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Parallel meetings for an in-depth review of progress made and peer learning on the sub-themes of the Regional Forum: Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of gender equality

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in Africa

Progress, challenges, opportunities and key priority actions to accelerate implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5

I. Introduction

1. Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), more than being a stand-alone goal, holds the key to the realization of all the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of an African where no one is left behind. For the continent to bridge the gender divide and mobilize Africans to be drivers of “the Africa we want”, it needs to critically look at its commitments to uphold gender equality and women’s empowerment and to challenge persistent areas of inequality.

2. African countries have taken significant steps to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In *Africa SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2020*, which provides an assessment of the continent’s progress (including its commitment to leave no one behind), it is noted that “African governments have made significant efforts to endorse SDGs and incorporate them into national strategies and development plans. Most countries have identified government units to coordinate the implementation and have prioritized specific targets and indicators”.¹ Nevertheless, while women represent around 50 per cent of Africa’s population, the continent scored an average of 48.6 per cent on the Africa Gender Index,² revealing a wide gender gap in key sectors pertaining to the development of the continent.

3. The global commitments made by member States to implement the 2030 Agenda highlight the primacy of investing in the human development of women in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Those commitments are

* ECA/RFSD/2022/1.

¹ Available at <https://sdgindex.org/reports/2020-africa-sdg-index-and-dashboards-report/>.

² <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/african-development-bank-and-partners-roll-out-comprehensive-report-state-gender-equality-africa-39648>.



further underpinned by international frameworks that pertain specifically to gender equality and women's empowerment, in particular the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Consistent with these are the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Paris Agreement, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. The complementarity and congruence among the above provide synergy for the implementation of aligned commitments by member States to achieving gender equality.

4. In this context, the African Union has made numerous strides at the normative, policy and institutional levels to ensure the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment through Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. As a strategic framework for the socioeconomic transformation of Africa within a 50-year period (2013–2063), Agenda 2063 sets out seven aspirational objectives that are key to the success of that transformation. Aspiration 6 recognizes that women are at the heart of the continent's development. The African Union Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018–2028) further strengthens the organization's commitment to delivering on its promise to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.³

II. Trends, progress and challenges in achieving selected targets

A. Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls

5. Most Governments in Africa have invested in strengthening or creating independent national institutions for the protection and promotion of women's rights in addition to reviewing national laws, policies and practices in accordance with international human rights law. The principle of non-discrimination is protected in 89 per cent of countries in Southern Africa, 73 per cent in East Africa, 71 per cent in North Africa, and 43 per cent in Central Africa.⁴ However, implementation of the principle has been inconsistent despite robust legal frameworks being in place. Women in rural areas and women and girls with disabilities, older women, women refugees, internally displaced women and women migrants⁵ face high economic burdens in gaining access to opportunities in the areas of education, employment and health care. These access-related challenges are frequently due to remote locations and inaccessible public transport systems coupled with high cost of services.⁶

6. Since 2020, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened to reverse the progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights. The diversion of resources to deal with the challenges that have arisen from the pandemic may delay the implementation of gender commitments.

³ See <https://au.int/en/articles/au-strategy-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>.

⁴ African Women's Development and Communication Network, *Rekindling the Beijing Fire of Revolution: African Women's Rights Organizations Parallel Report* (Nairobi, 2019). Available at <https://femnet.org/2020/02/rekindling-the-beijing-fire-of-revolution-africa-beijing25-parallel-report/>.

