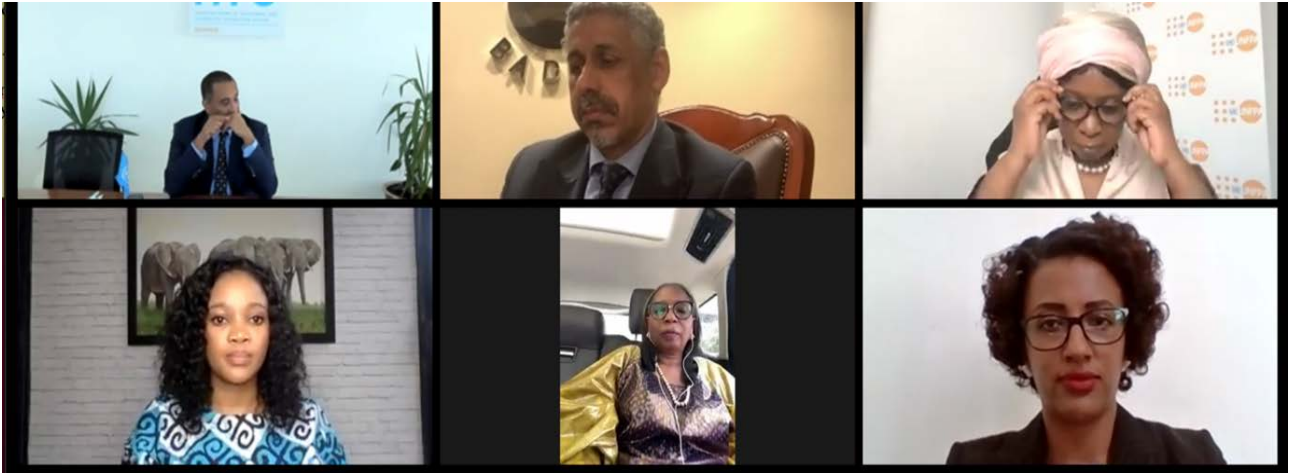


III. COM-21

Officials Call for Investment in Women and Young Entrepreneurs to Drive Africa's Growth



The [53rd session of COM-21](#) (Commission for African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development) was held virtually from 17-23 March 2021 under the theme: Africa's sustainable industrialization and diversification in the digital era in the context of Covid-19. The annual session included special and side events in addition to expert and ministerial sessions participating in an array of AU, UN and other strategic partners.

Accordingly, ECA hosted a [virtual side-event](#) in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) on 21 March, 2021 under the theme 'unleashing the potential of women and youth entrepreneurship in the digital age.

The event, which featured a panel discussion, focused on the challenges women and youth entrepreneurs face, how they can leverage technology and which practices can promote entrepreneurship after the COVID-19 pandemic. Panelists recommended a range of policy proposals. These include the need to support women and young people through the creation of a fund to promote digitalization, the urgency to put in place national and regional e-commerce and digital economy strategies, and to undertake an assessment of digital readiness to leverage the potential of women and youth entrepreneurs; the need to put in place a business eco-system that supports access to various financial products, technologies, markets and market information, particularly for women entrepreneurs to reap the gender dividend.

Globally, Africa ranks high in terms of numbers of women and youth-led start-ups. However, their

economic contributions remain limited because of challenges such as poor access to finance, training and technology. Ministers, bankers and development experts emphasized at this side event that investing to equip women and youth entrepreneurs with skills, resources and mentoring would drive Africa's growth.

Partners of "African Girls Can Code" Commit to Address the Digital Gender Divide in Africa

The AUC in collaboration with UN Women, UNECA and International Telecommunication Union (ITU) convened a virtual [multi-stakeholder policy dialogue](#) on 21 March 2021 at the margins of COM-21 to take stock of the African Girls Code Initiative ([AGCCI](#)) in view of its second phase. [AGCCI](#) launched in 2018, aims to train and empower a minimum of 2000 young girls aged between 17-20, across Africa to become computer programmers, creators and designers, placing them on track to take up studies and careers in the information, communication and technology (ICT) sector. The initiative just completed its first phase which run up to 2020.

