



Africa Women's Major Group Position Paper at the 4th African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

2-4 May 2018

Dakar, Senegal

Introduction

We, African Women's Major Group drawn from the African Union Member States, members of the global WMG, a coalition of more than 600 organizations focused on ensuring that gender equality and the rights of women and girls are centred in the sustainable development agenda that truly leaves no one behind. We are committed to upholding the rights of women and girls in all their diversities in the building and developing transformative, sustainable and resilient societies. Gender equality is central and cross-cutting to all of the SDGs and to actualizing a transformative agenda.

Gender inequality remains one of the most pervasive inequalities, evidenced by numbers of women and girls living in poverty and insecurity in many African countries. Laws and policies do not uphold the rights of women and girls and their abilities to make informed choices about their lives are curtailed. By not adopting and implementing gender responsive regional legal and policy frameworks that address systemic issues in the implementation of the SDGs, women and girls will not be able to thrive and achieve their ambitions. We know women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty, exclusion and the impact of environmental and climate change across the continent. Therefore solutions by, with and for women and girls as actors in sustainable development must be elevated to address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination from an approach that combines addresses systemic barriers while implementing a transformative agenda.

The empowerment of women and girls must be central and cross-cutting to all of the SDGs and the corresponding goals the First 10-year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063 under review at the Forum. African governments must turn commitments into action at regional level in recognition of this year's theme, "Transformation towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies." To ensure that the implementation process is inclusive and the most marginalized and excluded are not left behind, we call on African governments to take strategic action on the following concerns:

1. **Gender and age disaggregated** data is currently lacking and incomplete for many of the SDG Goals and targets and this makes it difficult to evaluate the impact of the SDGs on the lives of women and girls. Our governments must provide accurate, evidence-based, disaggregated, qualitative and quantitative data that is critical to monitoring progress and identifying gender gaps in the implementation of the 2030 and 2063 agenda.
2. **It is also vital that governments recognize the need to increase financing that recognize the needs of women and girls.** Governments should initiate progressive tax systems on wealth, capital and profits of the rich and corporations and strengthen strategies for curbing illicit financial flows including the establishment of an inclusive and resourced global tax body.
3. State actors must also **recognize the right of women and girls in all their diversities to participate in decision making processes at all levels** and their right to inclusive, transformative, sustainable and resilient societies.

Goal 6

Sub-saharan African countries suffer disproportionately from lack of access to clean drinking water and more burden is put on women and girls' shoulders since they are the main carriers of water in their families. Women suffer more from the failures of development by increasing their unpaid work and influencing their employment prospects. Lack of access to clean water and sanitation jeopardize women's and girls' safety and increase occurrences of rape and sexual assault when they have to walk for long distances to fetch water or reach toilets. One in ten girls in sub-Saharan Africa do not go to school during their menstrual cycle, which is according to some estimates at 20% of school time lost over a year. Lack of access to clean toilets, water and sanitation hinders girls from going to schools specifically in rural areas, menstrual hygiene management should be prioritized.

Recommendations:

- Invest in the education of girls including providing access to sanitation facilities for better menstrual hygiene management and invest in breaking the stigma around menstruation and raise awareness about it by pursuing initiatives that keep girls in school
- Improve access to safe drinking water for all but also in terms of the disparity in access between men and women, boys and girls.
- Ensure access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene services with particular attention to the needs of women and vulnerable people
- Entrench women participation in the development and decision making of water and sanitation infrastructure to ensure benefiting from indigenous knowledge.

Goal 7

Regarding goal 7, governments have to acknowledge that women constitute considerable percentage of people who are involved in generating energy from sources like coal and

firewood. It is imperative to ensure participation of women and girls in the value chain for new energy initiatives. Women and girl's ownership and control of energy should be prioritized. It is also worth mentioning that disadvantaged African women still suffer from the health hazards of unclean cooking.

Women are also less equipped with knowledge, information and skills about new energy because of the deeply embedded stereotypes and societal norms, governments should have gender sensitive programs to address these gaps.

Recommendations:

- Governments should increase investment in clean energy initiatives and ensure access to affordable clean energy sources for all.
- Governments should ensure there are regulatory frameworks that assure the participation of women and girls in all their diversities in alternative clean energy investments and developments including access to financing and control of these sources by removing barriers hindering participation.
- Governments should prioritize Indigenous knowledge on clean energy sources specifically women led initiatives and guarantee women inclusion in research and development and technology transfer.

