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Advancing Women's Political Participation

*African Consultation on Gender Equality
& Political Empowerment*

*March 9-10, 2017
Johannesburg, South Africa*

Background Information

Even though gender equality and women's empowerment are currently at the heart of the global agenda, the road ahead is still long and challenging. While international human rights mechanisms provide a valid framework to advance the protection of women and to reduce the gaps for inequality, more efforts are needed. The realm of politics has been considered as one of the most challenging spheres of the public life for women to enter and their participation in parliament is crucial for fair representation of women in society.

In this light, it is only timely to focus on an alternative policy agenda to address the root causes of inequality, including looking at the intersectionality of multiple inequalities and processes of discrimination. In addition, it is fundamental that the efforts and the core instruments from the regional organizations, including conventions, resolutions, legal instruments and programmatic agendas move beyond the identification of the causes and impediments towards the achievement of gender equality, but to the design and systematic implementation of gender responsive measures/mechanisms to guarantee equality and prevent gender based discrimination.

The Community of Democracies, from the moment of its inception in 2000, has been actively supporting activities and projects dedicated to women's empowerment and gender equality. The Warsaw Declaration, the founding document of the Community of Democracies, underlines that "Informed participation by all elements of society, men and women, in a country's economic and political life, including by persons belonging to minority groups, is fundamental to a vibrant and durable democracy." Democracy should transform power relations between men and women in such a manner that gender equality is promoted in terms of inclusiveness, participation, representativeness and accountability of democratic processes and institutions. The universal principle of equality and non-discrimination between women and men forms one of the major global commitments in the pursuit of gender equality in democracy building.

To support women's participation in politics, the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies (PSCD) implemented the project on "Advancing Women's Political Participation", funded by the Republic of Korea and organized in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International IDEA. Through dialogue, the project provided an opportunity for participants from all over the world to discuss and compare the challenges and successes that women face in politics and look for ways to propel the idea of women's political participation forward. It consisted of five regional consultations organized in 2016-2017 in Strasbourg (France), Johannesburg (South Africa), Tunis (Tunisia), Bali (Indonesia) and Mexico City (Mexico).

The Regional Consultations on Gender Equality and Political Empowerment of Women served as platforms created to enhance a multilateral dialogue regarding the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the legal frameworks, as well as the exchange of best practices to take specific actions to address the main issues related to the advancement of Gender Equality and the Political Participation of Women.

The project aims to produce a global and regional policy recommendations and contribute to the policy guidebook based on input collected from the five regional consultations. The guidebook is a part of the Inter-Regional Dialogue on Democracy (IRDD) and provides recommendations on how to efficiently advance women's political participation.

Introduction

The African Consultation brought together practicing politicians and representatives from international, non-governmental, and civil society organizations active in the region to discuss the issues of gender equality and the advancement of women's political participation on the African continent.

This report consists of three sections of relevant experiences and lessons learned on gender equality and the political empowerment of women:

1. Challenges to overcome in the region;
2. Existing tools and mechanisms;
3. Best practices and recommendations on how to effectively advance gender equality and women's political participation.

The African continent is very diverse in terms in the level of development, but poverty rates are still among the highest in the world and underdevelopment is widespread. Democracy is still a relatively new phenomenon in Africa, especially when compared to regions like Europe and the Americas. While the number of democratic elections is increasing in Africa, and a record number of women have successfully contested for seats in government, electoral-related violence is a growing concern.¹

While some African countries have made significant progress in expanding opportunities for women and girls, inequalities persist. Key challenges faced by women include sexual violence, "honour killings," female genital mutilation, human trafficking, restricted mobility, and forced and early marriage. Violence and discrimination against women are social epidemics, and despite the progress made by women's rights movements in identifying, raising awareness, and challenging impunity for women's rights violations, serious discrimination against women continues.²

In the political realm, however, African women have made notable strides, with the representation of women increasing from 9.8% in 1995 to 23.6% in 2016, which is in-line with the world average according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.³ Rwanda leads the world with the highest percentage of female parliamentarians in the lower or single House of Parliament (61.3%), with six other African

¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/africa>

² <http://www1.uneca.org/Portals/awro/Documents/African-Women-Decade-2010-2020.pdf>

³ Women in Parliament in 2016: The Year in Review (p. 2, Rep.). (2017). Inter-Parliamentary Union.

countries ranking in to the top 20 – Senegal (42.7%), South Africa (42.1%), Namibia (41.3%), Mozambique (39.6%), Ethiopia (38.8%), and Angola (38.2%). In addition, Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe have attained the 30% female political representation level advised by the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA). Only Mauritania, the Seychelles, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia currently meet the BPA threshold of 30% for women in ministerial positions.⁴

In the 2016 Global Gender Gap Index, which measures progress on gender equality in economic participation, education, political participation and health, Rwanda is the highest ranked African country at fifth, with five other sub-Saharan countries ranked in the top 50 – Burundi (12), Namibia (14), South Africa (15), Mozambique (21) and Cape Verde (36). No North African country is ranked in the top 100, the highest ranked being Algeria (120). The Index reveals that only two regions – Western Europe and North America – have a remaining gender gap of less than 30%. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the gap is 32.1%, with the gap in Northern Africa just under 40%.⁵

In the political sphere, women’s engagement in public life has a positive impact on inequality across society at large. The issues which women advocate, prioritize and invest in have broad societal implications, touching on family life, education and health. Women’s engagement in public life fosters greater credibility in institutions and heightened democratic outcomes.

⁴ Women in Politics: 2017. Report. Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017.

⁵ <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/rankings/>

PART I: challenges to be overcome to advance women's political participation

The Consultation identified and discussed a number of challenges women face in Africa related to political participation. While no country has managed to achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 5 (on gender equality) and 16 (on peace, justice, and strong institutions), many countries in Africa, as in other regions, lack the political will or resources to do so, and have a tendency to prioritize other goals and agendas.

First, the political machinery on promoting and enforcing gender equality in most African countries is weak, often due to lack of funding, low human resource capacity, and the absence of a legal framework with strong oversight. Furthermore, the culture of political parties and a shortage of political will from (often) male-dominated leadership in promoting women's political engagement work together to deter women from politics.

Second, there has been limited signing, ratification, implementation and enforcement of treaties and protocols on gender equality and women's empowerment. Although many African countries are party to several international treaties and charters on gender equality and promoting women's rights, these agreements and obligations have not been adopted by every country on the continent, and for those that have, implementation is often slow or absent altogether.

Third, access to education is very unequal in Africa, where women and girls have a much smaller chance to achieve higher education due to expectations that they marry at an early age, bear children, and take care of the household, especially if they live in rural or remote areas. Education for men and boys, on the other hand, is still privileged as they are considered the "treasure" of the family, as well as a future source of income.

Fourth, gender stereotypes, religious factors and socio-cultural norms that hinder women's empowerment remain prevalent. When it comes to the political arena, politics is still considered a male domain. Very few women dare run for office because they feel they will not have the support of their family or community. Vocal women or female community leaders are often labeled as "trouble makers" in a society where men and elders have the right to speak or act, not women or youngsters.

Fifth, according to some attendees, there is a lack of mutual support and solidarity between women in Africa. Women may not trust the abilities of other women because of long-standing social and cultural beliefs. Women are constantly marginalized and, as a consequence, they lose confidence in themselves and their peers.

Finally, poverty is a huge obstacle to political engagement, particularly in the sub-Saharan region, where more than one in four people remain undernourished – the highest of any region in the world. Women are often the first victims of this persistent poverty, leading them to prioritize economic survival over political engagement.

PART II: Existing mechanisms to advance women's political participation

Attendees of the Consultation discussed the various political actors, legal tools and mechanisms already in place, at both at the international and regional level, which could effectively increase female political participation.

