GENDER PRE-FORUM TO THE 10TH HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE

THEME:
ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING:
AS A LEVER FOR THE AFRICA WE WANT

COMMENORATING THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

6-7 DECEMBER 2021
VIRTUAL
I. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The African Union’s unflinching resolve to achieve gender equality resonates with the Constitutive Act and the noble aspirations of Agenda 2063-The Africa We Want, which aligns with the 2030 global agenda on sustainable development. The African Union’s broad mandate of coordinating efforts of the continental body aimed at unity and integration through, inter alia, pursuing democratic and participatory governance have not overtaken its commitment to ensuring inclusion. Central to the advancement of democratic governance is the commitment of the AU and its Member States 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.

In addition, the African Union has also made some commendable efforts in the mainstreaming of gender in all programming towards gender equality; this includes the development of the AU Strategy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (2018 to 2028) which sets forth a plan to realize Aspiration 6\(^1\) of Agenda 2063. This strategy focuses on various pillars that include gender mainstreaming in governance, social, political, legal, security and economic spheres. Such aspirations and accompanying frameworks embed a culture of gender equality, women’s empowerment and good governance.

Beyond the normative and policy pronouncements, data has shown that women in leadership and decision-making spheres in Africa are making significant strides with very visible changes being observed. As of October 2021, Women constitute only 24% of the 12,113 parliamentarians in Africa, 25 per cent in the lower houses and 20 per cent in the upper houses of parliaments.\(^2\) And of the 1,348 ministers on the continent, 302 are women. As such, women’s representation in African cabinets remains on average at 22%\(^3\). To name a few countries that have recorded significant progress in women representation - Rwanda (61%), Namibia (46%), South Africa (43%), Mozambique (40%), Ethiopia (39%), Tanzania (37%), Burundi (36%) and Uganda (34%).

Though these achievements are commendable, our continent, in its entirety, continues to face governance challenges and gender imbalance in decision making, which has manifested into a number of serious issues including failed governance systems, political instability, conflict and insecurity among others. COVID-19 has also exasperated multidimensional inequalities creating cultural, socio-economic and political disparities specifically affecting women, girls and the vulnerable. Concerns over women’s marginalization and invisibility in Africa policy-making remain a fervent issue that needs more attention. This marginalization stems from restrictive laws, cultural diversities and practices as well as institutional barriers including access to quality education and resources. Tackling this problem can only be achieved by implementing appropriate mechanisms and systems across national, regional and continental levels while creating an understanding of the progress made so far and the challenges faced.

Ensuring women’s leadership, representation and political participation are critical for inclusive, responsive, transparent and accountable governance. The right of 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 (ACDEG); and Article 9 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) that links the empowerment and the improvement of women’s social, economic and political status to the achievement of both transparent and accountable governance, inclusive and sustainable development and as a lever to achieve the Africa We want.

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\(^1\) Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063:

II. RATIONALE

We can hardly afford to disenfranchise women. The inclusion of women and enhancing their place in leadership remains unfinished, particularly in relation to women’s civil and political rights. The link between democracy, economic, and social progress has led to a growing focus on good governance and democracy. Democratic governance stands on two pillars, the first is representative and participatory. Making the distinction between representation in terms of numbers and meaningful participation that allows inputs and inclusion from the various stakeholders mainly women, youth and the vulnerable is key. There has been significant progress with regards to representation with percentages exhibited however, there is a swift realization that beyond the numbers meaningful engagement is tantamount to the meaningful and intentional expansion of spaces for engagement of women in leadership and decision making.

Hence the question is meaningful participation which leads to emancipation. Although not well documented culturally and historically women had a significant part to play and had impacted the Pan Africanism and African Renaissance movements. So far there seems to be little learning we have taken from our cultures and social movements that identified women as an asset rather than a liability. Women being an embodiment of culture and heritage have also kept the memory and knowledge across generations. Women are generational thinkers, their thoughts and ideas supersede current generations making them the maintainers of our social fabric. A deeper understanding and re-evaluation of how women can impact the continent in a positive way is ideal to help us to identify opportunities concealed in our heritage to build the Africa we want.

