

## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

Date: 04 March 2024

Venue: Virtual

### MEDIA ADVISORY

**The African Union Commission Hosts 2024 International Women’s Day Virtual Policy Dialogue on How Women’s Leadership Strengthens Health Systems in Africa**

#### INVITATION TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MEDIA

**What:** High-level Virtual Panel Discussion on “*Closing the Gap: How Women’s Leadership Strengthens Health Systems in Africa*”

**When:** Friday, March 08, 2024, from 10.00 am to 12.00 pm

**Where:** Online (*Register in advance for this meeting:*  
[https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJlpceuppjsgNaeD4FnKM2CzWn4bKS8kJVZ](https://zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tJlpceuppjsgNaeD4FnKM2CzWn4bKS8kJVZ))

**Who:** Hosted by the AU Commission with panellists from the Ministry of Health of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Organization of African First Ladies for Development (OAFILD) and the Pan-African Parliament

#### **Background:**

Since early civilizations, women have played an active role in health system strengthening and disease elimination, as nurses, midwives, healers and more. However, when medicine was formalized as a profession, women were banned from medical education and practice and had to fight their way back in. Today, women hold around 70% of health worker jobs globally; and over 80% of nursing and midwifery roles. Collectively, they make most health purchasing and usage decisions. A vital role in the health sector, as health workers, caregivers, decision-makers, and advocates. However, they face many barriers and challenges that limit their full participation and leadership in health systems. The existent limitations ought to be unpacked and addressed to empower women to play their respective roles in health promotion hence the vitality of commemorating International Women’s Day.

In 2024, International Women’s Day is being commemorated under the theme: Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress (#InvestInWomen). Despite the contribution women make to health systems and supporting the realization of health for all, women hold only 25% of senior leadership roles in the sector. If leadership roles were allocated on merit, then since women are 70% of health workers, 70% of health sector leaders would be women. This is the opposite of the current situation where men hold 75% of leadership roles but are only 30% of health workers. This gendered leadership gap in healthcare needs to be filled among other challenges, hence the cruciality of bringing women leaders together for health policy dialogue this International Women’s Day.

The Africa Health Strategy (2016 -2030), Catalytic Framework to end AIDS, TB, and Malaria by 2030, and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have strategic objectives which include strengthening leadership and governance and empowering women, youth and adolescents to expand social protection to address equity. Additionally, the Strategy for Gender Equality & Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) (2018-2028) sets forth a plan to realize Aspiration 6 of the AU Agenda 2063: “*An Africa where development is people-driven, relying upon the potential offered by people, especially its women and youth and caring for children,*”. Summarily, the AU recognizes the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment for achieving the health and development goals of the continent.

In this context, the AU Commission, under the leadership of the Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development will hold a virtual policy dialogue titled, “*Closing the Gap: How Women’s Leadership Strengthens Health Systems in Africa*,” to commemorate the 2024 International Women’s Day.

The event will bring together representatives from AU Member States, Specialized Organs, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), UN agencies and Development Partners, Civil Society Organs, and more, in the fields of GEWE and health systems strengthening.

**Objectives of the meeting are to:**

The main objective of the event is to commemorate 2024 International Women’s Day under the theme: “*Closing the Gap: How Women’s Leadership Strengthens Health Systems in Africa*.” **The specific objectives are:**

- i. To identify the gaps and opportunities for enhancing women’s leadership in health systems strengthening in Africa.
- ii. To explore the strategies and actions for advancing GEWE in Africa’s health sector.
- iii. To foster collaboration and partnership among African women leaders and other stakeholders in the health sector.

**Expected outcomes of the meeting:**

- i. A set of recommendations and commitments for strengthening African women’s leadership in health systems to be disseminated to all AU Member States after the session.

**Participation at the event:**

All Members of the Press are welcome to attend.

**For more information, please contact:**

**Ms. Inas Mubarak** | Head of Health Systems, Diseases and Nutrition Division, Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, African Union Commission| E-mail: [AbbasI@africa-union.org](mailto:AbbasI@africa-union.org)

**For further media inquiries, please contact:**

1. **Ms. Whitney Mwangi** | Health Policy Communications and Advocacy Specialist, Directorate of Health and Humanitarian Affairs | Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, African Union Commission | E-mail: [WhitneyM@africa-union.org](mailto:WhitneyM@africa-union.org)
2. **Mr. Gamal Eldin Ahmed A. Karrar** | Senior Communication Officer | Information and Communications Directorate | E-mail: [GamalK@africa-union.org](mailto:GamalK@africa-union.org)

**Information and Communication Directorate**, African Union Commission | E-mail: [DIC@africa-union.org](mailto:DIC@africa-union.org)  
**Web:** [www.au.int](http://www.au.int) | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia | **Follow Us:** [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)