International Treaties, Charters, and Declarations

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, is an international bill of rights for women and a legally binding instrument obliging states to promote gender equality. At present, there are 189 states parties, making CEDAW an important tool for national and international advocates of gender equality. All African countries, with the exception of Sudan and Somalia, have ratified the Convention. Article 7 specifically addresses the elimination of gender discrimination in political and public life, stating:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

In 1997, the CEDAW Committee issued General Recommendation No. 23 to elaborate on Article 7, making a stronger case for “temporary special measures” (for example, gender quotas) to achieve equality of participation. The Recommendation states that the “formal removal of barriers and the introduction of temporary special measures to encourage the equal participation of both men and women in the public life of their societies are essential prerequisites to true equality in political life.” It also notes that states parties, political parties, and public officials should actively encourage women’s full and effective participation, together with all other sectors of society.

The Beijing Platform for Action, signed unanimously by all UN member states at the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, lists Women in Power and Decision-Making among its twelve

Strategic Objectives. Under this Objective, states commit to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, as well as to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership. Paragraph 190a calls on governments to:

Commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary, including, inter alia, setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions.

Paragraph 191, in turns, urges political parties to:

- Consider examining party structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women;
- Consider developing initiatives that allow women to participate fully in all internal policy-making structures and appointive and electoral nominating processes;
- Consider incorporating gender issues in their political agenda, taking measures to ensure that women can participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, emphasizes the involvement of women in conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict reconstruction. Recognizing “the importance of [women’s] equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security,” Resolution 1325:

- Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict;
- Encourages the Secretary-General to implement his strategic plan of action (A/49/587) calling for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes.

The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in 2015, enumerate Gender Equality as Goal 5. The 2030 Agenda situates women's rights within human rights and development frames, explaining that “ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, but it also crucial to accelerating sustainable development.” Goal 5 includes among its targets to:

- Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life;
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

Regional Organizations

The African Union (AU) has taken numerous steps to promote good governance and democratic consolidation across the continent over the last fifteen years. The AU Constitutive Act enshrines the principle of gender equality and, together with other AU declarations, resolutions, and decisions, calls for the full participation of women as equal partners in Africa’s development. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), adopted by the AU in 2003, has been signed and ratified by 36 out of 54 African countries (and signed but not ratified by 15 more states). Article 9, entitled “Right to Participation in the Political and Decision-Making Process,” states:

1. States Parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that:
 - Women participate without any discrimination in all elections;
 - Women are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes;
 - Women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of State policies and development programmes.
2. States Parties shall ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making.

The AU African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, adopted in 2007, lists among its objectives the aim to “promote gender balance and equality in the governance and development processes.”

Article 29 links this to the goals of development and democracy and establishes that:

- State Parties shall create the necessary conditions for full and active participation of women in the decision-making processes and structures at all levels as a fundamental element in the promotion and exercise of a democratic culture;
- State Parties shall take all possible measures to encourage the full and active participation of women in the electoral process and ensure gender parity in representation at all levels, including legislatures.

The Protocol on Gender and Development of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), signed in 2008, makes very concrete pledges for action to achieve gender balanced decision-making. Article 12 on “Representation” states: “States Parties shall endeavour that, by 2015, at least fifty percent of decision-making positions in the public and private sectors are held by women including the use of affirmative action measures as provided for in Article 5.” It goes on to call for States Parties to conduct public awareness campaigns demonstrating a link between equal representation and democracy and good governance. Article 13 on “Participation” specifies a number of policy measures that States Parties should implement to achieve equal opportunities for women and men, including legislation, capacity-building, training and mentoring, support structures, and changing discriminatory attitudes and norms – crucially identifying the need to engage men in all of these activities.

PART III: Best practices and recommendations on how to effectively advance women's political participation

During the Consultation, organizations and activists working in the African region shared examples of best practices on how to effectively increase women's political participation.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been active in several countries in Africa in their efforts to increase and enhance female representation in politics.

