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PRESS RELEASE.

African Union rolls out initiative to document women and girls leading change across the continent.

The African Union Commission (AUC) through the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYD), has rolled out an initiative to [document the stories and contributions of African women and girls](#) in making a difference through demonstrated exceptional leadership on the continent. In an upcoming book to be published in the course of the year, the Commission will compile the experiences, triumphs and the impact of leadership led by African women and young girls. The book is intended to honor the leadership and achievements of African Women and girls in various sectors as they share their leadership experience, which will also inspire other girls and women to see beyond the existing structural barriers and to strive for excellence and contribute fully and meaningfully to a prosperous, peaceful and integrated Africa.

There remains many untold stories of women and girls, their successes, opportunities and challenges as they strive to achieve effective and meaningful participation in leading the political and socio-economic development of the continent. Documenting the stories of these women and girls will be crucial evidence of the potential women and girls to lead and leave legacies of success and the initiative is expected to continue to call on governments and other stakeholders to create an enabling environment and support female leaders and their enterprises. The women and girls to be featured in the book will be self-nominate or be nominated and the submissions to be submitted to the Gender Directorate by the 30th of June 2021. The Directorate through a diverse review panel will then proceed to vet, authenticate and select the stories to be included in the book. Read the nominations criteria [here](#).

For women to have a voice, they need to be equally represented in all areas of decision-making, at all levels, and be able to participate with impact through the removal of formal and informal barriers. Agenda 2063 and especially its Aspiration 6, seeks "An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of women and youth", which is aimed to achieve gender equality and empower all

women and girls on the continent. Gender issues are also taken into account in Article 4L of the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU), a solid foundation for the continent's efforts to build an Africa in which equality is a reality. Progressively, the reality of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) has been demonstrated at the African Union in the implementation of the AU Gender Parity Project, which has ensured equal representation of women and men in most elected official positions of the Organisation, including the leadership of the Commission.

To ensure the reality of gender equality and women's empowerment is also achieved across the continent and to advance women's full and effective participation in decision-making and leadership positions, the African Union has over the years enacted policies, strategies and regulations that guide member states and regional bodies on gender mainstreaming to ensure that women's voices are amplified and their concerns fully addressed through, among others, effective implementation of legislation and proper financing of gender equality work. These existing commitments are elaborate on legal and binding treaties such as the [African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights and its Protocol on the Rights of Women](#) (Maputo Protocol), which have translated into political commitments at the level of Heads of State and Government, through the adoption of the [Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa](#); the AU Gender Policy; and the [AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#) 2018-2028. These commitments restates the responsibility by governments to develop national policies and priorities in accordance with their international and regional obligations and commitments to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women.

To strengthen women's agency in Africa, the African Union also adopted the Declaration of years 2020 to 2030 as the "Decade of Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion". The overall goal of the Decade of Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion is that every women must be able to work, be paid and participate in the economy of her country. This will involve examining the regulatory, legislative and policy context to determine the changes needed to foster the financial inclusion of women and to assist financial institutions in adopting approaches tailored to women, as separate market segment as well as their participation in key economic sectors. The new decade is preceded by African Women's Decade 2010- 2020 on "Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" which marked a critical time for African women to advance Gender Equality by accelerating the implementation of agreed global and regional commitments.

Recently in February 2021, ahead of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65), African Union Ministers in charge of Gender and Women's Affairs on the adopted a Common African Position (CAP) that seeks to advance women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life as well as the elimination of violence for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in Africa. The CAP makes great import of the continuous struggle for women across

the African continent spanning several centuries in the pursuit of parity and equal representation of women in public life. The CAP made note of the efforts in recent years made by governments, public and private institutions implement gender-responsive actions, to address the unacceptably high under-representation of women in the executive, legislative and judicial branches and political party rosters, national institutions, the civil service, as well as in the broader workforce.

Women make up about 50 per cent of the African population, they remain largely underrepresented in leadership roles across financial, investment and entrepreneurial markets. As a result of these longstanding gender gaps, the continent loses over 20 per cent of its GDP every year. The under-representation of women in leadership positions is attributed to existing and emerging challenges including the limited awareness among men and women on women's rights; unequal power relations, poverty, low access to education; inadequate sex and age disaggregated data on economic disparities; negative traditional norms; the limited database of women qualified for decision-making roles; the limited political will among the authorities to enforce temporary special measures for women including quotas for political party nominations and create women friendly human resource policies in the public sector; limited funds to implement action plans promoting women's rights; and ineffective lobbying and engagement by women's organizations.

Political commitment translating into action, backed by functional institutional and ample resource allocation into gender mainstreaming activities, will go a long way in addressing the hurdles and placing women and girls as equal to the task in all aspect of the continent's development agenda.

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