

1. Africa



1.1. The role of African institutions in promoting gender equality and the political empowerment of women



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Introduction

This chapter describes the progress made by the African Union (AU), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in translating gender commitments into effective regional policy. It partially updates an earlier paper (Martín González 2013) on the same topic. First, it analyses the current situation regarding the AU's mechanisms for fostering gender equality and women's political participation and representation in decision-making and evaluates the AU's work and capacities. Second, it addresses the work of the AU in tandem with NEPAD, ECOWAS and civil society. The chapter concludes by identifying achievements and specific challenges, and making policy recommendations to advance the elimination of the gender gap, and promote gender equality and the political empowerment of women.

There were important milestones in the global and continental agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in 2016. The AU commemorated 36 years since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It also celebrated the 30th anniversary of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the 21st anniversary of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which is the key global policy on gender equality. The adoption of the AU's Constitutive Act in 2000, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (AU 2004) and NEPAD all reaffirmed Africa's commitment to promote and protect human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment and put gender mainstreaming at the centre.

The AU has made progress in advancing the gender agenda by recognizing the importance of women's contributions to development, reducing maternal mortality and promoting basic education for girls. It declared 2015 the 'Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063', and 2016 the 'African Year of Human Rights with a particular focus on the Rights of Women'. With these declarations, African leaders demonstrated their political will to address gender inequality and to overcome economic, social and political barriers.

Gender equality: key concepts

Gender

The socially and culturally constructed differences between men and women, and boys and girls, which give them unequal opportunities and life chances (Kabeer 2003). Can also refer to typically masculine and feminine characteristics and abilities; and expectations about how women and men should behave in society. These characteristics are time bound and changeable.

Gender equality

The absence of discrimination on the basis of sex in the allocation of resources, benefits or access to services.

Gender equity

Fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between men and women.

Empowerment

The process of generating and building capacities to exercise control over life by expanding choice. Empowerment is linked to inherent self-confidence, knowledge, skills, attitudes and voice. It is a function of the individual that is backed up by institutional change.

Mainstreaming gender

The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's and men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

Source: African Union Gender Policy (2009)

Nonetheless, while progress has been made, African women continue to face discrimination in both formal law and customary practice: 80 per cent of agricultural production is undertaken by women in rural areas, who do not have access to or control over productive resources or land, while just 15 per cent of landholders are women. Furthermore, women have limited access to financial services and suffer violence, which remains a serious barrier to women's full participation in economic, social and political life (Africa Gender Equality Index 2015).

On women's representation in national parliaments, in Africa as in other regions there are significant differences within and across countries. Figures show a direct correlation between the policy measures put in place and the increase in the number and level of representation of women in national parliaments. According to a 2015 report, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments had risen in North Africa from 4 per cent in 2000 to 25 per cent in 2015. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of seats had risen from 13 per cent in 2000 to 23 per cent in 2015. Over the same period, the global average rose from 14 to 22 per cent, making Africa a leader in women's representation in national parliaments (United Nations 2015: 122).

This sustained progress is thanks to the existence of legislated or voluntary quotas, increases in educational opportunities and advocacy undertaken by women's movements, which have had a positive impact on the share of women in national parliaments. The biggest

gains in women's representation have been made in Rwanda, where 61.3 per cent of the national parliamentarians elected in 2013 were women, followed by Senegal, which registered a 42.7 per cent share of women in its national parliament (IPU: 2017).

As of February 2016, the Central African Republic and Liberia had a female head of state or head of government. However, the election of female heads of state or government has not translated into increased women's parliamentary representation. According to a study by Afrobarometer, 72 per cent of Africans agree that women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men. The majority opinion on equality is not shared in some countries on the continent. While 74 per cent of people in East Africa and 73 per cent in Southern Africa believe in equality for women, only 50 per cent do so in North Africa (Chingwete, Richmond and Alpin 2014).

In 2013 the AU set out Agenda 2063, which envisages several measures on the integration of targets into national planning frameworks (AU 2014), as well as regular progress reports. It represents an opportunity to reflect on existing gaps, emerging issues and strategies for implementation of existing commitments on women's rights made by AU member states, and to focus on the implementation of concrete actions and practical solutions that will provide measurable results for women. The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and AU member states have been asked to accelerate domestication of the Agenda into regional and national development plans.

African Union commitments on gender equality

Main international institutional and legal framework on gender equality

The AU's approach to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality has been informed by United Nations frameworks and juridical instruments. The UN's commitment to the achievement of gender equality can be traced back to 1946, with the creation of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and 1948, with the adoption of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), which states that rights and freedoms will not be limited by a person's gender and recognizes the political right of women to participate in public and political decision-making processes.

