



Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Establishment of a Pan-African task force on gender equality, violence and education

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Introduction

In this report, the main causes of and issues relating to gender equality, violence against women, and education for women are discussed. The Progress and challenges in African human development, as a whole, is looked at, as well as the Social Dimensions of Gender Inequality in Africa. We take a look at women in different fields of work and politics and in leadership roles across the continent, as well as assess the legal and social norms which impact gender equality. Furthermore, in trying to offer solutions to the problem, this report considers policy and institutional responses to gender equality and ultimately a plan to accelerate gender equality in Africa. However, it is worth remembering while reading this report, that, despite the length of this report, there is a lot more to be discussed and thought about when attempting to tackle the issue, especially in specific situations. A much more in depth analysis and report of the issue can be found through the link listed in the Appendix.

Key Terms

The term “Pan-African” is defined by the Oxford dictionary as: “Relating to all people of African birth or descent.”

Sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.

Gender equality denotes women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere.

Gender equity denotes the equivalence in life outcomes for women and men, recognizing their different needs and interests.

Gender division of labour is the socially determined ideas and practices that define what roles

and activities are deemed appropriate for women and men.

Gender mainstreaming is an organizational strategy to bring a gender perspective to all aspects of an institution's policy and activities through building gender capacity and accountability equality.

Source: Reeves and Baden, 2000.

Countries and Organizations Involved

United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (UNOSAA)

"Within its mandate for advocacy and coordination of UN System and international support for peace, security, human rights and inclusive development in Africa, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) places a special emphasis on gender equality and the empowerment of women." -

<http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/peace/women.shtml>

UN Women

"All human development and human rights issues have gender dimensions. UN Women focuses on priority areas that are fundamental to women's equality, and that can unlock progress across the board." - <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do>

HeForShe

"The world is at a turning point. People everywhere understand and support the idea of gender equality. They know it's not just a women's issue, it's a human rights issue. And when these powerful voices are heard, they will change the world. The time for that change is now.

HeForShe is inviting people around the world to stand together to create a bold, visible force for gender equality. And it starts by taking action right now to create a gender equal world." - <http://www.heforshe.org/en/our-mission>

ANNEX A, ANNEX K, ANNEX L and ANNEX M of the full report (which can be found through the link in the appendix) will provide a full, detailed list of organizations and countries, and how they contribute to the issue.



General Overview

It is important to recall that widespread recognition that more gender equality promotes human development is not recent. Gender equality and women's empowerment have been a concern of the international community dating back at least three decades, and even longer when declarations on human rights are included. International and regional declarations on gender equality and women empowerment abound. The goal of reducing gender inequality has held a prominent place on the international development agenda. Global attention to the issue of gender inequality was reflected in Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3, which provided direction for governments focusing on education, employment and political participation. More recently, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 calls on the international community to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". In addition, many of the other SDGs have a strong focus on inequality, including ending poverty and hunger, and assuring access to clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, meaningful workplace opportunities and reduced gender inequality.

With this understanding, international and regional statements of solidarity for women's empowerment must be more quickly translated into concrete actions on the ground. While progress has been made in certain areas and within many countries, the pace of change has been slower than hoped and more inconsistent than desired.

This topic comes at a time of tremendous change across the Continent. The optimism of double-digit economic growth in some African countries only a few years ago has been dampened by the recent global downturn in demand for many commodities, such as oil, gas and minerals, upon which many African economies depend. The economic gains of the first decade of this century have been notably impacted. Political unrest and civil discord continue to affect many countries in North, East and Central Africa. The Ebola epidemic of 2014 in West Africa demonstrated how vulnerable and fragile African societies can be to unexpected shocks, which have set back economic and social advances in the affected countries of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. At this writing, drought in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, and a heat wave in Southern Africa are causing major hardships for the peoples of the affected countries. Similarly, the fight against terrorism and religious extremism can have devastating effects on civic and social order. All of



