

Walk the Talk

Gender Equality in the African Union



2015 Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063

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2015, the "Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063", is also the first year of implementation of the Ten-Year Action Plan of Agenda 2063 adopted during the January 2015 Summit. This important decision gives us the opportunity to lay the groundwork for innovative initiatives to substantially change the lives of women through the following priority areas: Education, ICT, Science and Technology, Peace and Security, Agriculture, Food Security and Environment, Financial Inclusion & Economic Empowerment, Decision - making & Leadership, Reproductive Health & Rights. This is a long process, because it requires the persistent mobilization of all development actors, including in the media.

Twenty years after the historic Beijing Women's Conference, there has been much progress. However, if we continue at the same pace of change, it will take another seven or eight decades before we reach full gender parity. Of course this is unacceptable.

Mindful of the challenges, we therefore strongly advocate for all stakeholders to learn from our experiences and to highlight good practices. In this regard, the joint biannual newsletter of the AU Commission and UN Women, "Walk the Talk", continues to be a platform to strengthen exchanges and synergy of actions. This edition is proof of the tireless leadership of both institutions for progress in gender equality in Africa and the world.

The topics in this edition, I believe are useful references for our action and good practices in Member States, within the AU Organs, RECs and partner institutions. The analysis contained in the articles constitutes a foundation for accelerating gender equality. It also serves as guidance for actions in favor of women's empowerment for the achievement of the 2063 agenda.



Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma ©AUC Photo

Women's Health | End Violence against Women and Girls & Protect their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights :
End impunity for sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls and invest in quality health services and facilities that are accessible to all women and girls, particularly those in rural areas



History Made in Malawi as Child Marriage Law Passes



Hon. Patricia Kaliati, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare of Malawi
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The 12th of February 2015 will go down into the history books of Malawi as the day on which Malawi decided to address critical issues that affect the lives of Malawians, especially as it pertains to women and the girl child, by passing into law the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations law.

The Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations law will, among other matters address the issue of child marriages in Malawi, as it raises the age of marriage to 18 years. Child marriage is a complex issue, rooted deeply in gender inequality, tradition and poverty. However, the law is the starting point to protecting the girl child and raising the marriage age which keeps the girl child safe from the countless risk factors and human rights violations that child marriages entail.

“This is a great stride towards ensuring that the human rights of women and girls are upheld,” declared Hon. Patricia Kaliati, the Malawian Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare.

The focus on the girl child is critical. The focus on her education, her right to family planning and not to marry at early age, as well as the elimination of gender-based violence, are key steps to ensure the social-economic development of Malawi. This piece of legislation is fundamental in further supporting overall ongoing efforts and contributing to economic development. Furthermore, the law will protect women, young and old, including the girl child, against any form of abuse or violence - emotional, physical or otherwise- that occur in marriages, sexual relations and the family. It will also hold those parents, who marry off their children below the age of 18 accountable to the law and ensure their prosecution.

UN Women Malawi has worked tirelessly, since the opening of its offices in 2012, to lobby for this bill. This includes hosting continuous dialogues and consultations with parliamentarians, civil society and non - governmental organizations. The United Nations in Malawi recognizes that all stakeholders work in jointly around the implementation of the law, as well as attitudinal and behavioral change. Commitment involves collaboration between the government, parliament and civil society along with the private sector in supporting the dissemination and implementation of the new marriage law.

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Women's Health | End Violence against Women and Girls & Protect their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights :

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Small Steps lead to Major Actions – UN Women enhances legal assistance for women in Senegal

In Senegal, insufficient information on legal tools means that local agents encounter difficulties in providing assistance to victims of gender-based violence. Recognizing the problem, UN Women and partners are taking steps to overcome these challenges.

In August 2014, the project 'Gender Equality in Local Government' (GELD) of UN Women, in partnership with the Association of Senegalese Lawyers (AJS), organized an on-site training for paralegals as well as local actors from the Linguere Department. This training was the final in a series of capacity building sessions for actors from multiple departments, initiated by the GELD project with the overall goal to promote community mechanisms that combat violence against women and girls.



© UN Women/ Hamet Diop

The training responded to a need for information, sensitization and capacity building for local actors in human rights, with a particular focus on legal procedures, civil administrative provisions as well as legal responses to Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

A challenge in supporting fellow women in legal cases is that many women drop out of law school. Opening the session alongside the Departmental Tribunal's Chairperson and the local Mayor, the Deputy Warden of the Linguere Department pointed to the relevance of the activity in the district where, among other obstacles, a real problem exists in terms of official birth registration. "Due to a simple lack of birth certificates, many students are unable to complete their final school exams," he continued, "many outstanding female students, thus, turn to precarious marriages."