In our current political dynamics, campaigns and movements are ready to ostentatiously show their women representatives and tick the gender balance box. However, in reality, gender is still highly associated with only women often relegated as a ‘women’s issue’ with their grievances often dismissed. Gender equality needs the commitment of all especially men. It is time to have deeper conversations on the significance of women’s participation by all and these conversations need to be grounded on the continent’s historical struggles for dignity and equality for all people.

Taking a lead from the AU theme of the year “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the African We Want,” specific focus on the continents’ rich culture, history, heritage and arts need to be fully taken advantage of in promoting gender equality, women in leadership and decision making. In addition, substantive investments need to be made in all forms of arts and culture that promote dialogue on gender equality, leadership and promote substantive representation of women in decision-making positions. Oral traditions, spoken word poetry should be used in shaping new gender dialogues that transcend current challenges and catapult our women into the future.

Transcending current challenges takes not only cultural, social consideration but also policy formulation and taking conscious efforts for plans and programmes aimed at explicitly advancing the gender equality agenda across the continent. Leadership and political will to leverage the pool of competent and well-trained women at all levels are viable pathways to reversing gender imbalances at all levels of public and political leadership in Africa.

It is in light of this rationale, that the African Union Organs and Institutions that form the African Governance Architecture (AGA) Secretariat on behalf of the Platform (AGP) organizing the Annual Gender Pre-Forum to 10th High-Level Dialogue under the theme “Enhancing opportunities for women in leadership and decision making: As a lever for an Africa we Want’ from 6-7 December 2021 virtually.

III. GOALS

The overall goal of the Gender Pre-Forum to the High-Level Dialogue is to provide a collaborative, open and inclusive space to leverage and foster meaningful participation of women and other stakeholders towards achieving effective inclusion of women in leadership as well as decision-making for an Africa We want.
IV. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the Gender Pre-Forum are to:

1. To provide a platform for historical reflections on women in leadership and governance and create a collaborative space for ideas on the way forward for effective inclusivity;
2. Increase the understanding of the AU shared values which are the normative and institutional frameworks that exist at the national, regional and continental levels or gender equality, particularly on leadership and governance;
3. To provide an opportunity for a focused discussion on the role of culture, heritage and arts to ensure gender equality expanding the space for women in leadership and decision making;
4. Provide a space for women in leadership to share their experiences, challenges and lessons as they contribute to the discussions of women in governance and leadership
5. Encourage greater inclusion of women in political spaces as well as in policy dialogue and decision-making processes.

V. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The following outputs will be derived from the Gender Pre-Forum:

1. Increased understanding of the state of play and historical context of women in leadership, governance and decision making;
2. Enhanced understanding of the existing normative and institutional frameworks on gender equality, women in leadership and decision making;
3. Improved understanding of the role of culture, heritage and arts in promoting gender equality, women’s participation in decision making as well as leadership;
4. Increased knowledge, values and best practices on building a culture of gender equality drawing from African values; and
5. Coordinated amplified voices of women on issues of leadership, decision making in governance, democracy and sustainable peace.

VI. EXPECTED OUTPUTS

- A compilation of Africa Talks sessions;
- An outcome statement of the conversations;
- Proceedings report;
- 1 Policy brief;
- Press Releases, and topical social media clips and sound bites will be provided; and
- Excerpts and snapshots from Social Media Engagement (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram)

VII. THEMATIC FOCUS

1. STATE OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING IN AFRICA: This section will focus on the historical context as well as the existing reality of women in leadership and decision making. The discussions will also revolve around women’s historical contribution to Pan Africanism and African renaissance and identify opportunities for women to contribute to the democratic governance regression the continent is experiencing. Speakers and panellists will paint a continental picture for the audience and encourage discussions on successes, challenges and opportunities for subsequent panels.

2. AU SHARED VALUES INSTRUMENTS AND WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: This section will provide the audience with rapid information on the AU Shared values instruments that have made normative and institutional pronouncements as well as legal frameworks on women’s leadership and decision making with a specific focus on democratic governance and while bringing the culture, heritage and African Renaissance into focus.
3. WOMEN’S CONTRIBUTION TO LEADERSHIP THROUGH ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE: This section will highlight the role of culture, past, present and future to consciously situate women in leadership and decision making as a contribution to a renewed African Renaissance and to build the Africa We Want.