these crises have significant gender dimensions because women inadvertently bear the brunt of the adjustment given the socially constructed roles they play in providing food and care for the young, sick and aged while dealing with lost livelihoods, health and security-related threats. These recent circumstances require more concerted attention to addressing gender inequality. Greater focus on gender equality and empowerment can mitigate the negative impacts of such events by distributing economic and social benefits across the entire population as part of the structural transformation process, and not by simply improving women's well-being in isolation from the overall transformation being sought. Using gender equality as an organizing policy lens not only promotes inclusive economic, social and political participation for the current generation, but also leads to high capabilities for present and future generations. This is a long-recognized argument for gender equality and remains a key part of this topic.

Before turning to the progress and specific challenges of gender equality in Africa, it may be useful to first establish the policy context and conceptual underpinnings of human development and gender equality. Since the concept of human development was first introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1990, the term has gained widespread acceptance. "Human development" was formally defined in the first Human Development Report (HDR) as "a process of enlarging people's capabilities and choices". The most important of these wide-ranging capabilities are to live a long and healthy life, to be educated, and to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-respect. In later reports and in work outside the United Nations, the concept has been refined and elaborated to include broadening the choices and strengthening the capabilities of all individuals. An important contrast was thus established between, on the one hand, the long-standing view of economic prosperity, embodied in the measurement of economic achievement by gross national income (GNI) per capita, and on the other hand, human development, i.e. human achievements measured in terms of capabilities – what people can do and what they are able to do. This wider approach to understanding economic and social development is now a well-recognized tenet of the international community.

Another accepted principle is that human development and human rights are closely intertwined. The expansion of human choices and capabilities, and the enjoyment of human rights for women and men are inextricably linked. Human development is thus built on a commitment to human dignity and freedom that has a human rights-based foundation (UNDP, 2000). Without such a foundation, equity

and social justice as well as the effective use of institutions, capacities and resources for promoting human development will be constrained.

In examining human development and gender equality, we need to explore how Africa has fared over time by using the human development indicators that account for inequalities between male and female outcomes, including the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the more recent Gender Inequality Index (GII) introduced by UNDP in 2010. Beyond the correlation between indicators of human development and gender equality, we must also review the challenge of gender equality in the context of the complex web of socio-cultural, economic, political and legal barriers that have a direct bearing on advancing gender equality – factors that vary from one country to the next and within countries. Achieving gender equality is ultimately based on family- and community-level decisions that are supported and enforced by national-level policies, laws and programmes in the context of changing societal norms.

More specifically, what are some of the lessons that can be drawn from a growing body of evidence that demonstrates the linkage between human development and gender equality in Africa? Below are 5 trends that have impacted and will continue to impact on progress in gender equality:

- **The recent dynamics of social and economic transformation have resulted in significant strides in Africa's human development.** Africa, as a whole, has seen more than a decade of robust economic growth and increasing integration into the world economy. This growth has resulted in more concerted attention to sound economic and political governance as well as the expansion of social investments. This has led to notable strides in human progress and human rights, including women's rights, despite the recent economic slowdown in some countries.
- **Africa's transformation has not been pervasive across national economies.** Economic and social transformation is leaving many behind, with large disparities at the regional, sub-regional and national levels in addition to a significant gap between outcomes for women and men. Until the ongoing transformation reaches all segments of society, inequalities could be exacerbated. Similarly, continuing gender inequality has measurable economic, social and development costs that can further impede Africa's transformation.