Over the two days of training, participants were briefed on several themes including Human Rights, GBV and the civil status. Benefitting from presentations by human rights specialists from both UN Women and AJS, participants were enlightened on questions they posed relating to challenges faced during their day-to-day work. An audience simulation organized at the end of the course permitted the paralegals to experience the reality of the legal profession, putting them in the position of steering their own procedure or personally accompanying a victim.

Participants used the opportunity of the training to advocate for the establishment of a legal assistance centre in Linguere to better meet challenges such as provision of information, as well as the treatment of issues relating to human rights, and particularly women's rights. The establishment of such a Centre would constitute not only a useful tool for prevention of GBV and protection of human rights, they argued, but would also serve as a facility for promoting the status of women in the Linguere locality. Overall, the intervention was a highly significant contribution to the implementation of policies and procedures for a multi-sectoral response to GBV, while allowing for paralegals to play a full role in terms of assistance and support to victims. Indeed, small steps can lead to major actions.

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Education | Quality Education for All Girls and No to Child

Marriage: End child marriage in Africa, invest in quality health services and facilities that are accessible all women and girls, particularly those in rural areas.



2015 Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063

A Vision of Quality Education for All in Burkina Faso - the International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women

In Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, the International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women (CIEFFA) plays a leadership role in the promotion of girls' and women's education in Africa. In 2004, the African Union Commission Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology (HRST) established the Centre as a specialized institution for the education of women and girls with a view to enhance their economic, social and cultural empowerment. Working closely with partners from AU Member States, Governments, UN Agencies, Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders CIEFFA aims at being a hub for quality education, which includes the development of specialized interventions, such as the "Emergency Intervention in Favour of Education". The Emergency Intervention is specialized in education in contexts of conflict, crises and disasters. Another main focus of the International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women is the sensitization at the community level in which CIEFFA has been involved in outreach activities to remove obstacles to girls' education, such as early pregnancy. In partnership with the Burkinabe Ministry of Secondary and Higher Education, joint missions have been carried out to rural schools in order to sensitize communities, parents and pupils on the phenomenon and its harmful consequences in terms of educational outcomes. Such missions also worked to identify solutions by outlining the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders, whether family members, schools or local administrations.

CIEFFA also provides support to Member States at the country level; for example in strengthening Education Management Information Systems (EIMS). EMIS are critical in the production of reliable and relevant disaggregated data for all levels of education, with an emphasis on vulnerable children. The International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women will continue its important work over the course of 2015-2016 with strategic priorities, including advocating for legal rights of girls and women in schools and universities, in addition to gender responsive curricula and retention of girls in schools across Africa.

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"She Did It, So Can I" - The transforming power and contribution of ICTs towards women's and girls' empowerment



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Since the launch of 'Women in African History: An E-Learning Tool' in November 2013, Amanuella Alemayehu Mengiste, secondary school student in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, has been using and sharing multimedia content that highlights African women's contribution to development. "The more stories you hear about women who are doing stuff on their own and following their dreams and doing what they want to do – I think it's inspirational," she says. "Whenever someone says 'oh no you can't do this,' you can point to that woman and say 'well she did it, so why can't I?'"

The inspiring stories of women "who did it" such as Wangari Maathai, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Gisele Rabesahala, Nzinga Mbandi, Taytu Betul, and many others, thanks to the 'Women in African History: An E-Learning Tool', are now told across the Sahara, in the plateaus of the Great Rift Valley, and on the coast of the Indian Ocean. Stories of African women are being read, sung, and shared, and are inspiring young women and girls to pursue their dreams and education thanks to the transformative power of ICTs.

Education | Quality Education for All Girls and No to Child Marriage: End child marriage in Africa, invest in quality health services and facilities that are accessible all women and girls, particularly those in rural areas.



'Women in African History: An E-Learning Tool', which is currently available in English and French, is doing just that through an internet platform that consists of multimedia content including comic strips, interactive pedagogical units, audio modules, and quizzes in order to highlight the role of women in African History. The project, which is funded by the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria, develops ICT tools for knowledge acquisition and sharing. Furthermore, it aims at encouraging Information and Communications Technology capacity development of young women, promoting their use of ICTs, and it capitalizes on intangible heritage to promote the link between technology, culture, education, and sustainable development. Furthermore, the project seeks to highlight the role ICTs can play in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, and to expand and disseminate knowledge on the role of women in African history, countering gender-based prejudices and stereotypes.

Sheila, a 15 year old student living in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, hurries up to go to school in the early morning to learn about Wangari Maathai, the famous female Kenyan environmental activist. The lesson shows her and her friends that women are central in African societies and contribute to its development. Firdous, Adelaide and Manal are three close friends studying in multi-confessional primary schools in Mombasa, Kenya. In their computer lab, they will learn about Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, the Nigerian female leader of the Abeokuta Women's Union, one of the biggest female-led organizations of the 20th century which fought to advance the rights of women. In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Haregewoin cannot find inspiration for her poetry. Her former IT teacher will introduce her Njinga Mbandi, a famous African queen of the 17th century, and share with her several artistic and pedagogical materials including a poem entitled 'My Queen' dedicated to her memory.