4. BUILDING THE AFRICA, WE WANT THROUGH EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: This section will delve into discussions of a future outlook while identifying solutions that can ensure women are not left out of building the Africa We Want. The session is intended to identify solutions that can ensure women are not side-lined while encouraging innovative conversations that will assess challenges, opportunities and identify new pathways for the inclusion of women in leadership.

5. AFRICA TALKS: This session is designed as an intergenerational conversation to allow cross fertilization of experiences and showcase women’s contribution in leadership and decision-making positions. In this session stories of women that have made immense contributions to their communities through their leadership resilience and power will be featured.

6. INTERLUDE: Interludes between sessions will be provided through creative means by sharing inspiring and relevant performances of culture, music, art and videos that are meant to inspire participants.

VIII. ABOUT THE GENDER PRE-FORUM

The forum will be convened under the auspices of the African Governance Platform’s Women Engagement Strategy (AGA-WES). The pre-forum will present an opportunity for women to discuss, highlight trends, opportunities, challenges and way forward on their contribution to the theme of the year. Moreover, the Pre-Forum will provide a safe space to engage African women in policy deliberations and recognize and amplify their contribution towards governance, democracy, and conflict prevention in Africa in light of the AU Theme of the year.

In furtherance, the outcomes of the gender pre-forum will be part of the deliberations of the 10th High-Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human rights and Governance exploring trends, challenges and prospects. The Gender Pre-Forum will also contribute to and complement policy discussions on the theme of the year spearheaded by AU Policy Organs and Departments.

IX. METHODOLOGY

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges of physical engagements, the gender pre-forum has gone virtual this year as well. The convening will use a combination of methodologies to facilitate deliberations. Discussions will be conducted through several interactive strategies including:

- Panel Discussions;
- Deep dive conversations with high-profile individuals and experts;
- Intergenerational conversations;
- Africa Talk’s; and
- Plenary forums.

The Panel Discussions will be designed to ensure an intergenerational exchange as well as a mix of policy and practitioner’s perspectives in the conversations along with showcasing practical initiatives. The Gender Pre-Forum will feature opinion pieces in the media, interviews, robust social media engagement, informative threads on sessions and sound bites and other innovative means to spur debate during, before and after the virtual Gender Pre-forum will be deployed to engage a larger audience in the deliberations, and disseminate the outcomes widely.

X. PARTICIPATION

Participants at the gender pre-forum will be identified through an online pre-registration process.
Specifically, participants will be drawn from:

1. Gender focused organizations working on democracy, governance, peace, culture, arts and heritage in general and specific thematic areas under consideration during this gender pre-forum;
2. AU Member States, including representatives of National Institutions, Agencies that focus on good governance, building the culture of democracy;
3. Selected Think Thanks and Academic Research institutions with experience on issues of democratic governance and peace and security;
4. Selected Media Practitioners;
5. Artists, Cultural and Heritage organizations;
6. Representatives of the African Governance Platform Members;
7. International organisations, Development Partners and UN Agencies; and
8. Diaspora.

XI. DATES

The gender pre-forum will be convened online from 6-7 December 2021.

XII. PARTNERSHIP, INSTITUTIONAL AND MANAGEMENT

The Gender pre-forum to the High-Level Dialogue is an institutionalized initiative of the African Governance Platform aimed at facilitating women participation in policy deliberations on democracy, governance and human rights. The Gender Preform will be supported by the Department of Social Affairs of the AUC as the lead entity for the AU theme of the year, WCYD and the Office of the Special Envoy on Women and Peace and Security with the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department leading the process through AGA-APSA Secretariat.

XIII. DOCUMENTATION AND WORKING LANGUAGES

The documentation for the Pre-Forum Dialogue will be shared electronically. All documents and news updates will be available on the www.au.int/aga, @AGA_Platform @AUC_PAPS @_AfricanUnion and on Hashtags #DGTrends

The Meeting will be conducted in the 4 AU Languages - Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese. Simultaneous interpretations are provided in all 4 languages while documentation will be provided in French and English only.

In addition, sign language interpretation will be provided for the entire dialogue.

XIV. CONTACT DETAILS

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