The first instrument of international law to recognize and protect the political rights of women was the Convention on the Political Rights of Women of 1953. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights entered into force in 1976 and CEDAW, described as the 'international bill of rights for women', was adopted in 1979.

In addition, several UN conferences on women took place with the aim of removing all obstacles in all spheres of public and private life based on a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. The first was in Mexico City in 1975. This was followed by the 1976–85 UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. The second conference was in Copenhagen in 1980 and the third in Nairobi in 1985. The fourth conference, in Beijing in 1995, launched the Beijing Platform for Action.

The AU member states made progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and lessons can be learned from 15 years of implementation experience. We now have better knowledge of how countries have fared on selected aspects. Nonetheless, trends and patterns are difficult to monitor in some areas owing to the lack of data and limited reporting. The positive experiences of MDG 3 (to promote gender equality and empower women), reflects the good practice that has accelerated progress, including quotas, while the challenges reveal areas where further efforts must be made. For example, women's political participation was only captured at the national level, whereas participation in democracy should also include the regional and local levels. The assumption was that progress on education would

contribute to progress in other areas. In fact, progress on other measures has been slow. UN Women has estimated that, at the present pace of change, it will take 50 years to achieve parity in parliaments and 80 years to achieve equality in the economy.

One criticism of the MDG 3 indicator on women's participation was that numerical participation in parliaments alone does not indicate meaningful involvement in decision-making. Studies and reality have shown that the positions women hold in government, parliament and decision making institutions are important indicators of influence and effective participation (Kabeer 2015).

The MDGs informed the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which the UN General Assembly adopted on 25 September 2015 along with the 2030 Agenda. The 17 SDGs and 169 targets seek to complete what the MDGs did not achieve. Under the new agenda, gender equality is focused on SDG 5, to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls', and one of the targets is to 'ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life'. The proposed indicators for this target are the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local government, and the proportion of women in managerial positions.

The African Union's institutional and legal framework on gender equality

The AU is composed of 53 member states and eight RECs (see Box 1.1). Some of the RECs have adopted gender policies and established gender units. For example, ECOWAS and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) adopted gender policies in 2004, while the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) did so in 2008. In addition, key programmes and instruments, such as NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) reflect the commitment of Africa's leaders to gender equality. The AU Commission (AUC) is the key organ that ensures gender mainstreaming in all the programmes and activities of the AU, ensures effective follow-up and monitoring, and conducts proper assessments and evaluations of the impact of gender instruments. The AU's priority areas are maternal health, ending child marriage and female genital mutilation, the impact of conflicts on women, and increasing female representation in office.

Box 1.1. The African Union and the Regional Economic Communities

The African Union (AU) was established in 2001 and is currently composed of 53 member states. The AU is the successor to the Organisation for African Unity. Its Secretariat, the AU Commission, is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The eight African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Source: African Union, 'Regional Economic Communities', [n.d.], <<https://au.int/en/organs/recs>>.

In regard to female representation in office, the Constitutive Act of the AU requires gender parity in the allocation of posts and this has become the standard for African states to meet. The AUC is a good example: four of the eight Commissioners are women. In addition, the Chair of the AUC became the first woman to head the Commission in 2012. Furthermore, for the first time, a Special Envoy is now in place to advise the AUC Chairperson on women, peace and security matters, and works closely with the gender, peace and security programme and other departments of the AU to ensure that gender is mainstreamed.

At the regional level, the AU has encouraged its member states to adopt, ratify, implement and domesticate treaties, conventions and decisions; and has established a consensus on gender equality issues among member states. It also plays an important role in supporting research on gender issues and collecting regional data and statistics.

At the subregional level, the AU has provided guidance to the RECs on complementing and harmonizing global and regional frameworks by integrating and translating various resolutions and commitments into their policies and plans of action. It should also be noted that most instruments adopted by the AU since 2003 make provision for gender equality and women's participation. The current mechanisms for enforcement and implementation include reporting, fact-finding missions, and advice and recommendations on implementation mechanisms. Various bodies have been established to effectively enforce these instruments, such as the African Commission on the Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Court. Although all these instruments are mutually reinforcing, and have enabled member states and the RECs to advance their own legal, administrative and institutional frameworks to make progress on women's rights and gender equality, many lack political backing and resources, which inhibits the use of these tools and the implementation of strategies.