⁵ <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

B. Eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls

7. African Governments have made considerable progress in adopting legislation, policies and other measures to combat violence against women. Examples of this are the revisions of the penal codes of Cabo Verde and Togo (2015), Burkina Faso (2018) and Côte d'Ivoire (2019), to recognize types of violence that had not been previously penalized or sufficiently addressed.⁷ Burundi, the Comoros, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe and Zambia introduced laws on both workplace sexual harassment and domestic violence. A further seven countries legislated against workplace sexual harassment, and eight African countries introduced domestic violence laws.⁸

8. However, 45.6 per cent of women in Africa have experienced physical and/or sexual violence.⁹ Exacerbating the problem of violence against women are ongoing conflicts, wars, epidemics, and natural disasters that have increased the number of forcibly displaced persons and refugees, in particular women and children, both internally and externally. In such humanitarian emergency and conflict settings, women and girls have experienced sexual and gender-based violence from security forces and armed groups.¹⁰

9. A 2019 review of Sustainable Development Goal implementation in Africa found that 26 countries in Africa did not have laws that specifically protected women and girls from gender-based violence.¹¹ Furthermore, there is a lack of data on gender-based violence against women aged 50 years and older.¹² New forms of violence targeting women, such as cyber-violence, are also emerging. Sexual and gender-based violence increased during the period of COVID-19 lockdowns, creating a secondary pandemic across Africa.¹³

C. Ending all harmful practices: Child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

10. In about 20 African countries, the child marriage prevalence rate is at an unacceptable 30–50 per cent, meaning 3–5 out of 10 girls in these countries are likely to get married before reaching 18 years of age.¹⁴ Although 80 per cent of countries in Africa have set the legal age of marriage at 18, there exist significant legal loopholes in over 30 of these countries that either exempt customary marriages from the legal age threshold and/or do not guarantee the full and free consent of the marrying parties.¹⁵

11. However, there are examples both of declines in the prevalence of child marriage and of increases in critical interventions to end it. In Ethiopia, the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ African Women's Development and Communication Network, *Rekindling the Beijing Fire of Revolution*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ African Union Commission and others, *Status of Women's Rights in Refugee and Internal Displacement Settings in Africa: The Context of AGA and APSA* (Addis Ababa, 2020).

¹¹ African Union and African Peer Review Mechanism, *Agenda 2063 and SDGs Implementation in Africa* (Midrand, South Africa, 2020). Available at <https://www.unsouthsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Agenda-2063-and-SDGs-Implementation-in-Africa.pdf>.

¹² World Health Organization, *Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018* (Geneva, 2021). Available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256>.

¹³ African Union Commission, *Taking Stock, Charting the Future: African Union Commission End-of-Term Report 2017–2021* (Addis Ababa, 2021). Available at <https://au.int/en/documents/20210203/african-union-commission-end-term-report-2017-2021>.

¹⁴ African Women's Development and Communication Network, *Rekindling the Beijing Fire of Revolution*.

¹⁵ Ibid.

prevalence of child marriage has dropped by a third during the past 10 years.¹⁶ Chad has made a commitment to end child marriage by 2030.¹⁷ The Gambia, Guinea, Malawi and Zimbabwe have adopted laws and policies that criminalize child marriage. Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Zambia have strengthened pre-existing laws and policies by enhancing the involvement of traditional and religious leaders and local civil society actors.

12. With regard to female genital mutilation, its prevalence among girls aged 0-14 years of age in Africa varies significantly across the continent. The lowest prevalence was in Benin (0.1 per cent) while it exceeded 80 per cent in Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Guinea, Mali, Sierra Leone and Somalia. Guinea and Somalia record the highest rates of female genital mutilation, at 97 per cent and 98 per cent, respectively.¹⁸ The majority of girls and women think female genital mutilation should end. Apart from Mali, there has been a significant reduction in female genital mutilation among girls 0-14 years of age as compared with women 15-49 years of age. This trend perhaps signifies a generational shift in Africa and the success of context-specific interventions to change social norms.