The 'Women in African History: An E-Learning Tool' represents a fruitful collaboration between intellectuals, artists, technologists, and pedagogues that positions UNESCO as a platform for innovation, international cooperation, and exchanges. Artists from Africa and the African diaspora, the majority under the age of 35, participated in the development of the tool's multimedia content, namely media and local content and comic strip art. Artists included illustrators from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, France, Kenya, Madagascar, and Nigeria. Hip-hop artists and slammers from across the United States, Senegal, and Eastern Africa also participated in the development of the pedagogical material that can be used on computers, mobile phones, and tablets and downloaded free of charge as open educational resources. Even more importantly, the E-learning tool represents a crucial step towards the expansion and dissemination of knowledge about the role of women in African history. The Project seeks to empower women through ICTs and access to information and knowledge to promote an accurate understanding of their role in the economic, social, cultural, and political development of the continent. New modules of additional women figures from across Africa and the African Diaspora will be developed. In 2015, the tool will be made available in Arabic and several African languages, including Swahili and Dioula in order to increase its target audience and increase the number of girls inspired.

In light of the 'AU's Year of Women's Empowerment', the platform is currently being rolled out across Africa and the African Diaspora. The uptake of the tool in African schools has been met with enthusiasm from teachers and students alike, underlining the important role technology is playing in transforming education in Africa, and the importance of a local, gender-sensitive content. The programme is in the framework of UNESCO's seminal work "the Pedagogical use of the General History of Africa" to counter prejudices and stereotypes in line with UNESCO's Gender Equality Action Plan. For the development of the E-Tool, UNESCO was awarded 1st prize during the first edition of the GEM-TECH awards (Gender Equality and Mainstreaming-Tech Awards). The tool is proof that twenty years after Beijing and the adoption of its Platform for Action, which emphasizes the importance of ICTs for women's empowerment and the achievement of gender equality, the links between ICT applications, content, production capacities and skills and Women's Empowerment are clearly advancing.

The platform can be consulted at <http://en.unesco.org/womenin africa/>

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Peace and Security | Women at the Peace Table to Silence the Guns by 2020: Recognize and amplify the role of women in early warning mechanisms to prevent violence, promote gender equality at the peace table, and invest in centres of excellence to build a critical mass of peace builders.



Amplifying Women's Voices at the Highest Level - The AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security



Mme Diop intervening at an Open Session of the PSC ©Ecoma Alaga

Today, if you need to address issues of women, peace and security, it will lead to the doors of the office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security. Established in January 2014, the office followed the AU appointment of Ms. Bineta Diop, as an advocate at the highest level on issues of women, peace and security. The Special Envoy seeks to work at the highest political level to ensure that we all “look beyond seeing women as victims only, and men only as victimizers. Instead, we should recognize them as active agents in the fight to prevent conflict-related sexual violence.”

In her role, the Special Envoy leverages AU's efforts in addressing issues of women's empowerment, participation and protection in conflict and post-conflict settings. Her appointment came through the efforts and support of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission “to ensure that the voices of women are heard much more clearly in conflict resolution and peace building”.

In order to hear women's concerns firsthand, the Special Envoy, since her appointment, conducted several solidarity missions which included trips to the Central African Republic, Somalia and Nigeria. Always being in support of women's concerns and aiming at finding solutions to issues that affect women and children. These are critical elements of her work to promote structures and processes that enhance the participation of women in decision-making processes. Consequently, the Special Envoy works closely with the Gender, Peace and Security Programme (GPSP) within the Peace and Security Department that has developed a strategy for mainstreaming gender into the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The GPSP has developed a plan of action as well as specific activities to ensure gender mainstreaming across the work of the Department and its divisions.

Madame Diop is also placing a strong focus on ways to close the gap between the various policy instruments on women, peace and security and their implementation. It is in line with this that the Special Envoy convened a consultative meeting of women's groups and experts followed by an open session of the Peace and Security Council. In these meetings, Member States and Experts deliberated on the situation of women in a number of conflict-affected countries and the implementation deficit. This resulted in a new endeavor of the Special Envoy, mandated by the Peace and Security Council, to develop a Results Framework that will accelerate, in a synergetic manner, the implementation of continental commitments on issues pertaining to women, peace and security. The Special Envoy aims to submit the framework to the Peace and Security Council in October 2015, in commemoration of the 15th Anniversary of the UNSC resolution 1325 and in the context of the “2015 AU Year of Women Empowerment and Development towards Agenda 2063”.

