Ensuring the Emerging Leadership of Africa’s Young Women and Girls Towards Agenda 2063

Recommendations from the High-level Side Event to the 59th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Wednesday, 11 March 2015, 1:15 PM–2:30 PM, Conference Room 11, UNHQ, New York

The event, on the theme “Ensuring the Emerging Leadership of Africa’s Young Women & Girls Towards Agenda 2063” was organized by the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) in collaboration with the African Union, the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, the UN Department of Public Information, Femmes Africa Solidarité and the World YWCA, provided 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 Agenda 2063.

The event aimed 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, especially the gender perspective.
SALIENT POINTS OF THE DISCUSSION

A. 2015 is a particularly important year for action towards gender equality and women’s empowerment in Africa. The 24th African Union Summit declared 2015 the “Year of Women’s Empowerment and Development towards Africa’s Agenda 2063”, recognizing the important role of women and girls in achieving Agenda 2063’s wide-ranging economic, environmental, social and political goals. In addition, 2015 heralds the 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the mid-term review of the African Women’s Decade 2010-2020 and the 15th anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. Furthermore, 2015 saw the adoption of the African Union’s Agenda 2063, the continent’s ambitious 50-year transformative framework, and will see the Conference on Financing for Development and the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a cross-cutting issue across all these global and regional agendas.

B. While progress has been made for empowerment of women, gender and equality gaps in Africa are among the largest in the world. Despite comprising over half of the African population, African youth, particularly young women and girls, continue to face a number of economic, social, political and peace and security challenges. Specific challenges highlighted include: lagging achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; lack of social and economic empowerment; high youth unemployment; lack of access to and control over land and capital; inadequate access to quality education, particularly beyond primary school; lack of vocational skills and training; lack of access to health information and services, particularly in relation to sexual reproductive health and maternal health; practices such as female genital mutilation and early, child and forced marriage; high levels of violence against women and girls, including sexual and gender based violence; and lack of engagement and leadership opportunities in processes related to peace and security, including conflict resolution, peace keeping and peace building.

C. Despite these challenges, young African women and girls throughout the continent have shown themselves to be agents of change, and not merely victims of circumstances. They have shown remarkable courage, resilience, determination and vision, becoming leaders in national and local government, the private sector, civil society and media, to name a few areas. As one half of the continent’s youth, young African women and girls are key for achieving Agenda 2063’s long-term goals. If fully empowered, they can help to lead the way to the continent’s transformative vision.

D. Participants at the side event discussed the newly-adopted African Agenda 2063, relevant priorities of young African women and girls regarding how the Agenda should be implemented and their potential role in its implementation. Participants also identified 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. The discussion also included specific recommendations for how key means of implementation, including financing, capacity building and technology, 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.
PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

A. RECOMMENDATIONS TO AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS:

1. Prioritize girls’ and young women’s education and ensure equal enrolment in quality primary, secondary and tertiary education and vocational training, as well as gender parity in completion rates, particularly in aspects that would enhance their empowerment such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics in order to strengthen their involvement in the creation of innovative, home-grown technologies.

2. Enforce legislation related to the health of young women and girls, especially laws ensuring access to quality and affordable health care and information, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, maternal healthcare, prevention of and treatment for HIV/AIDS and the provision of free sanitary napkins, as well as ensuring support for those affected by emerging health pandemics such as Ebola.

3. Ensure that young women and girls, particularly those in rural areas, have equal access to full employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship opportunities, including through targeted business development policies, the provision of financing and technology, and preferential access to local and regional markets and government procurement processes.

4. Ensure that young African women and girls achieve climate-resilient livelihoods and reduce disaster risks, including by developing adaptation strategies tailored to their specific needs, capacities and priorities, and addressing the ways in which gender equality acts as an underlying cause of vulnerability to climate change.

5. Achieve equal participation and representation of women and young girls at all levels of Africa’s political leadership and decision-making structures, including in government, judicial and security institutions, and private institutions, with the aim of ensuring women occupy at least half of elected public offices at all levels and half of management positions in the public and private sector. Consider implementing quota systems to help achieve these aims, as well as establishing gender mechanisms and offices in all government Ministries and institutions.

6. Strengthen and ensure the active participation of young women in all governance structures and processes, including those related to conflict prevention and resolution, reconciliation, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, justice and security sector reform, elections management, constitutional reforms, countering terrorism and violent extremism, and post-conflict reconstruction and development.

7. Establish and implement legislation that empowers, protects and upholds the rights of young women and girls, including laws that: give women and girls the right to own, purchase and inherit land and productive assets; ensure their reproductive rights; and prohibit early, child and forced marriages and all forms of violence against women, including sexual and gender-based violence, and female genital mutilation.

8. End impunity for violence against women by establishing comprehensive and effective legal frameworks and strengthening the capacity of judicial institutions to ensure full implementation of relevant legislation.

9. Utilize the Year of Women’s Empowerment towards Agenda 2063 in Africa to set concrete targets and timeframes for implementation.
B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN UNION, NEPAD AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES (RECS) WITHIN THEIR SPECIFIC MANDATES:

10. Engage and partner with the private sector to leverage their ability to empower young African women and girls, including through gender-sensitive work policies, conducive work environments, investment in corporate social responsibility and women-led enterprises, the provision of training and education and the establishment of public-private partnerships.

11. Establish a regional platform for the sharing of best practices as well as a forum for more frequent review of the status of African women and girls.

12. Provide a platform for women and youth in all countries to actively engage in the implementation of Agenda 2063, including women and youth representatives from the private sector, public service, civil society and academia.

13. Include “end child marriage” as a target of Agenda 2063’s first Ten Year Implementation Plan.

14. Ensure the active participation of young women and girls in the development and implementation of the AU’s Agenda 2063 roadmap for silencing the guns by 2020.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

15. Ensure that the priorities of young African women and girls are mainstreamed throughout the goals, targets and indicators of the post-2015 development agenda, and promote and resource their participation in on-going consultations related to the agenda.

16. Provide support for young African women and girls through targeted means of implementation, including financing, technology transfer and capacity building, as well as strengthening data through support to national statistical commissions.

17. Develop and strengthen policies aimed at promoting Africa’s youth development as a top priority and in a cross-cutting manner, integrating gender equality and empowerment of young women throughout all development agendas.

18. Partner with African non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and private sector entities to promote women and girl-child empowerment and leadership.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENTITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE MANDATES:

19. Collaborate with the African Union to facilitate the sharing of best practices by African countries in the implementation of Agenda 2063.

20. Collaborate with the African Union to convene regular meetings in New York to ensure the voices of African women and girls are heard in global processes.
E. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR:

21. Ensure access to equitable and safe employment for women and young girls, including by guaranteeing equal employment opportunities, providing social protection and child care support, as well as enforcing policies against workplace harassment and gender-based violence.

22. Promote measures to actively support and expand women-owned business and women’s entrepreneurial schemes, including by accelerating productivity and value addition and increasing purchasing from women-led businesses throughout their distribution chains.

F. RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY:

23. Monitor and report on the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the post-2015 development agenda for young African women and girls, so as to ensure accountability of local, national and international governmental entities and authorities.

24. Collaborate with government, private sector, academic and other civil society organizations to forge robust, multi-stakeholder partnerships in support of young African women and girls.