
African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing+25)

Addis Ababa

28 October – 1 November 2019

Political Declaration and key messages and priority actions on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Political Declaration

We, African Ministers and Representatives of African Governments, meeting at the fourth session of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, held on the theme, "Realizing women's rights for an equal future", to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in Addis Ababa, from 28 October to 1 November 2019,

Reaffirming the commitment of African member States to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Agenda 2063: "The Africa We Want" of the African Union, and other global, regional and national instruments aimed at promoting and realizing gender equality and women's empowerment;

Acknowledging and saluting the immense progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action across the continent, and recognizing the achievements made in promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls,

Do hereby state that:

We observe that good-quality and relevant education and training are necessary preconditions to address the high levels of unemployment and informality across Africa. To that end, continued education for girls and the promotion of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (referred to as STEM) are crucial;

We commit to the social and economic inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in all priority actions, to accelerate implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We recognize the different types of disabilities, while being cognizant of the fact that women and girls with disabilities often live below the poverty line;

We note the reduction in maternal mortality rates across the continent, reduced rates of new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths, and an increase in advocacy on the elimination of violence against women across the continent, although challenges remain;

We note with concern that economic performance in Africa, which is strong but uneven, has not led to a commensurate reduction in levels of poverty, and that the inequality of opportunities faced by women and girls exacerbates their vulnerability to poverty;

We note that participation rates of women in the labour force remain low, as women disproportionately face the burden of unpaid care work and higher unemployment, and are often among the working poor. Additionally, the majority of working women in Africa have remained concentrated in the informal sector, where decent work is often lacking;

We note with concern that the security of tenure and rights to land and property remain uncertain for women. In that regard, the adoption and implementation of robust policies matched with adequate financing are required;

We recognize that, across the continent, there is evidence of progress in strengthening institutional mechanisms for gender equality but that it is continuously overshadowed by inadequate financing and a lack of capacity to make measurable impacts;

We note persisting gaps in the timely generation, use and management of sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data, making it difficult to assess development and policy performance;

We emphasize the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of human rights for all, which includes women and girls, and recognize that innovative partnerships with traditional, cultural and religious leaders, young people, civil society organizations, the private sector and academia, are central to the realization of these rights in a holistic and comprehensive manner;

We note the progressive legislative, policy and programmatic efforts to ensure women's and girls' rights to education, access to social protection, prevention and criminalization of gender-based violence, and the constitutional and legal right to inherit;

We emphasize that peace is a critical prerequisite for sustainable development and acknowledge the considerable efforts made by member States towards peace consolidation, prevention and conflict resolution, and the integration of women in uniformed forces. Subsequently, providing women with a formal capacity to engage in peacemaking, prevention and conflict resolution, and human rights management, in line with the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) (S/RES/1325), is essential for women's effective participation in peace and security;

We commend the efforts made by member States in increasing the participation and representation of women in decision-making structures;

We wish to express our concern, however, at the slow and uneven progress across the continent in the representation and participation of women in decision-making at all levels, including in governance, conflict resolution and peace building, the private sector, the media, and climate policy and governance;

We agree that Africa is at a critical juncture, with a high youth bulge, which requires unprecedented attention to the issues of youth unemployment, migration, human trafficking, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, HIV and AIDs, and the rise of violent extremism;

We recognize that deep-seated negative traditional and cultural practices, and negative social norms that persist in some African countries, continue to put women and girls at a disadvantage. We therefore place a high premium on eliminating gender stereotypes, transforming gender norms and repealing discriminatory laws, for the effective realization of the rights of women and girls in Africa, in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Maputo Protocol, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063, “The Africa We Want”;

We acknowledge the diverse contexts of African member States, which include conflict, post-conflict reconstruction and development, humanitarian crises, natural disasters, and climate change impact. We are conscious of these realities and that they can compound the risks faced by women and girls;

We accord special attention to persons with disabilities, so that their specific concerns are addressed throughout all aspects of this Declaration;

We agree on the following key messages to guide Africa’s position in the political declaration that is expected to be put forward for adoption at the occasion of the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in New York from 9 to 20 March 2020, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Key messages and priority actions