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Peace and Security | Women at the Peace Table to Silence the Guns by 2020: Recognize and amplify the role of women in early warning mechanisms to prevent violence, promote gender equality at the peace table, and invest in centres of excellence to build a critical mass of peace builders.



Women Cohesion Spaces: A Safe Haven for Women in Cameroon

As a result of the conflict in the Central African Republic, Cameroon since 2013 has received a massive inflow of refugees among which about 60 percent are women and children. Most of these refugees arrived in Cameroon in a very bad physical shape, under shock after the atrocities they either witnessed or underwent, some as survivors of sexual assaults, sexual exploitation and abuse and transactional sex to save their lives. That is why women and girls need listening and counselling to overcome their trauma, fear and distress. Applying an evidence based approach UN Women as part of the inter-agency response to the impact of this crisis in the Eastern region of Cameroon, engaged in the design and implementation of a holistic integrated assistance project “Social cohesion and rehabilitation of women and girls, GBV/Rape survivors affected by CAR conflict in the East of Cameroon” with the financial support from CERF and UNCHR.



Women refugees held an awareness activity inside a WCS
© UN Women/Ivo Tapang

As part of the project three Women’s Cohesion Spaces (WCS) have been officially inaugurated in the Gado, Lolo and Mbile refugee sites in Eastern Cameroon, to offer immediate psychosocial, economic and material assistance to tens of thousands of women refugees who have fled the conflict in neighboring Central Africa Republic (CAR).

According to UN Women Cameroon Representative Ms. Rachele Djangone Mian, “there is a need for social cohesion and rehabilitation within the sites and in the host communities. By creating these spaces, we are seeking to empower the economic capacities of women and promote gender equality,” Ms. Mian said. Each WCS can host up to 3000 women and has specialized units created for guidance and counselling, trainings and psychosocial care. WCSs became a place where women not far from their tents, will feel confident to talk and vent all their frustrations and reconstruct their morals, ready to cope with a new life and rehabilitate themselves socially. Women receive attention tailored to their individual traumatic experience, psychosocial support, empowering information and orientation to services. Group therapies also proved to respond effectively to the specific needs of women and girls survivors of GBV and trauma as they offer a platform for self-expression. Indeed, in these safe spaces, women share their stories with one another and empower each other by mutually providing advice.

WCSs also serve as a place to promote livelihood opportunities as the affected women build self-reliance and learn new skills to start income generating activities. They are also helpful for social cohesion as women from host communities and refugee sites gathered to design and develop activities of common interest contributing to peaceful coexistence of the respective communities. A refugee, Ms. Sidonie Boura Doko said women should be integrated in crisis management and conflict prevention schemes. She adds that women refugees play a crucial role in peace building if they are repatriated in future. “Back home, we are the breadwinners. We must be considered as important players in conflict resolution if we want durable peace.”

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Agriculture & Financial Inclusion | Retire the hoe to the museum: Reduce physical burden on women farmers with technology innovation and increase farming-poultry-livestock-fishing yields, increase Climate Change response, while also reducing the number of hungry and undernourished in Africa and the world.



My Right to Land - Mozambican Women Defending their Right to Land

Today, due to a FAO Programme, women in Mozambique are increasingly obtaining land and traditional courts are recognizing the rights of women and children in proceedings and judgements. With nearly three-quarters of poor households and 70 percent of the population located in rural areas, and 80 percent of the population working in the agricultural sector, farming remains the main source of food and income for Mozambican households. An overwhelming majority of economically active women (86 percent) work in the agriculture sector. Despite the importance of women's roles in agriculture, gender issues in Mozambique are complex, and rural women face discrimination and vulnerability. Women are the main producers of food and are responsible for the management of their households, but many lack access to productive assets like land and related to that they also lack real decision-making power within their families. Men are the traditional authority for allocating land rights and making decisions about land tenure, so, whether women in Mozambique live in patrilineal or matrilineal communities, their access to land often depends on some form of relationship with the men in their community – their fathers, husbands, uncles. Most rural women who do obtain land rights do so through 'customary norms and practices', however, these norms and practices do not recognise the rights of women who lose their partners and/or are divorced and therefore expelled from the household. This is especially important in the context of HIV-AIDS, when many men are dying young leaving behind widows vulnerable to dispossession of their land.



Paralegal sharing knowledge on women's rights
© FAO Mozambique

Even though progressive laws in the country that recognize and defend women's rights over land and natural resources exist, the traditional system and practices continue to discriminate against women and have prevented progressive laws from being successfully implemented. It was against this challenging background that the FAO Gender and Land project was developed. The programme was set up in order to mainstream gender equality and women's rights into paralegal training courses for citizens, as well as into seminars for new judges in Mozambique. From 2010-2013, FAO worked with the Juridical and Judicial Training Center (CFJJ) of the Ministry of Justice in Mozambique to provide community-level education and support rural women to secure and exercise land and resource rights and address HIV-AIDS related tenure security.