The [dialogue](#) provided a platform for the [girl coders](#)

to share their experience on how they have used the skills acquired through the programme to contribute to COVID-19 response and related challenges in their respective countries. The discussion yielded strategic partnerships with stakeholders from the private sector such as Microsoft and Orange Africa, who expressed interest in addressing the digital gender divide through advocacy campaigns to address cultural misconceptions across Africa and funding

training centers that ensure equitable participation of young women and men and AU/CIEFFA who shared its commitment to support grassroots initiatives.

The dialogue platform brought together young girl coders and partners from AU Member States, the UN system and the private sector committed to promote the role of girls and young women in innovation and development in Africa amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

IV. AFRICA’S COMMEMORATION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY 2021

Women leaders of Africa Convened for an Inter-Generational Virtual Couch-Talk



In honor of the International Women’s Day (IWD) AU’s celebration has been focused on progress made and actions needed to achieve an equal future, as the world navigates the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. As part of this commemoration, the AUC-WGYD held an intergenerational virtual couch talk on March 25 2021. The dialogue was organized with three key objectives, explore and discuss the role of women in leadership, dialogue on the thematic area of Ending Child Marriage (ECM) and mobilize commitment on the role of women in Africa’s COVID-19 recovery era.

Panelists, through facts, dialogue and anecdotes, discussed what being a woman in leadership means in Africa, playing extraordinary roles in communities, the key issues which we must collectively tackle for a

bright future, and how to mobilize and spark positive, lasting change towards gender. This virtual couch talk facilitated an intergenerational conversation between high-level women leaders and young African women. The virtual talk aimed to build on an ongoing youth and gender advocacy campaign called “Reimagining an Africa Without Child Marriage”, in partnership with UNICEF.

IWD Policy Dialogue: African Women in Leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19



On March 29 2021, the AUC-WGYD in collaboration with UN Women, UNFPA, OHCHR and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) convened a multi-stakeholder virtual policy dialogue under the theme, “African Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a COVID-19 world” in commemoration of International

Women's month. The event brought together the voices of women, young girls and girl-child leaders from different sectors to share the stories of their efforts to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. As 2021 is the African Year of the "Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want", the dialogue recognized African women authors to celebrate their contribution to African literature as well.

The [event documented](#) the innovative contributions of women and girl leaders across different sectors in responding to the challenges posed by the pandemic and advance in GEWE; and solicit multi-stakeholder commitment to strategic priority actions, including promoting the roles of African women artists in changing the narrative about African women participation and leadership and contributing to the African cultural heritage.

The policy dialogue was also organized to culminate the month-long African commemoration held by AUC-WGYD and UN partners particularly on social media platforms. The partner took to their respective platforms to [honor a number of women leaders](#) and their contribution to their sectors as well as advancing women's leadership. The event came to a closing with the announcement of a joint initiative to produce a compendium that documents the success stories of exceptional women leaders in Africa. The [call for nomination](#) can be found on AU website and will be closing on 30th of June 2021.

Relevant Links

- [African Union Lauds Kenya's Court Ruling Against Female Genital Mutilation](#)
- [The AU through the Information and Communication Directorate \(IDC\), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit \(GIZ\) and implementing partner Africa Women in Media \(AWIM\) joined forces to launch the Africa Photojournalism Competition](#)
[Statement of H.E. Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, on the occasion of the International Women's Day](#)
- [AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment 2018-2028](#)
- [IWD blog: Empowering Women for an equal AfCFTA by ECA's Director for the Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division Ms. Thoko Ruzvidzo](#)
- ['What does gender equality look like in Africa?': A series of infographics released by UNECA on the occasion of IWD](#)
- [Gender Based Violence in Africa during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Realizing the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage: Emerging lessons from child marriage programming in Malawi and Zambia ENOUGH- Let Us Unite to End Child Marriage](#)
- [Story Book - Girls Who Code Gender Based Violence in Africa during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

IMPRINT

PUBLISHED BY:

African Union(AU), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa(UNECA) and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women(UN Women)

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PHOTOS AND INFOGRAPHICS: Cover Page: UN Women/Ryan Brown; P2: AUC; P3&P4: UN Women; P5: UN Women EASRO; P7 (top): UNECA; P7 (right): UN Women; P8 (left): AUC; P8 (left): UN Women