CONCEPT NOTE
HIGH-LEVEL VIRTUAL FORUM ON
“WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (WGPP):
ENHANCING AFRICAN WOMEN’S ROLE IN LEADERSHIP”

“Leveraging Women’s leadership in the COVID-19 response and beyond”

24th June – 25th June 2020 (TBC)

I. Background

Seventy two years after the universal declaration of human rights and twenty five years after the Beijing Declaration and plan of action that are enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) there is much progress on women’s rights to be celebrated. However, the agenda is still unfinished, particularly in relation to women's civil and political rights.

Enhancing women’s critical role in governance, leadership and the COVID-19 response is now an imperative

Women’s political participation across the African continent varies from country to country. Some countries have made particularly impressive progress, while others are lagging in the achievement of national, regional and global commitments to gender parity in decision-making. Raising women’s voice, their leadership, their participation and their representation are important and effective ways of advancing women’s political empowerment. This includes inspiring, mentoring and enhancing the capabilities of the current and next generation of leaders.

Leveraging the pool of competent and well-trained women and harnessing political commitment at all levels are pathways to reversing gender imbalances in leadership at all levels of public and political institutions in Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed both gaps and opportunities to engage more women in decision making and leading the response and recovery efforts.

Ensuring women’s leadership, representation and political participation is critical for inclusive, responsive, transparent and accountable governance. The right for women to participate in political and electoral processes is also recognized in continental, regional and international legal instruments including the provisions in article 3 of the African Charter on democracy, elections and governance (CADEG); article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW); and article 9 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the Beijing Declaration and platform for Action (1995), that links the empowerment and the
improvement of women’s social, economic and political status to the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration as well as sustainable development in all areas of life.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates a pre-existing mix of economic, social and political tensions and could reverse development gains. With the COVID-19 spread to almost all its 55 Member States, the AU is faced with a challenge of this pandemic possibly reversing some of the gains it has made in promoting gender equality, women’s empowerment and women’s rights. Gender inequalities have the potential to exacerbate the outbreak, and responses that do not incorporate gender analysis may in turn, worsen inequalities.¹

The AU has maintained Gender Parity at its topmost decision making level. Currently, there are five female commissioners and five male Commissioners - including Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and efforts are made for the gender parity principle to percolate other AU organs and institutions. Furthermore, the AU's vision to silence guns by 2020, pays particular attention to women’s voices not only as victims, but as partners and active contributors to all stages of the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa in the process of nation-building, peace-building and democracy-building.

The AU Department of Political Affairs, in collaboration with UNDP, is leading the development and implementation of an action plan to promote women’s equal representation and participation in governance through facilitating the effective implementation of related national, regional and global relevant legal and policy frameworks. Women’s leadership in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic is particularly important as the impact of COVID-19 disproportionately affects women. Young women and girls are particularly those in vulnerable conditions including those living in crises and conflict-affected areas.

The proposed initiative on women in governance and political participation contributes to the governance pillar of the joint AU-UN African Women Leaders Network (AWLN). This initiative of African women leaders from across sectors is aimed at enhancing African women’s leadership in transforming the continent in the context of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. The AWLN supports the advancement of African women in leadership through flagship projects, peer learning, and experience sharing as well as cross-generational dialogue in six thematic areas: (a) governance; (b) peace and security; (c) finance; (d) youth; (e) agriculture; and (f) social mobilization. Since it was established in June 2017, the network’s achievements range from multiplying the voices of African women leaders on the ground to enhancing their representation, participation and leadership in key decision-making processes.

¹ African Union guidelines for gender sensitive responses to COVID 19
Women’s representation in leadership is still low but it is improving.

The representation of African women in all spheres of life and at all levels, especially in political decision-making bodies is still low although they represent 52% of the African population. For example, there is only one female Head of State in Ethiopia. According to the International Parliamentary Union, in March 2020, only 23.4% of Africa’s parliamentarians are female. Women are also poorly represented in ministerial positions with an average of 22% across Africa. Only 12 countries have more than one third female ministers2 including Rwanda (53.6%), Guinea Bissau (50.0%), South Africa (48.3%), Ethiopia (47.6%), Seychelles (45.5%), Mozambique (42.9%), Angola (40.0), Uganda (33.3%), Sao Tome e Principe (33.3%), Zambia (32.3%), Eswatini (31.6%), and Madagascar (30.0%)

African countries are also lagging behind in terms of gender equality in public service, executive positions, the judiciary and private sector leadership. Women’s leadership and representation in public and private sector decision-making bodies is still low. On average, only 7% to 30% of the firms in 38 African countries have a female top manager, while only 2 out of a sample of 11 African countries have more than 30% women at decision making level in public administration.3 The representation of women in public administration leadership varies across countries ranging from a low representation of 12%-15% in Burundi and Mali to a high representation of 35% and 45% in South Africa and Botswana respectively.

