The Role of Women in Delivering Peace Dividends Through the AfCFTA Implementation

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The African Governance Platform (AGP) organized the Gender Pre-Forum to the 12th High-Level Dialogue under the theme of "Women’s Role in delivering peace dividends through the implementation of the AfCFTA." The Gender Pre-Forum to the High-Level dialogue is organized annually to provide women with a safe and collaborative space to discuss issues that are of critical importance to the Continent. The overall goal of the Gender Pre-Forum to the 12th HLD was to provide a collaborative, open, and inclusive space to leverage and foster meaningful participation of women’s role to deliver peace dividends through the implementation of the AfCFTA.

2. The sub-themes discussed during the pre-forum centred on enhancing the empowerment of African women in democratic governance and socioeconomic advancement, implementing the AfCFTA with a Gender-Inclusive approach for peaceful prosperity and pathways to acknowledging the voices of Women in trade, unleashing the potential of trade for achieving peace dividends.

3. This Outcome Statement presents the general trends, challenges, and recommendations of the Gender Pre-forum to the 12th High-Level Dialogue.

II. ATTENDANCE

Gender-focused organizations working on democracy, governance, and Human Rights in general and specific thematic areas under consideration during this Pre-Forum; 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; Selected Media Practitioners; Artist, Cultural, and Heritage organizations; Representatives of the AGP; International organizations, Development Partners, and UN Agencies; and Diaspora; and the Media.
III. HIGHLIGHTS

Women, specifically African women, have been trading before trade agreements and have been champions of cross-border trading for generations before the existence of legal and normative provisions.

Most trade policies consider women as a homogenous group, whereas women are heterogeneous and have different backgrounds and are dealing with different challenges.

African women are essential for the continent's development and governance. Despite this, they face significant challenges during conflicts, including violence and displacement. These challenges stem from cultural and structural barriers that limit their roles to traditional roles and responsibilities.

Given that women’s participation in trade is usually prominent in the informal sector, women are less likely to get access to bank loans, become exporters, receive social protection, and have access to information and technology.

In addition to institutional frameworks meant to ensure that women are properly represented, there is a need to ensure re-engineering of socialization of society, because promoting inclusion requires the transformation of spaces that perpetuate exclusion. This includes changing of mind-sets about women’s traditional roles in our African societies.

Peace is essential for trade, and specifically, for cross-border trading. It is evident that the achievements made so far by women in trade have proven to be crucial for community cohesion, sustainable peace, and stability.

Young women possess requisite creativity and innovation which are key to ensuring the effective implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) but this can only be possible when African women are capacitated.
IV. KEY OUTCOMES

Demographic Strength of Women: Africa’s demographic strength of women makes it crucial to invest in enabling them to contribute to sustainable development.

Women's Rights Legislation: Legislation has played a significant role in promoting women's rights, including eliminating harmful practices and increasing political participation. It is important to have increased policy and political engagement for women's participation in democratic governance.

Economic Empowerment: Women's economic empowerment is vital for sustainable economic growth cognizant of the fact that high taxes and corruption at borders are challenges faced by women in trade. Reducing the cost of exports within Africa can promote intra-Africa trade, thus actively boosting economic opportunities for women cognizant of the currency differences and reliance of the dollar.

Barriers to Trade: Women engaged in trade come from varied backgrounds and face a wide range of challenges that require careful consideration during the formulation of policies. Within the realm of informal trade, key obstacles include restricted access to loans, social safety nets, and technology, all of which are deemed as critical issues. Additionally, women in trade encounter further hindrances in the form of inadequate transportation infrastructure, visa restrictions, corruption, and other bureaucratic hurdles.

Impact of Instability: Political instability and conflicts in Africa affect women traders and livelihoods negatively. Additionally, women face obstacles due to conflict, cultural, systemic, and structural difficulties, as well as limited roles in leadership.

Nextus between Peace and Trade: Peace plays a pivotal role in facilitating cross-border trade, and the invaluable contributions of women to trade have significantly promoted community harmony, long-term peace, and overall stability. Women's engagement in informal cross-border trade has effectively addressed issues like unemployment, poverty, and food security. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that UCGs have introduced an added layer of complexity,
disproportionately burdening women who are required to pay fees for their safe passage.

**Grassroots Support:** Recognizing women’s contributions at the grassroots level, including their role in local peace structures, is essential. Part of the support includes empowering cross-border structures and committees at the local level.

**Gender-Responsive Actions:** Promoting gender-inclusive initiatives within the AfCFTA involves facilitating women’s access to information, training, technology, and financial resources. This encompasses actively involving women in cross-border trade through approaches rooted in gender-sensitive human rights principles.

**Mentoring and Education:** Promoting mentoring, training, and civic education can boost women’s confidence and participation in governance spaces.

**Leveraging Platforms and networks:** Utilizing established platforms such as Femwise plays a crucial role in advancing inclusivity and bolstering women’s advocacy initiatives. Women entrepreneurs are also encouraged to join existing networks to enhance their knowledge and skills.

**Addressing the role of culture and tradition:** Discussing inclusion would be futile without considering its sociological nature. Culture and traditions play a key role in keeping women in limiting roles and spaces.

V. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Simplify Policy Language:** Make an effort to simplify the technical language used in the development of policies, making them more accessible to the African population. This will enable better understanding and participation in trade-related initiatives.

**Document Women’s Contributions:** Develop structured ways to enable women to tell their own stories and document their successes in the democratic space. Highlight their contributions, especially at the grassroots level.
**Mitigate Conflict Impacts:** Recognize that conflict situations disrupt women's trade activities and decision-making. Consider the fragility of peace in various contexts and address the militarization of border areas and work to prevent human rights violations.

**Gender-Responsive Actions for AfCFTA:** Implement gender-responsive actions related to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), including awareness campaigns, training, mentorship platforms, access to technology, online markets, and credit and investment opportunities for women.

**Address Infrastructure and Administrative Bottlenecks:** Improve transportation infrastructure, streamline visa access, and address corruption and administrative barriers that hinder women's participation in cross-border trade. Encourage support for existing cross-border structures and committees to facilitate trade and cooperation.

**Empower Women for Economic Development:** Strengthen women's involvement in social and economic development. Recognize that women's economic empowerment is crucial for sustainable economic growth.

**Emphasize Policy, Transparency, and Engagement:** Promote policy measures, political engagement, transparency, and public engagement as key factors for women's participation in democratic governance.

**VI. CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, Africa's demographic strength in its female population offers a pivotal opportunity for fostering sustainable development. Realizing this potential requires a multi-faceted approach, involving legislative support, economic empowerment, and the resolution of trade barriers. While legislation has played a crucial role in advancing women's rights, a heightened policy commitment is imperative to enable women's active participation in governance.

Economic empowerment stands as a cornerstone for growth, and addressing trade-related challenges can unlock a world of opportunities for women. These obstacles encompass limited access to financial support, infrastructure deficiencies, and
bureaucratic hurdles. The progress of women is further impeded by political instability and cultural constraints. The promotion of peace is paramount, particularly for cross-border trade, where women make significant contributions. Grassroots support and gender-responsive measures are essential for fostering inclusivity.

Initiatives such as mentoring, education, and the implementation of quotas can substantially bolster women's involvement in democratic governance. Lastly, the transformation of cultural norms is an imperative step towards lasting change. These collective approaches jointly unleash the potential of women, contributing to a more equitable and prosperous Africa.