

# Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) *Newsletter*

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## WELCOME

Regressions in gender equality threatens the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and needs a dedicated, bold effort that builds on our breakthroughs, our shortcomings and lessons learnt since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities across all aspects of life for women, girls and their communities. The impact of lost education for children, especially girls, is likely to have permanent effects for many.

The pandemic has also exacerbated gaps in women's participation in decision-making. An analysis of COVID-19 task forces from 87 countries found that only 3.5 per cent of them had gender parity. As we look ahead to emerging from the crisis, aspects like parity in political representation take on increased urgency. Women's leadership and increased participation in decision making will be a cornerstone to sustain democratic values and enhance crisis management. Bold and ambitious change is needed. The pandemic must not in any way hinder the bold action needed for addressing gender equality and action is needed right now. The pandemic should not be a deterrent for equality and for all types of women's participation. This year's International Women's Day and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) have also focused on women's leadership. The priority theme recognizes how women and men can collectively solve the urgent challenges of our time through fast tracked, equal power-sharing in public life.

This third edition of the newsletter thus will share good practices, knowledge and efforts by the AUC, UNECA and UN Women to drive this priority themes to galvanize women's leadership and other relevant GEWE agendas in the first quarter of 2021.

Enjoy your read!

## I. HIGH-LEVEL CONSULTATIONS OF AU POLICY ORGANS

### Member States Appointed the First Women Deputy Chairperson at the 34th AU Summit



The [34th Ordinary Session](#) of the Assembly was held from 6-7 February virtually under the theme, “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want”. [The assembly culminated in the re-election of Moussa Faki Mahamat from the Republic of Chad, as the African Union Commission Chairperson for another four-year term from 2021-2024 and the election of Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa who became the first female to occupy the position of Deputy Chairperson.](#) Dr. Nsanzabaganwa from Rwanda secured the majority of votes in a highly contested position which saw two other female candidates vying for the post.

The elections demonstrate progress on the implementation of the Institutional [Reforms](#) of the AU adopted in 2018 directing to 2021. The selection principles were based on equitable regional representation, gender parity, predictable rotation, attracting and retaining Africa’s top talent, accountable and effective leadership and management, and transparent and merit-based selection. Moreover, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) also [elected](#) H.E. Felix- Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as the new Chairperson of the African Union for the year 2021.

The Assembly restated AU development priorities including trade, integration and peace and security. It was discussed that the commitment to drive trade and integration has been demonstrated by the progress in making the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) a reality for all African citizens. The Assembly noted the correlation between peace and security issues and economic exchanges, development of infrastructure, the individual and collective development of citizens, the involvement of young people and women in the socio-economic development. Terrorism, community conflicts, violent extremism, violent electoral crises, transnational crimes and trafficking were also cited as challenges that have hampered the development of the continent.

### [African Ministers of Gender Held Consultations Ahead of CSW65](#)



Ahead of the 65th Session of the [Commission on the Status of Women at the UN Headquarters in March 2021](#), the African Union Commission (AUC), the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and UN Women convened the Pre-CSW65 Africa Virtual Regional Consultations on 22-23 and 26 February 2021. [Africa Pre-CSW65](#) brought together African Ministers in charge of Gender and Women’s Affairs who adopted the [Common African Position](#) on the Status of Women, which was tabled during CSW65 at UN headquarters, in a bid to advance GEWE for African women and girls. The Ministers met under the Theme: “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 Ministers forged consensus on broadly, four key messages that speak to; the urgent need to strengthen the comprehensive legal and regulatory frameworks through legal reforms to enhance women’s participation and representation in public life and eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and regulations; gender mainstreaming in COVID-19 responses and recovery; prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women in public life, and the protection of survivors of violence; championing for change in negative gender social norms on women’s leadership and participation in public life and increasing the availability of financing in support of women’s participation in public life.

Facilitated by the AUC Directorate of Women, Gender and Youth (AUC-WGYD) in collaboration with the UNECA and UN Women, the meeting in addition to Gender and Women's Affairs Ministers in all AU Member States and their Experts, brought together other stakeholders included the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), AU organs and Specialized Agencies, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders.

During the meeting, the AU Commission also success-

fully launched the [African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#) (GEWE) as a framework document to strengthen women's agency in Africa and ensure that women's voices are amplified and their concerns fully addressed through, among others, effective implementation of legislation and proper financing of gender equality work.

## II. ADVOCACY PLATFORMS TO ADVANCE THE GEWE AGENDA IN AFRICA

### AUC Inaugurates Committee on Fund for African Women

During the month of February 2021, the AUC inaugurated the Internal Committee on the Fund for African Women, a demonstration of the commitment by the Union to advance its quest for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. The Committee will be crucial in developing a sustainable and comprehensive strategy on the transition of the Fund for African Women into a Trust Fund for African Women and oversee the implementation of the proposed activities for the fund to ensure transparency and efficiency.