The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance reinforces the commitment of the AU member states to democracy, good governance, development and peace. Its adoption in 2007 was an important milestone for democracy on the continent and for women's political participation. The Charter contains several specific references to gender equality. For example, article 2.11 promotes gender balance and equality in the governance and development processes, while article 3.6 promotes gender equality in public and private institutions. According to article 8.1, 'States parties shall eliminate all forms of discrimination, especially those based on political opinion or gender, ethnic, religious and racial grounds as well as any other form of intolerance.' In addition, article 29.1 states:

1. States parties shall recognize the crucial role of women in development and the strengthening of democracy.
2. States parties shall create the necessary conditions for the full and active participation of women in decision-making processes and structures at all levels as a fundamental element in the promotion and exercise of a democratic culture.
3. States parties shall take all possible measures to encourage the full and active participation of women in the electoral process and ensure gender parity in representation at all levels, including legislatures.

However, the Charter has not yet entered into force, as 15 ratifications are still required.



Pillars of the African Union's gender architecture

The AU gender architecture has been conceived in consultation with stakeholders, member states and the civil society forum, and is constituted by six pillars.

1. Constitutional framework

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was created in 1963 to foster regional integration among African countries. The OAU established a Women's Division with the objective of mainstreaming gender. However, the division lacked the backing of a legal framework, as well as financial and human resources, and gender mainstreaming did not take place. The OAU was transformed into the AU when the Constitutive Act was adopted at Lomé, Togo on 11 July 2000 (AU 2000). Among the objectives and principles set out in articles 3 and 4 of the Charter are to 'promote and protect human and peoples' rights' and the 'promotion of gender equality', respectively.

2. Legal framework

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) entered into force in 1986, as an international human rights instrument intended to promote and protect human rights (OAU 1986). It has been criticized for the omission of women's rights from its provisions (Viljoen 2009). Only in article 18(3) does it stipulate that states 'shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of women and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions'.

The ACHPR established the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in 1987 to promote and protect human and peoples' rights and interpret the Charter. In 1999, the African Commission appointed a Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa in recognition of the need to place particular emphasis on problems and rights specific to the region. Lucy Asuagbor was appointed the Special Rapporteur at the 57th Ordinary Session in November 2015.

The 2003 Protocol to the ACHPR on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) entered into force in January 2005 having being ratified by the requisite number of AU member states. At the continental level, it has been hailed as a positive instrument with the potential to transform unequal power relations. It will be useless, however, if it does not contribute to substantial change in the situation of African women.

The Protocol guarantees comprehensive rights to women, including the right to take part in the political process, to social and political equality with men and to control of their reproductive health, as well as an end to female genital mutilation. It is a binding instrument on states parties. Any failure by a state can be challenged in the national courts and, if required, at the level of the ACHPR and/or the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. The target of the Protocol is to achieve full enforcement and ratification by 2015 and domestication by 2020. Article 2 (1c) obliges the states parties to integrate a gender perspective into their policy decisions, legislation, development plans, programmes, activities and other spheres of life. Article 9, on the right to participate in the political and decision-making process, states:

1. States Parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that: (a) women participate without any discrimination in all elections; (b) women are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes; (c) women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of State policies and development programmes.

2. States Parties shall ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making.

Article 26, on implementation and monitoring, stipulates:

1. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of this Protocol at national level, and in their periodic reports submitted in accordance with Article 62 of the African Charter, indicate the legislative and other measures undertaken for the full realization of the rights herein recognised.

2. States Parties undertake to adopt all necessary measures and in particular shall provide budgetary and other resources for the full and effective implementation of the rights herein recognized.

The impact of the Maputo Protocol on the participation and representation of women is difficult to measure accurately. States that have not signed the Protocol feel that their national laws and other international instruments to which they are signatory are either more or equally progressive, and that there is no rush to ratify the Protocol. Reservations to the Protocol are mostly linked to article 14, which makes provision for sexual and reproductive health rights, as well as article 21 on land inheritance. A major obstacle, however, seems to be misinformation about what exactly the Protocol allows, which further emphasizes the need for sensitization.

3. Reporting framework

The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa is a non-binding commitment adopted in 2004 that covers six thematic areas: health, peace and security, governance, human rights, education and women's empowerment. Heads of state and government have committed themselves to report annually on their progress on gender mainstreaming in these areas. Despite these reporting obligations, no state has reported comprehensively on implementation and there have been no studies to date evaluating the Protocol (Kombo, Sow and Jama Mohamed 2013).

