



GENDER PRE-FORUM TO THE 9TH HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE

MAGNIFYING WOMEN'S ROLE IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND SILENCING THE GUNS

19-20 November 2020, held online [Webinar/ Virtual Conference]

OUTCOME STATEMENT

Introduction:

1. The 2020 Gender Pre-Forum was convened under the auspices of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) Women Engagement Strategy (AGA-WES) by the AGA secretariat. The consultation was done in close collaboration with the Office of the Special Envoy on Women Peace and Security and the Women and Gender Development Directorate (WGDD) of the AUC. This meeting was held online via webinar [zoom virtual platform] 19 – 20 November, 2020, as part of pre-events of the forthcoming 9th High-Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance in Africa. The meeting further reinforced the African Union (AU) activities towards actualizing its theme of “*Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development*” which was adopted by the 34th Ordinary Session in Niamey, Niger Republic in July 2019. Furthermore, the forum also deliberated on how COVID-19 pandemic requires not only a health-focused intervention but an overall systems solution that is multi-dimensional addressing cultural, socio-economic and political aspects while leaving no one behind specifically women, girls and the vulnerable.
2. The main goal of the Gender Pre-forum was to provide a collaborative, open and inclusive space that will enable African women to engage in policy deliberations, recognize and amplify their contributions towards conflict prevention and building sustainable peace in Africa. Whereas the specific objectives of the forum included: creating an understanding of normative and institutional frameworks relating to democratic governance, peace and security with a particular focus on women; sharing evidence-based knowledge, aggregating perspectives, experiences of women’s contribution to conflict prevention and silencing the guns in the continent; forging new pathways for implementing and mainstreaming gender initiatives across the continent; providing a platform for women to bring about their concrete strategies into the limelight and headline conversations towards silencing the guns in the context of COVID-19 in Africa; to build and strengthen women’s voices in contributing to peace and security governance agenda.
3. To actualize the set out goal and afore-mentioned specific objectives, the forum extensively discussed the state of play of women in conflict prevention, trends, challenges and opportunities, which unraveled the existing reality of women facing

the burden of conflict; the forum x-rayed the various normative and institutional frameworks on women and conflict prevention, which presented a horizon scanning and challenge of normative and institutional as well as legal frameworks on democratic governance and conflict prevention to address conflict; the meeting identified the magnifying women's contribution in conflict prevention through continental, regional and grassroots works they have been engaged in, particularly the role of women in silencing the guns through their contribution to silencing the root causes of conflict; the forum assessed opportunities towards forging new pathways for inclusion, engagement and participation of women beyond 2020; the forum further showcased cases (success stories) of contribution (especially by young women) in Silencing the Guns.

4. In attendance were individuals and agencies working on gender, democracy, governance, peace and security issues in general and specific thematic areas under consideration during this gender pre-forum; AU member states, including representatives of national institutions, organizations that focus on good governance, democracy; selected think tanks and academic research institutions with experience on issues of democratic governance and peace and security; selected media practitioners; private sector; representatives of the African Governance Platform members; international organizations, development partners and United Nations agencies; and the diaspora were present.
5. Following the conversations and frank deliberations during the two-day Gender Pre-Forum on '*Magnifying Women's role in conflict prevention and Silencing the Guns*', the forum came up with the below outcome statement that summarizes the issues, trends; challenges and opportunities, as participants observed:

Emerging Trends/Issues, Challenges and Prospects, and Recommendations, as observed by the participants are as follows:

General Trends

- The outbreak of COVID-19 has no doubt presented us with critical challenges. Participants agreed on the fact that women as first-line responders to crisis presents an opportunity to shape more equitable and inclusive development outcomes and accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.
- Recognised that the role and presence of women is very crucial and paramount in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, largely because women are generational thinkers and that should not be ignored in conflict prevention.
- Patriarchal domination of conflict mediation and prevention spaces makes it difficult to see the place of women in conflict prevention. Likewise, the local efforts of women at grassroots level are not receiving attention, rather the focus has been on continental and regional levels.
- Acknowledged that African Union Member States have put in place several legal and policy interventions which bear witness to their commitment to the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment. Regional frameworks such as the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa were mentioned as significant normative frameworks.

- The African Union Agenda 2063 recognizes that gender equality, peace and human rights are fundamental pillars for achieving sustainable development in Africa. To actualize this, participants were concerned about the entrenched political, economic, and social inequalities and discriminatory norms that have continued to pose as major threats and barriers to women's participation in governance and peacebuilding.
- Noted with concern the need for more AU Member States' to report adequately on regional human rights instruments, a situation which denies citizens and women in particular the opportunity to assess and appreciate the extent to which their governments are implementing obligations on issues of women, peace and security under ratified instruments.
- In addition, broad institutional ownership of initiatives to promote women's participation in governance and conflict prevention needs to be improved at the national level. Such processes are usually driven by a Ministry of Gender or Women's affairs, which should instead focus on coordination and reporting.
- Acknowledged that grassroots advocacy by women-led groups are under recognized and undervalued. This has contributed to failures in building relationships and finding mutual understanding in communities mired in conflict and those in need of post conflict healing and reconciliation. Similarly, the critical role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in supporting women and amplifying their place in peace building and conflict prevention is undervalued and need to be supported.
- Digital space has not effectively enabled conflict resolution and prevention especially in situations where majority of perpetrators are rarely found online.

