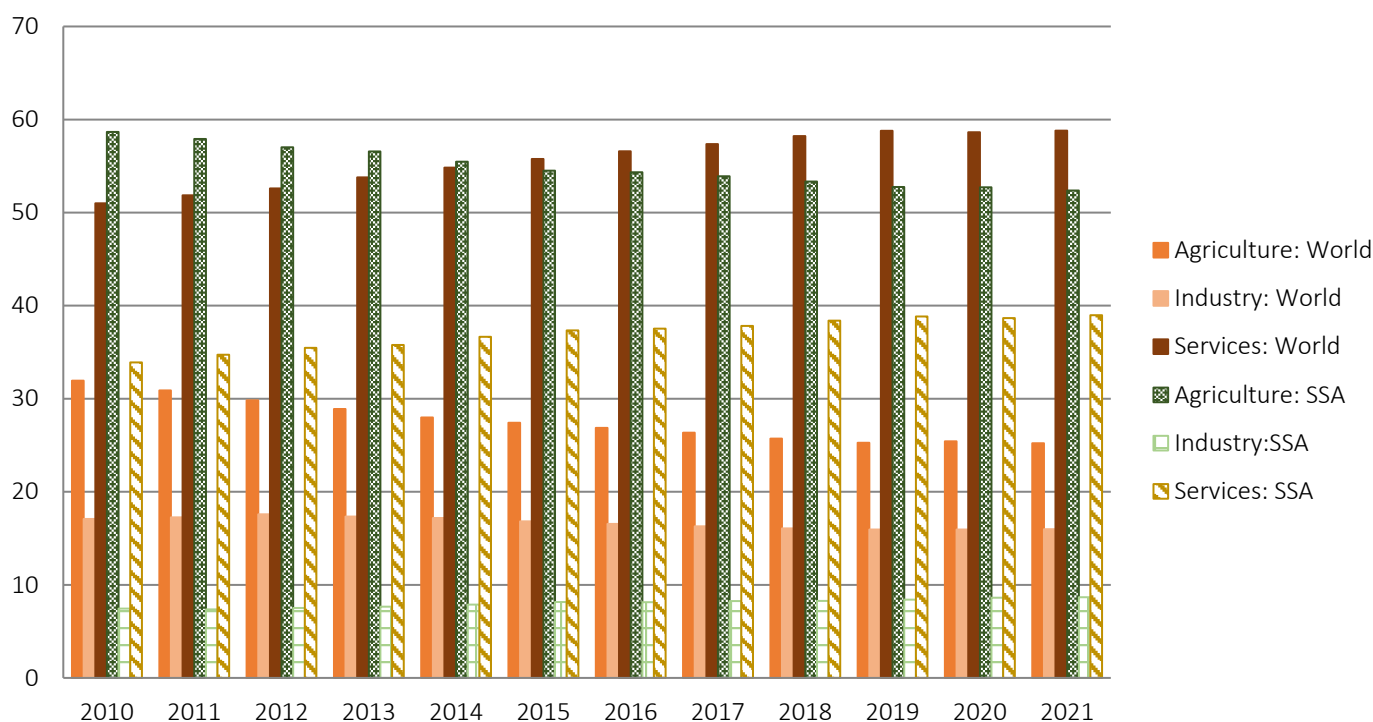


Source: ILO (2022)

The evolution of the structure of female employment is given in **Figure 4**. This shows the relative distribution of total female employment across sectors (i.e. the proportion of total females employed in a specific sector) for the world and for Sub-Saharan Africa. At the world level, the vast majority of females are employed in the services sector (58.81% in 2021). This was followed by agriculture (25.4% in 2021), and by industry (15.9%). For Sub-Saharan Africa, a majority of females are employed in agriculture (52.37% in 2021), followed by services (38.97% in 2021), and then by industry (8.66% in 2021).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, there has been an upward trend in the proportion of females employed in the services sector. This is an encouraging development as such growth goes in tandem with economic development, where more employment opportunities in the services sector including call centres, healthcare, tourism, and associated services are created. Greater female participation in the services sector is also beneficial in the sense that such employment is associated with higher salaries, better career mobility, more job security and other economic opportunities relative to agriculture. A downward trend in the proportion of females employed in agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa is also noted, from a high of 58.66% in 2010 to 52.37% in 2021, which, however, is still double the world average. The proportion of females employed in industry in Sub-Saharan Africa has slightly increased from 7.44% in 2010 to 8.66% in 2021.

Figure 4: Change in the structure of female employment (Percentage of total females employed in the sector)

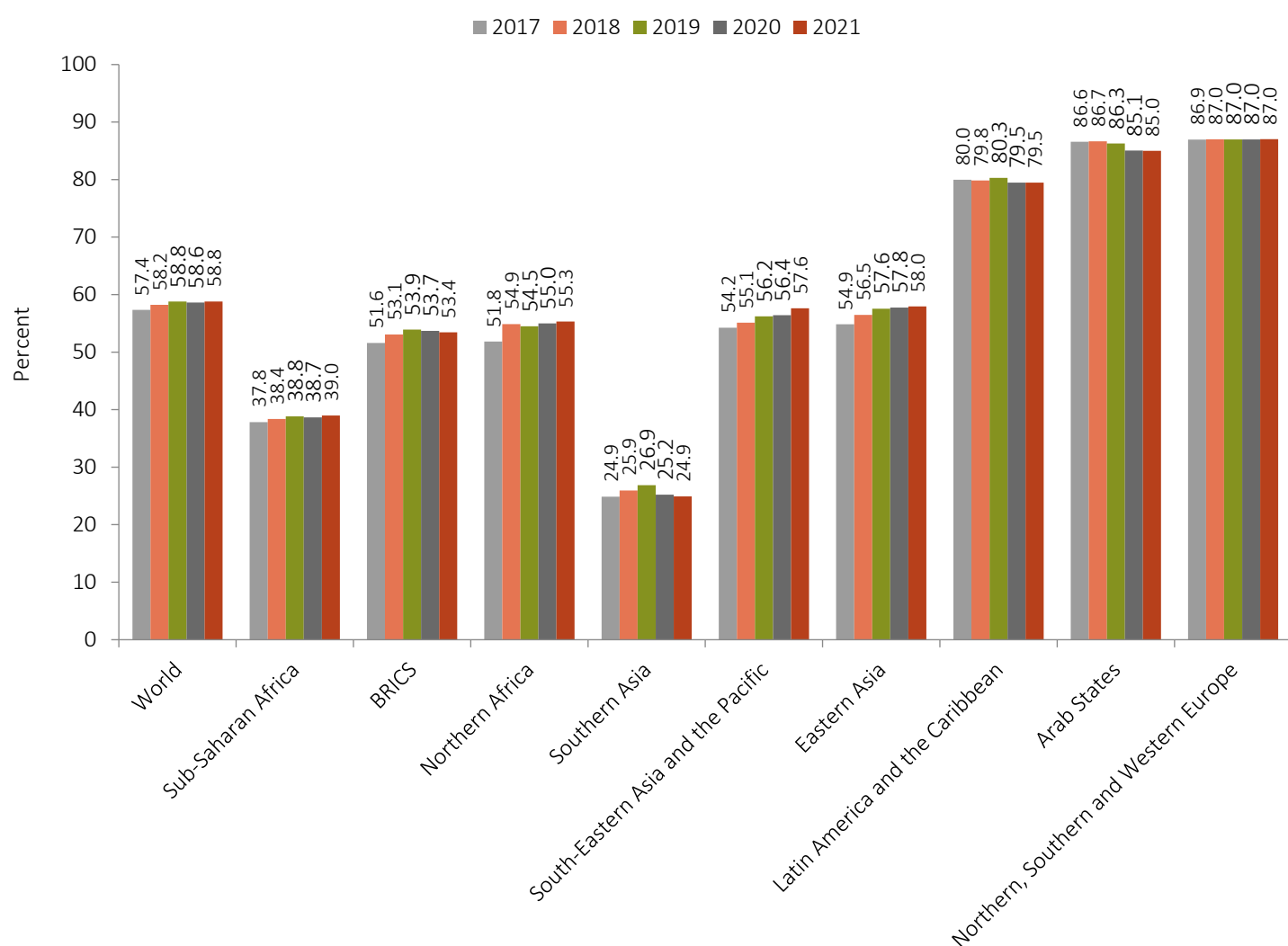


Source: ILO (2022)

Figure 5 shows the evolution of the proportion of females employed in the services sector for various regions over the 2017-2021 period. The Arab States; Latin America and the Caribbean; and Northern, Southern and Western Europe have more than 80% of total females employed working in the services

sector. Their share in 2021 corresponds to 85%, 79.5%, and 87% respectively. At 39% of total females employed in the services sector for Sub-Saharan in 2021, the region lags considerably behind the world average of 58.8%. Of the regions considered, Southern Asia has the lowest proportion of females employed in the services sector at 24.9%. Some regions, noticeably Sub-Saharan Africa, BRICS, Southern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Arab States saw a slight drop in the percentage of total females employed in the services sector in the first year (2020) of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 5: Percentage of total females employed in the services sector per region



