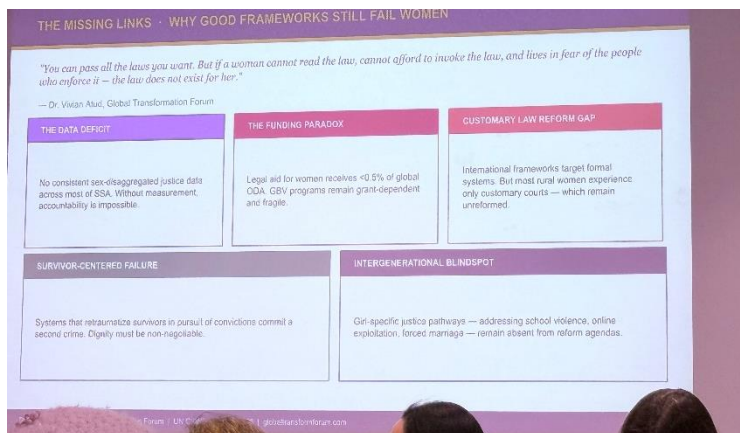


## Women push for access to justice Financing Reform Across Sub-Saharan Africa



The session on access to justice in New York during the UN 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2026. Source (CSBAG)

### Expanding publicly funded legal aid, investing in community-based paralegal systems, and embedding justice services within broader social protection frameworks.

A growing body of evidence presented at the 70th UN CSW confirms that limited access to justice for women is not only a human rights issue but a significant economic burden on households, communities, and national economies across Sub-Saharan Africa.

CSBAG is attending the UNCSW and from our observation, evidence from multiple regions highlighted how systemic barriers—including legal costs,

weak institutions, and social stigma—translate into measurable financial losses, particularly for women in rural and low-income settings.

In South Africa, one panelist described how the failure of justice systems to respond effectively to intimate partner violence forces women to remain in abusive environments, limiting their economic participation and undermining household stability. Across countries such as Nigeria and Brazil, the discussion underscored how the cost of pursuing justice particularly legal fees, travel, documentation, often exceeds what many women can afford. Rural women face compounded challenges, including long travel distances to courts and limited availability of legal aid, effectively pricing them out of justice systems.

These barriers have ripple effects beyond individuals. Children's education, community well-being, and local economies are all impacted when women are unable to claim their rights or seek protection. Of importance was the fact the chronic underfunding of justice systems and women-focused services. Many organizations providing legal aid and survivor support operate on limited donor funding, restricting their reach and sustainability. This financing gap, speakers argued, reflects a broader failure to prioritize justice as a public good.

Digital inequality was identified as an emerging economic dimension of the justice gap. With rising cases of cyberbullying and online gender-based violence, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls face new forms of harm that can damage reputations, limit educational opportunities, and reduce income prospects. Yet investment in digital literacy and reporting mechanisms remains insufficient.

Examples of more integrated financing approaches offered a glimpse of potential solutions. Brazil's cross-sectoral "Casa da Mulher" model was cited as a promising effort to streamline services which, combining legal, health, and social support in one system, thereby reducing the financial and logistical burden on survivors. It was concluded that there is need to shift towards comprehensive, cross-cutting financing strategies that treat access to justice as an economic priority. Proposed measures include: Expanding publicly funded legal aid, investing in community-based paralegal systems, and embedding justice services within broader social protection frameworks.

Recognizing and valuing the care economy within national accounting systems, noting that women's unpaid caregiving responsibilities often limit their ability to seek justice or recover economically from violence. As global attention increasingly turns to financing gender equality, CSBAG and its members must strengthen advocacy for financing women's access to justice as well as enhancing accountability. Key areas of interest include advocating for cross-sector financing approaches, linking justice to health, education, and social protection budgets.

In addition, CSBAG's policy influence can help elevate the economic case for justice financing, framing access to justice not as a standalone legal issue but as a driver of economic productivity, household resilience, and inclusive growth. Ultimately, it was agreed that without sustained investment and financial innovation, justice systems will continue to exclude the very women they are meant to protect.

**About UNCSW70:** The United Nations 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW70), happening between 9<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> March 2026, has gathered delegates from across the world including Ministers, UN experts, civil society leaders, and regional blocs, to interrogate one of the most enduring challenges to gender equality: the global failure to ensure full and equitable access to justice for women and girls. Delegates are also reviewing progress on women's participation in public life and the elimination of violence against women.