

FINAL

Africa Pre-Commission on the Status of Women's Sixty Fifth (CSW65) Ministerial Consultative Meeting

Africa Ministerial Virtual Pre-Consultative Meeting on the Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty Fifth Session (CSW65) on the theme

“Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”

KEY MESSAGES AND STRATEGIES FOR CSW65

PREAMBLE

African Union (AU) Ministers responsible for Gender and Women’s Affairs held a virtual consultative meeting on 26 February 2021 to prepare for the sixty-fifth (65th) session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65) on the priority theme: *“women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”*

The meeting built on previous commitments at international and regional levels, in particular the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), the Programme for Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (PAICPD); Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SDGs) as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) and the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.

We, Ministers responsible for Gender and Women’s affairs, participating in the Africa Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65), met to build consensus on a strategy for assuring women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life as well as the elimination of violence for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in Africa guided by the Africa Union’s Agenda 2063.

Recognizing that governments have the responsibility of developing national policies and priorities in accordance with their international and regional obligations and commitments to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and that the UN system entities are called to assist governments upon request in accordance with national laws and taking into account priorities, realities and capacities.

Reaffirming and recognizing:

- a) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- b) the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- c) The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)
- d) The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA)
- e) The Africa Union Agenda 2063
- f) Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SDGs)
- g) The AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Commending the efforts of the African Union and its members for progress made in the implementation of CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, amongst other normative frameworks, to advance women's participation in politics, public life and decision-making which includes commendable adjustments to laws to facilitate women's participation in public and private spheres;

Understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a differential impact on men and women, and that gender inequality has been exacerbated by the pandemic, threatening decades of progress made and eroding gender equality gains.

Commending the exceptional contributions of women in the front line in the health sector, other social sectors as well as households in Africa in the national COVID 19 recovery and response efforts.

Cognisant that the pursuit of parity and equal representation of women in public life has been a continuous struggle for women across the African continent spanning several centuries. Despite recent progress, women remain highly under-represented in the executive, legislative and judicial branches and political party rosters, national institutions, the civil service, as well as in the broader workforce. The limited awareness among men and women about women's rights; unequal power relations, poverty, low access to education; inadequate sex and age disaggregated data on economic disparities; negative traditional norms; the limited database of women qualified for decision-making roles; the limited political will among the authorities to enforce temporary special measures for women including quotas for political party nominations and create women friendly human resource policies in the public sector; limited funds to implement action plans promoting women's rights; and ineffective lobbying and

engagement by women's organizations to push for change remain to be persistent challenges on the continent.

Aware that several African Union Member States that adopted legislative measures to achieve equal representation of women and men need to take deliberate efforts to accelerate the full implementation of the commitments. Further that Violence Against Women and Girls is one of the critical impediments to women's realization of their fundamental rights including the rights to life, human dignity, peace, justice, socio- economic and political empowerment.

Recognising the interdependence between women's participation in public life and other crucial rights such as to social protection, the right to education, maternal and reproductive health, social protection, the protection from all forms of violence, and access to land and resources to enable women's access to public life.

Understanding that the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, is indispensable for women's economic and political empowerment and sustainable development. It facilitates a more inclusive and enabling environment in which all women could participate in public life through more ambitious targets, increased political will, sustainable financing, and gender-responsive institutional arrangements.

Pledging to ensure that COVID-19 recovery, response, and stimulus packages available meet the needs of both men and women equally and not to leave women and girls behind.

Conscious of the negative impact of COVID 19 in the implementation of SDGs and Agenda 2063, Member states are called upon to accelerate progress towards the realization of the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment.

In light of the joint commitments we took in October 2019 in the context of the twenty fifth regional review of the "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" (Beijing +25), we agreed to set the priorities of the African Union in the following areas

KEY MESSAGES:

Women's participation and empowerment are understood as being multidimensional¹, however, as recent studies suggest progress across all pillars has not advanced at the same pace. Among contributing factors hindering progress in women's participation and empowerment continued to be prevalence of negative cultural attitudes and persistent gender gaps in women's civic engagement, their representation in legislative and executive office, and their impact in transforming the public policy agenda. In many places, advancement towards gender equality in public life has commonly faltered and stagnated in recent years or even deteriorated making the promises of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2063 more difficult.