- **There is a growing recognition that gender equality has multiplier effects across the spectrum of development from health, education and labour markets to greater productivity, resilience and intergenerational mobility.** Seeking to achieve gender equality is not only the right policy, but also an economically and socially sound one. In addition, there is also a track record of successful initiatives and programmes in many countries. Scaling up and improving on these foundational initiatives is the overriding challenge. For most African countries, this challenge is moving beyond codified legal gender equality to gender equity and substantive gender equality so that women are practically and tangibly benefitting from these rights through corresponding actions to level the playing field.
- **The next 15 years represent a time of either tremendous opportunity or tremendous peril for African countries.** During the 15 years of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), significant opportunities for growth in human development from greater economic diversification and structural transformation are possible if based on national efforts to make growth and transformation fully inclusive and gender-neutral. Such an approach is much broader and more comprehensive than simply focusing on SDG 5 on gender equality. Through a broader focus, African governments will be much better positioned to address the expected changes in global development financing, deepen the benefits from democracy and effective governance, and leverage global trends from technology change and connectivity. They will also more likely be capable of addressing the still-evolving implications of climate change. Conversely, the African countries that fail to make concerted efforts for the transformation process to be more inclusive and gender-neutral are less likely to make the transition to strong economic growth and full integration in the global economy, and lag behind progress achieved by other countries in the Africa region.

From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 68 years ago, to the Millennium Declaration 15 years ago, and to the Sustainable Development Goals today, global attention remains focused on promoting human rights and eliminating discrimination and inequitable outcomes for women, men, girls and boys. However, despite widespread recognition of women's rights and the benefits that accrue to all of society from equitable treatment and access to resources and opportunities for women and men, inequalities persist. At the regional and national levels, there is growing recognition that as African women



attain higher measures of economic and social well-being, benefits accrue to all of society; despite this growing understanding, removing inequalities for women has not kept pace. Significant gaps between men's and women's opportunities remain a major challenge and a severe impediment to structural economic and social transformation that is still the goal of all African countries.

The evolving development landscape – with its emerging opportunities, vulnerabilities and shocks – makes it imperative for Africa to accelerate the advancement of sustainable and equitable human development. This can be achieved by building economic, social and environmental resilience for women and men, enhancing their productivity, and accelerating the pace of structural economic transformation in the region. We must explore where and how progress in gender equality has been made and how best to accelerate the pace of gender advancement in Africa. This focus on gender equality comes at a time of tremendous change across the continent, including recent dynamics of social and economic transformation that have resulted in significant strides in Africa's human development.

It is essential to pinpoint the intersection between political and economic processes, and therefore present a clear agenda for action. The agenda should provide an approach to help African countries more forcefully confront the challenge and accelerate progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. This agenda on gender equality can support progress toward Africa's Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While SDG 5 focuses specifically on gender equality, addressing gender issues more vigorously and comprehensively will expedite efforts by governments and other stakeholders to achieve many, if not all, of the other SDGs due to the role and position that women play across all of society and all sectors.

Analytical approach

From the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) perspective, gender inequality from the standpoint of human development is addressed by improving women's capabilities and opportunities, and contributing to better outcomes for present and future generations. The nexus between gender equality and human development is based on three overlapping concerns:

- **economic:** more productive work at home and in the marketplace as employers, employees and entrepreneurs;



- **social and environmental:** better health, education, cessation of physical and sexual violence against women, and sustainable resource use for present and future generations; and
- **political:** more equal voice and representation in decision-making and resource allocation.

The analytical approach taken should be to examine the challenge of gender equality by pinpointing the interaction between political, economic and social processes that either impede or contribute to advancing women's empowerment. A 'political economy' perspective is used to understand the way ideas, resources and power are conceptualized, negotiated and implemented by different social groups in relation to gender inequality – whether in the workplace, the marketplace, or at home.

The sections below highlight some of the key points that need to be considered in order to come up with a feasible solution for the problem.

Progress and challenges in African human development

The report reviews current progress in African human development using the different indicators that UNDP has constructed to capture various aspects of human development, including gender inequality. Using UNDP's different human development indicators, there is wide variation in values and ranking across the African region and between the different African sub-regions. Overall, Africa has one of the fastest rates of improvement in human development over the past two decades but also has the lowest average levels of human development compared to other regions in the world. At the same time, not all African countries have low human development. Seventeen African countries across the five sub-regions have attained medium and high human development countries each from Southern and North Africa, four in Central Africa, two in West Africa, and one in East Africa. The highest human development levels in Africa are in Algeria, Libya, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Tunisia. Thirty-six African countries (out of 44 countries worldwide) are classified in the low human development group.