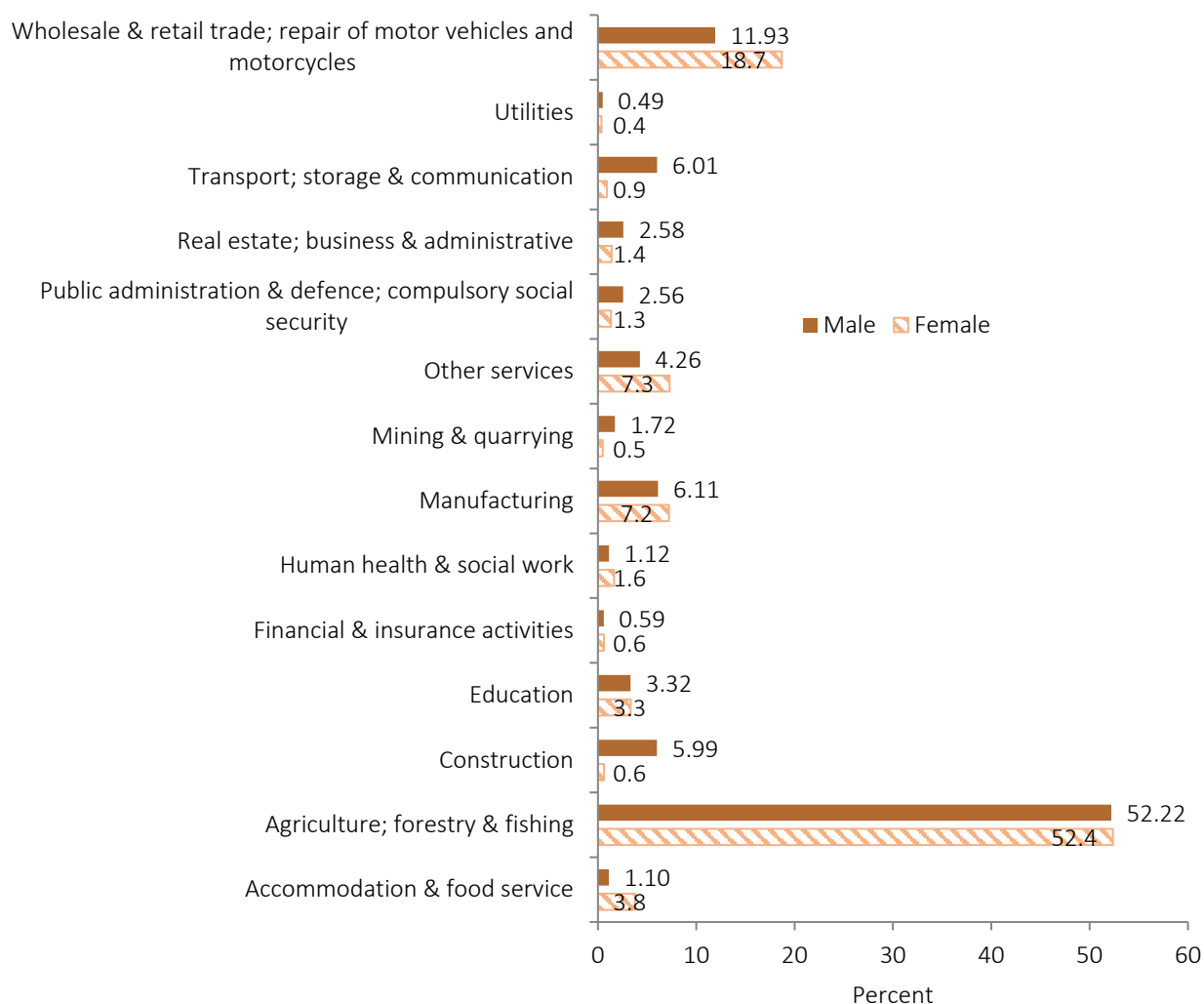
Source: ILO (2022)

2.2 Female participation in economic activities

This section will investigate employment activities by sex. **Figure 6** shows the percentage of each gender employed in various economic activities as defined according to the International Standard Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC) Rev. 4. These estimates pertain to 2021 for Sub-Saharan Africa.

Agricultural; forestry and fishing is the largest employment activity for both sexes at approximately 52%. Wholesale and retail trade is the second largest employment activity for females at 18.7%. Other major activities for females include; other services (7.3%), manufacturing (7.2%), and accommodation and food services (3.8%). Males outstrip females, particularly in higher-paying activities including; transport, storage and communication (6.01% versus 0.9%); real estate, business and administration (2.58% versus 1.4%); and public administration and defence (2.56% versus 1.3%). For the more physically intense activity of construction, males see a tenfold increase in representation relative to females (5.99% versus 0.6%). Given the structure of employment, it is clear that the vast majority of employment for both sexes is focused in primary sector activities. There is thus much scope for potential expansion into the higher-paying and stable tertiary sector.

Figure 6: Gender structure of employment in Sub-Saharan Africa (2021)

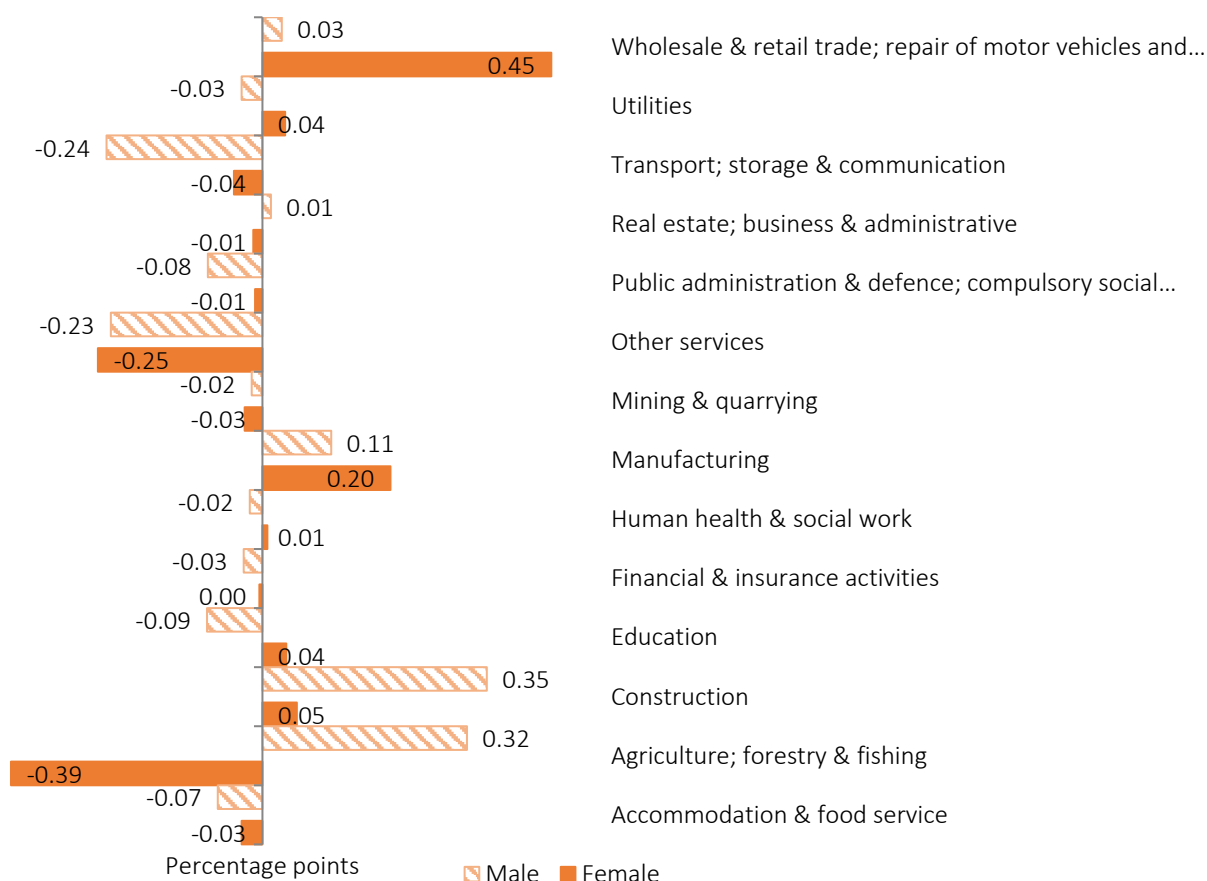


Source: ILO (2022)

To consider the potential impact of COVID-19 on the employment structure in Sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage point change in employment per activity between 2019 and 2021 was calculated. This is shown in **Figure 7**. The largest increase in percentage points for females was in wholesale and retail trade (0.45). Manufacturing also saw a 0.20 percentage point increase for females. Agriculture, forestry and fishing as well as other services saw decreases of 0.39 and 0.25 percentage points for females respectively. Thus, in percentage point terms, there appears to be little movement in terms of the economic activity makeup for females between 2019 and 2021. A possible explanation for this is that

because this statistic only considers the employed, it cannot capture the job loss trends associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, data for this is not available.

Figure 7: Percentage point change in the employment structure in Sub-Saharan Africa by gender between 2019-21