In addition to discrimination in regards to land ownership, land is also becoming scarcer, as private sector investment, population growth and climate change reduce real land availability. In this context, many families are taking new measures to either hold on to, or to obtain as much land as they can, resulting in young widows losing their land and their children being disinherited. At a time when the extended family is traditionally expected to rally around and support them, there is considerable evidence to show that, in many cases, the opposite occurs. Wishing to further their own economic interests, some family members will seize the property and belongings that a widow and her children ought to inherit. Valuable resources such as land, housing, money, household furniture, cattle, agricultural implements, and clothing are taken away in the name of culture and tradition, leaving the widow and children in even greater need.

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Through the paralegal training courses, the FAO/CFJJ program worked to change the negative aspects of traditional customary laws. This was done through awareness-raising on the advantages of gender equality within society as a whole, as well as through the legal education on land and women's rights in order to enable women to exercise and defend their rights. Over the course of the three year project, 19 paralegal trainings were conducted in seven of Mozambique's ten provinces involving 490 participants from both NGO and public sector. In total 545 separate community meetings were carried out from 2012 to 2014.

The work was necessarily slow as promoting gender equality and women's rights in Mozambique meant having to adapt cultural norms and practices, which cannot happen overnight. Over time, however, the message has gotten across and the project has begun to show results. Awareness levels of both men and women regarding women's rights in relation to land ownership are higher across the country. There is significantly greater awareness surrounding the issue of female land dispossession and a decrease in discriminatory practices towards women. Traditional courts are reportedly recognising widows' and childrens' rights in their proceedings and judgements, and women have begun to be appointed as customary judges for the first time. The process is ongoing, and paralegals continue their work to help rural women obtain their own land titles.

An example of the positive impact of the project is seen through the success of a group of paralegals in Sofala Province, in the central region of Mozambique. Ms. Inocência António Xerinda, one of the trained paralegals says that before the paralegal training course she did not know that women had the same rights as men, assuming that because men were some kind of "special human beings", only they were entitled to rights. When she and her ten paralegal colleagues from local NGO 'AMUDEIA' returned to their working areas, they held community sessions at a local level to inform other women about their rights. Identifying a number of women in vulnerable situations at risk of losing their lands, they immediately began supporting them, each paralegal taking the case of three women. As a result of their efforts, these women have officially received their own land titles. In the words of Chief Technical Advisor for the project, Marianna Bicchieri, the fact that "ordinary citizens of the rural areas in Mozambique managed to perform such activities after their introduction into the legal universe through the paralegal course is very important."

This achievement demonstrates the impact the project had on the lives of people, and in particular, for rural women. What is even more relevant than the land titles per se, is that the paralegal trainings really enabled Mozambican women from rural areas to pursue and defend their rights by themselves.

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Agriculture & Financial Inclusion | Retire the hoe to the museum: Reduce physical burden on women farmers with technology innovation and increase farming-poultry-livestock-fishing yields, increase Climate Change response, while also reducing the number of hungry and undernourished in Africa and the world.



Empowering a Community - More than 1000 women in Ethiopia join Women's Cooperatives and become WFP Business Partners



Members of Anja Chafa Cooperative Union ©WFP Ethiopia/ Stephanie Savariaud

“Busha budete,” these two words keep recurring as Mr. Yonal Lamiso speaks during a community conversation in Anja Chefa, a village near Hawassa in southern Ethiopia. The phrase means “bad culture,” and it refers to what women are not allowed to do in the community under customary law.

Discrimination against women within customary law is common in many African countries. Even though women are involved in various aspects of food production, they rarely own land, generally because of deep-rooted cultural constraints that do not allow them to own or manage land as well as other productive assets. However, it has to be noted that, according to FAO, if women had the same access as men to resources they could increase agricultural yields by 20 percent to 30 percent, lifting millions of people out of hunger.

Recognizing the issue, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) developed a women's focus in its Purchase for Progress (P4P) programme. The WFP Purchase for Progress (P4P) Programme buys large amounts of maize from smallholder farmers via cooperative unions which help to transform livelihoods. One of its goals was to include women cooperatives in the venture.

