



**GENDER PRE-FORUM TO THE 11<sup>TH</sup> HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNANCE: TRENDS, PROSPECTS, AND CHALLENGES**

**THEME:**

***STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AS AN ANTIDOTE FOR UNCONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES OF GOVERNMENT***

**DRAFT OUTCOME STATEMENT**

**20 - 21 NOVEMBER 2022  
COTONOU, REPUBLIC OF BENIN**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. After decades of the push for the consolidation of democratic norms on the continent, the recurrence of Unconstitutional Changes of Government and their associated challenges are becoming a worrying trend which pose serious threats to governance, peace and stability on the continent.
2. Creating a platform for conversations that attend to the realities of African women and register their contributions and recommendations for reversing UCG is critical. Due to the re-emergence of UCG in the African Continent, interlinked with security issues like the proliferation of terrorism, the enhancement of women's participation in politics and decision-making processes is not only an assurance of Africa's commitment to progress but can be a mechanism of de-escalating possible security challenges and reversing UCG in the Continent.
3. It is in light of this that the African Union Organs and Institutions that form the African Governance Platform through the AGA-APSA Secretariat convened the annual Gender Pre-Forum to the 11th High-Level Dialogue under the theme, "Women's political participation as an antidote for Unconstitutional Changes of Government" from 20 to 21 November 2022 in Cotonou, Benin.
4. The sub-themes discussed during the Forum include resurgence of UCG as a setback for women's human rights in Africa; analysis of AU and RECS' normative frameworks for the protection of women's rights during UCG; the role of women in contributing to peaceful political transitions and normalizing civil and military relationships; strategies for transformation: strengthening women's political participation as an antidote to UCG; inclusive implementation of the Accra and Malabo Declaration against UCG:
5. This Outcome Statement presents the general trends, challenges and recommendations of the Gender Pre-Forum to the 11th High-Level Dialogue.

## **II. ATTENDANCE**

6. The two-day forum brought together participants from Gender-focused organizations working on democracy, governance, and Human Rights; AU Member States, including representatives of National Institutions, Agencies that focus on good governance, democracy, and Human Rights; selected Think Tanks and Academic Research Institutions with experience on issues of democratic governance, peace, and security; media practitioners; artist, Cultural, and Heritage organizations; representatives of the AGP; International organizations, Development Partners, and UN Agencies; and the Diaspora.

## **III. GENERAL TRENDS**

**The following were mentioned as general trends with regard to women and UCG:**

7. Unconstitutional Changes of Government affect the society as a whole but the impact on women is one whose peculiarity should not be ignored.

8. Women are key for the realisation of Agenda 2063 and for the vision of a united, integrated and prosperous Africa. It was acknowledged that women make up more than 50% of Africa's population and should therefore take a central role in strengthening democratic governance in Africa.
9. There was unanimity on the fact that UCG reverse gains made in the promotion of women's political participation within Member States, particularly the absence of women in transition governments.
10. Unconstitutional conduct by governments such as the manipulation of election outcomes and the constitution, corruption and failure to deliver culminates into lack of trust of populations in their governments.
11. The AU has spearheaded the establishment of normative frameworks and policies to ensure that Africa harnesses its demographic dividend. However, these frameworks have not been sufficiently popularised, domesticated, or implemented.
12. Reflecting on avenues which could lead to enhancing opportunity for women in decision-making starts with changing the narrative of women being victims to magnifying their role and amplifying their positive contribution in political space, governance and decision-making.
13. It is important to forge a collective awareness about the essence and significance of the citizenship of women, in promoting awareness that their rights and freedoms are part of human dignity.
14. Increasingly, African women in political spaces are collaborating to bring about transformation with regards to women's effective participation and strengthening their capacities and the capacities of grassroots women to take up leadership roles.
15. Inaccurate conceptualisation of the struggle for women's political representation and participation, rather than being a "we versus them" approach, is being transformed into a collaborative endeavour for the well-being of our communities.