13. Cross-border movement to carry out female genital mutilation remains a challenge in Africa. Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania have formulated and coordinated regional actions to strengthen political will, programmes and stakeholders to reinforce member State obligations to end cross-border female genital mutilation in East Africa. The coordinated regional approach is the first of its kind in the history of global efforts to eradicate female genital mutilation. It reaffirmed the need for strong partnerships at all levels to end this harmful practice.¹⁹

14. In February 2019, the African Union launched the Saleema Initiative to galvanize political action to enforce strong legislation, increase the allocation of financial resources and strengthen partnerships to end female genital mutilation, in particular in those communities that have been the most affected by the practice.²⁰ In addition, the development by the African Union of an accountability framework on harmful practices manifests its commitment to ending such practices, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

15. In 2020, at the forty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council, Burkina Faso submitted a draft resolution on behalf of the group of African States in which they called upon Governments globally to take “comprehensive, multisectoral and rights-based measures to prevent and eliminate female genital mutilation”. In response, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 44/16, entitled “Elimination of female genital mutilation”.²¹

16. Generally, no region is on track to meet the target of eliminating these harmful practices by 2030.²² Child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation are exacerbated in conflict settings. Population growth will result in even higher absolute number of occurrences in the coming years if progress in reducing the prevalence of child marriage and female genital mutilation is not made.

¹⁶ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), “Child marriage: Latest trends and future prospects” (New York, 2018). Available at <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-latest-trends-and-future-prospects/>.

¹⁷ African Union Commission, *Taking Stock, Charting the Future*.

¹⁸ African Women’s Development and Communication Network, *Rekindling the Beijing Fire of Revolution*.

¹⁹ UNICEF, “Ending child marriage and female genital mutilation in Eastern and Southern Africa: Case studies of promising practices from across the region”. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/esa/documents/case-studies-ending-child-marriage-fgm>.

²⁰ <https://au.int/fr/node/35892>.

²¹ See *Official Records of the General Assembly*, Seventy-fifth Session, Supplement No. 53 (A/75/53).

²² UNICEF, “Child marriage: Latest trends and future prospects”.

D. Ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and rights

17. Eighty per cent of African countries have constitutional provisions that affirm women's and girls' right to health.²³ The following countries have put in place policy frameworks specific to addressing sexual and reproductive health: Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania. A total of 21 countries in East and Southern Africa have committed to providing comprehensive sex education and sexual and reproductive health services to adolescents and young people.

E. Ensuring equal opportunity for leadership and decision-making

18. Successful efforts have been made by African countries in increasing the participation and representation of women in decision-making structures. As of 2020, sub-Saharan African countries in which women's representation had previously reached or exceeded 30 per cent (Burundi, Cameroon and United Republic of Tanzania) continued to hold the course. The Comoros, the Niger and Mali recorded double-digit increases in women's representation in their parliaments.²⁴ In Mali, in 2020, the percentage of women members of parliament tripled from 9.5 per cent to nearly 28 per cent thanks to a new quota law, and stayed the course under the Transitional National Council, where women held 26 per cent of the seats.²⁵ South Africa made history by becoming one of the few countries in the world to achieve gender parity (50 per cent representation by women) in its cabinet.²⁶

19. The shift to digital platforms and remote technologies in election campaigning has reduced some of the gender disparities in campaigning. However, women's political participation has been increasingly threatened by widespread online violence against them. Moreover, women with already poor access to technology were at greater risk of being completely cut off.²⁷ Women's representation in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Liberia, Madagascar and Namibia remained below 15 per cent in 2020.²⁸ As of January 2021, African women's representation overall remained far below parity level, and progress was uneven.

F. Upholding equal economic rights for women

20. To strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment, Governments across Africa are providing business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, in particular to low-income women. In East and West Africa, some Governments have invested in promoting and supporting women's self-employment and the development of small enterprises. In addition, they have provided access to credit and capital and established innovative linkages with financial institutions. The African Development Bank has correspondingly developed the Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa programme, which facilitates women's access to finance by offering

²³ African Women's Development and Communication Network, *Rekindling the Beijing Fire of Revolution*.

²⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in parliament in 2020: The year in review" (Geneva, 2021).

Available at <https://www.ipu.org/women-in-parliament-2020>.

²⁵ [Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in parliament in 2020: The year in review"](#).