Economic Empowerment is central to the creation of gender equality, social equality, and obtaining the vision of creating vibrant, healthy and inclusive communities. Women's empowerment remains a prerequisite for sustainable development and pro-poor poverty reduction, and the recognition of women in their society. However, due to the limited sources of both private and public financing for women economic empowerment in Africa, coupled with the inadequate financing from national and international public funds, it became imperative for the AU to establish a Trust Fund to compliment governments and international efforts in funding women economic programmes in Africa.

This fund is also being aligned to Agenda 2063 with a particular focus on the implementation of key priorities of AU GEWE Strategy including the African Women Decade (AWD). This Committee is responsible for developing the AU's resource mobilization objectives for the Trust Fund for African Women and overseeing the implementation of the activities. The Committee's mandate also aligns with the framework of the AU Financing of the Union decision and the financial rules and regulations that calls upon the AUC to ensure reliable and sufficient resource mobilization as well

as prudent management of the resources to achieve a positive impact on the African citizenry through the projects and activities of the AU.

The inauguration of the Internal Committee was particularly timely as the Directorate of Women, Gender and Development transitioned into the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, and accelerated its implementation of the Gender Parity Project and the roll-out the AWD on Financial and Economic Inclusion (2020-2030).

### NANHRI holds the National Human Rights Institutions' forum

The [African National Human Rights Institutions](#) (NANHRI) held the [National Human Rights Institutions \(NHRIs\) Forum](#) from 8-9 April 2021 ahead of the [68th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' rights](#), focusing on the role of NHRIs in promoting the realization of indigenous women's rights in Africa, in line with AU's theme: "Year of the Arts, Culture and Cultural Heritage". Particular attention was paid to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, better known as the [Maputo Protocol](#).

The objective of the Forum was to increase African NHRIs abilities and resources to follow-up, monitor and influence the implementation of the Maputo protocol and the regional decisions impacting women in general and indigenous women in particular. The Forum was attended by representatives of NANHRI, Specialized National Institutions, African Commission on Human & Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), AUC, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other UN bodies, CSOs, development Partners and culminated in the adoption of [Declaration and Action Plan](#)

[on the Role of National Human Rights Institutions in promoting the realization of indigenous women's rights in Africa](#)'.

The discussions emphasized on the need to change and challenge the narrative about the role of women and profile them as agents of transformative culture in Africa. It was noted that indigenous women of Africa are an example of resilience and their knowledge and experiences must be preserved. It was also recognized that the slow progress in realizing women's rights holds back the full implementation of Africa's development goals as encapsulated in Agenda 2063 and that participatory and accountable institutions are needed to reverse inequality trends and push for action to accelerate greater change in the lives of African women and girls.

### [Virtual workshops by ECA's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section](#)

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section of ECA organized a [virtual Expert Group Meeting \(ECM\)](#) under the theme **"Education and Finance for Productive Entrepreneurship"** on January 19 2021 to disseminate findings and policy recommendations from the [Women's Entrepreneurship Report \(WER\)](#) and discuss these in the context of COVID-19.

The report, released on 19th of January analyzed data from tens of thousands of African entrepreneurs and firms to establish links between education, access to finance and improved productivity. The [objective of the Report](#) is to inform evidence-based policymaking by African member States and to expand the knowledge base essential for tackling structural and emerging gender issues in economic empowerment and private sector development in line with Africa's structural transformation agenda as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Agenda 2063. The WER is based on original empirical analysis of entrepreneur-level, firm-level and individual-level data collected in 2013-2019 period covering 45 countries across the continent.

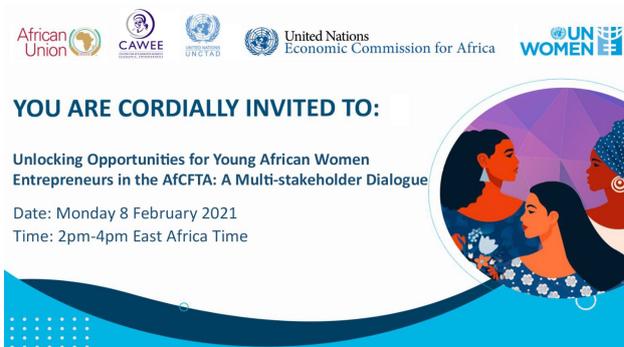
On January 21, a [virtual workshop](#) was organized by the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section to disseminate initial findings from the African Women's Report (AWR), discuss policy recommendations and the way forward on the theme "Digital Finance Ecosystems – Pathways to Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa".

The report aims to inform evidence-based policy-

making by African Member States and to expand the knowledge base essential for tackling structural and emerging gender issues in economic empowerment and the digital technology and financial sectors, in line with Africa's structural transformation agenda as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Agenda 2063. The AWR is based on analysis of the digital finance ecosystem across different dimensions and through a gender lens, to help identify the challenges, shortfalls and priority areas in order to address women's economic empowerment.

The meeting brought together academics, national and regional experts, government representatives from relevant sectoral ministries, representatives from partner institutions including UN agencies, AUC and RECs. These experts highlighted the importance of sharing lessons learned from high performing countries identified within the report, where shortfalls in women's digital and financial skills are being successfully addressed over the last few years and countries that provide increased online financial services for women.