Countries with initially low levels of human development are making large gains. The following countries have made the largest gains since 2000: United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi, Mali, Zambia, Niger, Angola, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Rwanda and Ethiopia. Countries that began with initially low levels of human development



are growing faster, on average, which indicates that they are catching up. However, the pace has slowed since 2010.

Calculations using the UNDP gender indices indicate significant gender inequality in almost every African country. Gender gaps in income and non-income dimensions mean that women often experience lower human development outcomes than men. On average, African women achieve only 87 per cent of male human development levels.

Social dimensions of gender equality

The social dimensions of gender equality involving trends in health and education are key determinants of women's equality and empowerment. Overall, gender inequality in social services translates into fewer opportunities for women, in particular, and society, as a whole, to achieve well-being. During the last decades, many African countries have seen the expansion of their citizens' capabilities in the basic areas of health, education and other social services. These improvements have included women and girls, and today they have greater access to education at all levels, have better health, safely give birth to their children, and achieve higher life expectancy. Yet, many women face severe deprivations in their health due to such factors as early age marriage, sexual and physical violence, and the continued unacceptable high incidence of maternal mortality.

The spectrum of violence affecting women includes domestic violence, intimate partner violence, rape, genital mutilation, intimidation, and additional threats to women's personal security in periods of war and conflict.

With respect to education, it is remarkable that near gender parity has been achieved in primary school enrolment. However, gender discrimination is still significant in secondary and tertiary education. The reasons why children do not attend school vary, but they are often associated with poverty, ethnicity, social exclusion, living in a rural area or slums, geographic remoteness, disasters, armed conflict, lack of basic facilities and poor-quality education. These barriers often interact with gender to create even greater disadvantages in learning opportunities.

Women in African economies

Another key determinant of gender equality is defined by women in the workplace and economic decision-making. Significant economic and workplace disparities



between men and women continue to be the norm rather than the exception in many African countries. These inequalities are found across Africa in terms of access to economic assets, participation in the workplace, entrepreneurship opportunities, and use of and benefits from natural resources and the environment.

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Increased female participation in the labour market has not meant increased opportunities in high paying jobs or enterprises. A gender wage gap outside agriculture is pervasive across all labour markets in sub-Saharan Africa, where, on average, the unadjusted gender pay gap is estimated at 30 per cent. Thus, for every \$1 earned by men in manufacturing, services and trade, women earn 70 cents. Gaps in earnings between women and men are influenced by parameters such as age, occupation type, education, parenthood and marriage.

Because social norms and beliefs assign African women and girls the primary responsibility for care and domestic work, women, on average, spend twice as much time as men on domestic work - child and elderly care, cooking, cleaning, and fetching water and wood. In sub-Saharan Africa, 71 per cent of the burden of collecting water for households falls on women and girls.

As the economic status of women improves, so does the economic status of entire families – a major factor in reducing the blight of inter-generational poverty and low human development. For example, ownership or title to land represents an important source of equity and collateral for women in obtaining credit and accessing other forms of productive assets. Lack of access to land deprives African women of an important economic tool for improving their livelihoods.

There is a high economic cost when women are not more fully integrated into their respective national economies. Gender inequality in the labour market alone cost sub-Saharan Africa about USD 95 billion annually between 2010 and 2014, peaking at USD 105 billion in 2014. These results confirm that Africa is missing its full growth potential because a sizeable portion of its growth reserve – women – is not fully utilized.