²⁶ African Women's Development and Communication Network, *Rekindling the Beijing Fire of Revolution*.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

capacity-building services to women entrepreneurs and advocating for reforms to support women-owned businesses.²⁹

21. One notable example of good practice in upholding equal economic rights for women is in Lesotho, where land has been converted from customary leases to registered leases, which has created opportunities for women to secure land. Women now hold 34 per cent of leases while joint registration by men and women stands at 25 per cent. The Governments of Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo have adopted policies, plans and mechanisms to integrate gender considerations in agricultural and food security policies.³⁰

22. The African Union also rolled out the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the Africa Continental Free Trade Area Agreement, which had been ratified by 31 member States as of 2021. In keeping Agenda 2063, the Agreement recognizes the differential impact of trade activity and resource allocation on certain groups. Article 3 (e) thereof sets out the commitment of member States to promote and attain sustainable and inclusive socioeconomic development and gender equality.

23. Challenges persist. The majority of working women in Africa are overly concentrated in the informal sector, where elements of decent work conditions, such as protection and representation, are often lacking. In addition, the security of tenure and rights to land and property remain uncertain for African women, notwithstanding the reality that most of the poor (82 per cent) live in rural areas and earn a living primarily through subsistence farming, in which women tend to be overrepresented.³¹ Furthermore, African women face greater burdens than men from the impact of climate change given their reliance on natural resources and agriculture for their livelihoods. Women also continue to face a host of social, financial and literacy barriers in opening a bank account. The continent's efforts to pursue women's empowerment by ensuring equal economic opportunities among men and women – including through ownership or securing rights over agricultural land – registered a low score of 20 per cent against the 2019 target.³² Moreover, with the COVID-19 pandemic, women's financial inclusion has suffered from the closing of many women-owned enterprises and cross-border trade. Reversing such negative developments will be the focus of work done by the African Union the decade of women's financial and economic inclusion (2020–2030).³³

G. Recognizing women's unpaid care and domestic work

24. Across Africa, women and girls are providing millions of hours of unpaid care and domestic work that remain under-recognized, undervalued and under-invested in. African women and girls living in poverty and those who are marginalized, with limited access to public services, social protection and technology, shoulder the heaviest responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work. This unequal and often arduous care workload robs them of time and

²⁹ See <https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/initiatives-partnerships/afawa-affirmative-finance-action-women-africa>.

³⁰ African Women's Development and Communication Network, *Rekindling the Beijing Fire of Revolution*.

³¹ Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Twenty-five year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) +25: Africa regional review – Summary report 2015–2019". Available at https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/Beijing25/summary_report_for_beijing_review_25.pdf.

³² African Union, *First Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063*, (Addis Ababa, 2020). Available at <https://au.int/en/documents/20200208/first-continental-report-implementation-agenda-2063>.

³³ African Union Commission, *Taking Stock, Charting the Future*.

limits their access to opportunities.³⁴ Many African households depend heavily on women as health-care givers. Where health sector funding is inadequate and the quality of care is low, it is women who fill the gaps. During almost all disease outbreaks, women voluntarily provide the majority of care to sick family members in their home – often at great personal risk and cost. In addition, there is also evidence that women and girls are at greater risk of sexual violence while engaging in domestic tasks outside the home such as collecting fuel and water. Finally, violent conflict, which results in displacement and dispossession, often increases the unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities of women and girls.³⁵

25. African women continue to play a significant role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including as frontline health-care workers, caregivers at home and community leaders and mobilizers. Although there are African countries that have begun to make policy commitments on unpaid care and domestic work, the development of care policies is insufficient. Investments must be made in care-supporting services and infrastructure and in ensuring that care providers are represented in budgeting and decision-making processes.³⁶ An effective response to these critical needs will have to include the provision of public services and infrastructure – such as nearby water sources, high-quality health-care and child-care services, and public transportation – which would have a positive effect on reducing women’s care workload and improve outcomes for women in connection with several Sustainable Development Goals.

