



OSAA
Office of the Special Adviser on Africa



**Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
UNHQ, 9 - 20 March 2015**

**High-Level Side Event: Ensuring the Emerging Leadership of
Africa's Young Women & Girls Towards 2063**

Date: Wednesday, 11 March 2015

Venue and time: Conference Room 11, UNHQ, 1:15-2:30 PM

Background:

At the 24th Summit of the African Union, held on 23-31 January 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, African Heads of State and Government adopted Agenda 2063, the continent's ambitious 50-year transformative development agenda. The Summit, convened under the theme "2015 Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063", recognized the important role of women and girls in achieving Agenda 2063's wide-ranging economic, environmental, social and political goals. The Summit's focus was particularly timely as 2015 heralds the adoption of the forthcoming post-2015 development agenda, the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action - the comprehensive global normative framework for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the mid-term review of the African Women's Decade, and the 15-year review of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) which advocates the full participation of women and girls in peace and security.

Over the past decade, Africa has made notable progress towards political, economic and social development, especially in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals that greatly benefitted African women and girls. The continent has made strong progress towards gender parity in education, rapidly closing gender gaps in primary education. The continent has also made significant progress in terms of women's participation in the labour force and now plays a leading role in women's political participation. As a result, of the 30 countries in the world that have at least a 30 per cent representation of women in national parliaments, 10 are African countries.

The continent has adopted several policy frameworks in its efforts towards gender equality and empowerment for young women and girls, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Strategic Framework for Youth Programme and the African Youth Charter (AYC) (2006), which, *inter alia*, emphasizes the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls and young women and ensure equal access to education at all levels, employment and healthcare. The African Union Heads of States and Governments declared the years 2009 to 2018 as the Decade on Youth Development in Africa and the years 2010 to 2020 the African Women's Decade. These continental frameworks are complemented by global frameworks that emphasize the girl child and young women, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action (1994) the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the Millennium Development Goals (2000), and the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth (2000), which includes "girls and young women" as one of its ten priority areas.

Despite these advances, the level of gender inequality on the continent remains amongst the greatest in the world. African women and girls are among the world's poorest and have the highest rates of illiteracy. Gender gaps in employment are high, with women dominating informal sector employment and vulnerable work. Even in agriculture, which is heavily dominated by women, women's productivity is 30 per cent lower than men's due to insufficient access to vital inputs. Furthermore, the vulnerabilities of women and girls have been exacerbated by armed conflict, new security threats arising from terrorism and violent extremism, and the recent outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease. Induced displacements from conflict have increased the number of female-headed households. Women and particularly girls continue to be abducted, subjected to sexual slavery and used as weapons of war by terrorist groups. In addition, women and girls were doubly jeopardised and more susceptible to contracting Ebola because of their traditional roles as care-givers to the sick.

African young women and girls face particularly strong challenges, struggling both with gender inequality and the challenges confronting African youth. With Africa's youth population increasing faster than any other region of the world, Africa's "youth bulge" has outpaced the continent's economic growth and surpassed the capacities of institutions charged with providing basic services such as education and access to the job market. As a result, African youth – both young men and young women – represent 60 per cent of the continent's unemployed and are frequently hindered by social, economic and political exclusion.

Due to the concurrent effects of gender inequality and youth disenfranchisement, young African women and girls face particularly high levels of unemployment and underemployment, exacerbated by inadequate access to quality education and vocational training, capital, and health-related information and services, including sexual and reproductive health. They also frequently face high levels of violence and discrimination, specifically the scourge of child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, as well as other violations of their human rights. These challenges are even more pronounced among young African women and girls in rural areas and in conflict or post-conflict contexts.

The Rise of Young African Women and Girls

Challenges notwithstanding, young African women and girls have proven to be remarkably resilient. Young African women and girls in all regions of the continent are making a dramatic impact in the world of politics, business, technology, the media and beyond. Examples of the power of young African women abound, including 30-something year old Senators and Members of Parliament in Kenya and South Africa, a 38 year old Mayor in Morocco, 20-something year old corporate and social entrepreneurs in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and incredibly young Ministers and Members of Parliament in Rwanda, to mention a few. They also include peer educators leading HIV/AIDS community programmes in Niger and a pair of teenagers in Zimbabwe fighting in their countries highest court to end child marriage. Their ground-breaking strides have been seen in virtually every sector and have influenced the world beyond their country and continental borders.

Because young African women and girls lie at the cross section of challenges facing women and youth in Africa, there is no denying that they face the greatest challenges and bear the heaviest development burdens in the world. They also, however, represent some of the most promising and as-of-yet-untapped potential for the continent's future. Young African women and girls have an important and catalytic role to play in Africa's development future as change makers, trendsetters, visionaries and thinkers, decision-makers, builders and young global leaders. As such, gender equality and empowerment of young women and girls are vital to Africa's efforts

to accelerate its economic growth and meet its ambitious development goals, including those of the post-2015 development agenda and the long-term vision of Agenda 2063.

Towards 2063: Young African Women and Girls Leading the Way

In light of the above, the empowerment of Africa's young women and girls will be integral to achieving the aims of the post-2015 development agenda as well as the long-term vision of Agenda 2063. Both agendas recognize that investments in young women and girls will be a powerful catalyst for successful implementation and specifically call for action in this regard.