African women in politics and leadership

Another key driver in advancing gender equality is the role of women's political voice and leadership. Women's political participation and representation in governance have long been taken as key indicators of the general level of public sector effectiveness and accountability in a country. When more women are involved in politics and leadership positions, women's rights, priorities, needs and interests are less likely to be ignored or silenced.

Significant progress has been made in advancing women's participation in holding elective office and in positions of leadership in the public and private sectors. Some countries have seen the successful election of women to their parliaments and other elected offices, but existing social and political structures still proscribe women's full potential in helping to equally shape the national and local economic, social and political agenda.

In addition to making progress in politics, women have also made advances in leadership positions in such areas as the civil service, trade unions and the private sector, but here again progress in achieving gender equity is still lagging due to a combination of political, economic and social resistance to change.

In the private sector, the general perception that male enterprises out-perform female ones is not supported by data nor does it justify the gap in leadership. Although the trend is improving, the percentage of firms with a female top manager still ranges between 7 and 30 per cent. Narrowing the private sector leadership gender gap relies on increasing the pool of women with tertiary education in science and technology-related fields.

Peace processes are another principal ground for decision-making and for the exercise of power and influence. However, historically women's formal participation has been limited despite the profusion of peace agreements across the continent. In the last decade, women's roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding have shifted considerably from when women could only informally impact negotiations for cessation of hostilities or peace agreements. There is a growing recognition that women should be an integral and formal part of any peace negotiations process, given women's role in securing and maintaining peace.

The role of legal and social norms in gender equality

Existing legal and social norms, and their interactions have a major effect on

gender equality and women's empowerment. The underlying importance of legal and social norms cannot be overstated in such areas as access to economic services, health and education, as well as the role they play in influencing gender-focused violence, childhood marriage and other socio-cultural barriers to gender equality.

African states and regional bodies have put in place a wide array of legal norms, precedents and legislation promoting gender equality. The challenge is not in re-tuning existing legal standards, but rather, in ensuring that standards are advocated, accepted and integrated into national laws and regulations, and then fully implemented and enforced. It is the gap between legal rights and expectations, on the one hand, and pre- vailing practices and behaviours embodied in social and cultural norms, on the other hand, that pose a fundamental challenge for accelerating gender equality and women's empowerment.

Many social norms have very important and positive roles in creating strong family and community bonds, as well as establishing conditions for trust and support in times of crisis and hardship. Other social norms, however, continue to have a negative impact on the attainment of gender equality, despite existing laws and standards. Such prevailing social norms and gender stereotypes that assign different standings, roles and privileges for women and men prevent progress towards gender equality. About one quarter of Africans did not embrace the concept of gender equality, i.e. they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the fundamental notion of equal rights between men and women. This calls for proactive awareness and advocacy on gender equality in Africa.

The impact of social norms that limit women has also been shown to have deleterious effects on men and boys, and communities, as a whole, essentially holding everyone back from achieving higher human development and impeding societies from realizing their full development potential.

Policy and programme approaches to addressing gender inequality

African governments have used a range of policy and programme approaches to address gender inequality. These include broad macro- and sectoral-level efforts that have sought to address gender inequality through a combination of policies and institutions. Examples include fiscal policy (including public expenditures and subsidies), legal and regulatory measures and set-aside programmes, as well as other targeted interventions. But the record of success is mixed, and there is ample room for expanding such efforts, both in scope and scale. In this regard, much can

be learned from the experience of Latin America and Asia.

Most African countries have followed international practice by setting up institutions for the advancement of women. These new organizational mechanisms for gender issues have taken many forms, including thematic ministries or ministerial departments for women, designated in some countries as lead institutional mechanisms. Developing effective institutional models towards more equal societies must be understood as a shared responsibility across multiple ministries and involving the private sector and civil society.

African governments have begun using various kinds of social protection programmes (including cash transfer and subsidies) to promote gender equality and poverty reduction. Still, there is considerable room for expanding a number of cash transfer and social service programmes that would have a direct impact on improving women's economic and social well-being. These include paid maternal leave, provision of childcare services, and some form of income support or cash transfers for women's unpaid work, usually taking place in the home or in the farm field.

