



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment Section

**Virtual Workshop on the initial findings and way forward
For the African Women's Report on Digital Finance**

**21 January 2021
2 pm to 5 pm East African Time**

Aide Memoire

December 2020

Draft

I. Context

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) through its Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division (GPSDP) and specifically Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section (GEWES) promotes female entrepreneurship in Africa in line with the Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment where women's economic empowerment constitutes one of three pillars. The African Women's Report (AWR) is the flagship report of the section, published biennially and based on a thematic topic of choice which reflect current gender equality and development priorities. The theme for the 2019 AWR is on "*Digital Finance Ecosystems – Pathways to Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa*". The draft report had been developed after a number of consultations with experts on pertinent topics to cover as well as the scope and focus of the report.

Digital finance is transforming the livelihoods of many who are excluded from traditional financial institutions, especially women and girls. While opportunities in digital finance are being led by private sector initiatives and financial institutions, very little analysis has been performed, on the impacts of digital finance in Africa, and on the economic and social prospects of women specifically. Gaps exist in knowledge and understanding of what constitutes digital finance, what is required in order for it to flourish and how to ensure that women benefit from digital finance initiatives. ECA has taken a holistic approach in looking at digital finance from a systems perspective, as an ecosystem of interconnected and interdependent components. Similar to many other technology driven initiatives, digital finance has been analysed in a systematic way in order to better understand each component and how it relates to women in terms of equality and empowerment.

However, very little analysis has been done across the region on how digital finance can address women's economic empowerment, how African countries can embrace digital finance to achieve gender equality, or the aspects of digital finance that need to be deconstructed in order to better understand its role in empowering women and achieving economic empowerment. The advanced draft of this report was presented to experts in November 2019, with the opportunity for experts to provide feedback during the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) to review the draft report "African Women's Report (AWR): Digital Finance – a pathway to women's economic empowerment in held from 12 to 13 November 2019. During this meeting experts provided critical feedback on the plan and structure of the report along with its proposed substantive elements, including research and analysis areas. The current report builds on this feedback along with a more thorough approach to addressing the thematic topic.

GEWES is organizing the following meeting in order to present the new report structure, its initial findings and discuss conclusions. In addition, during the finalization process, we have been facing a new global challenge and struggling to contain the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Within this broader context, it is necessary to revisit the findings and recommendations of this report and consider the policy implications and challenges to implementation, in this new pandemic reality. Therefore, GEWES will organize this EGM to both present the findings of this report and discuss the recommendations in light of COVID-19.

II. Objectives

The meeting will take place on 21 January 2021 in Addis Ababa, to review and disseminate the findings of the AWR Report.

- Discuss in-detail the various components of the Report and assess its policy implications in the context of digital finance and women's economic empowerment.
- Review the findings of regional analysis, country-specific research and recommendations emanating from the Report.
- Review the policy messages and recommendations against the policy issues identified and analyzed and provide suggestions on how to implement these in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

III. Expected outputs

- Dissemination of the initial findings and recommendations of the African Women's Report.
- Discussion and ideas on the way forward and policy coherence in the context of COVID-19.
- Identification of next steps in operationalizing ideas presenting in the report and taking forward the digital finance agenda for the African region, in promoting women's economic empowerment.

IV. Participants and

The meeting will bring together around 10-15 national and regional experts, representatives from the countries analyzed in this study, representatives from partner institutions including United Nations agencies, African Union Commission and Regional Economic Commissions and representatives from ECA.

V. Organization of Work

The meeting will be interactive. Plenary sessions will be combined with group work to allow for in-depth discussions and substantive suggestions from the participants. A detailed programme of work will be shared with participants closer to the meeting.

VI. Working languages

The working language of the meeting will be English and French.

VII. Further information

For more information about the experts group meeting, please contact Mr. Syed T. Ahmed, Associate Economic Affairs Officer (syed.t.ahmed@un.org), copying Mr. Gonzaque Rosalie, Economic Affairs Officer (rosalie@un.org), and Ms. Hannan Mohammed (mohammed27@un.org).