



**SUB-REGIONAL (ECOWAS) CONSULTATION ON GENDER PARITY IN DECISION MAKING  
STRUCTURES/INSTITUTIONS (POLITICAL)**

**AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION (AUC) IN PARTNERSHIP WITH INTERNATIONAL IDEA**

**23<sup>rd</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER, 2010**

**DAKAR, SENEGAL**

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***CONCEPT NOTE***

## Introduction

The African Union Commission and International IDEA launched a 5 year Joint Activity Plan (JAP) in 2008. The Joint Activity Plan is designed to support the African Union Commission in implementing its mandate related to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance that was adopted by the African Union in 2007. One of the stated objectives of the AU African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance is to “*promote gender balance and equality in the governance and development processes*”, The Gender component under the Joint Action Plan (JAP) is implemented in line with the defined JAP objectives, specifically the objective to;

- Promote sustainable democracy and a culture of peace in Africa through the popularization of the African Union shared values, such as democracy and good governance, credible elections, human rights, rule of law, gender equality, and regional cooperation and integration as encapsulated in the Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance;

The AU has been consistent in affirming and committing to the principles of gender equality. This commitment is reflected by the Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of African Women (2003), the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004), the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007) and the AU Gender Policy (2009). Importantly, in 2002, the AU Summit of Heads of States and Government concretised the parity principle by election of an equal number of male and female AU Commissioners.

International IDEA is an inter-governmental organization established in 1995 with Member States from all regions of the world. The African Member States of International IDEA are Botswana, Carpe Verde; Ghana; Mauritius; Namibia and South Africa. International IDEA’s mission is to support democracy building through providing comparative knowledge, assisting in democratic reform and influencing policies and politics. International IDEA views democracy as a political system marked by public participation and inclusion, representative and accountable government, responsiveness to citizens’ needs and aspirations, the rule of law and equal rights of all citizens without regard to class, sex, gender, ethnic or religious background. This implies that democracy requires a balanced participation of both women and men; otherwise democracy in any country where half the population does not participate in its daily work is incomplete.

## Background

The area of *Women in Decision Making* was prioritised as the area of focus for implementing the AU-IDEA JAP component on promoting gender equality. Women’s and men’s awareness/consciousness, knowledge and commitment to advance gender equality in political processes and institutions that can support democracy

building is therefore critical. This requires the engagement of both men and women in the democracy and gender discourse in order to facilitate conditions and opportunities for women and men to participate and be represented fully in political and democratic processes.

The AU Gender policy is premised on the fact that gender equality is critical in consolidating the democratic momentum and imperative for the development drive of the continent. Importantly, this continental policy position is reflection of individual and collective commitment by AU Member States to democracy and popular participation. Gender equality is now firmly enshrined as a democratic principle and practice in some countries' constitutions and is broadly seen and understood as a key issue in the pursuit for democracy, governance and development.

Critical in achieving the desired objectives of the AU position on gender equality is the imperative of reflecting gender parity/equality in decision-making structures at the national, regional and continental levels. The AU 50/50 gender parity principle is yet to be replicated and implemented at all levels of national, sub-regional and regional governance processes and institutions. Achieving the gender equality and women's empowerment/advancement is a grindingly slow process since it challenges one of the most deeply entrenched of all human attitudes and behaviours. It is recognised that the unequal participation and representation between men and women in decision making positions is in fact part of the broader issue of gender inequalities that are entrenched and perpetuated within society.

Against this backdrop, the challenge therefore is to translate the AU Gender policy from principle to action. In this regard, the January 2009 Conference of AU Head of States and Government has declared 2010-2010 African Women's Decade (AWD) in order to advance gender equality and women's empowerment through renewed focus and concerted efforts that accelerate the implementation of Dakar, Beijing and AU Assembly decisions on gender equality. The Women, Gender and Development Directorate of the AUC has developed the Road Map for AWD. One of the key areas of focus that is prioritised in the African Women's Decade: 2010-2020 Plan and Road Map is *Women in Decision Making Positions*.

Moreover, the 2011 January AU Summit on the theme Shared Values provides an opportunity for concerted effort to advance the AU agenda on gender. In establishing shared values as the theme for the 2011, the AU leadership have taken a decision that democracy, governance and other issues within the fold of shared values need to be a subject of further deliberation

## **RATIONAL**

In some countries relevant policies and legislation aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment have been adopted, but the implementation is slow and uneven across the African continent. As a result women are still under

represented in decision making positions in governments, civil society and the private sector in almost all African countries.