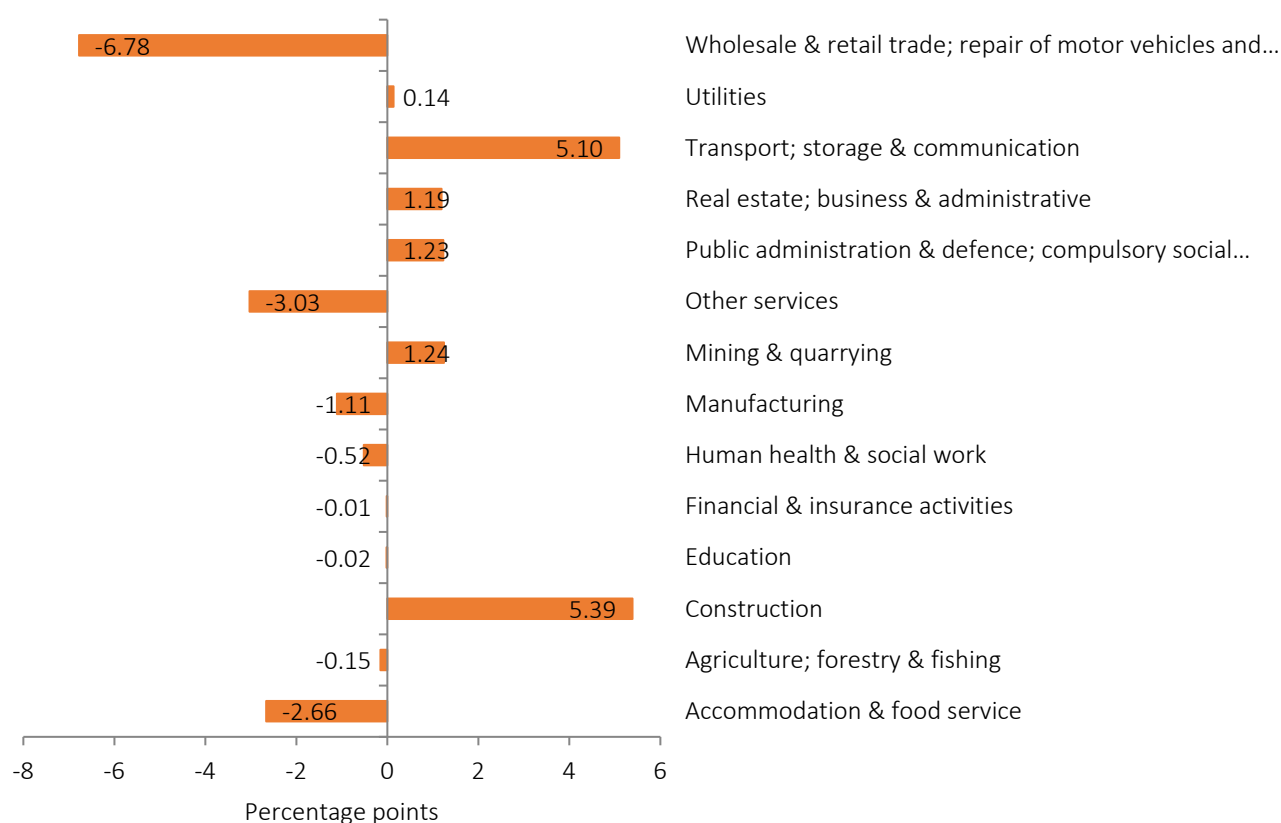


Source: ILO (2022)

The participation gap between males and females for various economic activities is shown in **Figure 8**. This is the difference, in percentage points, between the proportion of males and females employed in each activity. Females see a 6.78 percentage point higher participation in wholesale and retail trade services. Other activities seeing relatively higher female participation include other services (3.03 percentage points higher) and accommodation and food services (2.66 percentage points higher). Perhaps no surprise, males dominate transport, storage, and communication (5.10 percentage points

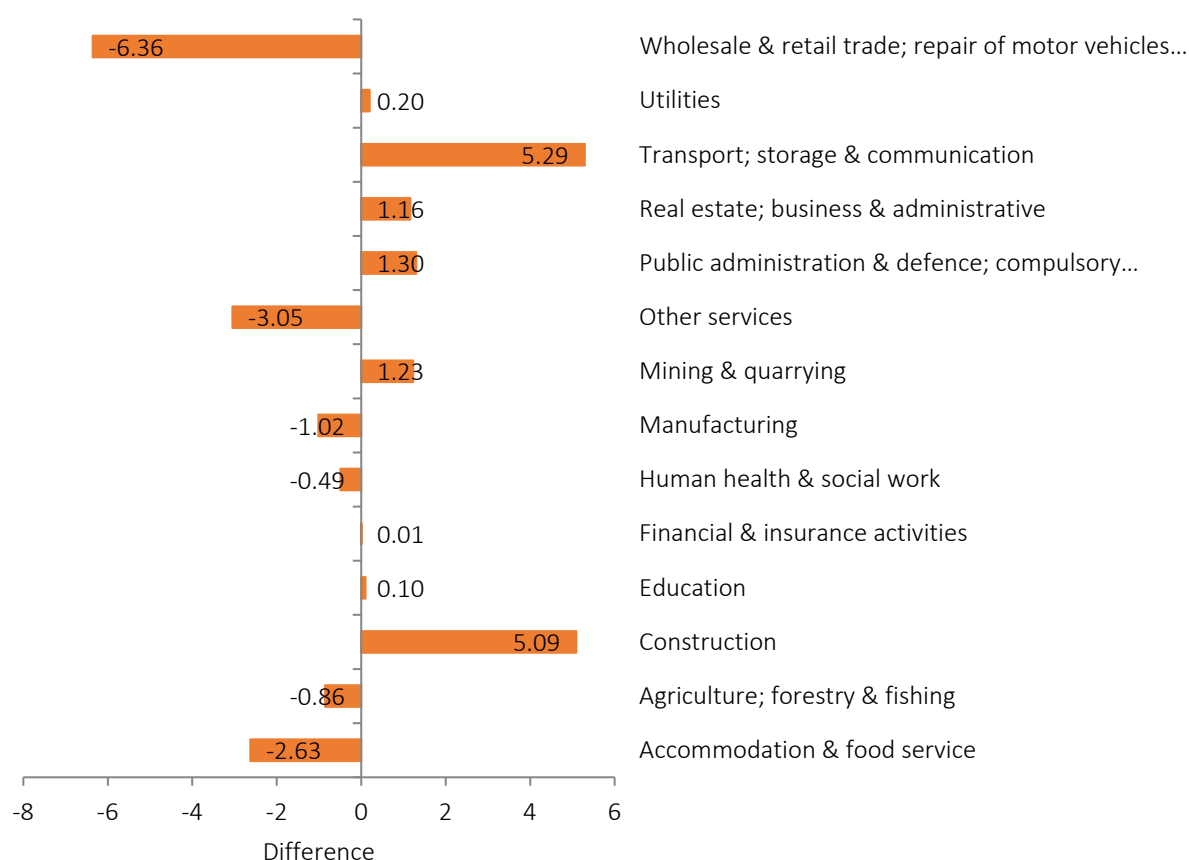
higher) and construction (5.39 percentage points higher). These participation gaps have not changed markedly from 2019 (See **Figure 9**).

Figure 8: Participation gap (male minus female) for 2021



Source: ILO (2022)

Figure 9: Participation gap (male minus female) for 2019



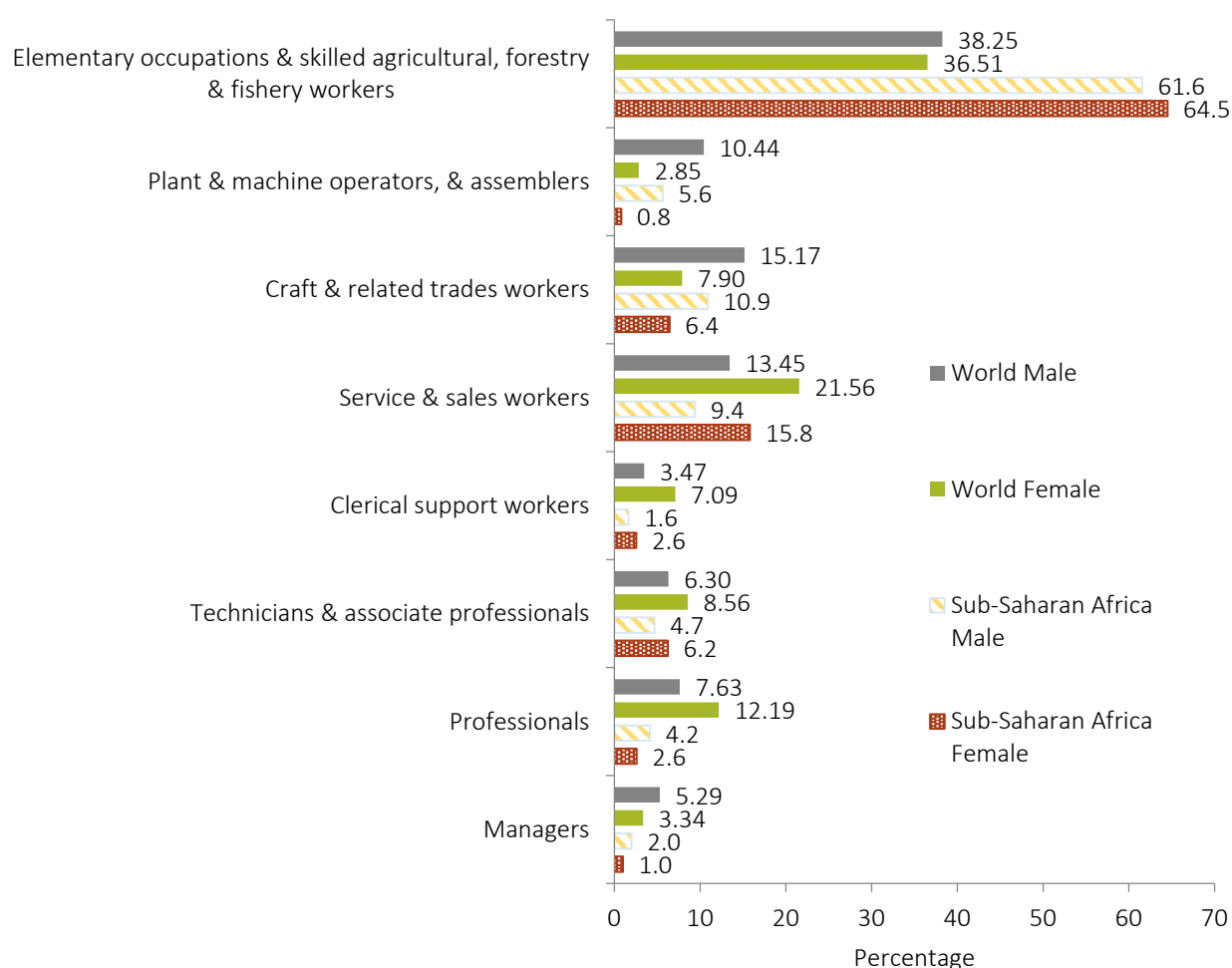
Source: ILO (2020)

2.3 Female participation in occupations

The latest available data for employment disaggregated by sex and occupation is for the year 2020 (ILO, 2022), which is displayed in **Figure 10**. For both sexes, the majority in Sub-Saharan Africa are employed in elementary occupations or as agricultural, forestry and fishery workers (64.5% for females and 61.6% for males). This is more than 20 percentage points greater than their respective world averages. Proportionately more females (15.8%) are employed as service and sales workers in Sub-Saharan Africa relative to males (9.4%). Where females lag considerably behind males in Sub-Saharan Africa are as professionals (2.6% versus 4.2%) and as managers (1% versus 2%). However, for both sexes, these representations are considerably lower than the world average. Given the disconnect between the sexes in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in professional and managerial positions, Africa has some way to go to fully reap the rewards of its demographic dividend through more active participation of females

(and indeed, males too) in higher-skilled positions. As this data illustrates, the largest share of female employment is disproportionately concentrated in low- and middle-skilled occupations. Such employment goes hand in hand with lower wages, lower status, fewer responsibilities, and limited opportunities to grow.

