



**FIFTH MEETING OF THE SPECIALISED TECHNICAL
COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT,
LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (STC-SDLE-5)
29 JULY- 02 AUGUST 2024
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

**DRAFT REPORT OF THE PARALLEL SESSION
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SECTOR
29 - 30 JULY 2024**

INTRODUCTION

I. OPENING REMARKS

The parallel session for the Social Development sector commenced with the opening remarks from the Chairperson, setting the tone for the day's discussions. The Rapporteur was then nominated, with the representative from Uganda taking on this role. The program for the parallel session was subsequently adopted by the delegates present.

II. ON ENDING HARMFUL PRACTICES

Five key documents were presented for endorsement:

The African Union representatives made presentations on the following documents:

1. **The presentation on the AU Declaration and Roadmap of the 2nd International Conference on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), held in October 2023 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania:** This presentation emphasized the African Union's commitment to eradicating FGM. The declaration reaffirmed zero tolerance for the practice and called for enhanced collaboration between member states, civil society, and international organizations. The roadmap outlined strategic actions, including capacity building, awareness campaigns, the establishment of strong legal frameworks, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

Key objectives of the roadmap include strengthening legislation to criminalize FGM, enhancing healthcare services for survivors, and promoting education to shift cultural attitudes. It also focused on supporting community-based interventions that offer alternative rites of passage and fostering international cooperation to share best practices and secure funding. The presentation underscored the need for a coordinated, multi-faceted approach to eliminate FGM across Africa.

2. **Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Strategy and Plan of Action (2021-2025):** The presentation on the Online Child Exploitation and Abuse Strategy and Plan of Action (2021-2025) detailed the African Union's approach to addressing online child exploitation through prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership. Prevention efforts focus on educational programs to raise awareness and promote safe internet practices among children, parents, and educators. Protection measures involve establishing robust reporting mechanisms and providing support services for victims. Prosecution aims to strengthen legal

frameworks and law enforcement capacities, while enhancing international cooperation to address cross-border cases.

The strategy emphasizes a multi-stakeholder approach, engaging governments, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations in a coordinated response. Technology companies are also involved in developing tools to detect and prevent online abuse. The plan of action includes specific timelines and benchmarks to monitor progress and ensure accountability, aiming to create a safer online environment for children across Africa.

3. **AU Harmful Practices Accountability Framework:** The following way-forward actions on the Accountability Framework were presented as follow-up actions on the implementation of the framework; The AU Harmful Practices Accountability Framework outlined several key actions to advance the elimination of harmful practices:

- a) **Enhance Technology Utilization:** Strengthen the use of information and communication technology, mobile technology, and social media to digitize and improve the efficiency of reporting processes for harmful practices.
- b) **AU Theme Designation before 2030:** Seek to have the elimination of harmful practices designated as the theme of the Year of the African Union by 2030, following AU procedures. This designation aims to provide special focus and accelerate efforts towards eliminating harmful practices.
- c) **Organize Collaborative Efforts:** Facilitate cross-fertilization by organizing joint meetings, missions, and briefings among various AU organs and member States to enhance coordination and knowledge sharing.
- d) **Strengthen Regional Partnerships:** Strengthen partnerships with Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and support the organization of annual regional meetings focused on harmful practices to promote regional cooperation and coordinated action.

4. **The Extension of the Strategy of the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage and the AU Saleema Initiative on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation from 2024 to 2030:** The proposal to extend the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage and the AU Saleema Initiative on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation from 2024 to 2030 aimed to sustain and enhance efforts to combat child marriage across Africa. Building on previous progress, the presentation on the extension emphasized the need for intensified advocacy and awareness campaigns that highlight the negative impacts of child marriage on girls' health, education, and well-being. It also encouraged member states to strengthen legal

frameworks prohibiting child marriage and ensuring effective enforcement, alongside promoting data collection and research to inform policies and interventions.

Additionally, the proposal for the extension of this document advocated for multi-stakeholder engagement, fostering collaboration among governments, civil society, and international partners to implement effective strategies and share best practices. A key focus is placed on education and economic empowerment for girls, which is critical in preventing child marriage and enabling informed decision-making about their futures. Overall, the extension of the strategy and the Saleema Initiative sought to ensure that the elimination of child marriage remains a priority, promoting coordinated actions and comprehensive strategies that align with the AU's broader goals for child protection and gender equality.

Discussions on the aforementioned documents

5. The floor was opened for comments and discussions from member states and delegates. The key points highlighted include:
 - a) **Support for Document Extensions:** All member states supported the extension and adoption of the documents presented. With the AU Saleema Initiative on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation and the Strategy of the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage being extended to 2024-2030.
 - b) **Inclusion of ILO Convention 190:** It was recommended to include ILO Convention 190 on the elimination of violence and harassment in the ICFGM Declaration and invite all member states to ratify this convention and the AU Protocol on Social Protection. In response to this recommendation, the meeting was informed that the declaration cannot be changed but the ILO Convention 190 will be part of the background document to be included in the roadmap for the implementation of the declaration.
 - c) **Cultural and Mindset Change:** Emphasis on the need for cultural and mindset changes, especially in countries with a high prevalence of FGM.
 - d) **Country-Level Interventions:** While regional interventions are important, country-level actions are crucial. There was a call for national-level implementation and accountability.
 - e) **Interlinked Documents:** Given the interlinked and cross-cutting nature of the documents, a simultaneous discussion of all documents was suggested.