H. Promoting women’s involvement in information and communications technology and digitalization

26. For women and girls, the digital revolution represents one of the biggest opportunities for gender equality. For example, as financial services have increasingly moved into the digital world, they have expanded access for African women to mobile money accounts. This has been important because receiving money directly enables women to have much more control over household budgets and increases the likelihood of greater economic empowerment and decision-making for women.³⁷ In addition, the digitalizing of payments from the government to people has a positive effect on increasing account ownership and providing women with independent access to predictable income streams and greater control over how money is used.³⁸ High technology tools are connecting African women to new and wider markets, broadening their social networks and providing them with information that opens up important economic opportunities.³⁹

27. Furthermore, new technologies are also being leveraged to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in a myriad of ways. These include gathering data to map violence; using data gathered to advocate for change and provide survivors with access to essential information and support; raising awareness

³⁴ Oxfam, “Unlocking sustainable development in Africa by addressing unpaid care and domestic work (2020). Available at <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/unlocking-sustainable-development-in-africa-by-addressing-unpaid-care-and-domes-620939/>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/blog/mobile-money-a-product-of-choice-for-women-to-send-and-receive-remittances/#_ftnref24.

³⁸ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Women 2000 and beyond: Gender equality and the empowerment of women through ICT (New York, 2005). Available at <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/W2000andBeyond.html>.

³⁹ Ibid.

of the violence faced by women and girls among their families and communities through entertainment and social media forums; and monitoring and evaluating gender-based violence interventions and their impact.⁴⁰

28. Barriers to the use of high-technology tools do exist for the majority of African women, especially given the high price of Internet access. Those who live in areas with low connectivity or in places where laws and regulatory frameworks are inadequate are the most at risk of being left behind and disconnected from the new digital financial services currently being developed. Other barriers for women include cyber-based violence, lack of financial knowledge and digital skills, and social norms that deter women from owning a mobile phone.

29. The opportunities presented by technology demand that gender-informed interventions be undertaken to create and boost demand for digital financial services and to improve the supply of digital financial services for women and girls.⁴¹ Teaching skills to women and girls and equipping them with digital devices is key. The African Girls Can Code Initiative, which is jointly sponsored by the African Union Commission, the International Telecommunication Union and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), is an example of the cutting-edge programmes that are crucial to advancing the gender equality and women's empowerment priorities of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

I. Recognizing the link between women and the environment

30. Africa has made progress in strengthening the evidence base and raising awareness in respect of the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to environmental degradation and disasters.

31. Recognizing that people in vulnerable situations are often disproportionately affected by disasters, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 is aligned with and strengthens the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Forty-seven African countries have developed a strategic programme of action to align national disaster-risk reduction with the priorities and targets of the Sendai Framework and to allocate the required budgetary support. Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia and Uganda have adopted environmental policies that recognize the important role played by women in climate-crisis response and the burden they carry during disasters.⁴²

32. In November 2021, UN-Women, in collaboration with over 60 women-led organizations, sought to strengthen commitment to the gender-responsive implementation of the Programme of Action for the Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 in Africa. At the seventh High-level Meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction, ministers and heads of delegation responsible for disaster risk reduction in Africa adopted both a final declaration that is explicitly gender-sensitive and inclusive and a matrix for the implementation of the Programme of Action covering the period

⁴⁰ Hayes, Ceri, "Tackling gender-based violence with technology: Case studies of mobile and Internet technology interventions in developing contexts (Hong Kong, ST ATT, 2014). Available at <https://www.genderit.org/resources/tackling-gender-based-violence-technology-case-studies-mobile-and-internet-technology>.

⁴¹ Molinier, Helene, "Leveraging digital finance for gender equality and women's empowerment" (New York, UN-Women, 2019). Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/09/discussion-paper-leveraging-digital-finance-for-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>.

⁴² ECA and UN-Women, "Twenty-five year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) +25".

