



Africa Ministerial Pre-Consultation on the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 62nd Session

21 - 23 February 2018

Outcome Document

PREAMBLE

We, Ministers of the African Union (AU) in Charge of Gender Equality and Women's Affairs, Representatives of Regional Economic Communities (RECS) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs), NGGO CSW Africa, members of the Gender is my Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) and other representatives of civil society including African young women and men living in rural areas, the Pan African Parliament, UN Agencies and other development partners, meeting at the Africa Union Commission to deliberate on and prepare for the Sixty-Second Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) that will take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 12 to 23 March 2018 on the theme: "*Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls*";

This Africa Ministerial Pre-Consultation on the Commission on the Status of Women 62nd Session was jointly organized by the African Union Commission (AUC), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The African Union's Bureau of the Specialized Technical Committee (on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (STC GEWE) provided strategic and political leadership for the organizing and running of this Ministerial Meeting.

In preparation of CSW62 and the Regional Consultation, Member States held national consultative meetings, engaging relevant stakeholders, local communities and especially women and girls living in rural areas to ensure that their needs, challenges and opportunities inform Africa's common position of the CSW62 Agreed Conclusions. The Regional Consultative meeting provided the Member States with the opportunity to agree on a strategy for effective collaboration and linkages with the Africa Group in New York to ensure an AU Member States Common Africa position to secure the CSW62 Agreed Conclusions. The participants further strategized on how to ensure effective implementation, monitoring and reporting of the Commission's Recommendations, including priority actions to advance the gender equality priorities of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063.



Committed to, the progressive normative frameworks that have been put in place by the African Union and its Member States, including, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEGA), the African Youth Charter (AC), the Youth Decade Plan of Action, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), the 10 Year Implementation Plan of AU Agenda 2063, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030, the African Women’s Decade (2010–2020), the Declaration on African Human Rights Decade and the Revised Maputo Plan of Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (2016 - 2030, the Malabo Declaration etc.), Abuja declaration on HIV, the African Common Position on ending child marriage; all which emphasize that the empowerment of women and girls living in rural areas and the realization of their human rights and gender equality are essential to the achievement of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Agenda 2030 and indeed Africa’s own Agenda 2063;

Recognizing, that rural communities in Africa are endowed with natural resources, however they are under resourced. Also recognizing the intersectionality and the indivisibility and the diversity in Africa and the fact that women and girls living in rural areas face differing realities and challenges across the continent which nevertheless, are all inextricably linked to gender inequality and structural barriers, including women’s unequal access to power and resources which disadvantages and discriminates against women and girls living in rural areas;

Acknowledging, that more than 50% of Africa’s population are women, and that more than 80% of these reside in rural areas and with more than 60% of women’s employment in rural areas in the agriculture sector, concentrated in time and labor intensive, informal and poorly paid activities with little social protection or income security;

Acknowledging, that women and girls living in rural areas are the backbone of African economies and that their contribution is slowly being recognized;

Cognizance that women and girls living in rural areas in Africa, face structural barriers to the full enjoyment of their human rights, which are often inadequately or insufficiently addressed in laws, policies, budgets, investments, and interventions at all levels across the continent;

Noting with concern, that women and girls living in rural areas are often excluded from leadership, and decision making, and it is evident that they are underrepresented in local and national institutions and governance mechanisms, which leads to their diminished voice, agency and decision-making power;

Further noting that women and girls living in rural areas are disproportionately affected by poverty and unequal access, control and ownership of land and natural resources, financing, infrastructure and services, and decent work and social protection;



Concerned, that the limited access to quality social services, infrastructure, energy and labor saving technology, coupled with the reproductive role of women which increases the burden of care on women and girls. This unpaid care work, time use of women and girls and multiple deprivations continue to undermine women and girls living in rural areas access to further skills development, quality educational opportunities and pursuing positions of leadership, access to affordable and quality healthcare and empowerment opportunities and adult literacy which are in violation of their human rights and which further limits their access to education and future economic, social and political empowerment opportunities;

Deeply concerned, that women and girls living in rural areas are affected by sexual and gender based violence, high prevalence of maternal mortality, HIV and AIDs, child labor including unpaid care and domestic work and harmful practices including child marriage, FGM/C, breast ironing, new types of sexual harassment including technology assisted violence against women and girls, impact of climate change, issues related to civil registration and statelessness and numerous violations against the girl child all negative practices that continue to impede young women and girls rights; also concerned that limit access to quality services for prevention of violence and for support to survivors of violence such as law enforcement and justice, health and social services and psychosocial support, including support to survival of obstetrical fistula;

Further concerned that gender data gaps and gender statistics remain a key challenge to evidence based policy formulation, monitoring, implementation and by programming and makes it difficult to achieve the agenda of '**Leave No One Behind**' as per the global Agenda 2030 and AU's own Agenda 2063;

Recognizing; the circumstances of girls and women living in rural areas, who face precarious conditions due to conflict and fragility (both women and girl refugees, internally displaced and host communities); violent extremism and insecurities which entail but not limited to terrorism.