Women's exclusion from productive assets is also a common issue in Ethiopia, where being recognized as a farmer requires owning land, and land is traditionally owned and controlled by men, who inherit it from their fathers. “When WFP launched P4P, we were asked to achieve parity, 50 percent men and 50 percent women, in farmers' organizations reached by P4P globally,” explains Mr. Mauricio Burtet, WFP's head of P4P in Ethiopia. “But the reality [in Ethiopia] is very different, as members of farmers' organizations are mostly men,” says Mauricio. “Because we knew the 50 percent target was not achievable, we decided to opt for quality rather than quantity when it came to getting more women involved.” In order to identify the underlying causes, the World Food Programme, in 2010, conducted a Gender Survey of the P4P programme in Ethiopia to understand why women comprise only 15 percent of the membership of farmers' organizations in Ethiopia, and only 5 percent of their leadership. It was found that men and women perceive land and livelihoods issues quite differently and that men believed that women lack the experience, the capacity and the skills to trade large amounts of cash-crops and that “they were already too busy.” Mrs. Nigist Melese is one of the participants in the women's initiative of the P4P programme and she explained why women's inclusion in farming is a challenge: “In our culture women are not allowed to learn; wives are being prepared to get married,” she said. That is why the inclusion of women in the P4P programme has been a challenge since the WFP launched the P4P gender initiative three years ago, although it is now starting to bear fruit.

One way of the main entry points in order to enhance women's participation, P4P supported the regional governments in setting up women-led farmers' organizations who can benefit from P4P market opportunities from which WFP buys food. However, from the women's perspective, the benefits of participating in farmers' organizations were few— especially given the fact that membership was predominantly male.

Agriculture & Financial Inclusion | Retire the hoe to the

museum: Reduce physical burden on women farmers with technology innovation and increase farming-poultry-livestock-fishing yields, increase Climate Change response, while also reducing the number of hungry and undernourished in Africa and the world.



Women face serious time poverty, which often prevents them from participating in income generating activities besides their other responsibilities. That is why the P4P Ethiopia, in collaboration with local partners, set up a range of activities to pave the way for women to progressively access agricultural markets and become more involved in P4P activities, focusing on women married to farmers from whom WFP purchased food. "Together with the NGOs Sasakawa and Women in Self-Employment (WISE), we put in place a convenient system for these women, who spend most of their time working at home," explains Mrs. Elizabeth Mekonnen, Gender Focal Point for the Ethiopia P4P programme. The 2010 Gender Survey also found women's illiteracy was one of the main obstacles to women's participation in cooperatives which is why it was one of the first activities to be implemented. "Trainers teach people in the community who are already literate, who then in turn teach other women how to read and count, working at their homes and at a time that's convenient for them."

Another important component of the programme are community conversations which seek to address gender inequalities between women and men and focus on addressing cultural and traditional behaviors. "A woman is not counted as a child of the family, she is considered as a gift to be given to her future husband. From the bone she is not treated as equal," says Ruth Elias during the community conversation under the tree outside Anja Chefa's school. The community conversations started two years ago, involving more than 1,000 men and women in 16 groups in the Amhara, Oromiya and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' (SNNPR) regions. Men and women were equally consulted during the initial phase in order to get a good picture of what would be acceptable to all. "The mere fact of women saying things in front of their husbands in joint meetings, or women gathering together to talk about these issues is already a big change," says Aberash Tsehay from Sasakawa, who is handling the organization of the literacy and business skills training in the programme. One of the strengths of the initiative is that the community dialogue was unhurried, and took place over the course of a year, involving a wide range of community members, including traditional leaders and farmers. Now, Nigist says, she and her husband have discussions and mutual agreements about the products of their farm, what type of business to set up, and how to use the household money.

As a next step of the programme, women receive basic business skills training and identify an activity that they want to participate in. Most of the women choose animal fattening, which can be done from home. Women are also able to obtain loans through the programme which allows them to kick start a business straight away. This was also the case for Nigist who received a loan of 6,000 Ethiopian birr (ETB), or about US\$300, through the programme, which enabled her to start a small oxen-fattening business. When she sold her first ox, she made a profit of 1,500 ETB (about US\$75), and was able to repay her loan on time. Her husband, Yonal, acknowledges the benefits of such a programme for the farm and their six children: "Our economy is increasing and we are equally making a business," he says. Interviews with a dozen women during the community conversations make it clear that the loan and the business skills work very well. Mrs. Alemitu Yohannes, who grows red beans and maize with her husband, explained how the loan allowed her to buy fertilizers and improved seeds and doubled their production.

As a result of the programme, so far, more than 1,000 women joined four newly created women's cooperatives, which have delivered some 110 metric tons of maize and 18 metric tons of beans to WFP. Weather conditions permitting, women farmers are confident that they can boost the production even further. And with additional incomes and the appropriate literacy training, women farmers have invested resources into renting land, purchasing oxen and other agricultural inputs to ensure productivity gains in the future.

The benefits of the gender initiative go beyond just increased productivity but to empowering a community.

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Economic Empowerment / A Bank for African Women:

Unleash the dynamism of African women by promoting women's entrepreneurship and board leadership, ownership and control of assets – including land, and women's agency in parallel with increased access to financial resources in rural and urban areas.



