



## **Summary:**

The **United Nations Spotlight Initiative** convened a high-level side event, “**Sustaining Progress toward Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls through Enhanced Economic Opportunity**,” at the 11th Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-11) in Kampala, Uganda, to examine the links between violence against women and girls (VAWG) and women’s economic empowerment (WEE), especially in the face of declining official development assistance (ODA). The session highlighted African-led solutions and called for greater coordination across sectors, innovative financing, and long-term systemic change. **In alignment with the Forum’s theme, the event underscored that ending VAWG is essential for sustainable economic development.** Side-event participants emphasized the urgent need to sustain progress on EVAWG in Africa amid shrinking resources, calling for a comprehensive, whole-of-society approach. They also discussed financing strategies and the role of laws, policies, and social norms in promoting economic empowerment and reducing gender-based violence, in line with Agendas 2030 and 2063.

## **Participants:**

The event brought together representatives from the African Union Commission, African Development Bank, the European Union, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, UN agencies (Uganda RCO Office, UNDP, UN Women), civil society organizations, and regional experts.

## **Key Themes:**

- *Scaled and sustainable financing is urgently needed:* Declining ODA and limited domestic resources are undermining progress. Mobilizing funding through domestic budgets, the private sector, and development banks – including innovative tools like policy-based lending and gender bonds – is critical.
- *Economic empowerment is a proven strategy for EVAWG:* Evidence shows that when women have economic independence, they are more likely to leave abusive situations. Investments in women’s access to assets, employment, and financial services are key violence prevention tools.
- *Integrated, cross-sectoral approaches are essential:* EVAWG strategies need to be embedded across sectors and ministries, including infrastructure, education, urban planning, justice, and labour, and foster collaboration among development partners, civil society organizations, young people and other stakeholders. A comprehensive and coordinated response should also prioritise work on social norms change and male engagement.
- *Civil society is central:* Women’s rights organizations and movements play a critical role in driving lasting change and must be consistently funded and included. Co-creation, local ownership, and a strong human rights lens are essential to building effective responses.

- *Data and measurement drive progress:* Better data is needed to track results, demonstrate impact, and strengthen accountability. Tools like the AU Gender Observatory and Spotlight Initiative's results framework can help shape evidence-based investments.