- In Uganda, UNDP helped in facilitating education and skills training to female politicians and candidates for office in the areas of women's leadership, conflict mitigation and democratic governance;
- In Zimbabwe, UNDP supported the incorporation of principles of gender-responsive budgeting in parliament;
- In Zambia, UNDP provided support in the drafting of the country's final constitution which calls for the establishment of the Gender Equity and Equality Commission. The constitution also includes provisions that require a minimum of 30% representation of both genders in decision-making bodies;
- In the Central African Republic, in partnership with other stakeholders, UNDP supported the drafting, lobbying and advocacy for the gender parity law which was adopted in November 2016.

Founded in 2012, the Women and Youth's League for Democracy from Madagascar (WYLD) has adopted three approaches for politically empowering women and promoting democracy in Madagascar:

- Women have to feel that they are full citizens, so the organization developed a program in which the Malagasy Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are explained and taught to women. The aim of this approach is to educate women that they are equal to men and are entitled to all human rights, including freedom of speech and expression, and the right to political participation. Discussing the Constitution is meant to enlighten women about the political responsibilities of elected people like the President or members of parliament. The program is aimed at the development of women's critical thinking, and is implemented on-site, through small workshops in rural villages or towns, and runs a weekly radio program called "Soa Miampita," which has national coverage. Presently, around 1,500 women have been trained, and many more listen to the radio program regularly;

- The organization offers free coaching and training for women who intend to run for office in order for them to become competitive candidates. The program, called Zaraina, is structured around three main areas: (1) mastering laws and regulations, (2) mastering a municipal or a national budget, and (3) mastering communication and leadership skills. A pool of volunteer trainers, who are experts in these domains, organize workshops in various regions, according to the needs expressed by women. Since 2013, 56 women have completed the program;
- One of the aims of the organization is to ensure women that they can be politically empowered by acting as responsible citizens who vote and who protect their vote against any manipulation: they can become electoral “teachers,” responsible voters and volunteer electoral observers. The organization trains women about the electoral process, how and when to get registered on electoral lists, how to vote responsibly, and how to observe elections and report back. So far, 300 women and young people have been trained, with 200 of them serving as electoral observers in the 2013 and 2015 elections. The organization is currently preparing for the 2018 elections, and plans to recruit and train at least 1,000 volunteers, both men and women.

The Consultation generated numerous insights on what direction government, organizations and civil society should take in order to promote gender equality and women's political participation in the African region. Participants produced the following set of recommendations.

First, gender stereotyping and discrimination on the basis of social and religious norms need to be addressed. The fundamental role of education was underlined as the means of empowering women and girls and preparing them for future leadership roles. Training in and the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was highlighted as an essential tool in education and training efforts, in particular to overcome the digital divide between men and women in the use of new technologies and to provide women with equal access to information.

Second, international organizations and national governments should strengthen monitoring, reporting and knowledge about women's participation in decision making through detailed gender data collection, dissemination and analysis. This should be accompanied by participation of parliament and civil society in the discussion on national periodic CEDAW reports prior to their official submission to the CEDAW Committee in order to raise the awareness about their country's commitments.

Third, civil society and other stakeholders should hold government, legislatures and political parties accountable for progress in increasing women's participation and representation. The role of regional and international institutions in promoting women's political participation and empowerment must be underlined, especially in mobilizing key actors and focusing attention on this topic.

Fourth, existing constitutional, political, legislative, and regulatory frameworks, particularly in post-conflict countries and countries in transition, should be revised in order to tackle the provisions that may hinder women's equal participation. These include rules requiring high numbers of signatures to register as a candidate or high monetary deposits that can be discriminatory against women candidates.

Fifth, there is a need for strengthening women's leadership skills through training and capacity building programs. It is necessary to provide mentorship opportunities for women who are already in politics and for those who are about to enter the political arena, and to create a network of women in politics to further develop relevant skills. Emphasis should be put on strengthening internal party working methods, with legally binding rules and sanctions, especially in the selection and nomination of women to elected party positions and on party electoral lists.

