

## **Concept Note: AU Gender Strategy**

### **Timing, Traction and Transformation for African women**

#### **Introduction**

The objective of this concept note is to launch the process of aligning the African Union's strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) with the 1<sup>st</sup> Ten Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - Agenda 2030; and other commitments recently renewed at continental and global levels in support of this key development agenda, including provisions for women's access to climate finance per the COP21 Declaration.

The current policy for GEWE was adopted in 2009 and represents the first continent-wide strategy of its kind in the history of the OAU and AU combined. Anchored in predecessor policy decisions and legal instruments, including among others UN frameworks, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) and the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa- Maputo Protocol*, the 2009 policy has since guided the AU's work in operationalizing its commitment to GEWE as set forth in Article 4L of the Constitutive Act.

A new gender policy is however needed to reflect changing social and economic realities, propel the pace of implementation of commitments and achieve the goals and objectives for GEWE defined in Agenda 2063 and SDGs-2030. By committing to leaving "no one behind" these continental and global frameworks are also amplifying the voices of the women and girls of Africa who are calling on leaders to seize the moment, fast-track and promote transformative actions so the course of history is changed for present and future generations.

This concept therefore outlines the rationale for a new gender strategy, its design process and timelines for its implementation. The initiative will be placed and managed by the AU Academy. It will be led by a WGDD, Gender Focal persons and strategy design specialist with a private sector focus. The UN-ECA Center for Capacity Development, ACBF and NEPAD, the ECOWAS Center of Excellence in Gender (Dakar) will also be leveraged to provide policy dialogue support- however through the AU Academy process.

#### **Context: Why a new gender strategy**

**Time is right** to revisit the rationale which underscores our current policy (2009) and practice on GEWE within the AU. Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 have significantly shifted the goalposts for development and for GEWE in particular. Their results frameworks are bolder, more focused yet inclusive and action driven. Never like before are the principles of GEWE driving global and continental aspirations and actions towards sustainable development and considered integral and foundational to achieving success. GEWE has not only become the "right thing to do" but the "necessary thing to do".

The narrative for GEWE is rapidly changing. Metrics are now available to quantify outcomes that result from pursuing GEWE and demonstrate that "gender is a smart business". For example, the African Development Bank (AfDB) estimates that eliminating gender inequality and empowering women could raise the productive potential of one billion Africans and a 2015 report from McKinsey shows that by narrowing the gender gap, sub-Saharan Africa

has the opportunity to add 12 percent, or an estimated \$300 billion, to annual GDP by 2025 in the best-in-region scenario. The impact would range from 6 percent in Zimbabwe to 17 percent in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The World Bank study, *Women, Business and the Law* highlights various legal constraints which sometimes not intuitive but hamper their access to economic opportunities. The Millennium Challenge Cooperation led an initiative which removed barriers like women's ability to seek medical care and open a bank account without needing prior consent from their husbands or a male relative.

Targets have become more ambitious to reflect progress made and present important opportunities to increase women's access to productive assets, social support systems and their representation in political structures. For example, Agenda 2063 sets to achieve a 50 percent reduction in poverty among women; and ensure that 25 percent of all nationally generated procurements are awarded to women and 30 percent of all start-ups are women-owned. Several funding mechanisms also exist to support the realization of these targets. Among others they include among others: AU Fund for African Women, World Bank Gender Facility, UN funds for Women and the International Conference for the Great Lakes support fund. As such there is both a direction and the means to support its realization. Recently, the African Development Bank also announced a \$300 million initiative to support enterprise development for women.

**Traction** is needed to move from commitments to action. As mentioned above, there is sufficient knowledge that purports the rationale for GEWE and political will has never been so tangible. Except for specific cases, the message has been well received and proponents are looking to the next concrete steps. At grass-roots level, women are desperately seeking solutions to lessen the burden of their work and living conditions, businesses are keen to harness women's potential spending power and women are eager to climb-up the decision-making ladder. As a senior official at the AU once said, it is time to move from "Solemn Declarations to Actions, however simple they may be-but action must be witnessed." The continent is ready to harness women's demographic dividends and hungry for concerted actions that will unlock this huge potential.