With respect to women's political participation and representation in positions of power and decision making, African countries with positive measures such as electoral quotas (legislated or constitutional quotas and voluntary party quotas) have fared well in terms of legislative seats held by women compared to countries without quotas. Some countries, namely Angola, Burundi, Mozambique, South Africa, Rwanda, and Uganda, have reached the Beijing Platform for Action benchmark of at least 30 percent of women's representation in Parliament. Rwanda has the highest percentage of women elected to parliament in the world, at 56.25 percent. Senegal has recently enacted a law on gender parity in electoral lists.

Though positive measures such as quotas may remain controversial, the outcome of the quota in Rwanda serves as a good example of the impact of an effectively implemented quota for addressing the representation gap between women and men. From the experience of the past few years, it is clear that without electoral reforms, implementation of positive measures such as electoral quotas, using regional and international gender equality agreements/instruments, advocacy and lobbying, countries in Africa will not achieve the target of a "critical minority" of at least 30 percent participation and representation of women in positions of power and decision making at all levels.

Indeed, some progress to increase women's participation and representation both qualitatively and quantitatively has been made especially at parliamentary/legislative level. However, in comparison to their male counterparts, women continue to face obstacles in the political arena and are clearly under represented at all levels of decision making (national, regional, district, community). The unequal participation and representation of women and men is evident in the predominance of men among parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, judiciary, local/regional authorities, heads of state/government, private sector executives.

On their own, positive measures such as electoral quotas are insufficient and do not remove all the gender based barriers that are encountered in both the private and public spheres. Such positive policy measures have to be underpinned by awareness raising advocacy to promote the need for equal participation and representation of men and women. The types of electoral systems and intra-party processes also have an impact on the effectiveness of quotas. Electoral systems and processes are vital to the functioning of democracy and therefore constitute one of the most important entrances to positions of power and decision making.

The continued lack of gender equality in political leadership in Africa points to some complexities which are a result of a multiple of factors. These include structural and institutional barriers which are driven by patriarchal and cultural attitudes as well as religious based value systems. Given the complexity of these issues and the fragile systems of democracy, concerted and robust multidimensional efforts are required

to address gender based obstacles in politics and positions of power and decision making.

### Objectives of the Consultation

The overall objective of the Sub-Regional Seminar is to leverage for effective measures to promote equal access in political processes and participation in decision making by both men and women. The specific objectives are to:

- Define priority actions and mechanisms to accelerate progress towards gender equality in political leadership;
- Identify strategies and share good practices for gender-sensitive transformation of political spaces and processes;
- Strengthen national and sub-regional alliances and partnerships to increase accountability on gender equality.

### Outputs

- Report on sub regional comparative knowledge on gender parity measures, the highlights of the report will be a component of the *Information Kit on Levelling the Political Field for Gender Equality in Political Processes: Making gender mission critical within Political Parties*
- Launch of the Global Quotas site in French [www.quotasproject.org](http://www.quotasproject.org) on knowledge resources and tools for use in the advocacy for gender parity in political leadership

### Key issues

- Access (mechanisms/strategies for getting in and retention of the gender balance in political leadership)
- Participating and transforming political spaces(mechanisms/strategies for influencing decision making and accountability for gender equality)

### Expected Outcomes and Way Forward

- Recommendations for national and sub-regional benchmarks to advance the AU African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance objective on gender equality;
- National level support and advocacy campaigns in partnership with national actors in countries where lobbying for positive measures such as quotas has been initiated
- Practical measures and strategies to ensure the implementation of the African Women's Decade:2010-2020 Plan and Road Map by a range of stakeholders/political actors;
- Compilation of lessons and experiences for developing an *Information Kit on Levelling the Political Field for Gender Equality in Political Processes: Making gender mission critical within Political Parties*.
- Integration of gender equality in the 2011 AU agenda on Shared Values

### Participating Stakeholders and Venue

Participants will be drawn from the thirteen (13) member States of the ECOWAS sub region, specifically Ministers responsible for gender and women's issues, Parliamentarians (men and women), Electoral Management Bodies, ECOWAS agencies/officials in charge of Democracy promotion, Election processes and Gender promotion, regional and national civil society organisations.

The Sub Regional Consultation which will be held in Dakar, Senegal is expected to be attended by a total of 55 key stakeholders. The Seminar will be held from 23<sup>rd</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER, 2010 at HOTEL JARDIN SAVANA Pointe Bernard – Petite Corniche

### **Organisation and Logistics**

The planning, organisation and holding of the Consultation is an initiative in accordance with the partnership agreement between the African Union Commission and International IDEA.

The Consultation will be conducted in French, English and Portuguese. It will consist of both plenary and break out sessions focusing on the analysis of political and electoral processes from a gender perspective and mechanisms to accelerate progress towards gender equality in political leadership. The Consultation will be conducted in a participatory approach that facilitates knowledge transfer and information sharing among the stakeholders.