In addition, the Chair of the AUC, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, must submit an annual progress report on the implementation of the Declaration at the national and regional levels. Zuma believes that the UN should explore with the AU the possibility of harmonizing reporting on the Protocol and CEDAW in order to avoid duplication. According to the 7th report of the Chairperson on the implementation of the Declaration to the AU Assembly of Heads of States and Government, 41 African countries reported on the Protocol compared to 49 that reported to CEDAW in 2013. This represents limited progress, given that 38 countries reported in 2011.

The Assembly of Heads of State and Government is the supreme organ of the AU. One of its functions is to determine the sanctions to be imposed on any member state for non-



compliance with decisions of the Union, including decisions on gender equality. During the June 2011 Assembly in Equatorial Guinea, it was decided that Specialized Technical Committees (STCs) would replace Sectorial Ministerial Conferences from January 2013. The Assembly decided that each committee should meet once every two years, although three STCs, including the Committee on Gender and Women's Empowerment, were to meet once a year. According to the AU's website, the first meeting of the STC on Gender and Women's Empowerment took place in Sudan in November 2015 (AU 2015) but there is no record of a subsequent meeting. The role of the Committee is mainly to monitor and evaluate the African Women's Decade, and to report back on the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, and on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation Convention.

4. Policy framework

The AU Gender Policy and Action Plan were approved in 2009 and adopted in 2010. The main goals of the Gender Policy are to adopt a rights-based approach to development through evidence-based decision-making and foster the reorientation of existing institutions by making use of gender-disaggregated data and performance indicators. It also establishes measures to hold managers accountable for policy implementation.

The Gender Policy and Action Plan contains policy commitments targeting eight areas. One of the commitments is the creation of an enabling and stable environment to ensure that all political declarations and decisions are geared towards the elimination of persistent barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender parity in representation is to be enforced in all AU structures. This has already been achieved in the AUC by the appointment of four women and four men. Other commitments are to develop policies that support capacity building and gender mainstreaming; avoid duplication of efforts, resources and interventions; and promote best practices across the continent by facilitating the alignment, harmonization and effective implementation of RECs' and member states' gender policies. The mobilization and allocation of financial and non-financial resources to implement the Gender Policy and Action Plan will be critical.

The Commission initially developed a five-year Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan (GMSP). Once the Gender Policy was approved, however, the GMSP was revised and aligned with the Action Plan for the African Women's Decade. It is reviewed periodically through the establishment of gender-responsive political and governance policies, and the adoption of affirmative action programmes, quota shares and representations to increase women's participation in decision-making. The Commission has begun to operationalize the Gender Management System (GMS) as part of the AU STC structure. Only a few AU member states have established a GMS, which according to Part IV of the Policy is an objective to be achieved by 2020.

5. Implementation framework

The theme of the African Women's Decade is 'grassroots approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment', which emphasizes the bottom-up approach to development and is based on 10 priority themes that aim to empower women across Africa. Theme 9 focuses on women in decision-making positions in the legislature, judiciary and executive, and achieving the AU parity principle (UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service 2010). At the national level, working committees for the African Women's Decade take responsibility for the development of annual work plans and budgets at all levels and the preparation of annual reports on activities and implementation. At the regional level, the RECs oversee the setting

up of the working committees, support advocacy campaigns and prepare annual reports on activities to implement the Decade.

6. Financing mechanism: the Fund for African Women

The Fund for African Women was created as a single mechanism to ensure policy implementation as well as the effective mainstreaming of gender into policies, institutions and programmes at the regional, national and local levels. In its first year of operation in 2011, the Fund supported 53 grassroots projects across 27 AU member states. The AU organs, RECs and member states have committed to allocate a budget for the implementation of policy. Member states are requested to devote 1 per cent of their assessed contribution to this Fund. Some member states have contributed more. Since the funds mobilized by this means are insufficient, efforts will be made to strengthen partnerships with international financial agencies and institutions, to increase technical expertise, and to facilitate the exchange of best practices and financial support for the implementation of AU gender policy.

African Union structures responsible for gender equality and the political empowerment of women

The Women and Gender Development Directorate (WGDD), created in 2002 in the Office of the Chair of the AUC, promotes gender equality in Africa and within the AU, and oversees the development and harmonization of gender-related policies. It designs programmes and projects based on the policies adopted by the AU member states. It also initiates gender-mainstreaming strategies within the Commission and for AU organs and member states; and supports capacity-building by providing training on gender policies and instruments to enable AU organs, the RECs and member states to understand gender and develop the skills to achieve the gender mainstreaming targets by 2020.