Sixth, engaging with male MPs to promote gender equality in legislative outcomes and gender equality principles is essential. Urgent tasks include introducing electoral laws that mandate efficient, rule-based quotas for the increased representation of women and additional measures to ensure compliance

Seventh, during elections, it is crucial to implement the gender equality recommendations of election observation reports in order to support electoral management boards, political parties and the legislature in advancing inclusive elections.

Eighth, international organizations and civil society should put constant pressure on governments to prioritize the achievement of SDGs in general, and Goals 5 and 16 in particular. Local non-governmental organizations working in the field of gender and women's empowerment might consider creating a national coalition, working together with donors and international actors such as International IDEA, UNDP, UNFPA and other UN bodies, and the Community of Democracies. This coalition would produce a yearly report based on a commonly developed scorecard measuring the implementation of the SDGs. Funding might be conditioned by the achievement of yearly goals to incite governments to improve their situation.

Ninth, the African Union has a crucial role in Africa in promoting women's empowerment and political participation. It should send monitoring missions on a regular basis to African countries, to assess progress and achievements and to put pressure on governments to comply with their international commitments and standards.

Finally, the Community of Democracies and its partners should develop an online class dealing with women's political empowerment in order to build local civil society capacities and help them sustain their mission and commitment. It should be free, easily accessible and run in French and English.

Conclusion

While women have made great strides in politics in Africa, the region still suffers from significant gender gaps in the political arena, as well as economic opportunity and fundamental human rights. There is a clear values-based case for promoting gender equality: women form half the world's population and deserve equal access to health, education, economic participation and earning potential, and political decision-making power. It is important to note that gender parity is equally fundamental to whether and how societies thrive. Utilizing half the world's talent pool has a vast bearing on the growth, competitiveness and future-readiness of economies worldwide, as well as security and peacekeeping efforts.



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The Community of Democracies is an intergovernmental organization that drives the global democratic agenda through common action. Since its establishment in 2000, the Community has brought the world's democracies together to advance and promote the democratic principles and standards enshrined in the Warsaw Declaration Toward a Community of Democracies that was signed by 106 countries.

Building on the Warsaw Declaration, the Community's founding document that 106 countries signed in 2000, the Community of Democracies seeks to support democratic transition and consolidation worldwide by:

- Assisting societies in the development and strengthening of democratic institutions and values;
- Identifying, alerting and responding, consistent with the UN Charter and the Warsaw Declaration to threats to democracy so as to assist states to remain on the path to democracy;
- Supporting and defending civil society in all countries;
- Advancing broad-based participation in democratic governance;
- Giving a voice to those working peacefully for democracy in all countries.



The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)/Inter-Regional Dialogue on Democracy (IRDD)

Since its inception in 1995, International IDEA has made significant contributions to the body of available knowledge and applicable policy options for promoting democratic participation and representation of women in decision-making processes. Through its global and regional programmes, IDEA supports political reform processes, awareness raising and capacity building on institutionalizing gender equality and women's empowerment in electoral and constitution-building processes, and within political parties. The Inter-Regional Dialogue on Democracy (IRDD) was launched in April 2011 by seven Regional Organizations and International IDEA at the headquarters of the Organization of American States (OAS). Its primary objective is to offer and facilitate a platform for regional organizations to exchange as peers' knowledge and experiences in the application of democratic principles.

To date, eight regional organizations are participating in the IRDD and these include the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Union (EU), the League of Arab States (LAS), the OAS, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). International IDEA acts as the facilitator of the IRDD and functions as its dedicated secretariat through the Inter-Regional Democracy Resource Centre.



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UNDP works in nearly 170 countries and territories, helping to achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion. We help countries to develop policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, institutional capabilities and build resilience in order to sustain development results. UNDP is working to strengthen new frameworks for development through integrated approach to supporting inclusive political processes in supporting and strengthening the capacities of political processes and institutions in order to improve citizen participation, voice and accountability. The advancement of women's equal participation and decision-making in political processes and institutions is one of the key priorities for UNDP across a variety of development contexts including stable, conflict/post conflict and transitional settings.



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