2021–2025 that incorporates gender and inclusion indicators.⁴³ To follow up on and support the implementation of the Sendai Framework, the United Nations system and other stakeholders will be expected to work with the Africa Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), thereby contributing to the realization of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

J. Making and tracking public allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment

33. The gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 require the allocation of adequate resources. Governments then need to track those allocations by deliberately planning and budgeting to meet their gender policy commitments. Overall, financing for gender equality remains inadequate, with budgetary allocations not being commensurate with the demands of the mandate to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

34. In the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development in Africa beyond 2014, African ministers responsible for gender and women’s affairs called upon member States to adopt gender-sensitive planning and budgeting schemes, and to strengthen domestic resource mobilization and allocation for women’s and girls’ rights.⁴⁴ Few sub-Saharan African countries have in place a system for tracking spending on gender equality and women’s needs, or public records of related allocations.⁴⁵ Notable exceptions include the adoption by South Africa of a number of fiscal policies that are designed to assist poor women specifically and their families. Similarly, Rwanda has made broad-based efforts to incorporate gender equity into sectoral policies, and progress towards education and health-related goals appears to have accelerated. Rwanda has also incorporated gender budgeting into its programme-budgeting framework. In Morocco, the High Commission on Planning conducted a household survey to assess the socioeconomic impact of lockdown measures on various population groups. The data showed that 19.3 per cent of surveyed men contributed, for the first time, to household work during lockdown, while women spent six times as long, on average, on domestic work. The Government integrated these data points along with others on women’s employment and violence against women into its gender report for 2020–2021, which accompanies its annual fiscal allocation bill. The report also made recommendations to address identified gender gaps and emphasized the importance of gender-responsive budgeting for a gender-responsive recovery.⁴⁶ In response to COVID-19 pandemic, the Supreme Audit Institution of Uganda, which is an important actor in a country’s accountability chain, is conducting a performance audit of nationally agreed targets that are aligned with Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.2 to assess intimate partner violence against women during the pandemic.⁴⁷

⁴³ Available at <https://afrrp.undrr.org/>.

⁴⁴ Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/addis-ababa-declaration-population-and-development-africa-beyond-2014>.

⁴⁵ Stotsky, Janet, Lisa Kolovich and Suhaib Kebhaj, “Sub-Saharan Africa: A survey of gender budgeting efforts”, IMF Working Paper (Washington, D.C., International Monetary Fund, 2016). Available at <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2016/wp16152.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Khan, Zohra and Katherine Gifford, “COVID-19 and fiscal policy: Applying gender-responsive budgeting in support and recovery measures”, Policy Brief No. 21 (New York, UN-Women, 2020). Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Policy-brief-COVID-19-and-fiscal-policy-en.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

III. Opportunities, transformative actions, and partnerships

35. Significant challenges lie ahead for African women. Progress has been compromised by rapid population growth, unequal access to socioeconomic opportunities, environmental shocks and fragility, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. All African countries are currently struggling to leave no one behind. Extreme poverty and material deprivation and access to and quality of services emerge as the greatest challenges.⁴⁸ Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment will require the adoption of holistic approaches that recognize and understand the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of all the Sustainable Development Goals.

36. Maintaining the focus on human rights will be critical to keeping the aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals and other frameworks on track during their implementation and ensuring that the means to achieve them respond to the experiences of women and girls on the ground.⁴⁹

A. Multi-stakeholder partnerships

37. Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 calls for multisectoral and multi-level partnerships. Governments have the primary responsibility for implementing programmes to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by drawing upon and ensuring equality of access to public-sector resources. At the international level, global commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment require development-cooperation partners to improve the effectiveness of development assistance by integrating gender perspectives into financing. For example, the Economic Commission for Africa is galvanizing action on financing for the Sustainable Development Goals and leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships with private-sector organizations, philanthropies and foundations to advance sustainable and inclusive development on the continent.