Figure 10: Employment by sex and occupation (2020)



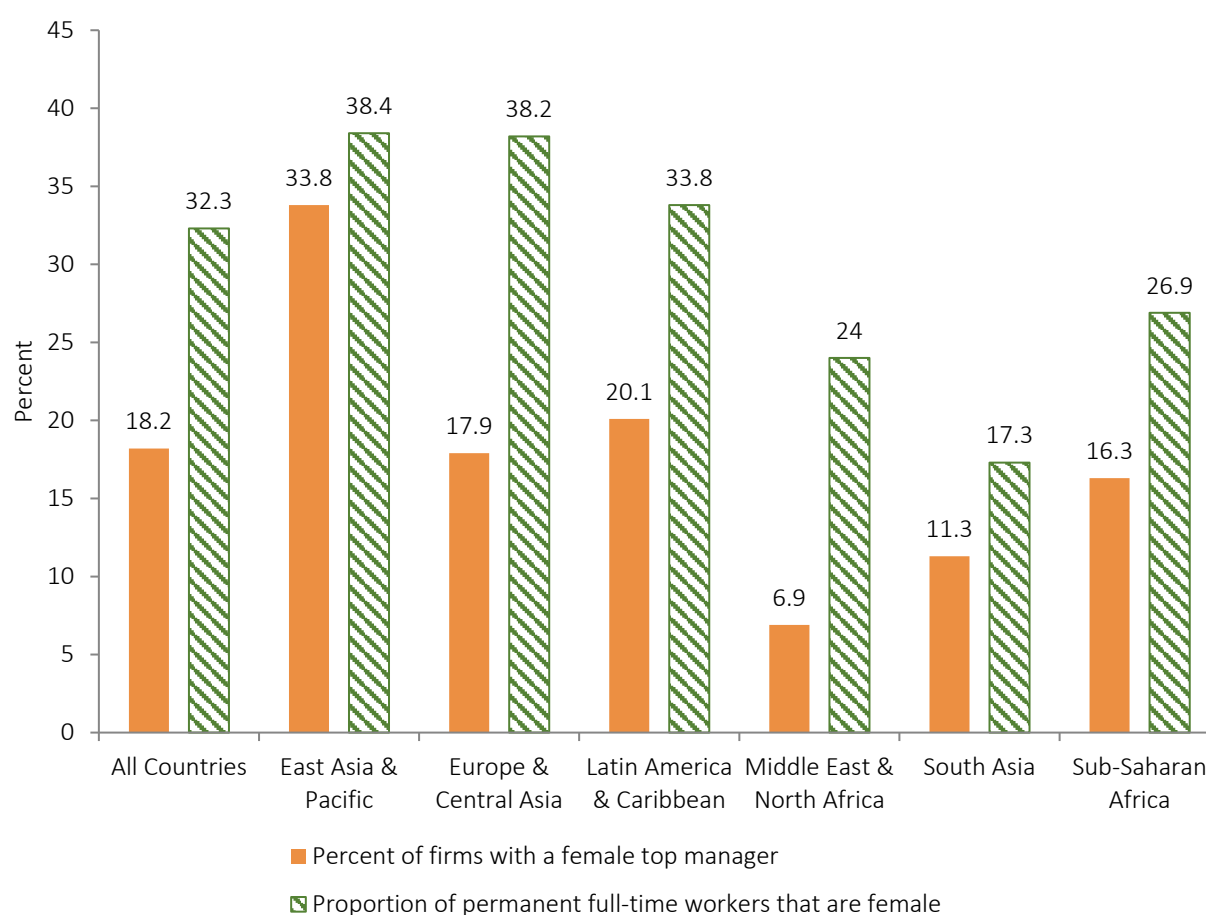
Source: ILO (2022)

2.4 Female participation in management and ownership

Data in this section is sourced from the Enterprise Analysis Unit of the Development Economics Global Indicators Department of the World Bank Group as part of their *World Bank Enterprises Survey* (The World Bank, 2022). Here, we will study female participation in management and ownership.

Figure 11 gives the percentage of full-time workers that are female and the percentage of firms with female management for 2020. The percentage of firms with a female top manager in Sub-Saharan Africa is 16.3% which is just slightly below the world average of 18.2%. This is a growth of 0.1 percentage point in Sub-Saharan Africa from the previous latest available data for 2019. However, of the regions considered, only the Middle East and North Africa (6.9%) and South Asia (11.3%) show lower participation. In terms of the number of permanent full-time employees that are female, Sub-Saharan Africa (26.9%) lags considerably behind the world average (32.3%). Again, however, female participation in Sub-Saharan Africa is higher than in the Middle East and North Africa as well as in South Asia.

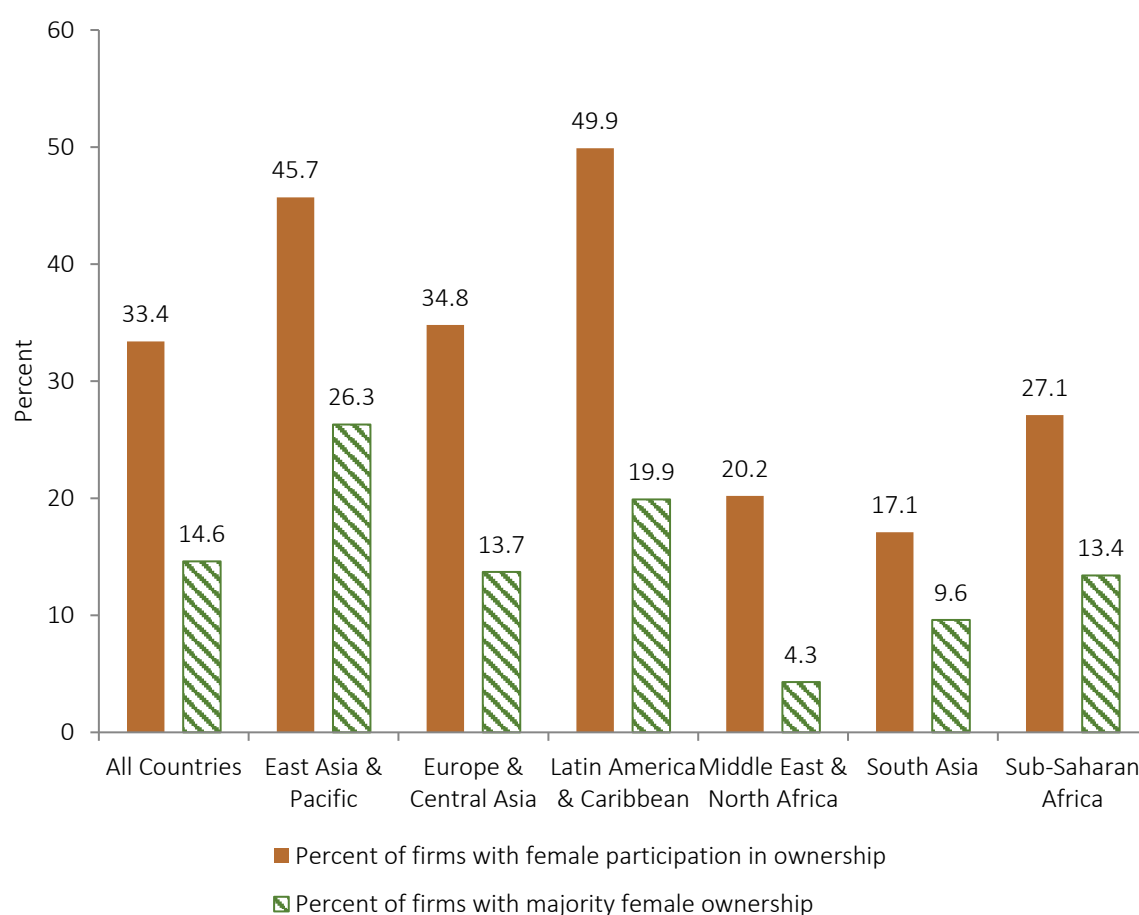
Figure 11: Percentage of full-time workers that are female and firms with female management (2020)



Source: World Bank Enterprises Survey (2022)

An overview of female participation in ownership for several world regions is given in **Figure 12**. These participation statistics are important indicators of gender representation and vertical growth. Unfortunately, Sub-Saharan Africa lags behind the world average in terms of the percentage of firms with female participation in ownership (27.1% versus 33.4%). The region also lags behind the world average in terms of the percentage of firms with a majority female ownership (13.4% versus 14.6%), although this difference is not as stark. Again, Sub-Saharan Africa outperforms South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa.

