



AFRICA
GENDER EQUALITY
CONFERENCE 2021

COMMUNIQUE

THE AFRICA GENDER EQUALITY CONFERENCE DECLARATION

FOR EQUALITY



Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls



CONCERN
worldwide

Tithetse
Nkhanza



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Working for a just world.



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act:onaid

UN WOMEN

FEMINIST
MACRO-ECONOMICS
ALLIANCE-MALAWI





PREAMBLE

WE, the participants from communities, government, civil society, private sector, academia, parliamentarians, media, and including gender specialist, advocates and activists, young people, and feminists across all diversities participating in the first Africa Gender Equality Conference 2021 (#AGEC2021) in Lilongwe, Malawi, from March 8th to 10th 2021 and comprising more than 2,500 participants from 38 African countries;

HAVING TAKEN STOCK OF, the strides made towards the attainment of gender equality, 26 years post Beijing, and the existing gaps and inequalities exacerbated by the Covid19 pandemic; and shared strategies on how Africa can build more resilient societies that are gender just and equal under the #AGEC2021 theme “Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a Covid19 world”;

TAKING COGNIZANCE of, the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) on Gender Equality and its targets; the 12 priority areas flagged at the Beijing platform for action in 1995; the provisions and spirit of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the African Women’s Decade (AWD) on Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment 2010-2020, where African leaders demonstrated their political will and commitment to promoting gender equality, women’s empowerment and women’s rights by dedicating an entire decade to women; and the many progressive pieces of legislation and policy available at country levels;

REALISING the existential threat posed by the Covid19 pandemic to all, especially women, girls and sexual minorities as was expressed in the Covid Voices; a collection of 78 real life stories - lived experiences of women, girls and sexual minorities from across the continent;

NOTE with concern that the pandemic is not just a health crisis; it is also a social and economic crisis, that is disproportionately affecting women;



PREAMBLE

THAT existing inequalities have been deepened by the pandemic, pushing back on the gains made over the past decades in advancing gender equality; that the pandemic will put 47 million more women into poverty; that the burden of unpaid care work has increased on women; and that incidence of gender based violence have significantly risen;

THAT whilst the pandemic wears a woman's face, African governments have not prioritised gender equality in response plans and mechanisms; evidenced through, minimal participation and representation of women in Covid19 decision making and implementation bodies and structures, gender insensitive planning and budgeting that does not prioritise the urgent and unique needs of women, girls and minority groups in their diversities, and failure to take progressive action to fight against the shadow pandemic of increased incidence of all forms of violence against women and girls; and

THAT the vaccine rollout programmes, without paying explicit attention to promoting health equity, will, once again, exacerbate major health disparities and 'leave women behind'.

WE therefore resolve that attaining gender equality by 2030 in the current context of Covid19 calls for: **TAKING STOCK**, using verifiable data and evidence, of progress made over the years in advancing gender equality and critically assess, using a gender sensitive lens, the extent of the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic on the lives of women and girls; **LEADING THE WAY** through crowdsourcing the development of homegrown solutions to address existing inequalities exacerbated by the Covid19 pandemic; and **BUILDING THE FUTURE** through charting new pathways to attaining gender equal societies that are more resilient to future crises.

OUR CALL TO ACTION

TAKING STOCK

Women's leadership at all levels: We acknowledge the urgent need for history to record and celebrate the leadership, resilience and power of women. Women have shown tremendous leadership at all levels during this pandemic, as caregivers, frontline responders, informal workers and traders, parliamentarians and heads of State. WE call on governments and civil society to intentionally celebrate and spotlight women's leadership at all levels. We further call on African governments to speed up the ratification, domestication and implementation processes of ILO Convention 190 and its accompanying Recommendation 206 that recognizes and places value on the care economy.

Political, Traditional and Religious leaders: In recognition of the important role political, traditional and religious leaders play in the shaping of prevailing beliefs, norms and practices. WE therefore call on political, religious and traditional leaders to use their platforms and influence to speak out against all forms of violence against women and girls and to spread accurate information about the Covid19 pandemic – its impacts, emerging challenges and opportunities and the vaccine – that is backed up by science and accurate and verifiable data, not populist rhetoric that endangers the lives of people.

Evidence based response: Given that the Covid19 pandemic is an ongoing concern, WE recognize the importance of evidence gathering and evidence based programming and response strategies. WE call on African governments to increase investment in evidence gathering so as to use real data and evidence to shape Covid19 response plans. WE further call on civil society, academia and the media to prioritise data and evidence gathering and strengthen information sharing mechanisms with governments for a more coordinated response. WE also call on African women and girls to speak out and use the power of their lived experiences, their stories, to influence policy.



OUR CALL TO ACTION

LEADING THE WAY

Women's leadership and participation: Given that the pandemic wears a woman's face i.e. women have been disproportionately affected by Covid19, it is imperative that women's voices are heard and are shaping pandemic response plans. WE therefore call on governments to abide by the provisions of numerous protocols and respect commitments they made on gender equality by ensuring that National Covid19 taskforces are gender equal, diverse and inclusive.