In particular, the sixth aspiration of Agenda 2063 is “*An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of women and youth.*” *Inter alia*, the aspiration calls for Africa to achieve the following by 2063: (1) People-centred and caring; (2) Puts children first; (3) Women are empowered and play their rightful role in all spheres of life; (4) Has full gender equality in all spheres of life; and (5) Has engaged and empowered youth.

To aid in its implementation, Agenda 2063 will be implemented in measured, 10-year Implementation Plans. The draft of the first 10-year Implementation Plan proposes 18 goals and related targets for the year 2023, including the following goals and targets specifically focused on gender equality and youth empowerment:

Goal 15: Full Gender Equality in All Spheres

Priority Area 1: Women and Girls Empowerment

National

- Equal economic rights for women, including the rights to own and inherit property, sign a contract, register and manage a business and own and operate a bank account by 2025
- At least 20% of rural women have access to and control productive assets, including land, credit, inputs, financial service and information

Continental

- Gender Parity in terms of access and control, representation and advancement is attained in all AU institutions and RECs
- Annual High Level Panel on Women Empowerment is functional by 2016
- Fund for African Women is established by 2017

Priority Area 2: Violence & Discrimination

National

- Reduce 2013 levels of violence against women and Girls by at least 20%
- Eliminate all barriers to quality education, health and social services for women and girls
- End all harmful social norms and customary practices against women and girls and those that promote violence and discrimination against women and girls
- End all forms of political, social, economic, legal or administrative discrimination against women

Continental

- Fully implement Executive Council Decision on Gender Parity in the African Union by 2020

Goal 16: Engaged and Empowered Youth and Children

Priority Area 1: Youth Empowerment and Children's Rights

National

- Reduce 2013 rate of youth unemployment by at least 25%
- Youth business start ups in all business start ups is at least 15%
- At least 25% of youth who cannot go on to have tertiary education are provided with TVET
- End all forms of violence, child labor exploitation and child marriage
- Recruitment of Child soldiers is ended
- At least 20% of Youth and Children are engaged in sports activities

Given that investments made in young women and girls are great multipliers of sustainable and human development, Africa's young women and girls are the key to achieving Africa's short- and long-term development objectives. But to unleash their tremendous potential, it is critical that Agenda 2063 go beyond simply reflecting the needs and priorities of African women and girls, and ensure full implementation in a manner that achieves practical and tangible progress in all of the abovementioned priority areas.

Purpose of the Event:

The Side Event will serve as a call to action to Governments and other stakeholders to ensure that Agenda 2063 and the post-2015 development agenda address the pressing concerns of young African women and girls – both in their formulation and their implementation. The Event will highlight the critical needs and priorities for young African women and girls, including in areas such as enabling policy environments that are conducive to job creation, wage equality and decent work, equal access to education and health; financing for inclusive and gender-sensitive youth development; the eradication of all forms of violence against young women and girls; and participation of young African women and girls in political and decision-making processes, including in peace and security. It will also highlight the significant role of young African women and girls and the success that can result from their ownership of these agendas.

The Event will provide a global platform for young African women and girls and advocates to articulate concerns and priorities, and to demand action to realize gender equality and women's empowerment, through inclusive, participatory and gender-sensitive youth development in the context of both the post-2015 development agenda and Agenda 2063.

The Event is structured to highlight key priorities and generate messages for negotiations and advocacy related to: (1) implementation, monitoring and accountability for Agenda 2063 overall; and (2) specific recommendations for Agenda 2063's first 10-year Implementation Plan.

Specific Objectives:

1. Discuss the newly-adopted African Agenda 2063 and the views of young African women and girls regarding how the Agenda should be implemented and their potential role in its implementation;
2. Highlight concrete proposals to address the priorities of young African women and girls in the first 10-year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063, as well as in the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals;

3. Outline specific ways in which key means of implementation, including financing, capacity building, technology and trade, can be directed towards young African women and girls to enable them to achieve the concrete targets of Agenda 2063 and the post-2015 development agenda; as well as ways to resource the participation of young women and girls in these processes.

Expected Outputs:

1. Inform and engage Member States, United Nations system entities, civil society and other relevant stakeholders key priorities and concerns for young African women and girls in relation to the post-2015 development agenda and Agenda 2063.
2. Key messages for consideration and incorporation into key regional and global intergovernmental processes, including the formulation of the first 10-year Implementation Plan of for Agenda 2063 and intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda. These key messages will be shared with the Commission on Development of the African Union Agenda 2063, the Group of African Negotiators on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and the co-chairs of the intergovernmental processes related to the post-2015 development agenda, and will be included in OSAA's reports to the General Assembly on the Support to the AU and NEPAD.

Participation:

The Event will be attended by young men and women from around the world participating in the CSW, along with African Parliamentarians, Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs, and high-level representatives of women's NGOs and civil society groups. Permanent Representatives of Member States to the United Nations in New York, Heads of United Nations system entities, civil society and private sector in attendance. The session will also be live-streamed on the Internet by UN Television.

The Event will feature strong women activists, policymakers and speakers.

Partners:

1. The African Union
2. The UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA)
3. The United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Africa (UNDP/RBA)
4. UN Department of Public Information (DPI)
5. The Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth
6. The World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA)
7. Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS)
8. The Advocacy & Outreach Cluster of the UN-AU-RCM