Gender-sensitive reviews of existing legislation in the areas of family law, land law, labour and employment law, and customary law are necessary to identify and remove ongoing gender discrimination.

Likewise, the legal environment within which women and men engage in society underscores the fact that more effective non-discriminatory labour institutions, family-friendly policies and work environment standards could contribute greatly towards reducing women's economic and social disadvantages. In an estimated 28 per cent of African countries, customary law is considered a valid source of law – even if it violates constitutional provisions on non-discrimination or equality.

In order to better apply international and regional legal norms for gender equality, many African countries may therefore need to more fully articulate, implement and enforce existing laws, statutes and regulations that could have a profound impact on improving women's access to equal rights and entitlements. Reconciling national laws and regulations with customary laws and traditions remains a monumental challenge.

An agenda for action to accelerate gender equality

The 2016 Africa Human Development Report offers some key conclusions and



overriding themes that provide a strategic framework and agenda for action aimed at a more results-oriented and comprehensive approach to addressing gender inequality. Four broad 'pathways' are suggested that offer policy and programme guidelines to accelerate gender equality and fully integrate gender into the broader human development agenda and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Agenda 2063.

Pathway 1:

Supporting the adoption of legal reforms, policies and regulations to advance women's empowerment through the formulation and full implementation of a combination of laws and regulations, policies and programmes that provide equal opportunities for all, regardless of sex.

Pathway 2:

Supporting national capacities to promote and increase the participation and leadership of women in decision-making in the home, economy and society. In this regard, public and private sector institutions as well as civil society organizations (CSOs) should commit to implementing UNDP's Gender Equality Seal (GES) in Africa.

Pathway 3:

Supporting capacity to implement multi- sectoral approaches to mitigate the impacts of discriminatory health and education practices can generate collaboration across ministries and with the private sector and civil society.

Pathway 4:

Supporting women to gain ownership and management of economic and environmental assets can help tackle factors that propagate socio-economic exclusion, poverty and inequality.

With these four pathways in mind, there is an overriding strategic question facing African governments wishing to accelerate women's rights and entitlements: Assuming the political commitment to do so, how can African leaders and policy-makers more forcefully address gender inequalities in the face of other competing national priorities?

Due to the pressure on leaders and policy-makers to maintain the pace of economic



growth, diversify the economy for integration into global markets, meet the rising demands of a growing middle class, address shocks and vulnerabilities and meet national security concerns, policy-makers must take tough and often competing decisions on the use of scarce resources.

To provide some policy guidance for African leaders concerned with this ongoing dilemma, six strategic considerations are offered as an organizational framework for action in addressing gender inequality. This organizational framework coincides with the argument put forward that accelerating gender equality and women's empowerment simultaneously represents a practical operational approach for African governments to tackle the challenge of achieving the SDGs and move forward on the AU's Agenda 2063. To the extent that gender inequalities are addressed, then, in effect, progress will be made across the wide spectrum of development goals found in the SDGs. Addressing gender equality is not separate from addressing the SDGs.

From this perspective, the six strategic considerations are outlined below.

Using gender equality as an organizing policy lens for formulation, planning and implementation of the development agenda. It is a false assumption that giving higher priority to gender equality means giving lower priority to other development priorities. Focusing on gender issues is not a zero-sum choice, where choosing one priority comes at the expense of another. Whatever the policy objective – inclusive growth and economic diversification, revitalizing the agricultural sector, improving national health services, eradicating extreme poverty, tackling climate change – if 50 per cent of the population, that is, women and girls, are not benefitting equally from the policies and programmes, then the latter cannot be considered a success. Discarding this false assumption and addressing gender equality is no longer about 'adding' in special policies and programmes for women or having separate women's ministries or agencies, but, instead, ensuring that all policies and programmes are intended to achieve equal outcomes for both men and women.