The AU is endowed with the most progressive legal and policy frameworks in the world however their realization still remains beyond the reach of the majority of its population. While issues at hand are often very complex, a few simple steps can help catalyze greater motion. They include providing a strategic direction, focusing on a narrow set of actions, coordinating responses, addressing systems and not symptoms, crowding-in comparative advances, leveraging the media and allocating adequate and timely resources. The AU campaigns such as CARMA and Ending Child Marriage, peace and security solidarity missions to conflict areas under as well as the UN "He for She" are such examples among many. Taking advantage of platforms offered by the Peace and Security Council, the Pan African Parliament and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights; and the AU "Ministerial Committee on the Challenges of Ratification/Assertion and Implementation of OUA/AU treaties" are clear ways to extend outreach and foster compliance.

Traction also means showing greater tolerance towards risks, accepting and learning from risks, celebrating gains, pushing the bar continuously higher and devising a mix of planning and implementation cycles. A 2015 study published by McKinsey identified ten "impact zones" (issue-region combinations) where effective action would move more than 75 percent of women affected by gender inequality globally closer to parity. While region specific, they range from access to quality jobs, legal rights, sexual and reproductive health, education,

financial and digital inclusion, political representation, cultural shift to girls rights and unpaid work. In addition, 28% of global tenders from multilateral development banks and governments come to Africa. Currently, under 3% of African owned businesses and less than 1% of women operated businesses access these public procurement contracts. Agenda 2063 has also set aside 25% of all nationally generated procurement awards to women-owned businesses. The Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network is driving an innovative collaborative contracting and consortia of women entrepreneurs from different parts of global value chains using IS11000 on business collaboration. The AU stands to benefit from collaboration with such initiatives.

Traction is also need to incentivize synergies and action at regional and national levels as well. The AU understands that results are achieved and measured at regional and national levels. Therefore ensuring that their voices, priorities and realities are accounted for in any policy making process is an essential step to accelerating the pace of implementation. As the pathways to success, it is an imperative to empower and enable their capacity to deliver their mandate. This includes effective collaboration and coordination, setting-up monitoring and evaluation systems that foster multi-way information exchanges, embedding diversity into plans and actions, converging efforts on priority issues and speaking with one voice to cross-cutting issues. But it will take higher levels of traction to capture these opportunities.

**Transformation** is an exigency. Africa is ready for change and one that will relegate poverty and exclusion to history. At the 2015 AU Summit in Johannesburg, women from grass-roots organizations demanded that the continent "Retires the Hoe to the Museum". They are asking for solutions which not only increase their productivity but create wealth and enables them engage more actively in citizenry. As a well-known female lawyer from the Gambia said "how can women participate in the political process when they are busy feeding their families". Agenda 2063 is designed to respond to such calls for action. It has set ambitious targets and defined innovative strategies to support this vision, including 10 Fast Track projects to maximize the benefits of development, remove major hurdles to integration and endow the continent with essential support infrastructure.

Transformation also calls for capturing opportunities in sectors normally perceived out of bonds for women yet strategic to economic growth. Such sectors include mining, maritime & blue economy, trade, science and technology, banking as well as academia and research and financial markets. Women are making headways in the maritime sector and organizations such as the South African Maritime Safety Authority are championing their deeper penetration in networks normally male dominated. Women, although not always visible are ubiquitous in all spheres of the economy and enabling them opens the space for new entrants, grows businesses faster, creates critical linkages with more profitable value chains and ensures policy and practice speak to the needs of women. This requires however a shift in focus from one that privileges small-scale and micro-actions to emphasizing growth, wealth and competitiveness. For example, Caterpillar foundation is pushing for women's entry into construction, mechanical engineering and heavy duty equipment operations; and ENAT Bank in Ethiopia has set a bank that helps overcome barriers to women's access to sustainable financing. UMEAO, the monetary institution for West Africa is also seeking ways to influence public finance policy for the benefit of increasing budgetary support and minimizing related policies on achieving GEWE.

Africa's population landscape is rapidly changing. The youth population is the largest in the world and set to double by 2040. Agenda 2063 is therefore meant to address the needs of many who are yet to be born but their forebears aspire to better living conditions for them. There is also growing pressure from the realities on an ageing population whose care is primarily provided by women and children and unless urgent action is taken, are likely never to receive any form of social security. There is also a rise in health conditions, such as non-communicable diseases linked often to lifestyle and urbanization and affect both men and women. Various forms of cancer have emerged and affect life expectancy and weigh on already weak health care systems and often attended to during the final stages. These pressures and realities evidently require that our approach to GEWE is broadened and speaks to the needs of a multi-faceted landscape.