#### **IV. CHALLENGES**

**The following are challenges that impact on women's substantive representation in decision-making positions:**

16. The framing of African women solely as victims, caregivers and as holders of soft positions directly impacts their socio-political participation, particularly in a post UCG environment.
17. Traditional notions on the role of women within African society still hold women back and hinder their full and meaningful participation in political leadership. These norms which are ingrained in

all the structures of political and social life confine women to roles which do not promote their aspirations.

18. Poor recognition of women's contribution to peace, security and development issues at a national, subregional and continental level.
19. The existence of a multiplicity of normative frameworks on good governance, democracy and UCG have not sufficiently translated to having an increase of women in decision-making spaces, despite the reality that the impact of UCG has the greatest bearing on them.
20. Although several African countries have laws on parity, the implementation of parity at the national level is stifled by the fact that political parties have not come to terms with the need for women to be equally represented.
21. Women's political participation and representation is still hindered by cultural norms, unprogressive traditional beliefs and institutional structures.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***TO THE AFRICAN UNION AND RECS:***

22. The AU is not an implementation agency, but plays a key role in making MS accountable in terms of abiding by constitutional principles and values.
23. RECs and MS should take responsibility at the sub-regional and national level and be accountable for reporting on the implementation status of normative frameworks.
24. Consideration should be given to the organisation of a forum between organised women leaders from the grassroots and the leadership of the AU and its institutions, as such voices from within communities are powerful change agents.
25. AU and RECs need to enhance and strengthen cooperation with civil society organisations to develop better solutions for women's inclusion in decision-making positions.

### ***TO AU MEMBERS STATES***

26. The inclusion of key normative frameworks on women's rights and women's representation in political spaces in education curricula could be an effective way of promoting domestication and ownership of these frameworks by African citizenry.

27. Efforts to promote women's political participation and representation must not only be pursued from the perspective of women's equal representation, but also from the perspective of the orientation of the state and the structures, systems and institutions that perpetuate patriarchal norms.
28. Women, especially those at the grassroots, ought to be empowered by MS to take centre stage in issues that directly affect them, including in situations of UCG. This requires promoting the education, training and sensitization of women in MS and entire populations about existing frameworks and the rights of women enshrined in these instruments.
29. Engage religious leaders on the need to ensure the representation of women in the religious sphere, as religion wields significant influence in shaping society's conceptualisation of women's participation in structures and institutions.
30. Rather than relying on society's goodwill to achieve women's political representation, MS should strive to implement tangible policies that ensure women's representation, such as quota systems.
31. Translate and popularise normative frameworks on UCG such as the Accra and Malabo Declarations into African indigenous languages of AU Member States.
32. Develop Action Plans that will facilitate the engagement of women in political spaces.
33. Ratify and domesticate the AU normative frameworks, particularly the Maputo Protocol and the ACDEG.

***TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS:***

34. Empower and harness the knowledge and experiences of women who have not necessarily acquired formal education is key in promoting good governance, peace and security.
35. Shift policy direction from engaging in individual self-reliance of women to the collective empowerment of women. Women who act in solidarity constitute political power to make their voices heard.
36. Forge partnerships and linkages with the diaspora, known as the 6th region of Africa, in order for them to be technical and financial resource partners towards implementing programmes that can empower women and increase their socio political participation. There is a great pan-African vision in the diaspora and the aspirations reflected in this statement should reflect that the diaspora wants to be involved as a stronger stakeholder.
37. Engage in lobbying and advocacy for the ratification of AU shared values and instruments, in particular the ACDEG and the Maputo Protocol to strengthen women's empowerment and political participation.
38. Civil society should enhance their position within the society as a grassroots implementing agent. They should use their local insight to design implementation mechanisms that effectively respond

to the needs of the community, aligning them to the various legal and normative frameworks in combating UCG.