Box

Examples of good practice in forging multi-sectoral and multi-level partnerships

1. In 2014, the African Union launched its first continental campaign to end child marriage; the campaign was then extended to 2023. In 2019, Heads of State and Government of the Assembly of the African Union adopted decision 737 (XXXII), in which they endorsed and launched the Saleema Initiative, the purpose of which is to eliminate female genital mutilation on the continent. Both initiatives have aimed to amplify efforts, programmes, best practices and experiences of member States, while galvanizing political action to accelerate elimination efforts. To underpin these efforts, the African Union Commission, the United Nations and the European Union are supporting an Africa regional programme under Spotlight Initiative, the aim of which is to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in Africa through targeted, large-scale investments.¹ The initiative is being implemented in Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, the Niger, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe. It is guided by Agenda 2063, the 2030 Agenda, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), and the Maputo Plan of Action (2016–2030) for the Operationalization of the Continental Policy Framework for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights,² as well as other key regional instruments.³

⁴⁸ The Sustainable Development Goals Centre for Africa and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, *Africa SDGs Index and Dashboards Report 2020: Leave No One Behind to Achieve the SDGs in Africa* (New York, 2020). Available at <https://sdgindex.org/reports/2020-africa-sdg-index-and-dashboards-report/>.

⁴⁹ UN-Women, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York, 2018). Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/2/gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018#view>.

2. The Africa Business Coalition for Health, launched on the margins of the African Union Summit in January 2019, has brought together the Economic Commission for Africa, the Global Business Coalition on Health, Aliko Dangote Foundation, and Private Sector Health Alliance in Nigeria to broker private-sector commitments to promote health across Africa and rally further political support to that end. It's African-led coalition that is mobilizing a core group of private-sector champions to offer their capabilities, resources and expertise, through a coordinated platform, to improve health outcomes and shape health markets across Africa.⁴
3. The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend project is grounded in a high-level commitment by Governments to invest in gender equality and women's empowerment. It is a regional, multi-sectoral and multi-partnership project that bring together nine countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) with total funding of \$680 million. Other African countries will join in the upcoming years. The project is supported by the World Bank, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union. The promising results registered by the project are the basis for the appeal by the African Union to consolidate and scale up the model across the continent in accordance with the five-year regional review of the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development in Africa beyond 2014, held in Accra in 2018.⁵
4. UNFPA has developed a methodology to carry out investment to achieve transformative results in the following three areas of endeavour: (a) ending preventable maternal mortality; (b) ending the unmet need for family planning; and (c) ending gender-based violence and harmful practices including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage. UNFPA has designed pilot projects to build the case for such investments. These are powerful tools for demonstrating the high returns that can be achieved by strengthening investment in the delivery of high-impact interventions, and by presenting the full range of costs involved and the full range of benefits that flow from those interventions. Typically, such investment cases are developed to influence decisions and catalyse transformative change, and are aimed at donor entities and Governments, as well as planning entities and other interested stakeholders. These investment cases take into consideration the current situation and the progress that can be achieved through evidence-based interventions, and identify key bottlenecks and gaps that limit sustained progress towards the desired goals. They include estimates of the cost required to meet those goals, as well as analyses of the available funding and financing gaps.⁶

1. <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/where-we-work?region=africa>.

2. Available at <https://addis.unfpa.org/en/publications/maputo-plan-action-2016-2018>.

3. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200507/multilateral-response-eliminate-all-forms-violence-against-women-girls>.

4. <https://multimedia.uneca.org/handle/10855.1/376>.

5. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "Sahel women's empowerment and demographic dividend (SWEDD)" (New York, 2016). Available at <https://wcaro.unfpa.org/en/publications/sahel-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-and-demographic-dividend-project-swedd>.

6. UNFPA, *Developing Investment Cases for Transformative Results: Toolkit* (New York, 2021). Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/developing-investment-cases-transformative-results-toolkit>.

B. Gender-sensitive data to transform policies

38. Gender-sensitive data and statistics are essential for policy analysis and advocacy to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. However, the lack of sex disaggregated data is a key challenge to the effective mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment priorities into national development plans in Africa.⁵⁰

39. A regional assessment on gender statistics in Africa was conducted in 2018 that revealed three interrelated challenges:

⁵⁰ African Union and African Peer Review Mechanism, *Agenda 2063 and SDGs Implementation in Africa*.