- f) **Stakeholder Involvement:** The importance of identifying key stakeholders, including social partners, who should be included in the ICFGM as the issue is related to human rights.
- g) **Awareness and Education:** Expand awareness-raising efforts at a wider level, including promoting free education to tackle harmful practices.
- h) **Social Policies:** Governments should implement social policies to protect vulnerable groups, which should be added to the strategies on Ending Female Genital Mutilation and Ending Child Marriage
- i) **Preventive Approaches:** Improve preventive measures, focusing on changing mindsets and targeting influential societal figures such as traditional, religious, and community leaders.
- j) **Legal Frameworks and Education:** Preparing society and establishing legal frameworks to protect girls while investing in education to improve human capital.
- k) **Data Collection and Information Sharing:** Enhance data collection and information sharing, involving other stakeholders in these processes.
- l) **Sensitization and Advocacy:** Focus on sensitization and advocacy to encourage member states to ratify the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- m) **Harmonization of Reporting Processes:** Propose harmonization of the reporting processes for better consistency and accountability.
- n) **Strategic Technical Support:** The African Union must provide strategic technical support to Member States experiencing conflicts through specialized interventions aimed at mitigating gender-based violence, with a particular focus on harmful practices such as FGM and Child Marriage.

The above initiatives reflect a comprehensive approach to safeguarding children's rights, demonstrating member states' commitment to creating a safer and more equitable environment for children across the continent

6. **Recommendation:** The experts recommended the following documents for extension and for endorsement by the Ministers: the OCSEA Strategy and Plan of Action; the AU Saleema Initiative on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation; the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage; the Declaration of the 2nd International Conference on FGM; and the AU Accountability Framework on Ending Harmful Practices, in addition to the roadmap on the Declaration of the 2nd International Conference on FGM and the way-forward actions on the accountability framework.

The experts further recommended an Africa Day on Ending Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage.

ON SOCIAL WELFARE, AGEING AND DISABILITY

7. Briefings on Protocols for Older Persons, Persons with Disabilities (African Union Disability Architecture), Persons with Albinism, and the AU Social Agenda
 - a) The African Union representative provided an overview of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights concerning the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. He noted that the Protocol has been ratified by Member States, thereby entering into force. He emphasized the necessity of progress reports on the Protocol's implementation, which must be submitted to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Furthermore, he highlighted the plans to establish a Disability Council and a Regional Office focused on advocacy and training, while also addressing the challenges posed by the limited engagement of Member States with reporting tools.
 - b) The representative also updated attendees on the AU Plan of Action and Implementation Strategy aimed at ending attacks and other human rights violations targeting persons with albinism in Africa (2021-2031). He asserted that violence against individuals with albinism constitutes a violation of human rights and a harmful practice. Continuous efforts are essential for the domestication, implementation, and monitoring of relevant tools at the national level, alongside programs that provide necessary health and social services for individuals with albinism.
 - c) The AU Representative also updated participants on the appointment of the Special Envoy on Albinism. The Special Envoy will support in the implementation of the Plan of Action on Ending Attacks on Persons with Albinism. Two Member States have expressed interest and the process is underway to implement the decision.
 - d) Regarding the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons, the representative indicated that 14 Member States have ratified , with one additional country required for the Protocol to come into force. He stressed the need for the Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing at the national level to be intentionally designed to advocate for the rights and welfare of older persons. He pointed out the necessity for specialized services, including the training of gerontologists, and the development of targeted national strategies and policies for Member States.
8. Following deliberations, the delegates at the Experts Meeting committed to several actions:

- a) The AU to continue advocacy and knowledge-sharing missions to encourage Member States to sign and ratify the Protocols.
 - b) Stakeholders engaged with or individuals impacted by issues concerning persons with disabilities, older persons, persons with albinism, and the AU social agenda must raise awareness regarding relevant laws and policies, as well as the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa.
 - c) Emphasized the importance of signing and ratifying the Protocol on the Rights of Older Persons, Persons with Disabilities, and the Protocol on Social Protection and Social Security. In addition, the AU to continue to engage Member States to enhance their understanding of the varying ratification processes across different countries.
9. **Recommendation:** The experts recommended that the Ministers endorse enhanced advocacy and technical assistance for the signing and ratifying of the instruments for the Protocols on the Rights of Older Persons, Persons with Disabilities, and the Protocol on Social Protection and Social Security.

PRESENTATION BY THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD

Under Decision Ex.CL/Dec.1201(XLII), the Executive Council requested the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child develop a Child Safeguarding Policy. Accordingly, the ACERWC has led the development of the Safeguarding Policy and, after a thorough process, adopted it during its 43rd Ordinary Session and found it important to submit it to the STC on Social Development, Labour and Employment for consideration and adoption by the AU policy organs, as requested by the Executive Council.

The Child Safeguarding policy aims to capacitate and support staff to prevent child harm; provide clear guidelines for reporting concerns, put in place procedures for handling misconduct and empower communities and children to report violations. The policy is applicable on all AU staff and associates worldwide, in both professional and private contexts. It covers all children in contact with AU staff or programs through activities such as meetings, events, research, publications, communications, missions and personal engagements. The Policy seeks to safeguard the protection of the child in the best way possible.. It is guided by the principles of the best interests of the child, non-discrimination and equal protection for all children, promotion of the right to life, survival, and development, and encouragement of safe child participation. The implementation of the policy is further guided by principles of; swift response to safeguarding concerns with confidentiality; Procedural fairness in investigations; Victim/survivor-centred

approach and "Do no harm" principle to prevent negative impacts on communities. The ACERWC is committed to oversee policy implementation, provide technical support and resources.

Recommendation: The technical experts at the STC-SDLE 5 recommended that the Ministers endorse the Child Safeguarding policy framework.