

Concept Note for UNOAU & African Union Joint Hybrid Workshop On Women's Equal Participation in Electoral Process

Date: 13th & 14th October 2022

Location: Addis Ababa

1.0 Background

The United Nations Office to the African Union and the African Union plan to hold a joint training for election management bodies in the region to address the limited participation of women in political leadership / elections in Africa.

It is noted that, since 1993, Africa has had only ten (10) female presidents, some of whom have facilitated tremendous economic, political and social changes that have placed their countries¹ on the path to globally successful transitions despite internal and external economic and structural challenge. Indeed, the contribution of these women and many others at different levels in Africa today is of great significance and unquestionable.

According to the first Women's Political Participation (WPP) Africa Barometer 2021, women constitute 24% of the 12,113 parliamentarians in Africa - 25% in the lower houses, and 20% in the upper houses of parliament. While local government is often hailed as a training ground for women in politics, women constitute a mere 21% of councilors in the 19 countries for which complete data could be obtained.

The Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) reports indicate that since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (twenty years ago), women's representation in parliament has increased by 26.5%. At this rate it would take fifty years (until 2070) to achieve gender parity. SDG 5.5 commits government to achieving “full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political life” women by 2030.

2.0 Justification:

The long-term effects of historical discrimination, recently compounded by the pandemic, have disadvantaged women in all spheres, including political and public life. To reverse inequality and to implement international and national standards and commitments, the adoption of temporary special measures, including gender quotas, is required (see E/CN.6/2021/3). Gender inclusive political participation is crucial for political stability and sustainable peace. As the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights makes clear, commitment to non-discrimination alone is

¹ <https://afjn.org/list-of-female-africa-presidents-updated-july-2021/>; accessed on 3 March 2022

not enough: proactive measures to increase women's meaningful participation and representation are needed.²

The training will present existing practices and options for promoting women's participation including through reforms, that may assist EMBs and assistance providers with skills needed to ensure a gender responsive approach to elections with a clear objective to ensure observance of the WPS agenda. The UNSCR1325 recognizes the relevance of gender in peace and security matters and mandated all United Nations member-states to ensure full participation of women at all levels of decision-making. It also calls for the protection of women and girls against violence during and after conflict, and for the adoption of a gender perspective to prevent and mitigate impacts of conflict on women. While progress has been made in implementing these provisions, particularly at international strategic and policy levels, various reports however, indicate that translating the goals of Resolution 1325 into reality in political elected positions remains a challenge.

The African Union Commission (AUC) has a broad mandate of coordinating efforts of the continental body aimed at unity and integration through, inter alia, pursuing democratic and participatory governance. Central to the advancement of democratic governance is the AU's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment in line with the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa adopted in Maputo, Mozambique as well as the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, adopted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The AU's unflinching resolve to achieve gender equality resonates with the noble aspirations of Agenda 2063-The Africa We Want and the 2030 global agenda on sustainable development.

Furthermore, Articles 3 and 4 of the AU Constitutive Act commits the African Union to function according to the principles of gender equality and to ensure the effective participation of women in decision-making, especially in the economic, political and socio-cultural arenas. Also, Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 further envisions an Africa, in which full gender equality is achieved and where gender parity is attained with women fully empowered with equal economic, social, political and cultural rights. The AU has adopted the intermediate objective of having in its Member States at least 30% of women candidates during the elections as formulated in its Common Vision 2030. These objectives deserve particular attention in their systemic operational effectiveness in relation to the States parties of the continental institution. The AU adoption of the Gender Parity principle in 2001, followed by the Parity decision in 2018, which requires the AUC to achieve 50/50 in its staffing and to have 30% of youth by 2025, is one of the most progressive decisions on gender equality ever recorded.

² Report of the UN Secretary General on women and Peace and Security - 2021: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_827.pdf

The full participation of women and men in political and decision-making processes as voters, candidates, elected officials and electoral management body (EMB) staff is crucial. Yet, despite a set of robust continental and national instruments and many positive developments in recent years, women represent only 26.5% of the world's parliamentarians and in many countries, they continue to be marginalized and underrepresented in political and electoral processes. Actions such as reducing violence against women in politics is essential for reaching equality in political and public life. The pandemic has amplified abuse, harassment and threats in person and online against politically active women. In some elections in the continent, violence has been used to silence women leaders and prevent them from running for office and carrying out their duties in any position they hold.

