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Economic empowerment of women can end the cycle of violence against women and girls.

African women from across the continent and in the diaspora are convening in Moroni, Comoros for the 2023 Women Leaders' Consultation on Positive Masculinity to push for a radical shift in strategies and efforts employed to prevent and eliminate all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls. The two-day meeting on 30-31 October 2023 is a pre-consultation forum whose outcomes are considered and influence the discussions at the annual Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity scheduled for November 2023, will explore alternative actions to sustainably prevent and end the scourge of violence against women and girls in Africa.

Convened under the theme "driving Commitments Towards Women's Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls", the meeting will among others, explore innovative and practical solutions to accelerate the promising initiatives offering women financing and credit solutions, money transfers, food aid, support for women's groups and networks of female entrepreneurs, and the implementation of the call by the African Union that proffers at least 25 per cent of annual public procurement at national and sub-national levels are awarded to women. Agenda 2063, Aspiration 6 aims for "an Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children".

Financial inclusion is a practical intervention for the realization of gender equality, women empowerment, and addressing the scourge of domestic violence. A study by the International Labour Organization and UN Women shows that besides violence against women and girls being a fundamental human rights violation, a major public health concern, and devastating for individual well-being, violence equally bears a high economic cost evidenced by among others, low labor supply, reduced productivity of women, and losses to companies due to costs associated with higher rates of absenteeism, staff turnover and the potential for reputational damage. The economic cost of violence against women is higher in countries where the gender gap in education between partners is high. A World Bank study equally found that violence against women can cost up to 3.7 percent of GDP in some countries.

Given the societal, legal, and normative changes required to create an environment conducive to improving gender equality and women's financial inclusion, a significant involvement of men in strategies and actions on preventing and ending violence against women and girls is fundamental. The Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity

has rallied men to actively participate and support in the creation of an enabling environment to promote gender equality. The engagement of men, especially those in leadership positions is aimed at promoting positive role modelling and championing policy and programmatic changes in the public and private sectors that enhance women's financial inclusion and, in turn, promote more gender equitable relationships between men and women. Men's engagement, however, should be a deliberate partnership and ally-ship with women's movement in a relationship of accountability.

The 2023 Women Leaders' Consultations on Positive Masculinity will therefore explore strategies to sustainably address the underlying causes of violence with a particular focus on bridging the gap on economic and financial inclusion of women. This aligns with the commitments on the women empowerment articulated in the African Union 2020-2030 Decade of Financial and Economic Inclusion for African Women.

The Outcome will cover existing and emerging avenues and strategies the African citizenry, especially men, should adopt and implement to enhance women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion to end gender inequality and violence against women and girls.

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