However, not all is doom and gloom. Modest progress has been made in terms of women’s political participation and representation in some AU Member States. For example, Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians in the world with 61.3% in the lower house, followed by South Africa (46.6%), Namibia (43.3%), Senegal (43.0%), Mozambique (41.2%), Ethiopia (38.8%) and Tanzania (37.0%)4. The composition of the new Ethiopian government is another good example with a government of 50/50 men and women.

Africa also has an experienced pool of former female presidents including H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia), H.E Joyce Banda (Malawi), H.E Catherine Samba Panza (CAR) and H.E Ameenah Gurib (Mauritius). Five other women have been "Acting Heads of State" including H.E Monique Ohsan Bellepeau (Mauritius); H.E Rose Rogombé (Gabon); H.E Sylvie Kinigi (Burundi) ; H.E Ruth Perry (Liberia) ; H.E Carmen Pereira (Guinea-Bissau) . The continent has also recorded few women Deputy/ Vice Presidents, particularly in The Gambia, Tanzania, Zambia, Uganda and South Africa.

African women former Prime Ministers include Sylvie Kinigi (Burundi) , Cissé Mariam Kaïdama Sidibé (Mali), Luísa Dias Diogo (Mozambique), Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila (Namibia), Agathe Uwilingiyimana(Rwanda); Maria das Neves Ceita Baptista de Sousa (São tome e Príncipe), Mame Madior Boye (Senegal) and Aminata Touré (Senegal). Many countries have also appointed women to strategic political portfolios such as, Ministers of Defense in Kenya, South Africa; and in Ethiopia, Minister of Peace, the only ever appointed in Africa.

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2 https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2020-03/women-in-politics-2020
4 Inter-Parliamentary Union (May, 2020)
The election of H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma as the first female Chairperson of the African Union Commission in 2012 was also a milestone in more than 50 years of existence of the OAU / AU.

An agenda to accelerate progress on women’s leadership and participation in governance and politics

The African Union Commission (AUC) has a broad mandate of coordinating efforts of the continental body aimed at unity and integration through, inter alia, pursuing democratic and participatory governance. Central to the advancement of democratic governance is the AU’s commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment in line with the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa adopted in Maputo, Mozambique as well as the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, adopted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The AU’s unflinching resolve to achieve gender equality resonates with the noble aspirations of Agenda 2063-The Africa We Want and the 2030 global agenda on sustainable development.

Besides, Articles 3 and 4 of the AU Constitutive Act commits the African Union to function according to the principles of gender equality and to ensure the effective participation of women in decision-making, especially in the economic, political and socio-cultural arenas. Also, Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 further envisions an Africa, in which full gender equality is achieved and where gender parity is attained with women fully empowered with equal economic, social, political and cultural rights.

The AU adoption of the Gender Parity principle in 2001, followed by the Parity decision in 2018, which requires the AUC to achieve 50/50 in its staffing and to have 30% of youth by 2025, is one of the most progressive decisions on gender equality ever recorded. The AU Heads of State and Government’s adoption of this Gender Parity principle demonstrate their commitment to reverse the gender imbalances that characterize decision-making structures within the continent.

The proposed three-year Action Plan on women in governance and political participation: Enhancing African women’s role in leadership will contribute to the effective implementation of the AU’s mandate in gender equality and women empowerment, especially women role in governance and political processes. The Action plan responds to the African Women Leaders Network5 (AWLN)’s call to action to increase participation of women in governance by focusing on the ecosystem for women in governance; ensuring gender parity in political parties and increasing the number of women in politics (including young women). The initiative will also galvanize efforts and strategies to raise awareness and advocate for more women’s representation in relief and recovery decisions with regard to COVID 19. As the virus continues to spread, governments must build the systems to support women’s leadership in health sector but also in other sectors of a nation’s life. Women’s participation will be vital to Africa’ success against this pandemic crisis.

