



DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

MEDIA ADVISORY /25TH AU SUMMIT

SECOND (2nd) AFRICAN UNION HIGH LEVEL PANEL ON GENDER EQUALITY & WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT (GEWE)

INVITATION TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MEDIA

WHEN: Wednesday 10 to Friday 12 June 2015

TIME: 9:00 am

WHERE: The Sandton Convention Center, Ballroom 1 A, Johannesburg, South Africa.

THEME: *"Make it happen through the Financial Inclusion of Women in the Agribusiness Sector"*

WHO: The Second High Level Panel (HLP) on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is jointly organised by the Africa Union Commission and the Republic of South Africa, with the support of NEPAD/Agency, UNWomen, UNDP, AfDB and OXFAM.

OBJECTIVES: Among the six priorities adopted under the AU Theme for 2015, the second HLP will focus on the promotion of financial inclusion of women in Agribusiness, The AUC jointly with the Government of The Republic of South Africa and partners will organize the 2nd AU High level Panel on GEWE a Platform of Academia, Scholars, Researchers and Gender Experts.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

The High Level Panel on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment will aim to:

- Create a space for high-ranked African women in public and private sectors including women' scholars, researches, academia, and gender experts to discuss emerging issues on GEWE;

- Develop a common GEWE advocates position on the African Agenda 2063, on the African Women's Decade (2010-2020) and on any other programs of the United Nations and the African Union on GEWE;
- Examine emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality of women and men and make recommendations to the AU Summits;
- To promote and strengthen networking among women in academia, media, Civil Society Organizations, international organizations, the private sector and the young women in Africa;
- Present analytical work and researches on financial inclusion of Women and their impacts on development;
- Brainstorm on practical strategies and actions on women's inclusion in financial mechanisms to boost women's empowerment in agriculture, trade and Industry, fisheries, infrastructure and Energy

PARTICIPANTS:

- AU Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs,
- academia,
- scholars,
- researchers,
- RECs,
- media,
- youth,
- CSOs,
- women in agribusiness private sector and
- development partners.

OUTCOME:

- Report on the High Level Panel Meetings will be shared with all stakeholders;
- Call for action/ action plan on the financial inclusion of women in agribusiness presented to the Heads of State and Government;
- Database of experts on women's financial inclusion and agribusiness;
- Documentation on success stories on national and regional strategies to improve women's economic empowerment in the agribusiness sector presented and shared among states actors and non-states actors.

BACKGROUND:

The consideration of gender in sectorial development policies of the African Union experienced a breakthrough at level of continental organization as well as in Member States despite the existence of many challenges that still persist in regards to gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa. This political will has led to the adoption of the AU Gender Architecture, whose seventh and latest pillar is the ***High Level Panel on Gender Equality and Empowerment Women in Africa (HLP on GEWE)***.

The idea of institutionalizing a High Level Panel was adopted during the Fifth (5th) Ordinary Session of AU Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs held at the AUC Headquarters on 14 May 2013, during which the Ministers recommended to the African Union Commission to hold an annual High Level Panel on ***Gender***

Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) in Africa, in a similar manner as the High Level Panel on Peace and Security and the one on Governance and Democracy in Africa, to:

- Create a space for high-ranked African women in public and private sectors including women' scholars, researches, academia, and gender experts to discuss emerging issues on GEWE;
- Develop a common GEWE advocates position on the African Agenda 2063, on the African Women's Decade (2010-2020) and on any other programs of the United Nations and the African Union on GEWE;
- Examine emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality of women and men and make recommendations to the AU Summits;
- To promote and strengthen networking among women in academia, media, Civil Society Organizations, international organizations, the private sector and the young women in Africa;

Following the recommendation of Ministers and the offer of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire to host the first edition, the African Union Commission organized the First (1st) High Level Panel on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, from 02 to 04 September 2014 in close collaboration of the Ivorian Government and UN Partners, namely UNDP, UNICEF, ECA, UNWOMEN and UNFPA. Among many others, participants of the First High Level Panel included academia, researchers, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and gender machineries.

The first edition of the High Level Panel, which was organized in the context of the Celebration of the Fiftieth (50th) Anniversary of the OAU/AU in 2013, made possible the consolidation of the contributions of African intellectual women to the African Common Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

This first panel was used to test the new approach of the African Union on the conception of an intellectual platform on emerging issues on gender mainstreaming. Consequently, eminent African women were able to make their contribution to the celebration of the Fiftieth (50th) OAU/AU Anniversary, as well as to the development of the Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Agenda. From this meeting, the Abidjan Declaration on the First AU High Level Panel on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Context of Post MDG's 2015 was adopted and requested to the Commission to incorporate the outcomes of the High Panel on GEWE into the African Common Position.

In the same line and as a reflection of the sustained political will to mainstream gender in the AU development Policies at the continental level, the AU Heads of State and Government (HOSG) have declared 2015 "*Year of Women's Empowerment and Development Towards Africa's Agenda 2063*" thus recalling that Agenda 2063, as the Continental development framework cannot be achieved without the full and effective participation of empowered African women, representing the largest population of the continent. The declaration coincides with the 20th Anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action (1995), the 5th Anniversary of the African Women's Decade (2010-2020), the 15th Anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the launching of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At the margins of the 24th AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government Assembly AU/Dec. 539 (XXIII) the AU Commission, GIMAC (Gender is my

Agenda Campaign) and UN Entities, organized a Stakeholders Consultative Meeting from 20 to 23 January 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At the meeting, AU Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs, RECs, CSO's and Development Partners have discussed the effective implementation of the AU 2015 theme on Women's Empowerment, which should go beyond the gender rhetoric. The need for the implementation of concrete actions with visible and measurable impacts on women's socio-economic and political status on the ground was very well highlighted. The Stakeholders also came up with Six (6) Priorities Areas to be implemented during and beyond 2015 namely:

- Education, Sciences, Technology and ICT;
- Agriculture with a focus on Agribusiness;
- Economic Empowerment and Financial Inclusion;
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Women;
- Peace and Security; and
- Leadership, Governance, Democracy

JUATIFICATION:

The AU Assembly during its 25th ordinary session adopted Agenda 2063, the continental development programme Agenda 2063 highlights particularly the importance of the involvement of women and youth in the development of the continent. In this regard, 2015 has been dedicated to Women in Africa and the theme of the Summit was: 2015, "**Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa Agenda 2063**". The Assembly further requested the elaboration of the First 10 Year implementation plan of Agenda 2063 for adoption during the upcoming June AU Summit. Agenda 2063 takes into account the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods which was adopted by the AU HOSG₂ at the AU Summit in July 2014 during the Year of Agriculture. **<<Women are key players in this development because Women comprise the largest percentage of the workforce in the agricultural sector and represent the largest number of small farmers contributing to 80% of the agricultural production, but they do not have access and control over all land and productive resources>>;**

Their labour condition is still hectic. African women continue to labour in the 21st century with out-dated means such as the hoe, the machete, pestle and mortar, grinding stone used in the 15th century for subsistence production to feed 900 million people on the continent. Consequently/therefore, African women can neither compete nor provide substantial contribution to the income of the women as well as the economy.

Furthermore, on the financial aspect, Research shows that in Africa, more than 70 percent of women are financially excluded and women's access to finance and financial services consistently lag behind that of their male counterparts. They face various barriers in accessing to financial services, such as time and mobility constraints, illiteracy, legal and cultural constraints and discrimination; and this, for various reasons: poverty, limited employment in the formal sector, and cultural barriers to land and property ownership, to name a few.

Indeed, most of African Business women are still engaged in very small's economic activities due to various factors including financial barriers arising from inadequate access to basic financial services savings such as savings, credit, and insurance services.

To tackle these challenges, the leadership of the African Union Commission prioritized financial inclusion and women economic empowerment focusing on the agricultural sector which significantly benefits from the contribution of many rural African women.

<<Women still own as little as 25 percent of the land, despite. FAO have found that closing the gender gap in agricultural inputs alone could lift up to 150 million people out of hunger; and are still not fully integrated in some of the most productive sectors, such as agribusiness or extractive industries. A one percent increase in the gender gap in effective labour reduces the output per worker up to 0.49 percent in African countries. This translates to an annual economic loss exceeding USD 60 billion. >>

<<In Africa, 80% of the agricultural production comes from small farmers, who are mostly rural women. Women comprise the largest percentage of the workforce in the agricultural sector, but do not have access and control over all land and productive resources>>

Hence, the AU through Agenda 2063 including the CADP, seize the opportunity to continue to support and promote the role of African citizens, particularly of women, as key drivers of the continent's development. Women rural farmers face various constraints, like time and mobility constraints, illiteracy; legal and cultural constraints and discrimination remain some of the barriers to women's access to financial services. Women have difficulties accessing finance for various reasons: poverty, limited employment in the formal sector, and cultural barriers to land and property ownership. Women Rural farmer' in Africa continue to labour in the 21st century with out-dated means such as the hoe, the machete, pestle and mortar, grinding stone used in the 15th century to feed 900 million people on the continent..

Subsistence production by women can therefore neither compete nor provide substantial contribution to the income of the women as well as the economy Research shows that in Africa, more than 70 percent of women are financially excluded and women's access to finance and financial services consistently lag behind that of their male counterparts.⁷ Indeed, most of African Business women are still engaged in very small's economic activities due to various factors including financial barriers arising from inadequate access to basic financial services savings such as savings, credit, and insurance services.⁸ There is thus a need for accelerating women's financial exclusion to advance women's economic opportunities and rights and to ensure that they meaningfully participate and contribute to the economy. By declaring 2015 year of women's empowerment and 2016 year on Human rights focusing on women's rights, African leaders, demonstrated their political will to address gender inequality and to overcome barriers. which undermine women's health, vulnerability during conflict and post-conflict situation, their un-empowerment at economic, social and political levels, In 2015 and beyond, African women should have access to and control over new technologies and be able to work on modernized and mechanized agriculture to reinforce AU's commitment and vision that **<<The hoe should be placed in agricultural museums>>**

In line with this vision, women's financial inclusion and economic empowerment is an efficient way to ensure access of women to new technologies, capital, finances, land, natural resources, markets and the entire value chain process new and strong legislations and policies have to be adopted by African countries. Financial inclusion of women is a human development priority to ensure an inclusive development in African countries. Financial inclusion cannot only be limited to microfinance and traditional financial system. Implementing financial inclusion involves access for rural women farmers to the following services: *Savings, medium and long term credit, investments, guarantees, money transfers, insurance products, including life insurance.*

For more information on coverage of the Summit please visit the 25th AU Summit web link: <http://summits.au.int/en/25thsummit>

Journalists are invited to cover the event tomorrow Wednesday 10 to Friday 12 June 2015 .

Attached is the draft work program of the event.

Journalists wishing to interview the leadership of the AU Commission during the Summit should submit their requests to Mrs Esther Azaa Tankou E-mail: YambouE@africa-union.org / esthertankou@yahoo.com , Tel: +27(0)789321782

For further information contact

Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission | E-mail: dinfo@african-union.org

Web Site: www.au.int | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia

Follow the AU Commission:

Face book: <https://www.facebook.com/AfricanUnionCommission>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/_AfricanUnion

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/AUCommission>

Learn more at: <http://www.au.int>