Figure 12: Female Ownership Participation (2020)



Source: World Bank Enterprises Survey (2022)

2.5 Sustainable Development Goals: Gender equality a focus on Southern Africa

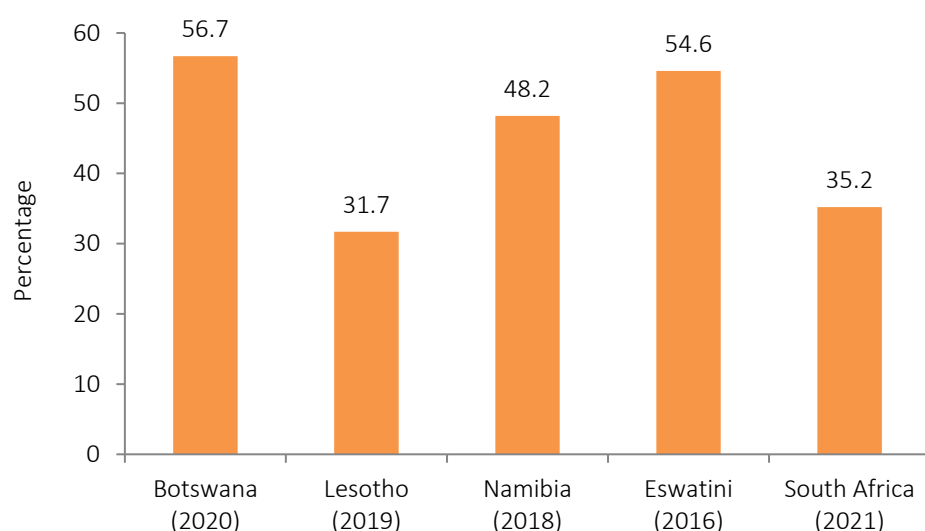
Gender equality is a central pillar of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) enshrined in SDG 5. Targets for SDG5 include, amongst others, ending gender discrimination, ending violence and

exploitation of women and girls, promoting shared domestic responsibilities, and ensuring the full participation of women in leadership and decision-making. The focus for achieving these targets includes providing equal rights to economic resources, property ownership and financial services access for women, empowering women through technology, and adopting, strengthening and enforcing gender equality legislation (United Nations, 2022).

In this section, we will investigate how well certain Sub-Saharan African countries are doing in terms of meeting SDG5 targets. Unfortunately, data are relatively scarce and therefore, we will focus only on countries where it is available, namely South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana and eSwatini.

Figure 13 gives the number of women as a percentage of total employment in senior and middle management positions. Botswana, Namibia and Eswatini are doing remarkably well with 56.7%, 48.2% and 54.6% being women. South Africa lags considerably with only 35.2% women in middle and senior management. This is considerably less than the approximately 51% of women in the population (Statistics SA, 2022). Lesotho also sees a small proportion of only 31.7% women in these management positions.

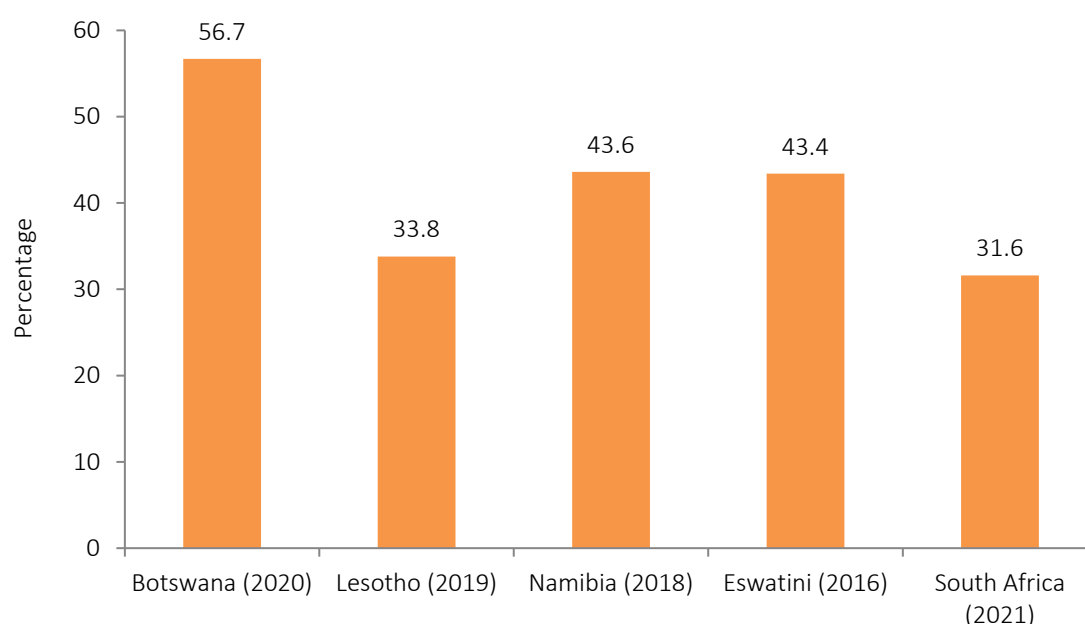
Figure 13: SDG indicator 5.5.2 - Proportion in senior and middle management positions who are women (%)



Source: ILOSTAT (2022)

The proportion who are women in total managerial positions (junior, middle and senior) is shown in **Figure 14**. Again, Botswana, Namibia, and Eswatini do well. However, when junior management is included, Namibia and Eswatini are below the 50% mark which is indicative of not yet realizing their full demographic potential across all spheres of management. When junior management is included, South Africa does the worst amongst the countries considered, only registering a disappointing 31.6% women in total management.

Figure 14: SDG indicator 5.5.2 - Proportion who are women in managerial positions (%)

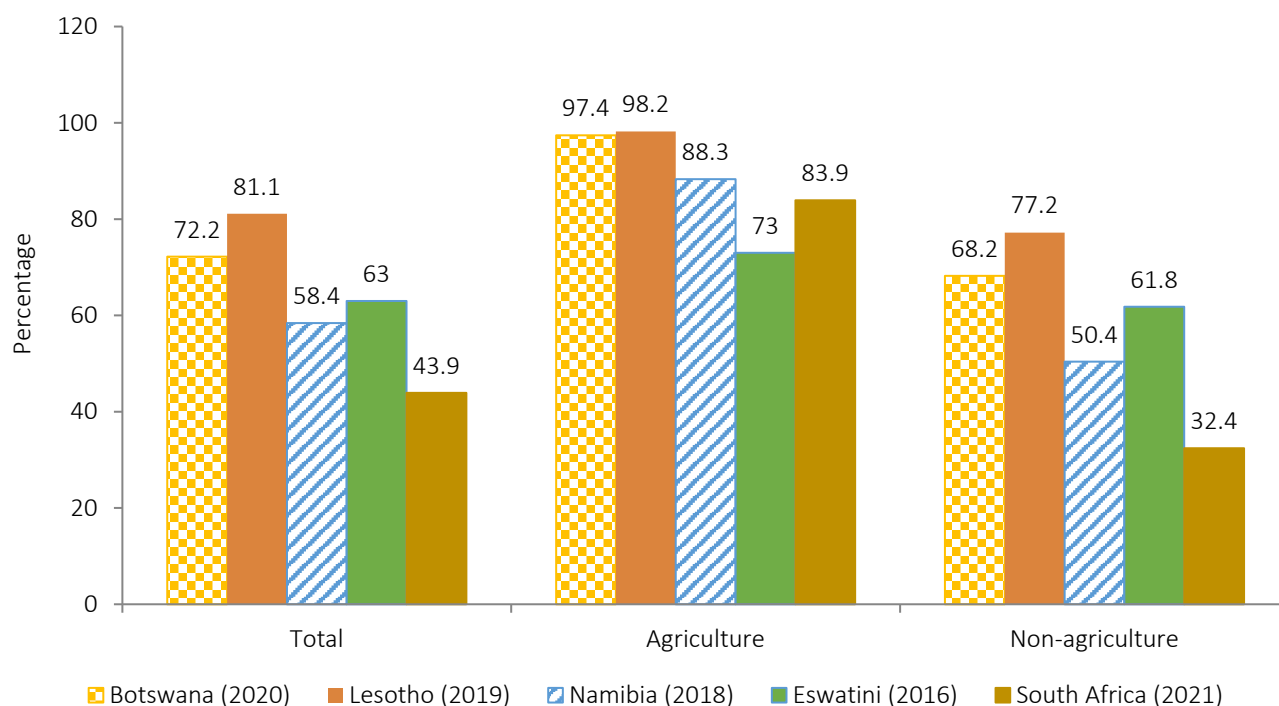


Source: ILOSTAT (2022)

The informal sector plays a significant part in the real economy of Africa. Unfortunately, due to its informal nature, statistics are hard to come by and the informal sector's actual impact is tricky to quantify. However, some statistics do exist. **Figure 15** indicates the proportion of women who are employed in the informal sector. In terms of total employment, Lesotho (81.1%), Botswana (72.2%), Eswatini (63%) and Namibia (58.4%) see a vast majority of females employed in the informal sector. Of employed females, 43.9% are employed in the informal sector in South Africa. In terms of the agricultural sector, there is a considerably higher proportion of females employed in the informal sector, with well above 70% for all the countries considered. In Botswana and Lesotho, almost all

females in agriculture are employed in the informal sector. Considering the non-agriculture sector, a lower proportion of females relative to the agricultural sector are in informal employment.