Investing in women for equitable growth: Existing economic models do not work. We need just economies that work for everyone. WE therefore call on African governments to accelerate investment towards women as a means of redressing the gender gap; progressively fulfil commitments made during the decade of action for women (2010-2020); put in place progressive legislation and policy frameworks that promote women's ownership of land and assets; and ensure effective utilization of resources meant for women. WE urge financial institutions to remove barriers that prevent women from accessing financing and development partners to provide seed capital and sustainable financing for local women led ventures.

New pathways for ending violence against women and girls: With the onset of the pandemic, all forms of violence against women and girls have increased. Whilst WE appreciate the many successful initiatives being rolled out across the continent, which demonstrate that a multi-stakeholder and collaborative approach can be an effective avenue for combating violence against women and girls, WE strongly condemn the increase in gender based violence and politically motivated violence and human rights violations that are being perpetrated under the cover of Covid lockdowns and restrictions. WE call on governments, community leadership, private sector and civil society to strengthen protection systems, both online and physical, and build innovative partnerships to end violence against women and girls. WE implore civil society and the justice systems to investigate human rights abuses and incidence of violence against women and girls and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. WE urge governments to increase the number of adequately trained health care workers and first time responders to gender based violence cases; and establish performance and social accountability structures for survivors and service provider feedback as key elements of driving quality.

Transparency and accountability: WE cannot respond effectively to the pandemic without transparency and accountability. WE therefore call on governments to adopt suitable accountability frameworks and monitoring mechanisms for loans and aid funds and vaccine donations received and to enhance transparent, inclusive and gender sensitive budgeting and vaccine rollout. WE call on parliamentarians and civil society to play their oversight role to ensure effective administration and rollout of Covid19 funds and vaccines.

OUR CALL TO ACTION

BUILDING THE FUTURE

Harnessing the power of Technology: WE acknowledge increasing importance of technology for innovating and advancing gender equality and that private sector engagement and investment is necessary to bridge the gendered technology gap and accelerate attainment of gender equality. WE therefore call on governments and all stakeholders to put in place the requisite regulatory frameworks to make technology and internet more affordable and accessible and increase investments into physical and digital infrastructure.

Harnessing the power of arts: WE acknowledge the role that the arts have historically played in shaping narratives, challenging stereotypes and effectively communicating key messages. The 34th Ordinary Session of the African Union, held in February 2021 was under the theme: “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want”. This is testimony to the power of arts and its key role in building the Africa we want. WE call on governments and all stakeholders to establish and/or strengthen partnerships with creatives and artists to drive Covid19 and gender equality messaging.

Mental health, Covid19 and Gender equality: To build back better, we cannot ignore the effects Covid19 has had on mental health. WE therefore call on governments to prioritise mental health through increasing budget allocations towards mental health infrastructure and human resource development. WE further call on governments to take radical and bold action to ensure that we build ambitious and transformative commitments for generation equality, as a means of building back better from the Covid19 pandemic.

Movements: In recognition of the significant role that the women’s movement has traditionally played and will continue to play in driving progress towards gender equality, we celebrate the strong and vibrant movements from across Africa. WE urge emerging and established movements to strengthen coordination and celebrate their strength in diversity. WE recognize and affirm local level movements and their strength in community organizing and urge development partners and funders to intentionally increase funding towards these movements. WE acknowledge the need to build the adolescent girls' and young women's agency, leadership skills and empowering them to be part of co-creating spaces and decision making processes and support initiatives and organisations that are working towards this. WE further recognise the importance of gender transformative approaches that entail working with boys and men, creating space for them to be allies and supporters of feminist movements by adopting positive masculinities and challenging negative gender stereotypes that contribute to gender inequality at various levels including in leadership. WE acknowledge the inclusion of ‘Feminist movements and leadership’ as Action Coalition 6 for Generation Equality Forum, as an important step and call on governments and development partners to increase financing for capacity strengthening on feminist leadership and feminist movement building.



CONCLUSION

THE FUTURE IS NOW!

Gender inequality is the biggest human rights violation of our generation! Investing in gender equality is therefore, not only the right thing to do, but a development investment with numerous socio-economic benefits. With Covid19 erasing the gains made over the past decades, we need radical and feminist action taken today by governments, civil society and all stakeholders to ensure that our response and rebuilding process pushes back against the deepening inequalities and does not 'leave women and girls' behind. We must celebrate and recognize women's leadership and participation at all levels and ensure that they are adequately represented in shaping response plans.

We must promote homegrown solutions to the Covid19 pandemic and affirm African thought leaders, scientists and practitioners through increasing investment and creating environments that promote innovation and African thought leadership. The vaccine rollout programmes must not exacerbate health disparities and should ensure women and girls are not left behind.

With a few years to go towards 2030, all partners must prioritise achievement of SDG 5 on gender equality, align their activities with government strategies and plans, coordinate their efforts and jointly monitor and report on progress.

This Communique should be distributed to African governments, the African Union and Regional Economic Bodies, and feed into various regional and international processes including the Generation Equality Forums in Mexico and France and CSW65.