Pooling Women's Resources for Grassroots Economic Empowerment in Kenya

Across Kenya, thousands of women have left school after primary level and struggle to find paid employment. One of the common strategies for women to make an income is starting one's own businesses. However, they face several challenges with little or no understanding of business management. That is why women's businesses and enterprises often fail, leaving women in a worse situation than before, having used up their savings and still winding up without a source of secure income. Recognising this systemic problem, a bottom-up initiative emerged from Nairobi.

The support to women seeking economic empowerment through start-ups is coming from Compassion CBO, a community based non-profit organization in Githogoro, the outskirts of Nairobi. The organization's main aim is to support women entrepreneurs, through trainings and networking, to succeed in their business endeavors. Other success strategies include innovative ways to scale up initiatives that have been proven to be a best practice, as well as the notion of collaboration. An example of such is the collaboration last summer with a team of MBA students from the Kelly School of Business of the Indiana University. Compassion CBO was selected by international partner organisation Safe World for Women, together with the MBA student team, for a pilot study to help develop and adapt a business programme to be relevant to grassroots women. The initial pilot study was very successful and the programme has continued to run and expand, in Githogoro and areas such as Tinganga, Ndumberi around Nairobi and Limuru.

These trainings and courses offer support and guidance for women on how to start and expand their own enterprises. Trainees have expressed and demonstrated, after the trainings, enhanced abilities in informed decision-making so as to achieve better outcomes for themselves and their children alike. As a result, to date, 120 individuals from 10 different local groups have been trained. In the trainings, Compassion CBO facilitates skills to apply to innovative areas, as opposed to replicating existing enterprises that might suffer from crippling competition. That is why participants are encouraged to exploit gaps in the market to ensure minimal competition. This is combined with providing hands-on training in skills that can include areas such as baking, arts and crafts, and detergent production to ensure that participants have ownership and autonomy in terms of starting the businesses of their choosing with adequate knowledge and expertise.

Compassion CBO also recognizes the dual role of women living up to responsibilities as caregivers while simultaneously seeking sustainable sources of income. In this regard, Compassion CBO encourages the women of Githorgo to work together in cooperative groups. This way, they can pool savings, as well as share traditional female responsibilities such as childcare, ensuring that everyone benefits from the collaboration. Furthermore, it means that women with different interests can share ideas and skills and have the opportunity to create effective partnerships. Capitalizing on the important role of these women in their communities, training sessions are also used to discuss and share advice on social issues such as FGM, health, corruption and domestic violence in a safe environment.

In order to facilitate the establishment of cooperatives and partnerships, Compassion CBO monitors progress on financial independence and links together groups and individuals who may be able to assist each other through skill-sharing. One major goal of the programme is to empower women by having them autonomously choose the individual path they wish to take with their businesses. This aims at women feeling empowered and self-reliant. This, in turn, strengthens self-confidence and enhances positive outlooks, which has a cascading effect on wider communities. Sessions require only a training manual and a discussion leader, and as such, the project is easily replicated. Already, many groups and individuals have taken it upon themselves to share the business skills they have learned with friends, family and wider community circles. The ripple effect of the pool is already clear, and the cascade continues.

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Lighting Up Lives - African women train as “barefoot” Solar Engineers

Stella, an illiterate grandmother from a small village in Malawi, found it hard to picture what lies ahead when she arrived at the Barefoot College of India to be trained as Solar Engineer. Six months later she emerged as one of 25 trained African Solar Engineers, ready to electrify her home village for the first time. “I never imagined that technical knowledge like this would be open to women who were illiterates, like us,” she reflects at the end of the training. “Coming to Tilonia has given us the confidence that we can learn about new things and make our lives better.”

By collaborating with the Barefoot College of India and its NGO partners, UN Women is supporting a programme to empower mostly rural women from Africa by helping them start to drive their local green economies. The overall goal of the program is to empower these women, many of whom have labored in agricultural work for most of their lives, to gain a skill more age appropriate, while giving them a new position of respect in their communities. The programme teaches engineering skills to illiterate older women from rural communities - a particularly vulnerable group - before equipping them with solar lamp kits to assemble and install in their own and nearby villages.

For the first training session of the programme, which ran for six months, women travelled from across Africa, from countries like Uganda, Liberia and South Sudan, to take part in it. Participants were selected or nominated by their local community and supported by a variety of local and international organizations, and in some cases, their governments. Bawor Mamma, for example, has spent years recovering from the lingering effects of civil war and economic dislocation in Liberia. At 53, she prefers assembling solar lanterns to the physical strain of farming. “I am not just a farmer like everyone else,” she says with a clear sense of pride. “I am a solar engineer now and I want to electrify my village and other neighboring villages.”