The Directorate has two divisions: the Gender Policy and Development Division and Gender Coordination and Outreach. It presents funding projections to the Assembly every year but the funds allocated are not always enough. The WGDD is increasing the capacity of the department through training and has worked closely with the AU Departments of Political Affairs and Social Affairs.

The WGDD also acts as the Secretariat for the AU Women's Committee (AUWC), which was established in 2003 as an advisory body to the Chairperson on gender and development following a decision by the Executive Council of the AU to transform the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development into the AUWC. One of its functions is to watch over progress towards gender equality on the continent, working with government and civil society within the framework of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and the Women's Rights Protocol.

The WGDD organizes annual AU Gender pre-Summits in collaboration with other departments of the AUC and development partners. Initially conceived as civil society consultation platforms, the Gender pre-Summits now draw participation from the African ministers responsible for gender and women's affairs, RECs, AU organs, AUC departments, the private sector, UN agencies and development partners.

An AU Gender pre-Summit takes place before each AU Summit to bring together the voices of key actors in the gender equality and women's empowerment arena to update and discuss critical developments, and assess the extent to which commitments have been implemented. They also serve as an important vehicle for incorporating a gender perspective into the highest decision-making body of the AU. The pre-Summit should produce a



document containing the concrete decisions to be presented to the AU Summit of Heads of State and Government, for their consideration and adoption.

The 2016 Gender pre-Summit took place on 17–21 January 2016 at the AUC in Addis Ababa (AU 2016). Among the objectives were: (a) to assess progress on women's participation in politics, public office and the judiciary, identify the challenges and barriers preventing their effective participation and develop strategies to accelerate women's agency and leading role; (b) to raise awareness and develop a common strategy on the implementation of the 2016 year of Human Rights; (c) to stimulate dialogue between AU member states, regional intergovernmental institutions, civil society organization (CSOs) and development partners on the opportunities, gaps and solutions, and call for acceleration of the effective implementation of commitments; and (d) to engage practitioners, policymakers and activists to review the implementation of the women's political participation agenda, learn from experiences and challenges, and reflect on what is needed to accelerate implementation and monitoring.

Partnerships

The AU, NEPAD and the RECs have coordination mechanisms in place, most notably the Protocol on Relations between the AU and the RECs, for the development of a better working relationship based on the principles of subsidiarity and partnership. This partnership makes the RECs the building blocks of the AUC, while NEPAD is the development programme, with the AU playing a supervisory and coordinating role. The treaties and mandates of the RECs should reflect and agree with the role of the AU.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development

NEPAD was established in 2001. One of its priorities is to ensure the economic empowerment of women. It also has an obligation to strengthen the capacity of the RECs. Currently, a Gender Unit works to implement strategies, tools and approaches to mainstreaming gender within all the sectoral priorities, programmes and projects. At its core is the NEPAD/Spanish Fund for African Women's Empowerment, a partnership between NEPAD and the Spanish Agency for International Development and Cooperation, which has provided EUR 20 million. The overarching long-term goal of the Fund is to promote gender equality and increase the capacities and autonomy of African women, specifically linked to improving women's economic, political and social empowerment and the full use of their rights.

Since its inception in 2007, the Fund has helped the Gender Unit to fulfil its role of mainstreaming gender issues, and supported, financially and technically, 77 projects in 35 countries in sub-Saharan Africa executed by CSOs, government institutions and RECs. Under the Fund, a legal handbook, 'A Guide to Using the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa for Legal Action', was developed to lobby for countries to ratify the African Protocol on the Rights of Women, and for gender-responsive policies at the municipal, local and state government levels in Ethiopia, Namibia and Nigeria. NEPAD has, however, been criticized for focusing on achieving gender equality through microprojects instead of mainstreaming gender in the rest of its initiatives and sectors (see e.g. Randriamaro 2006).

The Economic Community of West African States

ECOWAS was founded in 1975. It places gender under the responsibility of the Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender. A Gender Technical Commission was also

established at the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre (EGDC), which was set up in 2003 as a specialized agency on gender and development.

In 2004 ECOWAS adopted a Gender Policy that stipulated regular communication and consultative meetings between the ECOWAS Commission and the national bodies responsible for the advancement of women in member states, and with other regional and international stakeholders (EGDC n.d.). The ECOWAS Commission hosts the Annual Consultative Meeting of ECOWAS Ministers of Women's Affairs and Gender as a side event at the UN CSW meeting and the EGDC has created two regional networks, made up of CSOs, the West African Network of Young Female Leaders, set up in 2009, and the Association of ECOWAS Female Parliamentarians.