The strong political participation of women is critical for democratic governance. However, girls and women throughout the world continue to be marginalized from the political sphere due to restrictive laws and institutional barriers; discriminatory cultural practices; and disproportionately low access to quality education, healthcare, and resources. However, reversing discriminatory policies and practices is possible and has been done with the technical support of the EMBs. It is therefore important that EMBs intentionally and proactively take gender into account in the analysis, planning and implementation of all their activities, as well as in their interactions with other stakeholders involved in electoral processes.

The training for Election Management Bodies will be a good platform to focus on and support inclusive participation in line with UNSCR 1325 and the African Union legal framework and practice, as well as on the legal framework of the States following a comparative perspective in terms of feedback from different countries.

3.0 Objective

This workshop aims to provide EMBs and other participating election practitioners with a venue to share experiences and good practices on challenges and opportunities facing women's political and electoral participation in the region and how to develop an integrated approach to gender responsiveness and inclusion of women in electoral processes. By adopting a gender responsive approach, EMBs, with the support of other relevant actors including political parties, can play a pivotal role in maximizing the participation of women in elections.

Specifically, the activity will aim to achieve the following:

- Provide a platform for the Election Management Bodies (EMBs) to share experience on how to support inclusive women's political participation in elections.
- Engage with EMBs on the challenges affecting women's political participation in elections and seek for strategies to redress them, throughout election cycle.
- Seek for opportunities for networking and sharing of information
- Create awareness on how to leverage legal and policy frameworks for gender parity in electoral management.

4.0 Thematic Issues

In order to ensure a productive workshop, the following thematic issues will be addressed;

- **Framing the issue of Gender inclusive political participation and WPS:** This session will provide an outline of the challenges and the various ways that they can be addressed as well as linking women's participation to broader issues of peace, security and development.
- **Legal and Policy Framework:** This session will discuss key issues such as the impact of the legal framework and electoral systems on women's participation, as well as issues related to temporary special measures (TSMs) and quotas.
- **Electoral disputes relating to the implementation of parity laws and political and systemic challenges in Africa:** This session will discuss challenges facing the implementation of parity and quota laws in the continent.
- **Sharing experiences on addressing the issues related to violence against women in electoral and political processes.** During this session participants share experiences on entry points to promote women's participation in Electoral Cycle.

5.0 Format of the workshop

- i) The workshop will be held in a hybrid manner to allow more participants to participate.
- ii) the availability of relevant background material for each session.
- iii) Panel discussions will also be held in order to encourage knowledge sharing among the participants.
- iv) Q &A as well as group discussions will provide the opportunity for participants to share their experiences.

6.0 Target Groups

- The primary target groups of this hybrid workshop are Election Management Bodies (EMB) of Member States who are holding election in the remaining months of 2022 and in the year 2023. The EMBs from the countries mentioned in the table below will be invited to participate in this workshop. In the same perspective, countries like Kenya and Senegal that had also elections in 2022, will be invited as well to share their experiences in terms of what challenges they faced and how they addressed those challenges.
- Invitation will also be extended to UN/AU/ RECs representatives working in the areas of election to participate. (These includes, Gender Focal points in the region, the Economic communities- ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD).

7.0 Number of participants participate face to face

The total number of participants who are going to participate face to face is 50. Out of the 50 participants, 17 are representatives of Member States EMBs that are holding election in the remaining months of 2022 and in the year 2023, these will include the following:

No.	COUNTRY	TYPE OF ELECTION
1.	Tunisia	National Assembly
2.	Guinea Bissau	National Assembly
3.	Benin	National Assembly
4.	Nigeria	President, House of Representatives & Senate
5.	Djibouti	Parliamentary
6.	Equatorial Guinea	Presidential
7.	Sierra Leone	Presidential
8.	Zimbabwe	General
9.	Gabon	Presidential & National Assembly
10.	Eswatini	Parliamentary
11.	Mauritania	National Assembly
12.	Liberia	Presidential
13.	Mali	National Assembly
14.	Madagascar	Presidential
15.	Togo	National Assembly
16.	DRC	Presidential & National Assembly

UNOAU deployed AU FemWise and the Panel of the Wise as well as some AWLN members to Senegal and Kenya during the recent parliamentary and Presidential elections, so it is also intended that a few participants from these two countries will be invited to share their experiences during the event.

8.0 Date and Venue

The hybrid workshop will be held on **13th and 14th October 2022** at African Union Commission, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

9.0 Expected outputs:

The workshop will mainly result into a workshop report documenting the experiences of the participants and the proceedings of the workshop.