

POLICY BRIEF 2021

Renewing African Renaissance as a Lever for Building a Democratic, Peaceful And Prosperous Africa

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-six years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, several frameworks and initiatives have been developed and pursued at global and regional levels to shore up gender equality and women's empowerment and have opportunities to reflect on the roadblocks to achieving them.

For Africa, this started with the formation of the African Union (AU) in 2000 on the basis of the AU Constitutive Act which has promotion of gender equality as one of its foundational principles under Article 4(L). Following the AU Constitutive Act, gender frameworks devised consisted notably of the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter and Women and Peoples' Right on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) and the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.

Also forming an integral part of Africa's gender framework is the AU Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018 to 2028) which was developed to mainstream gender in all AU programming towards gender equality and which sets forth a plan to realize Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063, The Africa We Want.

Agenda 2063's Aspiration 6, which aspires for Africa's development to be driven by the potential of its people including women, also falls in this category of frameworks that set out the

AU's shared values on gender equality. Aspiration 6 has the stated goals of ensuring full gender equality in all spheres of life and eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

The concept of gender parity (full gender equality) that this introduces to the AU's policy and normative landscape is a uniquely African creation that elevates the level of commitment required from AU member states and aspires to change the role of women from victims to change makers in democratic governance spheres.



The gender pre-forum that precedes the annual High Level Dialogue Democracy, Human Rights and Governance in Africa is a platform for dialogue within the African Governance Architecture (AGA). The pre-forum is organized by the AU and its partners to discuss different themes relevant to African women. Given this year's gender pre-forum's focus on women's role in leadership and decision making, all the above stated frameworks and particularly their emphasis on full gender equality in all spheres of life are

an important area of reflection and engagement among participants of the forum. This policy brief was prepared seeking to capture in the format of a policy brief the main themes of reflection and discussion on the topic of

“Enhancing Opportunities for Women in Leadership and Decision Making: As a Lever for The Africa We Want”.

On this section, offered a general overview and introduction on the AU’s policy and normative frameworks on gender and having located the topic of women’s role in leadership and deci-

sion making within this framework, the document will proceed to zeroing in on the specific themes that permeated the different sessions under the pre-forum’s agenda. Accordingly, the subsequent sections are organized thematically to respectively cover: the gender parity principle as a cornerstone of African gender frameworks; the need to challenge traditional conceptions of leadership; leadership and opportunities for inclusion in the economic agenda; and the African Women’s Decade as a model of re-focusing commitments and action; the continued use of quotas to as a tool to achieve gender parity in governance.

GENDER PARITY AS A CORNERSTONE OF AFRICAN GENDER FRAMEWORKS

Article 5 of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa adopted by the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2004 constitutes the most important point of departure for the uniquely African principle of full gender equality, or gender parity, as it is more commonly known and referred to under the Solemn Declaration. Building on prior decisions of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government on gender parity within the AUC, the Solemn Declaration has 13 operative articles and is a document carefully drafted to elevate and entrench the principle of gender parity as a pan-African agenda that extends full gender equality beyond the AUC to institutions in every member state. To date, the Solemn Declaration’s codification under Article 5 of the principle of gender parity at a multilateral level constitutes the most progressive and highest level of commitment prescribed towards gender equality under international law.

The progress achieved by member states towards their commitments under the Declaration have been observed over the years and gender parity is a possible and achievable goal that Member States can work towards. The cases of Rwanda, South Africa and Mozambique are notable in this regard.

However, despite these illustrations that show that gender parity is an achievable goal for member states, the slow progress observed at a broader continental level points to a need for urgency. Monitoring conducted on progress of Member States under the Solemn Declaration

Index/SDI developed in 2012¹ suggests that at the current rate of AU Member States achieving a 9% change in the overall gender parity index between 2013 and 2021, and this translating to approximately a one percent change per annum, would take 53 years to close the 53% observed to full equality/gender parity in Ministerial Cabinets and Parliaments.

This means at the current rate, gender parity in political participation in Cabinets and Parliaments would be achieved by the year 2074, eleven years after Agenda 2063. This points to a need to take legislative and policy measures to accelerate the rate of progress towards gender parity.

