

*Concept note for Dialogue Forum on Young Women's Participation in Politics & Decision-Making
in African Union Member States: From Policy to Action*

Date: 30 November 2021

I. Background

The African Union estimates that almost 75% of Africa's population is under the age of 35 years, and 35% are between the ages of 15 and 35. There are over 200 million young people in African continent and half of them are girls and their number is expected to grow between now and 2030 making youths, girls and boys, the largest proportion of the population.

By 2030, it is estimated that the share of Africa's youth in the world will increase to 42% and will continue to grow throughout the remainder of the 21st century, more than doubling from current levels by 2055.¹

Approximately 50% of young people in Africa are young women. Recognising the burgeoning youth population that dominates Africa's demographics, it is clear that the continent cannot achieve the development objectives that it has set for itself without the active participation and leadership of its young people, including young women.

Strong evidence shows that increased youth's and women's political participation and leadership helps build safer and more stable societies. When women and youth are in decision-making positions, more inclusive decisions are made, different voices are heard, and different solutions are found.

We draw conclusive evidence from countries where greater numbers of women participate as political leaders. In conflict-affected contexts, for instance, women's participation and representation in public life brings credibility to peace processes and negotiations, as their presence and influence is essential for unifying divided communities and rallying peace-building actors.

Moreover, issues of health, education, violence against women, infrastructure, and overall quality of life concerns are paid greater attention.

Young women are a critical part of the continent's labour force; they are students, teachers, professionals, industrial workers, labourers – and an untapped resource of future leaders. In addition, recent research shows that African youth have been a driving force in mobilising and demanding political change². Their participation in political processes is especially important, as young women are already leading change on different issues like climate change, conflict

¹ <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/08/convene-engage-influence-african-youth-commemorate-the-2021-international-youth-day>

² *ibid*

prevention, gender equality, etc. They are powerful advocates for intergenerational collaboration and accountability towards a more just, sustainable, and equal world. It will thus be critical for governments and different institutions to ensure the involvement of more young women, in their diversity, representing different generations when political decisions for the future are made.

Participation in politics and decision-making is a fundamental human right guaranteed under global, continental and national legal instruments. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) enshrines the principles of non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of political rights, including the right of women and men to take part in the government of their country. Subsequently, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) reinforced women's equal right to participation in political and public life, including the right to vote in elections and public referenda, eligibility for election to all publicly elected bodies and participation in the formulation and implementation of government policies.

The principles in these global frameworks are reiterated in African regional instruments such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). Despite the breadth of these frameworks, young women's representation in political institutions, policy-making and decision-making processes has remained limited. However, the last decades have marked progress around inclusive democratic political processes with many AU Member States have increasingly adopted political quotas in place for women and youth, in an attempt to proactively break down some of the barriers.

In the context of COVID-19 pandemic on the continent, it is even more important that young women's voices are heard as governments continue to design and implement their economic and social responses to the pandemic. However, research has shown that women, including young women, are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Domestic violence has been on the increase, the informal and casual labour sectors where African women predominantly work have suffered the most from economic contractions and particularly vulnerable groups (such as women with disabilities, refugees, rural women and women vulnerable to trafficking and forced labor) are even more at risk. In some instances, the pandemic further relegated women's voice to the background as their needs are not adequately reflected in COVID-19 response and national mechanisms such as COVID-19 Task Forces and Committees.³ Thus, Member States and other stakeholders should ensure that women are able to access and contribute to decision-making

³ <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/08/convene-engage-influence-african-youth-commemorate-the-2021-international-youth-day>

that affect their lives so that the gains made to ensure women's and young women's participation particularly in political processes are not reversed.

II. The proposed initiative

UN Women's programmes on leadership and participation are guided by a history of international commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These commitments uphold women's right to participate in public life and call for removal of barriers to equal participation.

UN Women, through its Liaison to AU and UNECA Office, commissioned a working paper titled '*Young Women's Participation in Politics & Decision-Making in African Union Member States*' which was finalized in 2020 with the view to contributing to the knowledge and evidence base on young women's role and contribution to politics and decision-making processes in Africa. This paper builds on previous and ongoing initiatives implemented by UN Women and other partners and aims to provide relevant data and knowledge to inform programs, initiatives and processes at all levels in Africa.

As part of the popularization effort, UN Women thus proposes to convene a continental multi-stakeholder policy dialogue platform on 30th November 2021. The forum will build on the momentum of the outcomes of [65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women](#) (CSW), "*Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls*". The Commission recognized young women are particularly under-represented in public life and disproportionately excluded from consultations on issues that affect them and the need to take specific measures to expose young girls to public life. On the same note, during Africa Pre-CSW consultations held in February 2021, Member States have resolved to provide dialogue, leadership training programs, and mentorship opportunities as well as funding support to enhance young women's participation in political processes and decision making at all levels. Similarly, the two Generation Equality Forum that took place in Mexico from 29 to 31 March and in Paris from 30 June to 2 July 2021, further provided an opportunity for various stakeholders from across the globe to pledge to enhance young women's leadership, among others, through the Feminist Movement and Leadership Action coalition.

As such, the forum will discuss the state of young women's participation in politics and decision-making processes, promote exchange of promising practices and opportunities, as well as solicit workable recommendations for accelerated action to translate continental, regional and national policies and commitments into action for young women in Africa.

III. Objectives of the policy forum

The policy dialogue platform aims to:

- Discuss the key findings of the study
- Enhance awareness on the state of young women's participation in political and decision-making processes in Africa.
- Promote exchange on promising practices, existing challenges and opportunities and key priorities of action by stakeholders.
- Garner multi-stakeholder commitment and partnerships for the implementation of the key priorities to advance young women's participation in political and decision-making processes.
- Provide a platform for young women in politics and decision making as well as advocates to share their experiences and call for actions.

IV. Expected outcomes

- Enhanced awareness on the state of young women's participation in politics & decision making in Africa.
- Young women leaders from Africa share their experiences and call for actions.
- Multi-stakeholder commitment to strategic call for actions made.

V. Participants

The event will be attended by AU Organs, Specialized Agencies, AUC Staff from different Departments, UN Agencies, policy makers, representatives of CSOs, youth advocates, Development Partners, and the media.

VI. Format and Date

The launch will be conducted virtually on November 30 2021 at 14:00 – 16:00 PM East African Time (EAT)

VII. Language

Simultaneous interpretations will be available in – English and French languages

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Webinar link

https://unwomen.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_OYxVfjktTD6vIESL9iP2rQ