¹ UN Women Expert Group Meeting Sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65)

Strengthen the comprehensive legal and regulatory frameworks by:

1. Undertaking legal reforms to ensure women's participation and representation in public life and eliminate laws, policies and regulations that discriminate against women and that are barriers to women's development, empowerment, and engagement in leadership positions and public life.
2. Encourage the full implementation and monitoring of global, continental, and regional frameworks ratified by countries and national constitutional, legal and policy commitments for gender equality and Women's Empowerment and inclusive political participation. This would entail the establishment or strengthening (where they already exist) of the institutions for implementation of the adopted frameworks with adequate financial and human resources; regular reporting on progress on implementation of global and regional frameworks to treaty bodies and collection of the relevant data for reporting.
3. Enacting temporary special measures (TSMs), in compliance with CEDAW, to accelerate de facto equality between men and women and to ensure women's continued representation in decision making bodies. TSMs to be applied to all areas of decision-making and not just parliament, i.e. local government, the executive, judiciary, legislature, public administration, security services, etc. These measures should continue for the required period of time to accelerate the achievement of women's substantive equality with men; and until Member States effect the structural, social and cultural changes necessary to correct past and current forms of discrimination for TSM to have the required impact.
4. Encourage the progressive implementation the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Maputo Protocol through the adoption of relevant policies, procedures and strategies, and the issuance of legislation that enhances the rights of women and supports their participation in public life, commensurate with the national orientations, legislation and laws. Member States that have not ratified and those that ratified with reservations on CEDAW and Maputo Protocol are also encouraged to ratify and lift all reservations for the full implementation of these commitments.
5. In countries where TSMs are not in place including quotas, Member States to support the adoption of TSMs including affirmative measures for women in the legislative and executive bodies, public service, the private sector, and adopt reforms in the internal rules of political parties, civil service and private sector to adopt policies and programmes for promoting the effective participation and representation of women including young women in public life.

6. Establish quotas to ensure 50% of women on boards and in senior leadership with the view to achieving parity in the private sector. Promote the proposed AU protocol on 30% preferential procurement for women-owned businesses as well as the proposed AU Women in Trade Protocol as part of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement.
7. Aligning the implementation of Agenda 2030(SDGs) and AU Agenda 2063, the AU and Member States to harmonize indicators and reporting processes to ensure the availability of sex and age disaggregated data on gender equality and women's rights commitments including on women's political participation.

Ensure effective gender mainstreaming in COVID19 responses and recovery

1. In line with the "AU Guidelines on Gender Responsive Responses to COVID-19²", to "ensure the effective, equal, and full participation of women, including grassroots women in all mechanisms established to prevent, contain and end the virus. These include national response and recovery plans, emergency protocols and all other national decision-making structures like National COVID-19 task forces and committees, cabinets, institutions and commissions as well as response and recovery decision-making processes.
2. Ensure access to safe and affordable ICT for women and girls including in partnership with technology providers to eliminate online violence including sexual exploitation and harassment, in particular in the context of COVID-19, ensuring access to fast and effective remedies for women and particularly young women and girls who experience such violence and harassment, in cooperation with internet service providers.
3. Encourage gender parity in decision-making positions, in cabinets, institutions and commissions including COVID-19 Task Forces and adopt a range of regulations and temporary special measures for the public and private sectors to accelerate equal participation of women in decision-making and leadership.

Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women in public life, as well as protect survivors of violence against women in public life

1. Explicitly recognise through continental, regional and national level policy and legal commitments that Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in public life is a critical barrier impacting the ability of women, including young women, to actively and safely engage in public life as leaders; In this regard, AU Member States are encouraged to ratify and implement the ILO Convention C190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work including migrant women.
2. Build the capacity of law enforcement personnel, prosecutors, police officers and judges; to apply laws on violence against women, respond to incidents, and hold perpetrators accountable.