### [Unlocking Opportunities for African Young Women Entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA](#)



**YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO:**

**Unlocking Opportunities for Young African Women Entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA: A Multi-stakeholder Dialogue**

Date: Monday 8 February 2021  
Time: 2pm-4pm East Africa Time

The AUC in collaboration with UN Women, UNECA, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Center for Accelerated Women's Economic Empowerment (CAWEE) held a [high-level virtually policy dialogue](#) on 8 February 2021. The event was organized under the theme "Unlocking Opportunities for Young Women Entrepreneurship in the AfCFTA" bringing together officials from the AU, AUC, ECA, UN Women, ITC, UNIDO, UNCTAD, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), associations of African women entrepreneurs, civil society organizations including CAWEE and FEMNET, development partners and young African people.

[The dialogue](#) asked 'how can the Africa Continental Free Trade Area deliver for young African women

entrepreneurs?’ and called for women’s involvement in all continental and regional discussions related to the implementation of the AfCFTA. It identified the key issues, challenges, and entry points to accelerate the implementation of gender equality and the empowerment of women through the AfCFTA. The need to invest in young women’s economic empowerment and skills development was also identified as one of the most urgent and effective means to drive progress on gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth on the continent.

The discussion of the dialogue emphasized the importance of a continued partnership and collaboration within AUC’s departments as well as with UN agencies, CSOs, and other development partners. UN partners also reaffirmed their continued commitment to broker transformative partnerships including with the AU, the UN system, women’s organizations and other key strategic stakeholders to ensure that women’s economic empowerment remains a central consideration in all efforts.

### Traditional and Religious Leaders Reflect on their Community Engagement in Girls’ Education



SAVE THE DATE!

**Dialogue on community engagement of traditional and religious leaders in Africa for girls’ education**

Focus on bringing girls back to school

18<sup>th</sup> of March  
11:00-13:00 (GMT) / 14:00-16:00 (EAT)

👉 Register here:  
[https://unicef.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_RUbfLQFTJ2ey0CRrVq\\_-g](https://unicef.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_RUbfLQFTJ2ey0CRrVq_-g)



unicef  
for every child



UN WOMEN  
GENERATION EQUALITY



COTLA/CONATA



African Union



AFRICAN UNION  
International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa



UNION AFRICAINE  
Centre international pour l'Education des Filles et des Femmes en Afrique



CIEFFA

The AU-Centre for Girls’ and Women’s Education in Africa (AU/CIFFA), UN Women and UNICEF, the Council of traditional leaders of Africa (COTLA) jointly organized a continental dialogue to discuss strategies to accelerate collaborations between political, religious and traditional leaders, educational authorities and development partners to create an enabling environment enhance girls’ access to get education and break the cycle of poverty. This highly interactive meeting was attended by members of COTLA, Religious Leaders, UN Agencies, Representatives from Ministries of Education, women and government bodies responsible for federating traditional leaders, representatives of networks of young activists on gender. The forum provided the space to look back on the commitment taken in 2019 and share good practices and views on the role that leaders can play to support girls’ return to school during the COVID-19 pandemic. It presented an opportunity to define a concrete way forward as a kick-off for an action-oriented, longer term collaboration of UNICEF, UN Women, AU/CIFFA and COTLA for girls’ education. It was emphasized that girls’ education is paramount to achieve the sustainable development goals of ensuring inclusive, equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning for all children, to empower girls and communities and to break the cycle of poverty.

The dialogue acknowledged COTLA members for their respective engagement to push forward the agenda on Girls’ education in Africa with the support of the AU, UN Women and UNICEF, noting with concern that progress made in girls’ education is placed under an unprecedented threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate negative impact on girls’ development and agency. It also provided the platform to highlight the important findings of relevant researches that help guide stakeholders’ work on girls education and other matters particularly during the COVID- 19 pandemic .The virtual meeting concluded with a call to action to all the partners.

### 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](#)

**Multi stakeholder policy dialogue on the African Girls Can Code Initiative (AGCCI)**  
Side Event of the 53rd session of the Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (COM-21)

**SAVE THE DATE**  
2:00 - 4:30 PM (EAT), 21 March 2021, Sunday

2021  
**COM**  
53<sup>rd</sup> SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA  
AFRICA'S SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION AND DIVERSIFICATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

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-WYGD 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](#)

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**IMPLEMENTED BY:**

African Union, The Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia

Contact: Ilwad Elmi Mohamed, ELMIMOHAMEDI@africa-union.org

www.au.int |    

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, African Center for Gender, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia

Contact: Syed T Ahmed, syed.t.ahmed@un.org

www.uneca.org |    

UN Women, Liaison to AU and ECA, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia

Contact: Dukaye Amare Mergia, dukaye.mergia@unwomen.org

www.unwomen.org |    

**DESIGN:** Tensae Yemane (UN Women)

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