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5 The African Women leaders Network (AWLN) is a joint AU-UN initiative of African women leaders from across sectors aimed at enhancing African women’s leadership on the continent in the context of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.
II. Rationale

A step change is needed to transform the ecosystem, institutions and structures including those related to address the COVID 19 crisis that continue to restrict the participation of women in political, public and private decision making. Despite examples of women’s effective leadership, many women are discouraged from seeking political and leadership positions. Some of the barriers include discriminatory laws, socio-cultural gender norms and stereotypes, skills and capacity constraints for women as candidates and voters, lack of access to information and other resources as well as political intimidations and gender-based violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated some examples of women’s effective leadership in the health sector, business sector and at community level. It has also highlighted gaps as women’s voice and needs are inadequately reflected in the response. There is a risk of being further relegated to the background with no voice and no means to influence policies and decisions. As it is, there is a huge deficit of women’s leadership in COVID-19 responses. National mechanisms like COVID-19 Task Forces and Committees rarely consider gender parity or women’s effective inclusion.

Despite existing legislations, which are key components of the ecosystem to support women’s participation in governance, actual implementations have been slow. Legislation that supports gender equality in leadership including legislated quotas and reserved seats is present in 30 out of 55 African AU Member States. These are mandated by the constitution or electoral law. Yet, the existence of this legislation has not guaranteed equal outcomes for women and men in terms of political representation. For instance, 4 of the lowest performing countries, Congo Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and Eswatini have legislated quotas and reserved seats.

Perception and attitude towards women in leadership are another key component of the ecosystem that limits women engaged in decision making. On average, 68% of citizens from 34 countries agreed to have women leaders. This ranges from a low of 47% of nationals surveyed in Sudan to 88% of the nationals in Togo; positive attitudes towards women’s leadership were highest in Southern Africa followed by East Africa and lower in West Africa and even lower in North African countries.

Access to financial services, another important aspect of the ecosystem for women’s leadership is highly unequal. On average African women achieve only 70% of the access that men have in terms of account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile money service provider. The most equal access is in South Africa while access is highly unequal in South Sudan, Algeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Morocco, Niger and Nigeria where women have approximately 50% less access to financial institutions than men do.

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6 Bineta Diop, Statement given during the ECOSOCC-AfDB Webinar on gender integration in COVID 19 responses, 24 April 2020
8 World bank gender data, 2018
Fear of political intimidation and violence is another barrier to women’s political participation, 50% of women surveyed in 34 countries as part of Afro barometer surveys\(^9\), are afraid of political intimidation or violence. Countries with the highest fear of violence and intimidation include Congo Dem. Rep, Kenya, Mauritania, Seychelles and Zimbabwe. Of these stated countries, only Zimbabwe has been able to achieve the threshold of 30% elected positions in parliament.

In addition, with the outbreak of COVID 19, there is a high risk that women and men may not be able to exercise their rights to vote, as the majority may opt to stay home. For example, in Mali only 36% of registered voters turned out\(^10\) for parliamentarian election due to collective fears of Covid-19 and other challenges including terrorism. In Benin, although special measures to protect voters had been taken by the Independent National Electoral Commission, voters did not go to the polls in large numbers for the municipal elections, in particular because of the risks of the spread of the Covid-19.

The proposed initiative on Women in Governance and political participation aims to address the ecosystems, institutions and structures that hold women in leadership back. It will build on the progress African countries have made so far, and the positive attitudes towards women’s leadership in some countries to boost women’s role in leadership and in political participation including in relief and recovery decision making process with regard to COVID 19.

The proposed action plan will address the root causes of the above challenges for women’s empowerment in leadership and in partnership with national, regional and global actors to advance the “50/50 agenda of Women in Governance.” The action plan will also include capacity building activities to raise awareness and advocate for more women’s representation in relief and recovery decision-making with regard to COVID 19.

It is in that framework that the AUC – Department for Political Affairs in collaboration with Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) as well as the AUC Envoy on Women, Peace and Security Office with the support of Development partners including UNDP and UNWOMEN, are organizing a High-level Consultative Forum and Consultations on Women in Governance and Political Participation: Improving women’s leadership and participation in Governance and Politics under the theme **Leveraging women’s leadership for the COVID-19 response and beyond.**

### III. Objectives

- **The overarching objective**

To support AU member States, engage with diverse stakeholders and mobilize political support, partnerships and resources for the implementation of the initiative on **Women in governance and political participation: Enhancing African women’s role in leadership** including in relief and recovery decisions processes with regard to COVID 19 Pandemic.