Tackling destructive social norms directly. Reversing the social norms that impede women's and girls' equal opportunities will be a long-term and difficult process. Pushing to deconstruct harmful social norms and cultural barriers is no doubt a morally demanding, socially difficult and politically risky course of action, or more precisely, multiple and overlapping courses of actions. African leaders and policy-makers therefore need to understand the long-term nature of

deconstructing harmful social norms and replacing them with positive social norms. In many instances, the approach will entail reconciling legal and social norms.

Using plans and budgets to prioritize gender equality. African governments will invariably need to identify and then implement a strategic set of policy and programme choices that are deemed priorities in the national context, that have the highest likelihood of making important changes, that can work synergistically, and that have the best chance of being successfully implemented. The objective is to suggest that African governments must have a prioritization process for achieving gender equality given the tremendous needs and resource constraints facing each country. The task does not necessarily entail selecting and implementing a wide range of policy options, but instead, prioritizing, in an orderly and transparent process, among multiple (and often contending) policy options—all of which place competing demands on scarce public resources.

Three guiding questions are suggested for linking short- and long-term prioritization:

- What policies and programmes have the highest likelihood of improving the lives of women and bringing them into the economic mainstream through productive employment opportunities and improved social welfare?
- In what ways are the views and concerns of women, stakeholders and other recipients being factored into the decision- making process?
- In situations where resources are shifted from one programme or initiative to another, can the shift be justified in terms of improved economic and social out- comes for women and girls than would otherwise have been the case?

Strengthening adaptive policies and institutional capacities. Achieving gender equality and accelerating the pace of human development will require African governments to incorporate a commitment to a strong, proactive and responsible social framework that develops policies for both the public and private sectors – based on a long-term vision and leadership, shared norms and values, and rules and institutions that build trust and cohesion. At the same time, governments will need the capacity for flexibility and adaptation. In complex societies such as in Africa, the outcome of any particular policy is inevitably uncertain. African governments will need to follow a governance framework that is pragmatic and able to problem-solve and adapt collectively and rapidly – as opposed to



abandoning a course of action in the face of unintended effects.

Adding value to data for improved decision-making. For African governments to fully address gender inequalities and understand the outcomes of chosen policies and programmes, more robust data collection and monitoring systems will be required. Effective capacity in statistics and monitoring and evaluation is the ‘lubricant’ by which governments are able to perform as an adaptive state and undertake necessary policy change and mid-course corrections. Data collection and analysis should not be considered an afterthought, but rather a core function of governmental services, which require commensurate financial and political support.

Assessing capabilities for monitoring national development plans and budgets, and the SDGs, together with traditional economic and social statistics, is an imperative. This represents a window of opportunity for African governments to evaluate how their statistical agencies and line ministries can improve their data gathering, management and analysis functions in order to fully capture the gender implications of current policies and initiatives, and how, over time, they can be modified and improved.

Prioritizing regional and South-South cooperation. It is important to underline the importance of regional and South-South cooperation in designing and implementing gender-focused policies and initiatives. African countries have much to learn from each other – both what has worked and what has not. There are also many useful lessons that can be learned from the Asian and Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) experience. The focus of such cooperation should be on sharing tools, strategies and experiences across sectors, from large infrastructure projects to community-based interventions – all need to drive innovation, learning and upscaling. There is considerable scope for expanding cross-national training and study tours, secondment of staff and other kinds of experiential learning opportunities that place managers and policy-makers more directly in the fulcrum of on-the-ground change.

In summary, it is necessary to focus on the continuing problem of gender equality facing African women and girls. A key conclusion is that gender equality is not achieved by having gender-specific ministries or women-only projects and programmes (although they can be important), but rather, by tackling gender equality as a wide-ranging effort across multiple sectors that engage all segments of society. We must further emphasize the inter-linkages between the social well-

being of women and their economic opportunities for more productive lives. Underpinning all of these efforts will be the necessary but understandably difficult task of breaking down harmful social norms and cultural barriers that have a particularly serious impact on women and their families.