The EGDC's mission is to work with member states on the enforcement of the Gender Policy and to provide technical and financial support. It collaborates with the gender machineries of the member states, through its focal points based at the ministry in charge of gender, and works with other line ministries, the private sector and CSOs. For example, ECOWAS has provided technical and/or financial support to five member states for the development and/or implementation of their national gender policies, and provided financial support to four member states to assist with preparation of their National Action Plans on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. It has also initiated and facilitated capacity building and skills transfer.

The EGDC had intended to prepare an annual report to provide information and data on the gender situation in the West African region and on interventions capable of providing an adequate response to gender needs. However, due to the lack of financial and human resources, and the absence of reporting by member states, its first annual report was only published in 2012.

In 2015, instead of revising its Gender Policy, ECOWAS decided to elaborate a Supplementary Act on Equal Rights between Women and Men for Sustainable Development in the Community Region (ECOWAS 2015), which has already been ratified by 11 heads of state without reservation. The document addresses gender from the angle of human rights and obliges member states to domesticate the Act in order to respect and advance women's rights. One chapter deals with governance and political participation. The document will be disseminated at the regional level in order to start implementation of the action plan.

Civil society

CSOs often act in close proximity to the intended beneficiaries of development policies, and can therefore make public spending on development more efficient, effective and equitable by influencing policy formulation as well as monitoring policy implementation and evaluating outcomes. Civil society can also act as a necessary constraint on the power of government and facilitate governance improvements through its calls for, among other things, greater transparency and accountability. CSOs are uniquely placed to act as watchdogs over political manipulation of development processes. Access to information, adequate funding and dialogue mechanisms are required in order to ensure their effective participation.

In 2004, the Solidarity for African Women's Rights Coalition, a network of 44 African and international organizations, was established with the objective of pushing for the entry into force of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. It does this by popularizing the Protocol throughout the continent and advocating for its application at the national and regional levels.

In 2006, the African women's civil society network launched the Gender is My Agenda campaign (GIMAC) dedicated to the implementation of the Solemn Declaration on Gender



Equality in Africa. At the 20th African Women's pre-Summit on Gender Mainstreaming in the AU in 2012, GIMAC members insisted on monitoring, evaluating and reporting on AU member states' policies on women's rights, and made a commitment to produce shadow reports and to continue to recognize countries that are performing well (GIMAC 2012). In 2013, at the pre-Summit Consultative Meetings, GIMAC recommended that member states 'Ensure women's equal participation in all spheres of decision-making, and the equitable distribution of resources in the post-2015 development framework' (GIMAC 2013). In the same year, the coalition campaign, Africa for Women's Rights: Ratify and Respect was adopted to call for the continental ratification of the Solemn Declaration and for its effective implementation.

In 2015, at the 25th GIMAC pre-Summit, members proposed that to help measure the progress made towards its implementation, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa should be linked to Agenda 2063; and insisted that civil society produce an alternative report. It was also proposed that all studies and research on good practice and solutions be put on the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) knowledge-sharing platform (GIMAC 2015).

Achievements

The AU has made progress in advancing the gender agenda and recognizing the importance of women's contributions to development. Some countries have been able to overcome barriers through innovative approaches and taken steps on legislative and budgetary support in order to enhance women's participation in politics. The gender focal points have become gender cells in almost all countries. However, the target set by the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa of 50 per cent female representation in all AU organs, RECs, national governments, parliaments and judiciaries, which was to be achieved by 2015, remains largely unmet, both in Africa and worldwide.

In 2013 the Bureau of the Chair of the AUC in partnership with the UN Development Programme designed an initiative, Building an Enabling Environment for Women's Economic Empowerment and Political Participation in Africa (AU 2013). As one of the major outputs, it sought to enhance leadership participation by women in public and private institutions at both the national and the regional levels by 2016. It also sought to train female politicians on how they can make an impact, whatever their numbers may be, by learning the rules of the game and using this knowledge and understanding to promote women's issues and concerns from inside regional and national legislatures. The programme also aimed to ensure that by 2016 there would be enhanced integration of gender equality into institutional planning, budgeting and monitoring processes at the regional level.

In 2015 the Political Affairs Department of the AUC organized the fourth High-level Dialogue on Women's Equal Participation and Leadership in Political Parties in Rwanda. The dialogue targeted three concrete goals: (a) a renewed commitment by member states to ratify, domesticate and implement AU shared-values instruments that promote gender equality; (b) enhanced synergy, cooperation and collaboration in promoting gender equality and the leadership of women in political parties; and (c) enhanced strategic partnerships between the AUC and the African Political Parties Council on the operationalization of gender equality (AU 2015b).