**Transformation also means actions** and the time is right for moving closer to realizing the agenda for GEWE through galvanizing support from a wide-range of stakeholders.

The private sector is emerging as potentially reliable partner for GEWE. They influence consumer behavior, are present in the most remote locations and create much needed jobs. This position of privilege needs to be harnessed to make changes both in the labor market but also shape cultural and social belief systems which continue to hold women back. In recent times, they have also increased their investments in Corporate Social Responsibility activities to further their contributions to social and economic development and build stronger relationships with host communities. Star Bucks Coffee is known to have helped Ethiopia brand its coffee to its current \$900 million a year business, including influencing the growth of high employment chains like Khaldi's coffee in Addis and Java House in Nairobi. Similarly, the US Corporate Council for Africa organizes annual networking events which bring together business communities from both sides. In addition to business linkages, this platform could also present opportunities to raise awareness on AU goals to provide better employment and social security to women. UMEAO, the monetary union for West Africa is also seeking ways to further engender macro-economic policies.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have pioneered some of the most difficult causes on the continent. The Pan African Women's Organization (PAWO) was created a year before the Organization for African Unity (OAU) and spearheaded the decolonization movement alongside their male counterparts. The CSO coalition Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOWAR) led the movement which witnessed the enactment of the Maputo Protocol-, the bill of rights for African women- and the most progressive legal instrument of its kind. The Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) is also credited with creating the Solemn Declaration of Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) which helped renew political leadership commitment and make progress reporting mandatory for the AU at its highest political level. The Inter-African Committee on Female Genital Mutilation and Harmful Traditional Practices paved the way to outlawing such customs.

Several Youth networks have consolidated their position on the continent in pushing forward the youth agenda and have approached the AU to strengthen their role in policy influence and implementation. Foundations, associations and industry coalitions are also helping keep the spotlight on key issues affecting women, furthering research to improve their conditions and funding many quick-wins. The Africa 2.0 Foundation and many other diaspora organizations are harnessing the power of the continent's emerging youth leadership to drive transformation. Thus, the AU stands to benefit from working with these private initiatives and

should create the linkages to build the necessary relationships. The ECOSOC is a strong entry point and readily accessible to gender initiatives.

The role of the media as a social change agent cannot be underscored enough. Communications is essential in getting the message heard, understood, implemented and accounted for. They are a critical ally in promoting GEWE. The African Media Initiative, a leading media and communications management organizations is spearheading efforts to change the African narrative, including social perceptions about women's role and capacities.

### **How is gender mainstreamed at the African Union?**

The Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) is the AUC's Department responsible for leading, guiding, advocating for and coordinating all efforts to achieve gender equality and promote women's empowerment within the Commission, Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Organs. WGDD was created in 2000 and is strategically located in the Office of the Chairperson as provided by Article 12(3) of the Statutes of the AU Commission.

The AU's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment is anchored in the legal and policy frameworks listed below. They are informed by and closely aligned with other continental and global commitments, including but not limited to: Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, UN Resolution 1325 and recent policy frameworks on women's economic empowerment.

- Article 4 (L) of its Constitutive Act-2002
- The *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* - Maputo Protocol- 2003
- The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA)-2004
- Gender Policy-2009
- African Women's Decade (AWD)-2010-2020
- The Fund for African Women-2011

Achieving GEWE is also a shared responsibility within the AU and WGDD provides leadership, coordination and technical support on behalf of the Chairperson. Specifically, the following additional mechanisms are in place:

- All AU Commissioners
- All AUC Departments, Missions and Liaison Offices
- NEPAD
- All AU Head of Organs and specialized agencies
- The Pan African Parliament
- The African Commission on Human and People's Rights
- The Tribunal and special courts
- The Special Envoy on Women Peace and Security
- AU Special Representatives
- Commissioners and Gender Directorates at RECs and Regional mechanisms
- AU Gender, Peace and Security programme
- UNDP Gender Support Project
- AHRMD Gender in the work place programme
- Accredited CSOs and associations

The AU also works very closely with UN partners (UN Women and UN-ECA being the lead), development banks, continental CSOs, business networks, communications and media groups, donor partners and foundations.