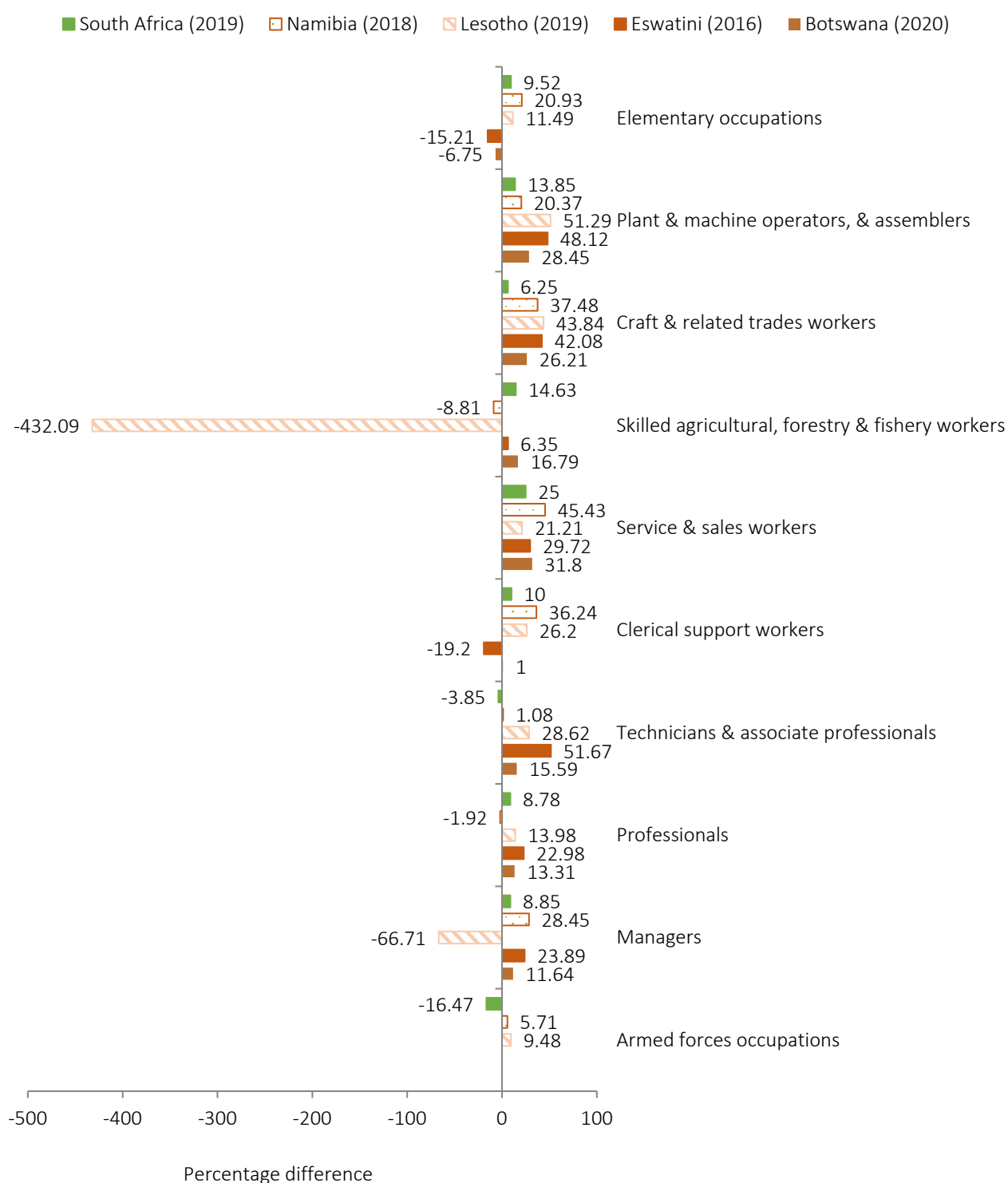
Figure 15: SDG indicator 8.3.1 - Proportion of informal employment* in total employment for females by sector



Source: ILOSTAT (2022)

Another important metric of gender equality is the wage gap in terms of differences in earnings between males and females. **Figure 16** gives a breakdown of the wage gap for various occupations in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa. Excepting the clear outliers of Skilled agricultural, fishery and forestry workers (-432%) and managers (-66.7%) in Lesotho, males considerably outearn females in the vast majority of occupations. Amongst the higher-paid occupations, male managers outearn females by 8.85% in South Africa, 28.45% in Namibia, 23.89% in Eswatini and 11.64% in Botswana. Male professionals also greatly outearn females in South Africa by 8.78%, in Lesotho by 13.98%, 22.98% in Eswatini and 13.31% in Botswana.

Figure 16: Wage Gap* between Males and Females in various occupations



Source: ILO (2022)

* Calculated as average earnings of men minus average earnings of women expressed as a percentage of the average earnings of men

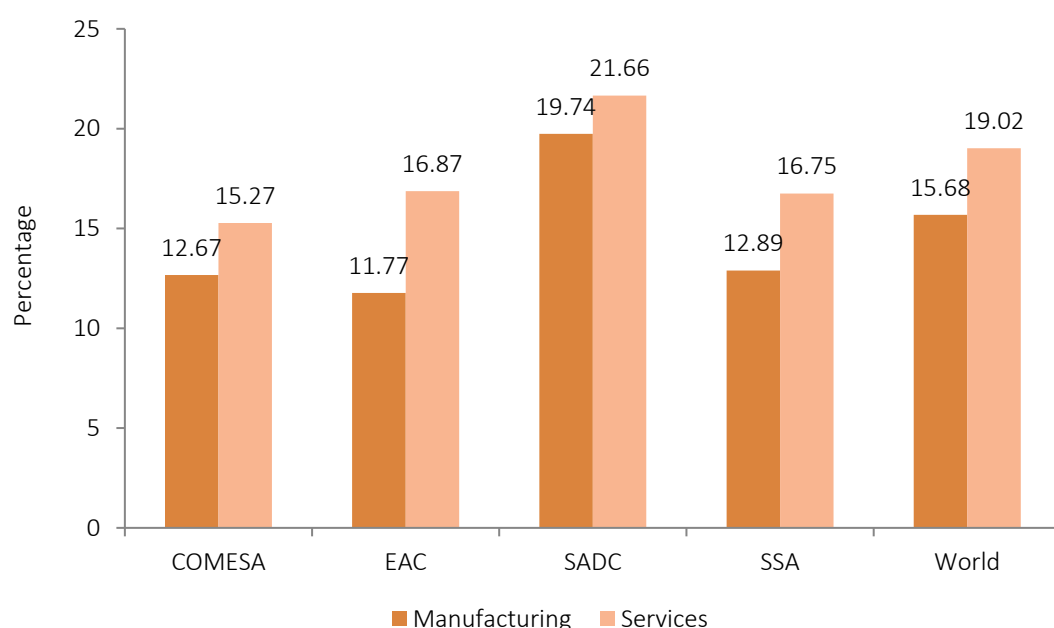
3. Sub-Saharan Africa and regional economies: Firm characteristics disaggregated by sex of management

The data in this section is primarily sourced from the Enterprise Analysis Unit of the Development Economics Global Indicators Department of the World Bank Group as part of their *World Bank Enterprises Survey* (The World Bank, 2022). Data were aggregated across countries and an average was calculated for each region based on the latest available data per country. Here we will consider female participation in the services and manufacturing sectors. Constraints to business, technology and innovation, as well as service sector exports and imports characteristics will also be studied.

3.1 Female participation in manufacturing and services firms

The percentage of manufacturing and services firms with female top managers for various regions is shown in **Figure 17**. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) lags behind the world average, both in manufacturing (12.89% versus 15.68%) and services (16.75% versus 19.02%). COMESA and the EAC also trail the world average. However, SADC has, on average, when compared to the world, a higher percentage of firms with female top managers in both manufacturing and services.

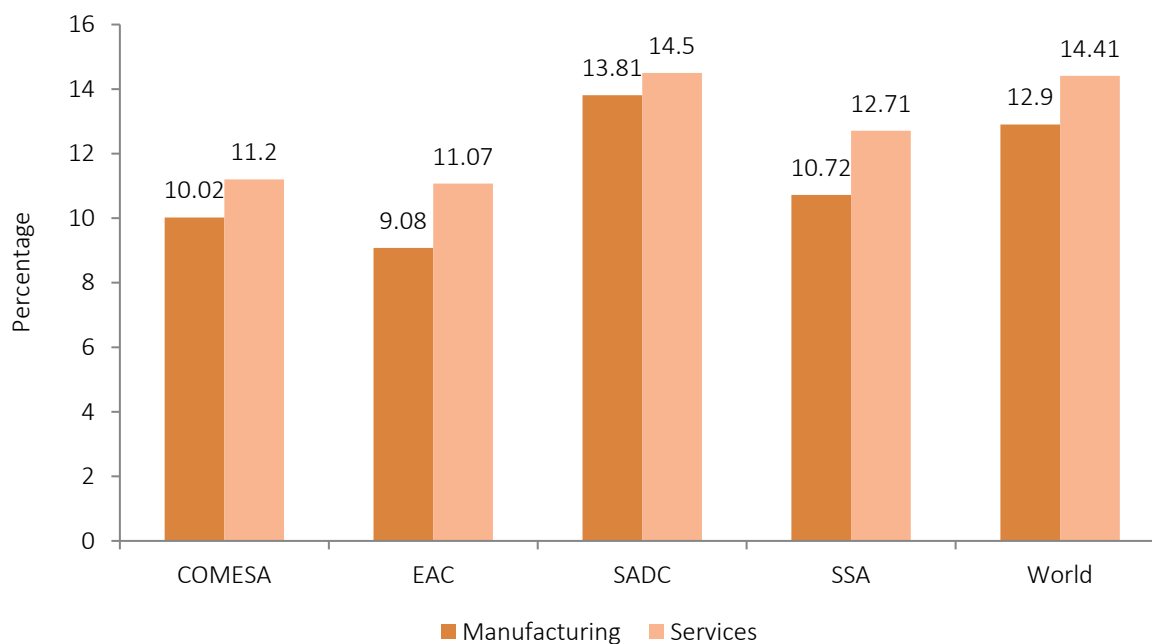
Figure 17: Percentage of firms with female top managers



Source: Author's calculations from World Enterprises Survey (2022)

Figure 18 shows the percentage of firms with a majority female ownership. Again, SADC slightly edges the world average in both manufacturing and services firms (13.81% versus 12.9% and 14.5% versus 14.41% respectively). COMESA, EAC and SSA all do significantly worse than the world average.