Challenges

Regional organizations and CSOs face a number of challenges that limit their capacity to promote gender equality in Africa. Their dependence on donor funding and the competition for funds, the slow progress of change at the legislative and policy levels, the lack of real political backing, and the weak binding power of declarations, protocols and policies over member states make the translation from commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment to concrete policies, programmes and actions very difficult. The fact that there are no sanctions attached to failing to comply with reporting obligations is a major weakness in the enforcement and implementation system.

To date, there has been limited evidence of coordination or exchange of information among the AU, NEPAD, ECOWAS and CSOs. The level of coordination between the AU and the RECs appears limited and among the RECs is almost non-existent. This gap needs to be tackled urgently; there is a need for more transparency and public recording of results. The EGDC is currently developing a website on which to upload key documents and publicize all the work it is doing, and intends to set up an information and documentation centre on gender.

The AU, NEPAD and some RECs have Gender Funds for project implementation. These provide visibility but have only a short-term impact. It is important to shift this approach to become more strategic; and to reinforce the capacities of the member states on project implementation while at the same time enhancing appropriation, according to the principle of subsidiarity which stipulates that activities should be carried out by the agencies at the lowest level that is both effective and efficient.

Another challenge is harmonizing laws, where positive law establishes equality while customary law tends to disadvantage women. By engaging in politics, women challenge traditional roles; the case of the holy city of Touba, Senegal, provides one example. Senegal signed a gender parity law in 2010, which obliges all political parties to maintain a party list male-female ratio of 50:50. This law was not respected during the 2014 local elections, which led the Supreme Court to cancel the election of a mayor and several deputies in two communes. When Touba presented an all-male party list, however, there were no sanctions (Tøraasen 2017).

Concrete actions and recommendations

Work at the regional level does not replace work at the national level, but it can complement it and strengthen it by using both top-down and bottom-up approaches. The AUC should provide strategic guidance on the operationalization of gender issues, step up its advocacy, follow-up and monitoring roles, and conduct proper assessments and evaluations of the impact of gender instruments to reinforce the mechanisms in place and track progress.

The AU should continue to develop and use appropriate qualitative and quantitative indicators to report on progress; and embark on a regional assessment of the status of women. The lack of available or up-to-date data is a significant obstacle to identifying trends and documenting progress. This should be an area of extensive research by the AU and the RECs in order to establish a mechanism to track the annual progress of each member state on the domestication of regional conventions. For example, the SADC Gender Protocol Barometer produced by the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance to measure progress annually with the implementation of the SADC Gender Protocol by its member states, could be replicated by other RECs.



The AU in partnership with NEPAD, the RECs and CSOs can make a difference in Africa. As a regional organization, the AU understands the local situation and is often more accepted than outsiders and more committed to engaging for the medium to long term. These institutions should build on lessons learned to expand programmes in the field of women's political participation.

All the RECs should ensure the existence and effective implementation of national gender policies in all member states. Where a REC has no gender policy, the AU should provide support to develop one. Greater attention should be paid to the worst-performing RECs. RECs should base their gender policies on international conventions, especially CEDAW, and adhere to the SGDEA. A comprehensive gender policy coupled with adequate human and financial resources would help address gender issues more fully and meaningfully.

On continental ratification, there is a need to consistently include on the agenda of every AU Summit an item on the status of ratifications, and to remind heads of state and government of the commitments made. Linkages and partnerships between continental and national mechanisms would facilitate accurate, harmonized and effective reporting, and provide a mechanism for cross-country comparisons and peer learning.

An effective coordination and cooperation mechanism is required with the objective of permitting synergies between organizations. At present, there is only one annual meeting, organized by UNECA, with the gender focal points of the RECs. The new AU Gender Director intends to convene such meetings. The AU needs to build a closer partnership with the RECs, which are regarded as the pillars of the AU, and with NEPAD and CSOs. This will enhance efficiency by avoiding duplication of effort and services, and ensure complementary planning and programme delivery that will accelerate the integration of a gender approach into policies, planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation. It will also help to manage competition for scarce resources and put in place creative strategies for resource mobilization.