### **What will be achieved through this strategy?**

The **objective** of designing a new gender strategy is to provide an operational and strategic framework for implementing the objectives of GEWE of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ten Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063. **Specifically**, the strategy will achieve the following:

- **Implementation of Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030:** A new strategy will provide practical ways of translating the various strategies outlined in these policy frameworks into more concrete actions. Agenda 2063 is our pathway to transformative development and therefore its implementation is our main priority.
- **Strategic direction:** There is a clear need to define what the final destination looks like and how we get there. This is a precursor to ensuring a timeliness, traction and transformation. There are large numbers of stakeholders whose contributions can be maximized and become of greater value to the AU provided they are given a clear pathway to achieving desired goals and objectives.
- **Consolidation and streamlining:** Brining efforts related to GEWE under a single roof and using a common denominator is critical realizing higher-impact and sustainable results. As a cross-cutting area, the propensities to lend definitions and create frameworks which while interesting do not necessary support the agenda is real. There needs to be a clear way of doing business in GEWE and one that can be traced back to internationally recognized norms.
- **Strategic focus:** While priorities abound, a stronger focus needs to be placed on investing into actions that have a greater potential of yielding results within the desired timelines and present the clear opportunities for collaboration, innovation and transformation.
- **Enhanced advocacy:** By focusing on a set of priorities, the AU can build and keep momentum on where change needs to occur. Similarly, because the strategy will be developed through an inclusive process, it will commit members to its principles and therefore provide legitimate space for advocacy in targeted areas.
- **Broadened partnerships:** The AU sits at the cross-roads of many high value partnerships. They are seeking opportunities for greater collaboration provided they are given the space for collaboration, including defining areas of mutual interest.
- **Evidence for change:**
  - Better quality data: With the AUCs shift to becoming more of a knowledge organization, WGDD needs to ramp up very quickly its capacity to lead and generate knowledge that supports its mandate. It will require a more analytical, strategic and evidence-based approach to gender mainstreaming, thus

deepening our understanding of where the gaps effectively lie, identifying opportunities for change and the removal of hurdles that remain stubborn.

- Monitoring of commitments: The AU is the seat of inter-governmental power on the continent. WGDD needs to further harness this power through strengthening its contributions to the technical and political bodies of the organization by generating knowledge on all issues related to GEWE through the effective generation of higher quality and timely data and reports.
- **Resource mobilization:** Funding is paramount and the 1<sup>st</sup> Ten Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063 calls for leveraging resources from a variety of non-traditional sources. It is also a well-known fact that national gender machineries, including Ministries are the least endowed and therefore need support to expand their resource base. However, equipped with the right “business case” and resource mobilization strategy which is driven by robust accountability mechanisms, WGDD has a comparative advantage to mobilize resources required to support its programmes, including at continental, regional and national levels.

Through achieving these results, a focus will be placed on identifying:

- How to harness AU’s “convening power” to influence change and increase accountability to the commitments made by Member States
- Specific measures to remove barriers and constraints to gender equality and women’s empowerment
- Define measurements for gender mainstreaming within the AU
- Identify key levers of change and opportunities and methods to scale-up
- Determine what tools, approaches and methodologies are needed to improve policy design, knowledge management and learning, and implementation capacity
- Identify areas of comparative advantage for the AU and how to mobilize complementary knowledge and resources from partner organizations
- Define strategies to enable continued growth of the women’s movement

### **What are the potential areas of focus of the new strategy?**

The canvas is currently empty and will be filled through a multi-stakeholder process. However, taking note of priorities outlined in Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030, the following can guide the priority definition process.

**Unresolved and emerging issues:** In order to break the cycle of poverty, hunger and exclusion, several priority and foundational areas of human development need to be finished. They include women’s sexual and reproductive health, jobs, education, food security and nutrition. Africa and the world have committed to leaving “no one behind and achieving zero hunger” between 2030 and 2063. These unresolved issues must therefore be brought to closure to deflect risks of reversing the gains and harnessing the demographic dividends.

**Rights, Protection and Representation:** The AU applies a rights based approach to development and the Maputo protocol guarantees women’s rights in all key areas. UN resolutions and treaties address the needs of women affected by conflict and violence. It is an imperative to further compliance with these instruments to help women enjoy their basic rights and fulfil their potential.