The fourth session of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, was held on the theme, “Realizing women’s rights for an equal future”. Following consideration of the theme, the fourth session agreed on the following key messages to accelerate in Africa the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

1. Eliminating all discriminatory laws, practices, negative stereotypes and social norms that are based on culture and not aligned to international and constitutional commitments to human rights:

(a) Strengthen women’s agency and creativity for gender equality and women’s empowerment;

(b) Engage political, traditional and religious male leaders, and male opinion leaders, to influence and encourage positive forms of male attitudes and behaviour that support gender equality and women’s empowerment, change negative mindsets and gender stereotypes;

(c) Engage in and support the transformation of negative cultural and religious institutional practices and sensitize institutional leaders, to eliminate discriminatory practices against women and girls and advance their rights;

(d) Protect the rights of women workers and create safer working spaces for women in various ways, including through improving institutional and cultural practices;

(e) Implement the 50/50 principle and affirmative action, for increased participation of women in politics and decision-making;

(f) Promote a more positive image of women in the media and eliminate the dehumanization of women, especially their objectification.

2. Investing in education, training, science and technology for women and girls to promote their equal access to employment and eliminate occupational segregation:

(a) Prioritize digital technology and innovation in the implementation of national development policies, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: “The Africa We Want” of the African Union, with particular focus on employment;

(b) Promote the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, referred to as STEM, for girls attending primary, secondary and tertiary education; and promote technical and vocational education and training for women and girls who are out of school;

(c) Promote financial, computer and legal literacy to enable women’s engagement in the economic policy arena, trade, innovation and entrepreneurship;

(d) Eliminate wage gaps and institutionalize equal pay for work of equal value;

(e) Remove the barriers to completion, retention and transition to school for women and girls, including pregnant girls, young mothers and women with disabilities.

3. Strengthening and repositioning gender machineries as key drivers for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with appropriate capacity and resources to deliver on their mandate:

(a) Ensure adequate technical skills, institutional mechanisms, and human and financial resourcing of gender machineries;

(b) Invest in institutions, and various line ministries to catalyse change through gender-responsive programmes and activities;

(c) Harness and strengthen public–private partnerships that advance gender equality and women’s empowerment;

(d) Harmonize the mandate of gender machineries in Africa to coordinate, monitor and hold accountable all public and private institutions, for delivering on gender equality and women’s empowerment and achieving the gender-related Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Improving and scaling-up social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls:

(a) Build women’s resilience to trauma and shocks, including those caused by natural disasters, humanitarian crises, armed conflict and climate change;

(b) Extend and ensure the access of women and girls to sustainable infrastructure services such as clean water, sanitation and hygiene, energy, renewable energy, technology and markets;

(c) Provide and upscale social protection programmes for women and girls, especially those who are active in the informal sector, the elderly and those with disabilities;

(d) Invest in gender-responsive, sustainable and accessible infrastructure and services for women living in rural areas.

5. Implementing the women, peace and security agenda, United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) (S/RES/1325) and related resolutions:

(a) Foster a culture of peace and women's participation and protection in conflict prevention and resolution, and ensure the protection of women before, during and after conflict;

(b) Ensure that countries develop, fund and implement peace and security programmes;

(c) Encourage member States to adopt national action plans under United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) (S/RES/1325), on women, peace and security;

(d) Increase the participation of women in peace operations, negotiation processes, mediation and preventing and countering violent extremism;

(e) Ensure the participation of women in post-conflict reconstruction and development and good governance;

(f) Instil a culture of peace into formal and civic education within communities and society;

(g) Train women peacekeepers and increase their numbers in peacekeeping missions, and in decision-making positions;

(h) Strengthen efforts to understand the gender-differentiated aspects of displacement, in order to provide a more robust protection and response to refugees and internally displaced persons who are women and girls;

(i) Employ strategies that address the needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations, including sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights and HIV prevention services.

6. Eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls as a prerequisite for gender equality and women's empowerment:

(a) Accelerate efforts and engage traditional leaders to eliminate violence and harmful practices against women and girls, including child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM);

(b) Expedite and strengthen integrated support services for survivors of gender-based violence to ensure efficiency, safety and trust through protection mechanisms;

(c) Prevent violence against women and provide care and support services, including victim's access to justice, social and legal services;

(d) Address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, particularly among women with disabilities, the elderly, refugees and internally displaced persons who are women;

(e) Enforce zero tolerance and address the impunity of perpetrators of gender-based violence in peace and conflict situations;

(f) Encourage member States to strengthen and enact legislation on the protection of women and girls, as victims of violence.

7. Investing in and ensuring meaningful participation of women and girls in productive sectors, particularly agribusiness and agricultural value chains, to increase wealth and reduce poverty:

(a) Reform the customary and statutory laws that impede women's access, control and ownership of land and other productive resources to facilitate their full participation in economic activities;

(b) Strengthen financial services and opportunities for women entrepreneurs and women-owned enterprises;

(c) Ensure that the effective implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area benefits women in business and provides opportunities for the meaningful contribution of women, to improve the situation of women traders across the continent;

(d) Strengthen the capacity of women, and especially women living in rural areas, to gain access to and to use technology to increase productivity in all industrious sectors;

(e) Promote urbanization policies that are advantageous to population groups living in poverty, particularly women and girls, focusing on the provision of decent work spaces;

(f) Promote affordable housing and suitable policies for women and girls living in rural and urban areas;

(g) Promote and empower women to move up the value chain and engage in entrepreneurship based on opportunity and not economic necessity;

(h) Uphold human rights principles and eliminate the exploitation of women labour, and the degradation of land and misuse of natural resources, by appropriately regulating multinational and national corporations engaged in large-scale agriculture, mining, mega-projects and commercial logging;

(i) Invest in progressive taxation, mobilization of domestic resources, curbing illicit financial flows, gender-responsive budgeting, corporate accountability and uprooting corruption, in addition to the implementation of debt reduction;

(j) Adopt and implement gender-responsive policies and programmes to mitigate and reverse the adverse effects of climate change, disaster management and environmental conservation, on ecosystems and local communities, including through collaborative approaches across all sectors;

(k) Encourage and support women and girls living in rural areas to participate in agrobusiness value chains to enhance their livelihood opportunities.

8. Closing sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive statistical and analytical gaps to ensure gender-responsive planning, budgeting and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063:

(a) Improve the collection, analysis and use of data disaggregated by sex, age, disability, together with gender-sensitive data;

(b) Exploit the collection and use of complimentary data for measuring and monitoring the 2030 Agenda;

(c) Utilize real-time data for gender-responsive planning, programming evaluation and reporting;

(d) Invest in information and communications technology and other relevant technologies to enhance data collection, analysis and use;

(e) Strengthen national statistical systems to generate, manage and disseminate gender-responsive data from, and across, different data ecosystems, especially where data sets are fragmented and isolated;

(f) Strengthen the collection and use of disaster-related gender statistics, to better assess the needs of women in crises situations;

(g) Invest in research and academic institutions to generate evidence-based impact-evaluation research to inform the needs and good practices relevant to women and girls;

(h) Build partnerships to strengthen the capacity of countries in undertaking data collection and statistical analysis;

(i) Harness information and communications technology to facilitate birth registration and the acquisition of legal identity, including in rural and remote areas.

9. Accelerating the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 3 on universal health and well-being for all, to reduce the prevalence of disease in women and girls, and to mitigate the disproportionate burden of care affecting women:

(a) Strengthen primary health care to reduce the incidence of communicable and non-communicable diseases among women and girls;

(b) Ensure universal access to good-quality health care, including testing and treatment for HIV and AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health;

(c) Implement the Committee on the Status of Women, resolution 60/2 on Women, the Girl Child and HIV, towards ending the unequal burden of the HIV epidemic, including in conflict and post-conflict situations;

(d) Reduce maternal mortality rates and prevent deaths of newborn babies and children under the age of five years;

(e) Accelerate efforts to end AIDS as a public health threat, in line with the 2016 Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and to Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030;

(f) Strengthen health-care systems for an effective response to combat infectious diseases and epidemic outbreaks, including Ebola, HIV, malaria, tuberculosis; and to combat cancer and other non-communicable diseases;

(g) Expand social protection services for women and girls with chronic diseases, such as HIV and cancer.