The AU, NEPAD and ECOWAS should work more closely with CSOs, which have greater capacity to mobilize public support and solidarity. For example, to ensure the implementation of the Women's Protocol at the national level, it will need to be disseminated widely. Women's organizations have an important role to play in lobbying governments to ratify the Protocol and bring it into force.

In addition, the three regional entities should more actively promote women's political participation, since they are in a position to bolster national efforts by facilitating dialogue, coordination and consensus building. Promoting initiatives and sharing experiences among political parties and women parliamentarians in Africa, as well as among the RECs, and fostering South–South cooperation and supporting institutional capabilities for gender mainstreaming and equality, would facilitate the expansion of programmes in the field of women's political participation.

Conclusions

Progress made on women's political participation has not been evenly distributed across Africa. Despite commitments to gender equality, discrimination against women and a lack of effective participation by women in decision-making persist. Legal and policy commitments will always need to be accompanied by measures to combat gender inequality.

Regional organizations have easier access to a wider range of media and are better placed than national institutions and some international organizations to address transnational issues. It is also easier for them to obtain buy-in from government representatives. Due to its wide membership, the AU can act as a catalyst to promote gender equality and women's

rights, and has the potential to influence policies, agendas and practices at the regional and national levels, have a multiplier effect and create peer pressure among member states in order to advance the gender agenda. AU member states should mobilize and allocate more resources in order to strengthen the gender architecture and achieve gender equality.

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1.2. Recommendations from the African consultation



During the African consultation, held in Johannesburg on 9–10 March 2017, organizations and activists working in the African region shared examples of best practices on how to effectively increase women’s political participation (Community of Democracies 2017a). The consultation generated numerous insights on what direction government, organizations and civil society should take in order to promote gender equality and women’s political participation in the African region. Participants produced the following set of recommendations.

1. Gender stereotyping and discrimination on the basis of social and religious norms need to be addressed. The fundamental role of education was underlined as the means of empowering women and girls and preparing them for future leadership roles. Training in and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) was highlighted as an essential tool in education and training efforts, in particular to overcome the digital divide between men and women in the use of new technologies and to provide women with equal access to information.
2. International organizations and national governments should strengthen monitoring, reporting and knowledge about women’s participation in decision making through detailed gender data collection, dissemination and analysis. This should be accompanied by participation of parliament and civil society in the discussion on national periodic CEDAW reports prior to their official submission to the CEDAW Committee in order to raise the awareness about their country’s commitments.
3. Civil society and other stakeholders should hold government, legislatures and political parties accountable for progress in increasing women’s participation and representation. The role of regional and international institutions in promoting women’s political participation and empowerment must be underlined, especially in mobilizing key actors and focusing attention on this topic.
4. Existing constitutional, political, legislative, and regulatory frameworks, particularly in post-conflict countries and countries in transition, should be revised in order to tackle the provisions that may hinder women’s equal participation. These include rules



- requiring high numbers of signatures to register as a candidate or high monetary deposits that can be discriminatory against women candidates.
5. There is a need for strengthening women's leadership skills through training and capacity building programs. It is necessary to provide mentorship opportunities for women who are already in politics and for those who are about to enter the political arena, and to create a network of women in politics to further develop relevant skills. Emphasis should be put on strengthening internal party working methods, with legally binding rules and sanctions, especially in the selection and nomination of women to elected party positions and on party electoral lists.
 6. Engaging with male MPs to promote gender equality in legislative outcomes and gender equality principles is essential. Urgent tasks include introducing electoral laws that mandate efficient, rule-based quotas for the increased representation of women and additional measures to ensure compliance
 7. During elections, it is crucial to implement the gender equality recommendations of election observation reports in order to support electoral management boards, political parties and the legislature in advancing inclusive elections.
 8. International organizations and civil society should put constant pressure on governments to prioritize the achievement of SDGs in general, and Goals 5 and 16 in particular. Local non-governmental organizations working in the field of gender and women's empowerment might consider creating a national coalition, working together with donors and international actors such as International IDEA, UNDP, UNFPA and other UN bodies, and the Community of Democracies. This coalition would produce a yearly report based on a commonly developed scorecard measuring the implementation of the SDGs. Funding might be conditioned by the achievement of yearly goals to incite governments to improve their situation.
 9. The African Union has a crucial role in Africa in promoting women's empowerment and political participation. It should send monitoring missions on a regular basis to African countries, to assess progress and achievements and to put pressure on governments to comply with their international commitments and standards.
 10. The Community of Democracies and its partners should develop an online class dealing with women's political empowerment in order to build local civil society capacities and help them sustain their mission and commitment. It should be free, easily accessible and run in French and English.