Committed, to ensuring that every, woman, and girl living in rural areas, living with HIV/AIDS, living with disabilities, refugee or internally displaced, negatively affected by all forms of migration and trafficking, elderly, orphaned and widowed, women in conflict settings, single parenting, child headed households, are valued and can contribute to the development of their families, communities and countries when prioritized and sufficiently resourced;

RESOLVE; to shift the narrative from "Rural Women and Girls" to "Women and girls living in rural areas" and thereby address the underlying issues of inequalities and lack of prioritization of investment in rural communities which creates the disparities and disempowerment of women and girls.



CALL TO ACTION:

We hereby call for the following actions to address the challenges and build on the contributions of women and girls living in rural areas by:

- 1. *Changing the narrative from “Rural Women and Girls”:*** We call upon the Commission on the Status of Women at its 62nd Session to note that, it is not the women who are rural, but that it is the context and environment within which the women and girls derive their livelihoods and experience which is rural. Hence, we call for focus to be on interventions that change those contexts and environments for the benefit of the women and girls.
- 2. *Securing the rights of women and girls living in rural areas to land and productive resources:*** Ensuring women’s rights to land and other productive resources is correlated with a broad range of benefits for women and girls living in rural areas, including greater decision-making power and economic independence as well as freedom from violence and intimidation. Strong legal and policy frameworks and their effective implementation at national and local levels are needed alongside the elimination of discriminatory gender norms and practices to secure women’s rights and access and control to land and security of tenure.
- 3. *Eradicating poverty, hunger and malnutrition:*** women and girls living in rural areas continue to suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition, with the number of chronically undernourished people increasing in Africa. To eradicate poverty, hunger and malnutrition by 2030 will require increasing agricultural productivity, incomes, access to technology, financial inclusion; supporting sustainable agriculture and food production systems, and conserving and equitably sharing the benefits of agricultural biodiversity. It would also mean negotiating trade rules to protect domestic policy space for agricultural development and food security, while prioritizing women’s and girl’s empowerment and gender equality. This will include the creation of food banks in rural areas which are managed by women and development off season agriculture strategy.
- 4. *Investing in education and life-long learning for women and girls living in rural areas:*** women and girls living in rural areas are at the greatest disadvantage in terms of schooling, literacy and adult education. Greater and more systematic investments are required to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure women’s and girls’ full and equal participation and completion of quality education (primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational and technical). This means providing access to good school infrastructure and technology, reducing the distance to school, and ensuring safe environments, quality teachers, school retention programs and the eradication of sexual harassment in schools; ensuring re-entry and other educational means for girls and young women who dropped out of school because of early marriage and pregnancy, child marriage, poverty, conflict and other factors in rural areas. Adequately resourced initiatives targeted at girls living in rural areas should be implemented to expand the scope of ICT-enabled mobile learning, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and literacy training.



5. Invest and avail essential infrastructure and technology: including sustainable energy, safe and sustainable transport, safely managed water and sanitation, and ICT. These services tend to reach women and girls living in rural areas last. But these are vital for enhancing their economic and educational opportunities and reducing and redistributing their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. To address these inequalities, increased investments and innovative partnerships are needed, increase women's participation and decision making and ensure women's economic participation in these sectors.

6. Strengthening the voice, supporting the effective and equal participation, decision-making and leadership at all levels of women and girls living in rural areas. All structures of governance, political, private sector, Civil Society Organizations, enterprises and cooperatives are critical for strengthening the voice, agency and representation of women and girls living in rural areas in the political, social and economic spheres, for claiming their rights and allowing them to influence the decisions and institutions that affect their lives and livelihoods. A conducive legislative and policy environment as well as secure funding to facilitate their participation in decision making are required to strengthen the organizing capacity and mentorship, of girls and young women.

7. Eliminating all forms of sexual and gender based violence, harmful practices and child marriage in Africa: Accelerate efforts to eliminate all forms of violence and harmful practices including FGM, all forms of trafficking, child marriages, breast ironing and widow cleansing, affecting women and girls living in rural areas. Ensure access to essential social, health, psycho-social support and justice services for survivors of these forms of violence. This requires facilitating advocacy campaigns on the rights of women, predictable and long term financial support and investments, including through gender-responsive fiscal and social policies.

8. Realizing the sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of women and girls living in rural areas in line with the Maputo Protocol article 14ⁱ: The lack of access, information, and services about sexual and reproductive health is particularly acute for women, especially young women and girls living in rural areas. Women and girls need the resources, services and opportunities to have access to age appropriate education and to manage their own sexual and reproductive health and exercise their rights including addressing the socio, economic and health impacts of HIV and AIDS.