Another conclusion is that accelerating gender equality will entail highly collaborative efforts involving not only national and local governments, but also non-governmental organizations, the private sector, advocacy groups and effective community-based organizations.

Finally, it will be important for African governments to articulate time-bound benchmarks to measure progress, make adjustments as needed, and maintain a national vision of the important ramifications that achieving gender equality has for the entire society. The peoples of Africa must hold themselves and their governments accountable for making progress on improvements within a sufficient timeframe that does not dilute the urgent need for action. The 15-year timeframe of the SDGs and the first ten-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063 represent a viable timeframe to which African governments have already pledged themselves.

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Related UN resolutions and Previous Approaches to Solving the Issue

- The [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa \(2003\)](#)
- The [Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa \(2004\)](#)

Following the adoption of the [African Union Gender Policy](#) in 2009, African leaders launched the African Women's Decade 2010-2020 and the Fund for African Women to accelerate the implementation of all commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment on the continent. These continental frameworks complement important global frameworks, to which many African Governments are signatories, including:

- the [Dakar Platform for Action \(1994\)](#),
- the [Beijing Platform for Action \(1995\)](#),
- the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(1979\)](#), and
- [UN Security Council resolution 1325 \(2000\) on Women, Peace and Security](#), among others.

At the [24th Summit of the African Union](#), held on 23-31 January 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, African Heads of State and Government adopted [Agenda 2063](#), the continent's 50-year structural transformation and development agenda. The Agenda's sixth Aspiration is:

"An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of women and youth".

Inter alia, it calls for Africa to work towards full gender equality and the empowerment of women in all spheres of life.

In further recognition of the important role of women and girls in driving the achievement of Agenda 2063's wide-ranging economic, environmental, socio-cultural, political, scientific and technological goals, the Summit declared 2015 "The Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063."

In keeping with Africa's gender equality and women's empowerment agenda, and as part of its advocacy activities, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA):

- Convenes events that aim to amplify the voices and priority concerns of African women and girls in major intergovernmental processes such as the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) and the [International Conference on Population and Development](#);
- Collaborates with key partners including Governments, the [African Union](#), [Regional Economic Communities \(RECs\)](#), UN entities, civil society organizations and the private sector to promote and support Africa's efforts towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

In addition to high-level events and engagements, OSAA promotes gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa throughout its substantive work. The Office prepares several annual reports of the Secretary-General that each includes a focus on gender and women's issues, including those on:

- "[New Partnership for Africa's Development: progress in implementation and international support](#)," which includes a dedicated section on "Gender mainstreaming, empowerment of women",
- "[Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa](#)," which includes a sub-section on "women's empowerment and gender equality for peace, security and sustainable development", and
- "[United Nations System support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development](#)," which includes a focus on gender equality and women's empowerment as a "Cross-Cutting Issue".

Furthermore, acting as the secretariat for the [United Nations Monitoring Mechanism](#), OSAA monitors and reports on progress in the implementation of all major commitments made towards Africa's development, including those relating



to gender equality and women's empowerment.

With regards to coordination, OSAA participates in relevant inter-agency coordination mechanisms, including in the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and in the Regional Coordination Mechanism's sub-cluster on Gender and Development. OSAA also participates in major meetings convened by the African Union and RECs on gender equality and women's empowerment in peace, security and development, including in meetings of the [Gender is My Agenda Campaign \(GIMAC\)](#).

Works Cited

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<http://www.heforshe.org/en/our-mission>

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do>

Appendix

This report is largely a summary of the very recent Africa Human Development Report for 2016. The report is extremely highly recommended to delegates wishing to gain a much deeper understanding of the issue, the history of the issue, any past attempts at solving the issue, the statistics about the issue and much more, and is available for download through the link below.

<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html>