Challenges and Prospects:

- Participants restated that the role women and girls play in political leadership as well as economic governance, peace and security sector in Africa are yet to be well recognized. This has continued to hinder support from women through various initiatives at national and regional level.
- The lack of prioritizing implementation of key gender responsive international instruments has continued to create problems for women's rights across the continent.
- Participants decried the absence of homegrown indices for monitoring and evaluating commitment of AU member states to the AU shared values particularly in the areas of protecting women's right and enhancing their participation in governance and conflict prevention. This has further engendered the non-translation of global gender-based instruments in Africa.
- There is less emphasis and neglect in investing in young women. This limits and denies young women their role as key drivers for achieving Africa's sustainable development and peace agenda. Participants therefore noted that it is critical to raise and empower a new generation of young African women leaders and experts to serve Africa and the world in designing and implementing development programmes in the context of the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

- Women's movements are now playing critical role in ensuring the implementation of international norms against gender-based violence. Such movements are critical in pushing for police reforms as seen in Nigeria's end SARS protest where feminist played key role. Similarly, Women traditional rulers play important roles in preventing violence and also in mediation as was the case during the war in Liberia. Yet, women traditional leaders do not get much attention in Africa and that needs to change.

Recommendations

CSOs and Women focused grassroots organizations;

- It was underlined that women should aspire to be at the center of Africa's peace and development agenda. Women must understand that their meaningful engagement is imperative in strengthening democratic governance which is central to achieving peace and sustainable development in Africa. Hence CSOs and grassroots development organizations have to do their part to bring women to the fore.
- Citizens and governments must be sensitized to start seeing women's rights as human rights rather than differently. The success of this would enable ratification, domestication and implementation of key gender responsive global and regional human rights instruments by governments. The sensitization would also further strengthen the capacity of Regional Institutions and Member States for women and girls to further enjoy their rights in a bid to bring the much-needed transformation.
- Build synergies through creating platforms to strengthen women's voices to influence policies and bring to life these instruments and contribute to silencing the guns. This requires women-focused agencies embarking on projects to support stakeholders at the national level to ensure greater inclusivity.
- Women groups and networks that operate at the local and national levels should provide opportunities for strengthening women's participation in conflict prevention. This is to boost women's contribution to peacebuilding processes.

Member States:

- Governments across Africa must demonstrate high level of political commitment that combines support for institutional reforms with a focus on strengthening women's socio-economic position, political capacities and addressing discriminatory social norms.
- AU Member States should also invest more in accelerating and scaling up actions to ensure that women's leadership in peace processes is fully recognized and acted upon. This will ensure evaluation of good governance on the basis of governance frameworks established by the AU and other bodies, with inclusion of criteria on women's participation in governance and peacebuilding processes.

African Union

- The African Union should facilitate greater inclusion and empowerment of young women to actively and meaningfully drive the full realization of Africa's Agenda 2063.
- African Union should move from aspiration to action so as to translate into action its shared values as contained in numerous frameworks. To actualize this, women should be placed at the centre of peace agendas in Africa and should be supported

through national and regional initiatives which are country specific, with a focus on countries that are most in need. A clear effort to add young women to high level African Union Led mediation efforts and discussions is recommended.

RECs:

- Women Engagement frameworks and strategies should be developed and implemented throughout the REC's in close collaboration from regional and national organizations.

Development Partners:

- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) should scale up its initiative on "Building an inclusive Post COVID-19 Recovery, Crises Transitions and Governance Reforms in the Sahel" to more beneficiaries across the continent.
- Investing in young women is a key driver for achieving Africa's sustainable development and peace agenda. It is therefore critical to raise and empower a new generation of young African women. The development partners can actualize this by supporting the designing and implementation of development programmes in the context of the SDGs and Agenda 2063.
- Development partners should as much as possible to be consistent with their commitment to supporting the implementation of the Action Plan on Women in Governance and Political Participation. Participants attest that this support to women's broad-based collective action and voice, is instrumental to their ability to negotiate transformative change.
- Women-based civil society organizations require political, technical and financial support from governments and international organisations, which they can leverage on to drive actions towards greater inclusion of women in governance and conflict prevention initiatives. It is therefore essential for development partners to support measures that ensure security and safety of women in their participation in peace and political processes.