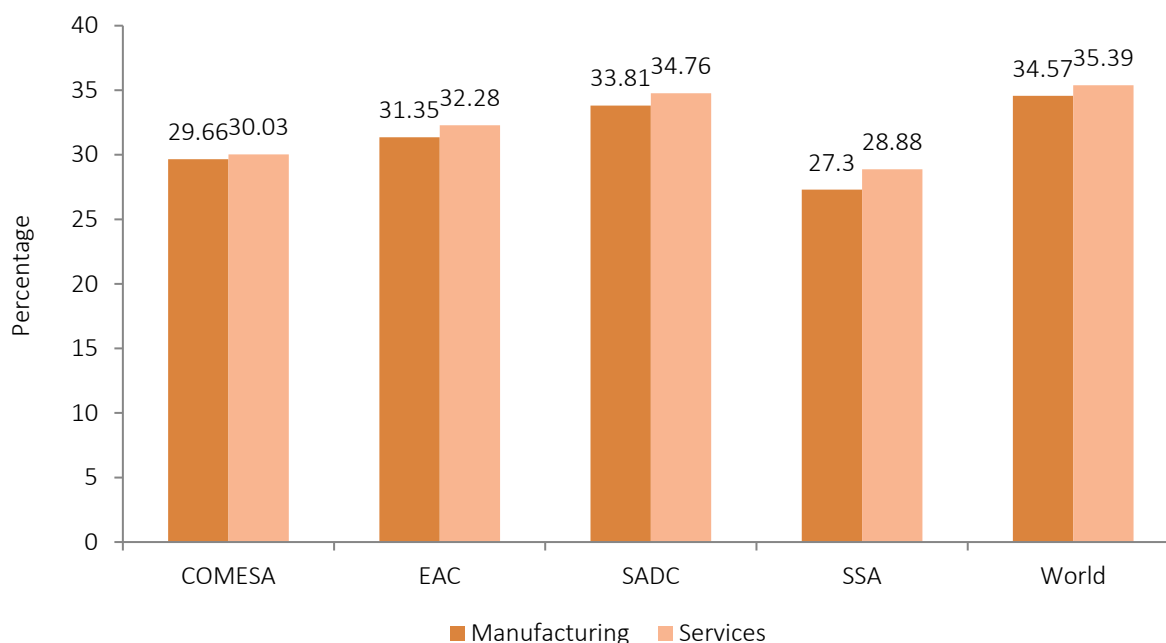
Figure 18: Percentage of firms with a majority female ownership



Source: Author's calculations from World Enterprises Survey (2022)

The percentage of firms with female participation in ownership is highlighted in **Figure 19**. Here, all the considered regions in Africa have lower participation, on average, in both manufacturing and services firms when compared to the world. SADC is the best performer of the African regions, where it, along with COMESA and EAC see higher female participation on average than SSA as a whole.

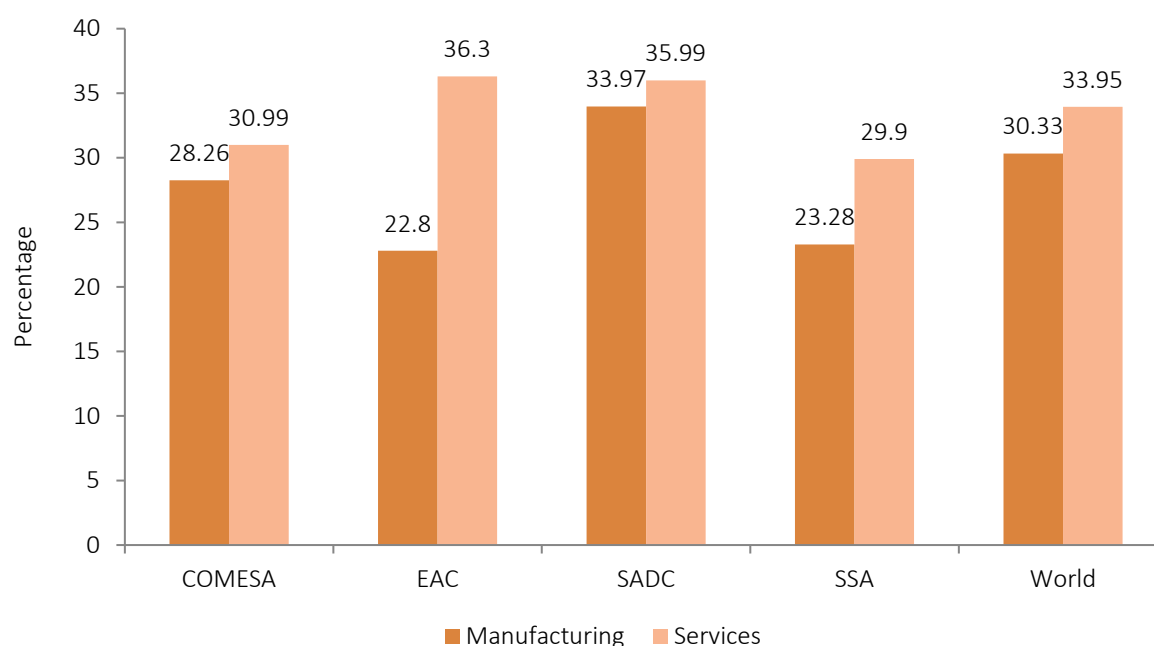
Figure 19: Percentage of firms with female participation in ownership



Source: Author's calculations from World Enterprises Survey (2022)

Of the proportion of full-time workers that are female (**Figure 20**), SADC (35.99%) and EAC (33.97%) exceed the world average for services (33.95%). However, only SADC at 33.97% exceeds the world average for manufacturing (30.33%). EAC sees the highest percentage of females in services (36.3%), which is marginally higher than SADC (35.99%). SADC sees the highest representation of females in manufacturing (33.97%) relative to the other regions.

Figure 20: Proportion of full-time workers that are female



Source: Author's calculations from World Enterprises Survey (2022)

Considering the above, we see that female participation in ownership and management is considerably less than demographics would reflect, regardless of the region.

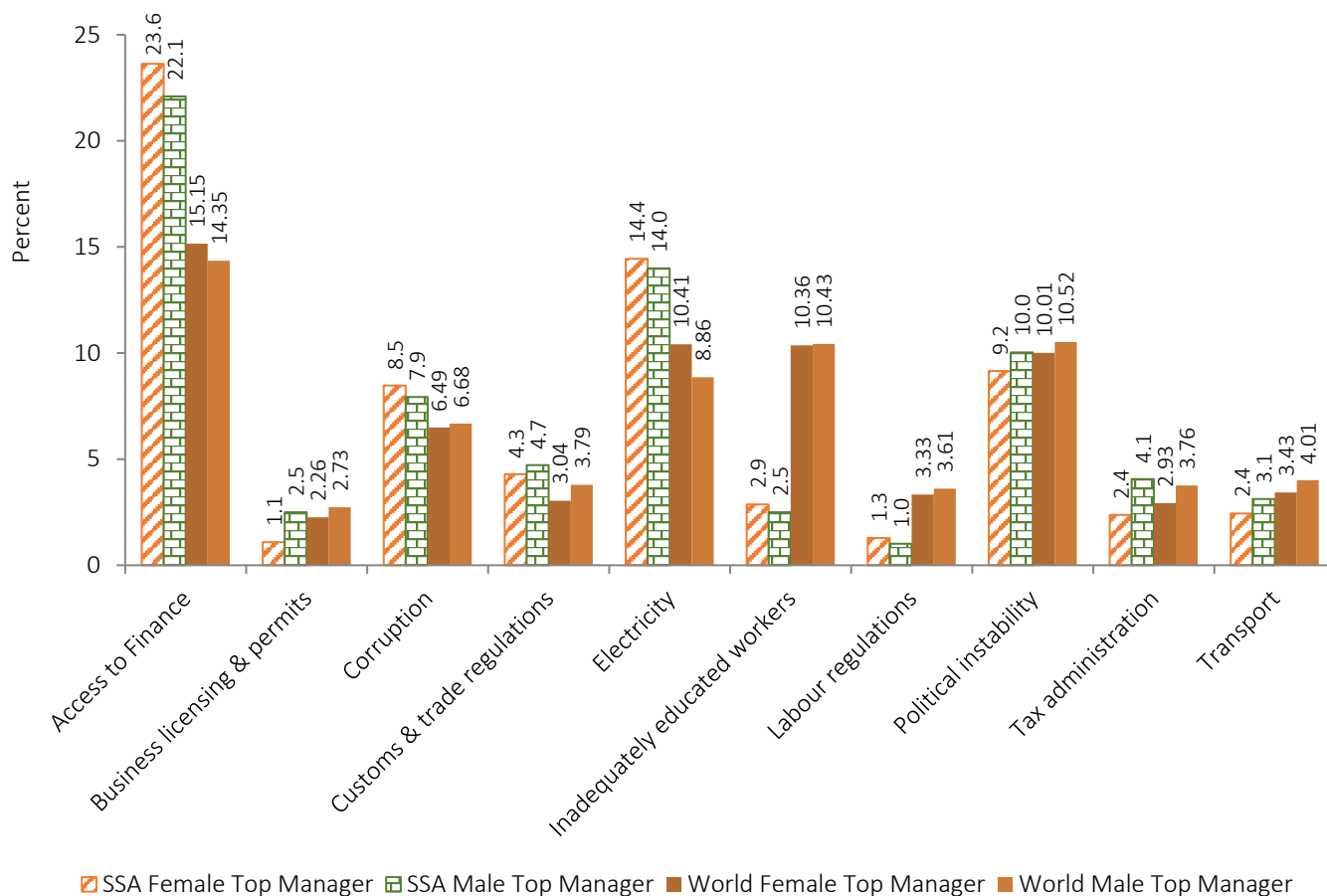
3.2 Constraints to business

Operating a business is a challenge, regardless of the environment or region. Businesses with female managers often face different challenges than men in the same region. Such differences could simply be struggling to negotiate favourable business contracts, securing customers, and establishing a brand name. **Figure 21** shows the various challenges faced by firms disaggregated according to the sex of the top manager.

Firms in SSA with female top managers struggle the most with access to finance with 23.6% of firms reporting this as an issue. This is considerably more than the world average of female top managers at 15.15% of firms. The second greatest challenge for firms with female top managers in SSA is electricity, with 14.4% of firms reporting this as a challenge. Political instability comes in third place, with 9.2% of firms with female top managers in SSA saying that this is a constraint. Other major challenges include corruption (8.5% of firms), and customs and trade regulations (4.3% of firms). Given these identified

constraints, if governments were to facilitate processes to lower these barriers, one can expect major improvements in the ease of doing business and associated growth in trade in services.