53 YEARS LEFT FOR 53% INDEX FOR GENDER PARITY

ADDRESSING EXCLUSION OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

The above noted commitment of African states to achieving gender parity is commendable in its own right. However, an accounting of the continent's record on gender equality would not be complete without acknowledging and highlighting that historically women were largely excluded from leadership roles namely the OAU did not give a major decision on women between 1963 and 1992, which accounts for the first 27 years of its existence or around half of the combined lifetime of the OAU and AU. A look at the OAU/AU's decisions would reveal that the first major decision on women or gender equality only came in 1993.

Among the major reasons for such exclusion are orthodox understandings of leadership especially in politics and governance, which are generally overly focused on hierarchy and chains of command. A change is needed from such an understanding to one emphasizes who in society are first to identify economic, social or other problems, find solutions for these problems and mobilize resources and people to come up with solutions.

Given that it is mostly women that perform these activities in the everyday lives of communities across the continent, such a realignment of understanding is important to recognizing the role women play in leadership both historically and now. Moreover, there is need to revolutionize how leadership is viewed in the workspace in such a way that it removes the undue importance placed on extreme present-ism that has little room for flexibility and where a good leader prioritizes work over all other aspects of his life by naturally assuming that the latter are taken care of by someone else – which in the overwhelming majority of cases is a woman who is not compensated. (For more on women's undervalued and unpaid care work, see section "Opportunities for leadership and the inclusion of women in the economic agenda" below)

Such a realigned understanding also makes it possible to account for women's role in less hierarchical but equally crucial avenues of influencing societal change such as culture and

the arts. Although it is evident that the creative and cultural works of women have been key to societal advances throughout history including Africa's own independence struggles, such contributions are often not given the commensurate recognition, visibility and credit. Such a change in understanding of leadership should be accompanied by a parallel sea of change that broadens our understanding of consequential leadership to include leadership in the cultural and creative spheres. It should also be buttressed by intentional efforts to name, cite and celebrate the African women that have contributed in creative and cultural works that have affected generations.

Having the stories of women told through women's voices would contribute greatly to bringing about such shift in understanding of leadership. It would also make incremental inroads into the essential task of challenging status quo and stereotypes ingrained on society that portray women as too emotional and lacking competence to lead and make decisions.

In addition to asking who identifies problems in communities and mobilizes resources to solve them, efforts to challenge traditional conceptions of leadership should also ask who society views as the proverbial "trouble makers" that force its members to have hard conversations, which create opportunities to question the status quo. Given that artists and creatives are specialists in capturing society's imaginations, it is important to ensure that creative spaces and cultural works are at the center of policy efforts on a variety of governance issues as opposed to them being an afterthought.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERSHIP AND THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN THE ECONOMIC AGENDA

The reason that equal opportunity for women in leadership and decision making is said to be an important lever to the [prosperous] Africa We Want is that without the full potential of women engaged and put to use, the Africa We Want cannot be achieved. That same truism is what Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 reinforces. However, the reverse is also true – that without the inclusion of women as beneficiaries of the dividends of economic pursuits of the societies they belong to, women will not be able to access opportunities participate in leadership and decision making.

Access to early development infrastructure especially to education is the biggest factor that affects women's ability to rise through the ranks of any given field and become a leader later in life. The exclusion of or challenges faced by women in accessing education from a young

age due to issues to do with child labor, child marriage and period justice has therefore meant that the full potentials of generations of women have not been realized. Outside of educational institutions as well, adult women continue to experience exclusion in the work space owing to the burden of domestic life that falls squarely on the shoulders of women. This burden prevents women from returning to the leadership tracks they had to leave to give birth during their reproductive years. The burden of domestic life is best articulated by the number of hours per day a typical woman spends working and how much of that is paid – which for an average is 13 hours a day, out of which only 40% is paid work, according to OECD research. The fact that the majority of the work that women do is not paid suggests that there is need to crack the code of the “care economy” which is almost exclusively extracted from the labour of women.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERSHIP AND THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN THE ECONOMIC AGENDA

The [first] African Women's Decade (AWD) was launched in October 2010 and forms part of the AU's actions the aimed at advancing renewed efforts to accelerate the implementation of gender equality and women empowerment commitments. The theme of the decade between 2010 and 2020 was organized under the theme “Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.” The end of the first AWD, which coincided with two equally important milestones, i.e. the 20th anniversary celebrations of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, was followed by the launch of the second African Women's Decade in February 2020 through the declaration by the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the years 2020 to 2030 as the “Decade on Financial and Economic Inclusion for African Women”.