(a) Despite regular censuses and surveys conducted by national statistical offices, there were huge gaps in data to track gender-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators across Africa. Regional stakeholders acknowledged that lack of coordination and poor communication had been a major drawback, leading to duplication of efforts and missed opportunities to leverage resources.

(b) Technical challenges limited the production of gender statistics and the ability to inform regional and country-level interventions to address economic empowerment, violence against women and girls, political participation, and peace and security.

(c) National statistical offices and other producers of statistics were still using outdated or ineffective methods of dissemination and communication, which resulted in the limited use of gender-sensitive data to influence policy dialogue, planning and budgeting.⁵¹

40. Efforts are ongoing to strengthen the collection and use of gender-sensitive data,⁵² for example:

(a) By working with organizations such as the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank, countries are being supported to identify and address institutional, legal and financial constraints to mainstreaming gender into national statistical systems and establishing an efficient system for monitoring and evaluating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

(b) UN-Women has provided technical support to African countries in conducting gender-sensitive surveys. The data generated provides insights to inform intersectional and inclusive policy and decision-making. In addition, through its Making Every Woman and Girl Count flagship programme, UN-Women aims to bring about a radical shift in how gender statistics are used, created and promoted.⁵³

(c) A community of practice on data and statistics was established for East and Southern Africa to create an enabling environment for learning and coordination around gender data and statistics. With the participation of representatives of national statistical offices, ministries for women's affairs, regional bodies and United Nations agencies, the community of practice is a forum for user-producer dialogues to foster South-South learning and expand the knowledge base of best practices relating to gender statistics in East and Southern Africa.

IV. Key messages

41. The following key messages relating to gender equality and women's empowerment are hereby submitted for the consideration of participants in the eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development:

(a) Institutional arrangements, including national gender machinery, need to be strengthened to enhance national ownership and responsibility for effective implementation, monitoring and accountability of programmes to achieve the gender-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in all sectors and at all levels of Government.

⁵¹ <https://www.data4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/Gender%20Data%20-%20Data4SDGs%20Toolbox%20Module.pdf>.

⁵² UN-Women, "Making every woman and girl count in Africa". Available at https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/Publications/AR2020Annex/MEWGC_ANNUAL_REPORT_2020_BRIEF_REGIONAL_REPORT_AFRICA.pdf.

⁵³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/flagship-programmes/making-every-woman-and-girl-count>.

(b) Prioritizing development and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programmes that are aligned specifically with the principles of Goal 5 and more broadly with the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 is critical to addressing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. This requires a renewed focus on strengthening social protection systems to reduce poverty sustainably in a resilient manner, including through increased investment in key enablers (i.e. reproductive health, mental health, primary health care, education, good governance, and addressing income inequality and gender-based violence).

(c) Financing gender equality and women's empowerment in the 2030 Agenda will enable the inclusive and sustainable realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and the aspirations of Agenda 2063. Therefore, partners need to advocate and promote accountability towards increased financing for gender equality and women's empowerment, including through domestic resource mobilization, gender-responsive resource allocations and fiscal policies.

(d) Strengthening the evidence for gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda will contribute to improved gender data, statistics and analysis to effectively monitor progress for women and girls across all goals and targets. It is thus important to enhance the role of national statistical offices to generate and utilize research-based information, along with gender and sex-disaggregated data and statistics, to support the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

(e) Broad-based, inclusive, strengthened and coordinated partnerships are key drivers for sustainable development and the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. This requires the strategic engagement of member States, the African Union, regional economic communities, civil society organizations, traditional and community leaders, as well as the United Nations development system, to leverage the complementary of processes, initiatives and available resources, and to strengthen coordinated action for the implementation of the gender equality and women's empowerment priorities of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.