Goal 11

Migration into cities due to loss of livelihoods and access to opportunities is leading to rapid urbanization in many African cities. And most cities are unable to accommodate the large of number of people including women and youth who are moving to cities to find better opportunities and most who end up living in slums. The lack of inclusion of women and girls in the development and implementation of gender sensitive urban policies results in few safe spaces in cities. Violence against women and girls is a reality as women travel across cities to work, women and girls often face harassment on public transport and this results in limited mobility. And due to conflict and security issues, women and girls living in rural communities are displaced to urban areas without jobs or safe spaces.

Also as result of rural-urban migration, trafficking of women and girls, their migration status puts them at great risk. We must also note the link between corruption and trafficking; bearing in mind that If governments were free from high level of corruption & impunity, there will be job security for women and girls. Thus there will be no need for women and girls to seek unsafe and risky sources of livelihood outside their countries.

As African countries harness the demographic dividend, family planning must be included in the measures that are implemented to address population growth, it should not be ignored.

Recommendations:

- Governments must ensure that the economic empowerment of women and girls include initiatives that recognize decent work, unpaid care labor and uphold women's rights
- African countries need to create safe spaces in cities including ensuring means of transportation that are affordable and accessible for women and girls in all their diversities. The spaces must be free from harassment and other forms of sexual violence especially women and girls no matter their migrant status
- African governments need to ensure food sovereignty by scaling up investments in agriculture and protecting the rights of women to land.
- African governments need to rise up to the challenge of urbanization, tackle waste and air pollution by implementing the polluter pay principle and build resilient infrastructures that are accessible and user friendly for all including persons living with disabilities to combat risks from natural disasters
- Governments need to ensure renewable energy access for clean and sustainable cities
- Governments need to tackle corruption and ensure that all funds are judiciously utilized to build confidence of citizens in the process building reliable systems
- Governments need to increase access to sexual and reproductive health information and services to address population growth by implementing the Maputo Plan of Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, the Continental Policy Framework on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, the Abuja Actions Towards the Elimination of HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria in Africa.

Goal 12

Many African countries continue to be a landfill for toxic waste of the developed countries which endanger the health and lives of people living in Africa. Current consumption and production patterns are contributing to the destruction of the limited resources and promote a culture of overconsumption and increased waste. Local and indigenous women have valuable knowledge on ecosystems and sustainable cycles for producing and consuming which governments should leverage.

Recommendations:

- Governments across Africa need to strengthen their regulatory frameworks to tackle the issue of dumping especially for electronic waste. They (governments) should respect and put into action the Bamako convention as well as policies, standards and regulations for production and consumption on the continent.
- Incentives and disincentives should be put in place to support the implementation of sustainable production and consumption models. Awareness raising about the importance of sustainable consumption is crucial here, governments should come up with policies to make consumers aware if the products they are consuming are genetically modified.
- Governments should hold corporations accountable for violations of sustainable production regulations.

- Information on seedlings, varieties and the consequences of their use should be clearly made available to the farmers at all levels.
- Information and education about the implications of use for improved goods, products and services imported into the continent should be made available to populations.
- Governments need to support, invest in and improve upon indigenous knowledge related to sustainable production and consumption.
- Safety and regulatory standards need to be set up, respected and implemented to ensure safety of consumers by governments across the continent.
- Governments should support women all along the value chain, especially in post-harvest and preservation mechanisms to prevent wastage and post-harvest losses.

Goal 15

In many African countries, women are the largest percentage of smallholder farmers and are often the custodians of the natural resources in their communities despite having numerous barriers to ownership of land. Their livelihoods and ability to care for their families is largely dependent on the land, ecosystems and other natural resources. Without proper care of the environment and ownership rights, women livelihoods is threatened. Involving women and girls in conservation efforts from design to implementation is critical in these communities in addition to protection of community lands from land grabbers.

Recommendations:

- Enact, review and implement and enforce policies and legislation related to conservation of natural resources including prevention of land grabs.
- Conserve and preserve land for agriculture and promote agricultural practices and indigenous knowledge that supports conservation
- Adopt and promote policies that increase access to land ownership by women and resources.
- As state party to Human and Peoples Rights African governments need to recommit to protection of women human and environmental rights defenders and the promotion of their work.