Several progresses have been recorded over the course of the first AWD. The most notable amongst these are the adoption by 20 member states of constitutional reforms to include prohibition of gender discrimination in the exercise of

the right to vote and to stand for elections; legislative changes in some member states guaranteeing equal participation by women and men and to increase women's participation in governance for example through quotas ranging from 20-50% across the continent.

By one account, as a result of concerted efforts in the first AWD, 20 AU member states have either legislated quotas for women or have political parties that voluntarily provide for women. However, challenges also befell the first AWD. The main challenge was form slow implementation of law, policies and national strategies and action plans adopted in the decade. Telling in this regard is that, although 42 countries have ratified the Maputo Protocol by 2020, only 20 have reported under it in the 18 years since the Protocol's adoption. This is compounded by the lack of accountability mechanisms and systems that push states to report – unlike under the CEDAW which has such mechanisms. Another problem was that although some countries have introduced quotas in the last decade, in many cases the quota did not extend throughout all government structures including local levels. However, a

challenge seen as the biggest impediment overall to women's political participation in the first AWD was enduring traditional views that regard women as unfit for political engagement. This view permeates through all society structures and thus affects the media's portrayal of women participating in politics and the airtime given to women candidates. The access that women have to financial resources they need to support/fund their political activities is also affected by this view that sees them as less deserving of such support. Lastly and at the most basic level, such view of women exposes women voters and candidates to intimidating and degrading treatment violence against women in political space is also highly concerning derailing the progress made so far

In light of these challenges therefore, it was prudent to launch a second AWD that focuses on women's economic inclusion – an issue that, as

already established, is at the heart of addressing the problem of a limited role for women in leadership and decision making. The second AWD re-commits African Heads of State and Government to scale up actions for progressive gender inclusion towards sustainable development at the national, regional and continental levels. With the overall goal of ensuring that every woman is able to work, be paid and participate in the economy of her country, the new AWD on Financial and Economic Inclusion has as one of its objectives the development of market access for women. Commitments that are being made by States to make advances on such specific and key areas of importance for women's economic inclusion are commendable and a promising start to the new installment of the AWD - a mechanism that seems to be taking shape as an African model of organizing continental action on gender.

THE CONTINUED USE OF QUOTAS TO AS A TOOL TO ACHIEVE GENDER PARITY IN GOVERNANCE

It is natural that questions may arise as to the wisdom and ethics of using quotas as a go-to mechanism to shore up women's participation in politics. This is perhaps owing to the misgivings some may have about the interventionist and prescriptive quality that quotas inherently possess which in turn creates a sense of a perfunctory obligation being imposed.

However, just as it is common to use affirmative action to as a temporary measure to close the gap between historically marginalized groups and others, so to should quotas be seen as a legitimate interventions to support women's political participation.

As noted in the previous sections of this document, there is a whole smorgasbord of challenges facing and preventing women from becoming leaders and decision makers, i.e., challenges in accessing education in their formative years, challenges causing them to be economically ex-

cluded later in life including due to the burdens of domestic life and traditional and backward views that sees women unfit or unqualified for leadership that limits their capacity to succeed in politics, financial resources, access to media and even exposes them to degrading treatment and violence when participating in politics. In light of these challenges that have endured through the first AWD (which lacked robust implementation of laws and policies adopted), the continued use of quotas and continued calls for more countries to legislate or otherwise provide for quotas is very much warranted. Until substantively holistic interventions that last the whole lifetime of women are put in place and succeed in ridding women's lives of these multifaceted challenges, such late-life instruments of intervention are crucial if African countries are serious about their much touted commitment to achieving gender parity.

NOTES

1. The SDI was developed in 2012 as a tool to monitor and measure progress in implementation of the Solemn Declaration. The SDI has analyzed the performance of member states in the past nine years (2013-2021) and has generated reports in 2016 and 2019, with the third SDI Report in progress. The SDI was developed by the Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) with the support of the UNECA to supplement AU's reporting guidelines. Dr. Olumide Ajayi, who was the key note speaker during the gender pre-forum, is a member of GIMAC. GIMAC is a network of civil society and women's organizations across the continent of Africa that are engaged among other things in monitoring gender mainstreaming within the AU.