9. Integrate gender in macroeconomic models: We call for accelerated integration of gender into macroeconomic models that position women and girls living in rural areas at the center. Curb Illicit Financial Flows and invest those resources in social sectors that have disproportionate impact on women and girls living in rural areas as well as implement the recommendation of the High-level panel report of illicit financial flows. In addition, adopt and implement progressive national tax systems that collect revenue fairly and distribute equitably.

10. Expanding opportunities for women's economic empowerment: We call for accelerated integration of gender into macroeconomic models that position women and girls living in rural areas at the center. These should promote ownership, control, management and participation by women living in rural areas at all levels of the rural economy and across economic sectors, including mining, eco-tourism, construction and manufacturing. Women living in rural areas should be supported to benefit



directly from economic activity to enhance their economic status including through facilitating access to finance, markets and entrepreneurship skills development, quotas for rural women in public procurement and support for women-owned businesses.

11. *Promotion of the financial inclusion of women and girls living in rural areas:*

Acknowledging women's access to finance and their financial inclusion is key to their empowerment, meaningful participation in value chains of productive sectors and eradicating financial illiteracy. Efforts should be exerted to promote women's financial inclusion through raising financial awareness, knowledge and culture of savings and loans and to support them in initiating small, medium and large-scale enterprises.

12. *Recognizing women's unpaid care work:* It is vital to undertake targeted measures to recognize, value, reduce, redistribute unpaid care work mainly performed by women and girls in rural Africa. There is a need to conduct time use surveys and systematically incorporate the value of this work in the calculation of GDP and the formulation of economic and social policies.

13. *Climate Change and Sustainable Agriculture, Aquaculture and Mari-culture:* We recommend that Governments take decisive action to transform existing agricultural policies, fully embracing climate resilient sustainable agriculture (CRSA) and use of marine resources as an alternative model that is economically viable, addresses the specific needs and protects the rights of women living in rural areas, and is environmentally sustainable; this includes attention to corporate accountability as well as public agricultural financing and budgeting.

14. *Investing in conflict prevention, management and post conflict reconstruction:* Conflict and fragility undermine sustainable development and exacerbate burdens faced by women and girls living in rural areas. Therefore, achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, sustainable peace requires protection for women and girls in conflict and humanitarian setting, increased investments and meaningful participation of women and girls in conflict prevention, management and resolution and post conflict reconstruction.

15. *Accelerating gender-responsive measures to end the Aids epidemic:* Support the reaffirmation of resolution CSW 60/2 on women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS and reiterate the continued resolve to achieve the commitment made therein. Recognize and address the disproportionate burden of HIV and AIDS on adolescent young girls and women which is characterized by a feminized epidemic and sustained by gender inequalities and structural barriers to access to services. We call for governments to accelerate gender responsive HIV prevention, care and treatment programs and policies that do not criminalize women and girls in their diversity and ensure that they are supported to achieve viral suppression.

16. *Men and boy's engagement, responsibility and accountability:* Building on the best practices in Africa, we call on men and boys in positions of responsibility to exercise their roles in ways that advance women and girls rights and empowerment; ensure that all persons (men and women) who violate women and girls rights face justice, and continue re-socializing men and boys towards positive values of promoting rights, equality, and development.



17. Sex, age and spatial disaggregated data and gender statistics: Call for the implementation of the Africa Data Consensus and ensure all data is disaggregated by sex, age, religion, geographic location, income and economic status inclusive of qualitative data to improve the understanding of the lived realities and experiences of women and girls living in rural areas and develop the appropriate policies and interventions.

18. Harnessing arts, sports and culture: Call on member states to harness the power of creative arts, sports and positive culture to empower women and girls living in rural areas thereby creating economic and social opportunities and build resilience.

19. Mobilizing and effective use of domestic resources: Develop appropriate mechanisms to curb corruption in social services and socio-economic sectors; Establish multi-stakeholder, bottom-up approach that creates social accountability and tracks resource expenditure, particularly in education, health, agriculture, water and sanitation with specific reference to women and girls living in rural areas. Special Initiative funds should be released and priority given to women and girls living in rural areas such as the universal service agency fund.

20. Speaking with One Voice at CSW62: As Ministers of the African Union (AU) in Charge of Gender Equality and Women's Affairs who care for the improvement of the lives of women and girls living in rural areas, we commit to work closely with our counterparts, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in our respective countries and indeed with the Africa Group in New York to speak as "**One Africa One Voice**" during the CSW 62nd session to secure consensus on Agreed Conclusions for the benefit of all women and girls living in rural areas around the world and indeed on our own continent.

ⁱ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol); Adopted by the 2nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, Maputo, 11 July 2003. Article 14: State parties shall ensure the right to health of women including sexual and reproductive health is respected and promoted. This includes; a) the right to control their fertility; b) the right to decide whether to have children, the number of children and the spacing of children; c) the right to self-protection and to be protected against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS; e) the right to be informed of one's health status and on the health status of one's partner, particularly if affected with sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS; in accordance with internationally recognized standards and best practices; f) the right to have family planning education.