² <https://au.int/en/documents/20200603/au-guidelines-gender-responsive-responses-covid-19>

3. Ensure that women leaders, voters, members of campaigns and electoral administrations and members of women's organizations are protected from violence for engaging in public life.
4. Increase capacity of national protection systems and statistical systems to collect data on violence against women in public life regularly and systematically and use the same for policy development and implementation.

Changing negative gender social norms on women's leadership and participation in public life

1. Devote adequate human and financial resources on behavior change programs at national and local and community levels, to systematically accelerate positive social norm change.
2. Recognize the family as a contributor to development, including in the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals for women and girls, that gender equality and women's empowerment improve the well-being of the family, and in this regard stress the need for elaborating and implementing family policies aimed at achieving gender equality and women's empowerment and at enhancing the full participation of women in society.
3. Recognize the important role played by women in the family and in the upbringing of children which requires shared responsibility of parents, women and men and society as a whole and that maternity, motherhood, parenting and the role of women in procreation must not be a basis for their discrimination in public life.
4. Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family, inter alia, in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, the full participation and decision-making of women in public life, work-family balance and the self-sufficiency of the family unit as agreed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
5. Ensure that all social and economic development policies are responsive to the different, specific and the changing needs and expectations of women and girls and their families in fulfilling their numerous functions and that the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of all family members are respected.
6. Implement awareness raising measures and sensitize communities through the media, companies that run social media platforms, men and boys and different generations of women to counter negative social norms that restrict women's rights and participation in public life and decision-making and to take deliberate action to transform these norms.
7. Engage traditional leaders and faith-based communities in the fight against negative social norms and harmful practices such as child marriages in all communities.

8. Develop gender-responsive curricula at all levels of education and remove references to gender stereotyping that support negative social norms and harmful practices.
9. Strengthen adequate access to educational opportunities and the provision of quality education, training and skill development opportunities for women and girls as fundamental prerequisites for women's full participation in public life.
10. Improve the level of women's representation and participation in the spheres of media and Science, Technology, Education and Math (STEM) and ICT; establish systems to collect and process data, monitor and evaluate progress on representation and participation of women and girls in media and ICTs.

Support women leaders and increase the availability of financing in support of women's participation in public life and leave no one behind in public life

1. Make efforts to ensure equal opportunities during electoral processes such as election campaigns, including equal access to financial resources and creating conditions and incentives for women candidates' campaigns as appropriate.
2. Consider increasing the quality and quantity of funding available to support women in political and public life through the creation and financing of specific funds that prioritize direct funding to women's organizations.
3. Encourage women to participate in political parties and incentivize political parties to finance women's campaigns and promote their effective leadership.
4. Support and encourage the entry and sustainability of women's engagement in public life through meaningful capacity-building, training, and awareness-raising initiatives, and by providing targeted support to all women to participate in public life and politics.
5. Provide dialogue, leadership training programs, and mentorship opportunities as well as funding support to enhance young women's participation in political processes and decision making at different levels.
6. Include women living in rural areas, vulnerable groups, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) in all legal and policy frameworks in alignment with the international and regional treaties and conventions without prejudice to the national legal and regulatory frameworks.
7. Build strong partnerships with development partners to support capacity building of women in leadership and strengthening of government institutions in mainstreaming gender and women's rights in policies and development frameworks.
8. Match political commitment with strengthened institutional frameworks for the mobilization and allocation of adequate and necessary resources for gender responsive plans, programmes and budgeting tools for gender equality in all sectors.

9. Carry out collection, analysis, disaggregation and utilization of data by sex, age and other socio- economic indicators which is critical for planning, measuring progress and for targeted policy making to address gaps and challenges
10. Urge developed countries that have not yet done so, in accordance with their commitments, to make concrete efforts towards meeting the target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for official development assistance meant for developing countries and the target of 0.15 to 0.25 per cent of their gross national product for official development assistance meant for least developed countries.
11. Encourage developing countries to build on the progress achieved in ensuring that official development assistance is used effectively to help meet the sustainable development goals and targets.