“What Barefoot College has effectively demonstrated is how the combination of traditional knowledge (barefoot) and demystified modern skills can bring lasting impact and fundamental change when the tools are in the control and ownership of the rural poor,” says Dr. Bunker Roy, the Director of the Barefoot College. Besides the empowering key aspect of the programme, the women are also supporting a greener form of energy usage. Many live in villages without any electricity at all and kerosene usage is high. Yet kerosene is not a sustainable resource, nor is it cheap or healthy. Barefoot College estimates that the initiative now saves around 160,000 litres of kerosene a month across South America, Africa and Asia.

To ensure the sustainability of the project, the new Solar Engineers are also taught how to train other villagers in the maintenance of these lamps. They are also encouraged to set up electronics repair shops, which will generate a regular income for them. “In the beginning, many women face problems since it is the first time they have left their children and the village,” says Leela Devi, a teacher in the solar engineering department. “But we have their sisters, and constantly remind them of the advantages of being here and learning solar engineering.” Their trainers, who mostly speak Hindi, must cut across linguistic and cultural barriers using gestures and signs. Yet the desire to light up their communities and empower the women in them has proven to be a unifying bond. With just six months of training in the college, students have shown that they can transcend tremendous barriers, and emerge as self-sustaining Solar Engineers and role models to many.

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Message

by AUC Women, Gender and Development Directorate

Ms. Leila Ben-Ali, Acting Director



Ms. Leila Ben-Ali, Acting Director Women, Gender and Development Directorate, AUC
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Five months after Addis Ababa saw the 24th Ordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government during which we launched the 'Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063', it is fitting to share with our readers the roadmap that has followed since individual actions are not sufficient to promote women's empowerment. With this in mind, the African Union engaged, in collaboration with partners, in establishing a process of consultation with stakeholders on priority areas. These include, among others, the financial inclusion of women in agribusiness, as well as education, science and technology, peace and security, health, as well as political representation and leadership. These priorities were identified thanks to the willingness of stakeholders to take action in giving renewed focus to realizing African women's rights.

This, indeed, is the very reason why Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs decided, at the margins of the 59th Session on the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), held in New York in March 2015, to finance projects under the theme of the African Women's Decade "Education, Science and Technology", within the framework of the implementation activities of the Fund for African Women.

In April 2015, the AU's Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) and partners participated in the organization of the 10th African Congress for Women's Entrepreneurs in Cairo. Objectives here aimed at ensuring that female entrepreneurs participate in the consultative process on the implementation of the priority area of Women's Financial Inclusion, as well as at inspiring young women to look to accessing international markets for the promotion of the products of female entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the WGDD is currently carrying out preparations for the 2nd High Level Panel on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment to be held at the margins of the 25th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government, in Johannesburg, in June 2015, so as to complete the consultation process on Women's Financial Inclusion. The panel aims to create a dialogue between, on the one hand, academics and researchers, and on the other hand, Ministers and politicians to exchange on recent findings on the theme, as well as to develop a plan of action relating to women's empowerment and the implementation of the year's theme.

Underlying all of this is the indisputable fact that the empowerment of women is a fundamental human right, indispensable to the realization of the vision and development objectives of the African Union.

Message

by UN Women Representative
to the AU, UNECA and Ethiopia
Ms. Letty Chiwara



2015 Year of Women's Empowerment and
Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063

Let us celebrate! 2015 is our year to celebrate first and foremost the African Woman as the African Union dedicated 2015 to be the "Year of Women's Empowerment and Development Towards Agenda 2063".

2015 is also a momentous year for all of us to take stock and celebrate the progress achieved by Member States since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action 20 years ago, the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals 15 years ago, as well as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, 15 years ago.

This is the Year during which we can proudly look back on 20 years of advancement in various areas of women's empowerment and gender equality and to integrate our knowledge and lessons learnt into the development of the Sustainable Development Goals.

2015 also marks the first year of the implementation of the Agenda 2063 Ten Year Action Plan during which we should cherish the actions taken across the continent, and recognize the central role women play in Africa's transformation and development.

In this edition of the 'Walk the Talk' Newsletter, we highlight these success stories, where gender equality commitments have been translated from paper into realities. We feature stories from Senegal to Malawi; stories of rural grandmothers being trained as Solar Engineers, stories of the use of ICTs sharing the stories of the continent's heroines with our youth, and women at the center of implementing UNSCR 1325.

I invite all of you to enjoy these inspirational examples of change and to envision Africa 20 years from now.

An Africa where girls don't get married but go to school to reach their full potential.
An Africa in peace, where women are at the center of conflict prevention, peace negotiations and peace building.
An Africa where women thrive in an innovative and modern agricultural sector that secures food for all.
An Africa where women provide and receive opportunities and assets that lead to their economic empowerment.

This year, 2015, we are paving the way for a prosperous and peaceful Africa where the term 'gender inequality' will only be used in history classes to describe times in the past.



Ms. Letty Chiwara, UN Women Representative to the
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Ethiopia

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