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\(^9\) Afro barometer surveys, 2016  
➢ **The Specific objectives**

- To raise awareness and engage AU members States to undertake normative and institutional reforms that promote women’s representation and political participation and to implement legislated quotas and reserved seats in countries where they exist and applying them to responses mechanisms with regard to COVID 19 crisis

- To provide participants with an opportunity to exchange good practices and lessons learned on innovative strategies to increase women in governance and political leadership that have been tested in participating countries including the COVID 19 response.

- To equip women with relevant tools to improve their self-confidence by demystifying gender stereotypes which place them in the inability to compete for political and leadership positions

- To review and validate the draft plan of action on Women in governance and political participation: Enhancing African women’s role in leadership and identify relevant partners to support the action plan’s implementation.

**IV. Methodology**

The high level virtual forum and stakeholders’ consultation on Women in governance and political participation: Enhancing African women’s leadership and participation in Governance and Politics will be co-convened by the AUC-Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported by the Women, Gender and Development Directorate as well as the AUC Envoy on Women, Peace and Security Office and UNWOMEN.

The Forum will be an occasion to introduce the initiative to wider stakeholders building on the outcome of previous stakeholder consultations used to curate lessons, expectations and needs. The key contribution to the African Women Leaders Network is the value created in promoting actions to enhance African women’s role in leadership and participation in decision-making, particularly in the response and recovery to COVID-19.

The stakeholders’ consultation will include online pre-consultations as well as a virtual consultation for discussing inputs collected from various stakeholders. Those discussions will allow participants to share ideas and experiences on the status of women in governance and political participation in Africa, particularly in the context of the Coronavirus crisis.

Three virtual consultative meetings are planned to take place in June including pre-consultations for National chapters, wider stakeholder consultations to validate the Action Plan culminating in a High Level Consultative Forum to launch the WIGPP initiative.

The High-Level Virtual Forum will be devoted to contributions from leaders across the continent and the globe and lead to the official launch of the initiative Women in governance and political participation: enhancing African Women’s Role in Leadership under the theme Leveraging Women Leadership Role amid the Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid19) and beyond. It will include discussions with
member states and partners to mobilise commitment and resources for its implementation.

Once the three-year action plan is adopted, the second step will be the implementation of some activities including the training of women candidates from political parties and civil society organisations to build their capabilities in electoral campaign management, public speaking and political leadership. Capacity development for Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), Parliamentarians and Political parties on Gender and elections, strategic dialogue on Women Situation Rooms (WSRs) for conflict prevention and sustained peace between elections as well as leadership capacity development through networking and intergeneration dialogues for leaders including women leaders involved in COVID 19 response, will be other initiatives to be supported.

V. Participants

The high-level virtual Forum will involve gender ministries, national chapters of the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN), the friends of the AWLN and other high-level personalities that support the initiative across various institutions and organizations. The representatives of AU-RECs, women from civil society organizations working on women in governance and political participation will be part of the high level virtual forum.

VI. Facilitation

A main facilitator will be identified to guide the proceedings of the high level virtual forum. The AUC-Department of Political Affairs in collaboration with the Directorate on Women, Gender and Development supported by UNDP will agree on resource persons with required expertise in governance, gender and political leadership. The UNDP roster of consultants/Experts can be used. Each session will be chaired by a moderator who will ensure the formulation of comprehensive recommendations to address the challenges facing women in governance and political leadership during and after COVID 19 crisis.

VII. Language

English and French will be used as working languages during the meeting with simultaneous interpretation.

VIII. Dates and Venue

The High-level virtual forum on the Launch of the initiative Women in Governance and Political Participation (WGPP): Enhancing African women’s role in leadership will take place on 24th and 25th June 2020.
IX. Working Documents:

2. Draft Concept Note of high-level virtual forum on the launch of the initiative Women in Governance and Political Participation (WGPP): Enhancing African women’s role in leadership.
3. Draft Programme of high-level virtual forum on the launch of the initiative Women in Governance and Political Participation (WGPP): Enhancing African women’s role in leadership.
4. The Policy brief: COVID – 19 impacts women’s leadership and political participation

X. Reference Documents:
- The AU Strategy on gender equality and women’s empowerment
- Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want
- The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development
- The African Charter on democracy, elections and governance (CADEG
- The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW);
- The 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
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- Statistics on women participation in government and parliaments (10th June 2018 and analytic paper for call to action
- The African Women Leaders Network- Strategic framework

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