**Solutions and Innovations:** Economic empowerment is a cornerstone for achieving GEWE. Opportunities need to be expanded through working in new frontiers while consolidating gains in ongoing initiatives. Among others, the AU places a particular emphasis on increasing skills in science and technology, trade, the blue economy, and manufacturing and high growth agricultural value-chains. The AU understands the multiple barriers that must be removed and will therefore leverage public-private partnerships to identify solutions, innovations and opportunities that transform the way women do business and bring them into 21<sup>st</sup> century practices.

### **What products will be generated through this initiative?**

The design of the new gender strategy will deliver three other strategic knowledge products: the evaluation of the 2009 Gender Policy, the development of a gender strategy aligned with Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030, harmonized regional and national policies with the continental strategy; and a communications and outreach strategy.

**Evaluation 2009 Gender Policy:** The evaluation report will provide an analysis (qualitative and quantitative) of progress against targets set in the 2009 policy and which findings will be foundational to the development of the new continental strategy. The report will help provide a better understanding of what works, constraints that must be overcome, relationships and opportunities that need to be harnessed and overall lessons that can be learned from.

**2017- 2023 Gender strategy, operational plan and results framework:** Building on progress to date and lesson learned provided through the 2009 evaluation report, the new strategy document will replace the 2009 Gender Policy. It will be supported by an **operational plan** which will provide business centers of investment by priority area. Equally important will be the **results framework** which will guide future decision-making and activity implementation. The results framework will consolidate and provide further details to the performance management plan under development within the AU for Agenda 2063. The results framework will be rigorous to ensure credibility, reliability and verifiability of knowledge that will be generated and therefore enable greater influence on policy and practice across the AU.

**Harmonized regional and national gender policies:** This is a critical success factor of the new strategy. Harmonization will ensure adaptation at local levels, thus foster greater ownership and implementation of the policy; and the generation of the requisite knowledge information. It also enables the AU to identify resource requirements, constraints and realities which must be addressed or acknowledged in respective implementation environments. The AU's primary role in this process will be to mobilize complimentary resources to support the harmonization efforts, provide technical guidance at continental level and provide the necessary political support to overcome hurdles where they might arise.

**Advocacy and resource mobilization strategy:** Communication is a critical input to the delivery of the WGDD mandate. WGDD's advocacy and outreach function must be strengthened and grounded in a clear strategy that foster greater awareness of the AUs commitments and achievements and shed light on critical gaps. Communications also influences resource mobilization efforts, networking and alliance building and demonstrates stewardship of resources.

## **What process will be followed to develop the strategy?**

This initiative will be placed under the AU Academy, which among others is dedicated to fostering change in the way business is conducted at the AU through promoting critical and independent thinking. The 'Friday's at the Commission" platform will serve as a platform for exchanges and the UNECA Center for Capacity Development, NEPAD, ECOWAS Center for Excellence in Gender and ACBF will also help implement relevant policy discussions.

A team of consultants led by a senior expert will develop the required knowledge products. They will develop data collection and analysis tools, prepare briefing notes and final strategic documents and present them for validation to stakeholders. They will co-lead consultations with WGDD staff, Gender Directors in RECs, Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on GEWE bureau members and continental CSOs. The consultants will have a strong understanding of development principles with a specialized skills in private-sector type results-oriented strategy design.

A series of consultations will take place with internal and external stakeholders (face to face and online) at AUC headquarters, at RECs headquarters, at Missions and Liaison Offices. Participants include but not limited to AU (includes RECs and Organs) staff, members of the Permanent Representative Committee (PRC), women Ambassadors, private sector entities, UN and donor partners, CSOs, associations and industries and academic institutions. These will be done in small segments to ensure high quality debates.

The consultants will use a mix of desk review, key informant interviews and brainstorming sessions to generate the necessary qualitative and quantitative information.

The process will be closed by validation workshops at AUC headquarters which will convene representatives of the various segments that participated in the design process.

### **Timelines:**

#### **2016**

**June:** Recruitment of lead consultant

**July- September:** Consultations

**October:** Draft documents are presented for initial review

**November:** Validation workshops

#### **2017**

**January:** Presentation to Gender Pre-Summit and AU Assembly.