Figure 21: Major constraints to business for firms by top manager sex (percentage of firms)



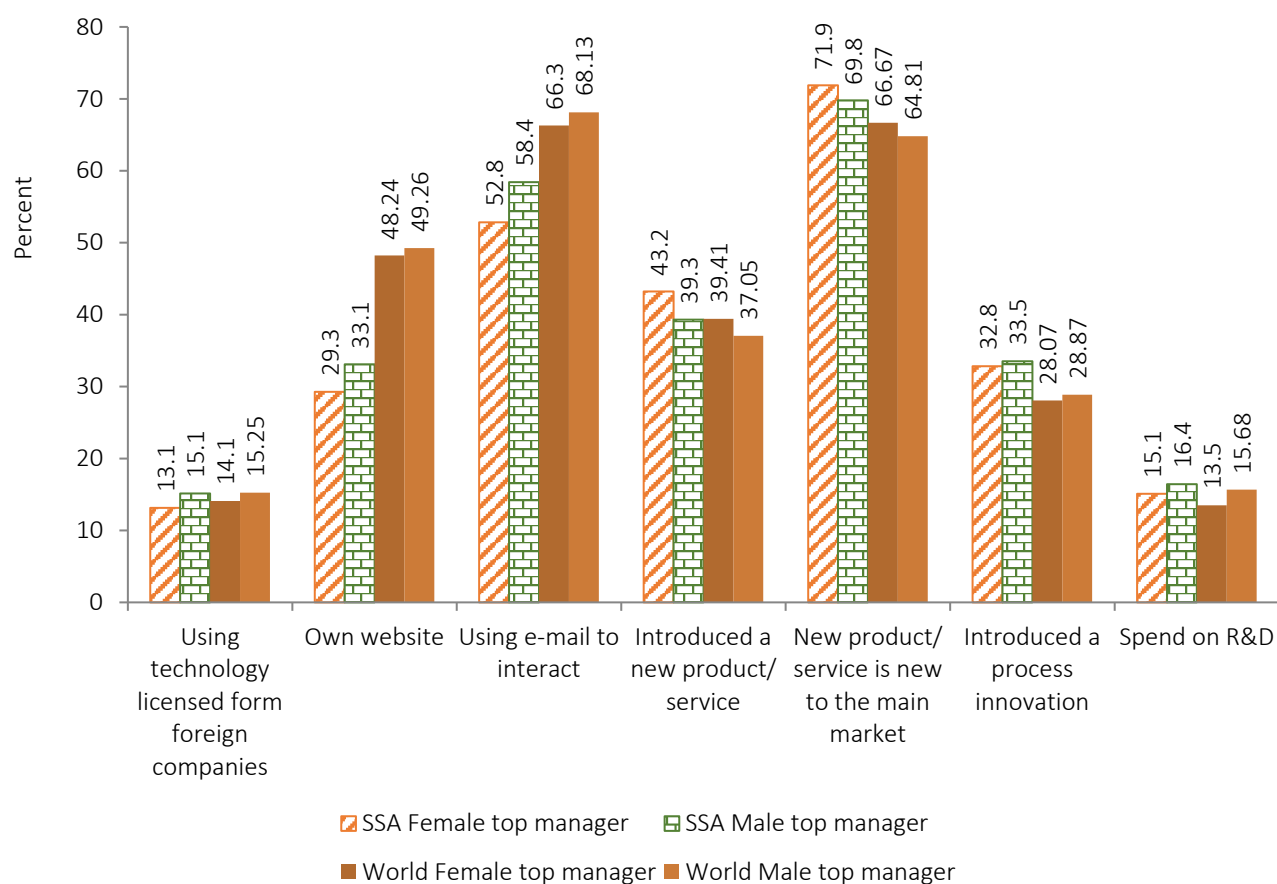
Source: Author's calculations from World Enterprises Survey (2022)

3.3 Technology and innovation

Figure 22 shows the percentage of firms using various technologies and/or producing innovations. It is clear in SSA with top managers regardless of sex that the number of firms having their own website and using e-mail to interact is considerably below the world average. This could be for various reasons, ranging from not having internet access to not being in contact with professionals who can design and maintain websites. What is striking is that SSA firms compared to the world average, regardless of the sex of the top manager, are more likely to introduce a new product and/or service, introduce a new

product and/or service to the market, and introduce a process innovation. This occurs often in direct response to the vast untapped potential market for innovative products and/ or services in the region.

Figure 22: Technology and innovation characteristics for firms by top manager sex



Source: Author's calculations from World Enterprises Survey (2022)

3.4 Service sector exports and imports

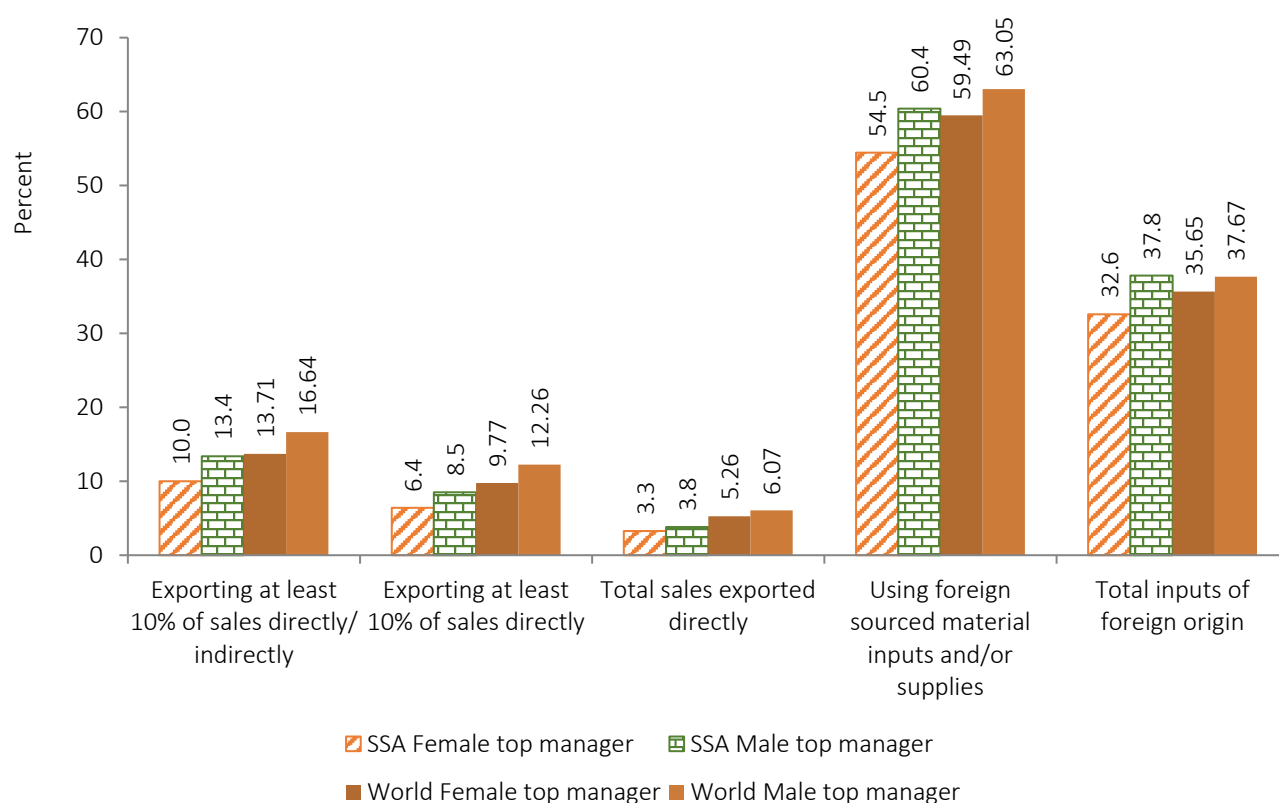
As already discussed, growth in services trade has the potential to lead to net welfare gains in society. It also allows for foreign cash injections as well as increasing competitiveness which boosts firm performances and employment availability.

Figure 23 shows the trade characteristics of firms disaggregated according to the sex of the top manager. For both sexes, we see fewer firms relative to the world average reporting that they export at least 10% of their sales indirectly and directly (10% for females and 13.4% for males). Fewer firms in

SSA compared to the world average also a smaller percentage of total sales being exported directly, 3.3% for female top manager firms and 3.8% for male top manager firms.

For firms in SSA, regardless of the sex of the top manager, we see them using marginally less foreign-sourced material as inputs and/or supplies. However, these firms still represent a majority of the sample. Furthermore, for firms in SSA with female top managers relative to the world average, we note a lower fraction of total inputs that are of foreign origin (32.6% versus 35.65%). For firms with male top managers in SSA, we see that the percentage of total inputs that are of foreign origin is slightly higher relative to the world (37.8% versus 37.67%).

Figure 23: Trade characteristics for firms by top manager sex



Source: Author's calculations from World Enterprises Survey (2022)

4. Conclusion

This paper has served as an update to the data on female participation in the economy within Sub-Saharan Africa. We note that, on average, females in Sub-Saharan Africa trail the world average for

females in terms of ownership, participation and employment, specifically in higher-paid professions. Moreover, in many instances, female activity severely lags that of males in Sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, the continent is not yet yielding the full fruit of its demographic dividend. Access to finance remains a major constraint to business success for females in Sub-Saharan Africa, with access to electricity being another significant constraint. However, of female-managed firms, a vast majority have introduced a product and/ or service which was also new to the main market. This highlights the great potential for innovation and growth within the sector.

Women play a prominent role in trade within Africa. For Africa to realise the full potential of women, governments should focus on policies facilitating access to key trader networks, address harassment and extortion at the border (which women are more likely to face), and speed up time-consuming trade procedures and documentation obligations (Brenton et al., 2013). Time-consuming procedures are especially detrimental to women as this usually conflicts with the time they devote to household duties and the community.

Finally, as shown, women are less likely than men to obtain material inputs for their businesses which would raise productivity and directly increase competitiveness (both within countries and internationally). Being cognizant of these facts, and facilitating the important role that women do, can, and should play in the economy will go a long way towards Africa reaping the full potential of services trade and the participation of women in economic development.

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