3rd HIGH LEVEL PANEL ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

HELLED ON 8th-9th JULY 2016

IN KIGALI, RWANDA

REPORT OF THE 6th SESSION ON
GENDER EQUALITY AND GIRLS’ EDUCATION
The session on the theme of "Gender equality and women’s empowerment" took place on the July 9th 2016, during the 3rd African Union High Level Panel on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. The session was moderated by Dr. Rita Bissoonauth, Coordinator of the African Union with the following keynote speakers:

1. **Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi**, Special Envoy on Gender, African Development Bank (AfDB),
2. **H.E Dr, Mrs. Fatima Delladj-Sebaa**, AU Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriage,
3. **Ms. Hendrina Doroba**, Executive Director, Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)
4. **Ms. Valerienne Marie Maltemps and Ms. Patricie Uwase**, Awardees of Imbuto Foundation

The Session was divided in 3 sections, as follows:

   a. Girls voices
   b. Challenges
   c. Recommendations

### 1.1. Section 1: Girls voices

In introduction, the moderator outlined the importance of girls and women’s Education in Africa. She explained that Education is the key instrument to empowering more than half of the population on the continent. Dr. Rita also explained the mission of the AU/CIEFFA, which is to contribute to building an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa by ensuring that all girls and women have the required competencies to respond to life challenges, as well as sustaining Africa’s sustainable development. The mission of AU/CIEFFA is in line with the vision of Agenda 2063, which outlines that the African woman will be fully empowered in all spheres, with equal social, political, and economic rights and opportunities and enabled to fight against all forms of violence and discrimination.

In this first section, the aim was to listen to what young girls had to say on the challenges faced by girls in accessing and completing school for girls. They outlined issues of affordability such as, school texts, manuals and uniforms; and choice deprivation for poorer families who resort to keep girls at home to help with the chores, and cook for the household. They also identified issues in cultural beliefs that negatively exert pressures on the role, conduct and expectations of girls in African society.

Another challenge mentioned is the issue of Child marriage and Dr. Fatima Delladj-Sebaa explained how Child Marriage negatively obstructs girls and women’s Education and impacts on their Health, adulthood, ...etc. She explained the numerous efforts being deployed to eliminate it on different levels, such as the adoption of an African Common Position (ACP) to eliminate Child Marriage (ECM) by all African Members states and the nationwide launch across 15 African Member States of the AU campaign to ECM.

Ms. Doroba provided the issue of implementation in current gender-responsive policies and practices to enable change and impact outcomes at the grass roots levels. Another challenge highlighted by Ms. Doroba, was that learners are not equipped with skills matching the labor market. Ms. Doroba also outlined the issue of gender-biased learning and
teaching environments. She suggested using novel approaches by establishing gender responsive policies and practices that readily bear fruits for learners and teachers in the sector of Education; equally ensuring that learning adds value beyond the classroom into the pupils; and instituting Role models within the texts and capacity building training schemes for teachers to prevent and manage gender bias in learning and teaching environments.

Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi highlighted poverty as the precursor from which emanates the challenges in society aforementioned by the panelists such as issues of affordability, child marriage negative perceptions and cultural beliefs. She enlightened that these challenges linked from poverty worsen other important challenges peculiar to the girls such as malnutrition in school, early pregnancy, access to sanitary towels, toilet separations, walking distance school at crucial childhood times such as puberty and menstruation periods; as well as the role of girls as “moving infrastructure” in African society (where boys are left to go to school while girls are kept to take care of the household, collect firewood or fetch water).

1.2. Section 2: Challenges

In the second section, the objective was to learn and understand what are the challenges faced in the implementation of girls and women Education in the continent. Dr. Rita explained that Girls drop out from schools for many reasons: Early marriage and pregnancy, Gender-based Violence in and around schools, poverty, household chores, lack of gender-sensitive learning contents and environments. Out of 75% of girls starting school, only 8% finish in the African continent. Hence, simply getting girls into primary school does not ensure that Girls complete their schooling. Many programs or projects on the continent are in existence but many have not had the impact as outlined in their aims and objectives as set out. To these facts, each panelist was requested to underline the main challenges they encountered in their respective areas or institutions in view to achieve their aims set out for girls and women’s Education. The panelists were also required to answer why the desired impact is not obtained despite the many efforts and investments being deployed.

Ms. Doroba emphasized that the lack of impact is due to interventions promoting the Girl Child, which are implemented in silos. She outlined that civil society organizations (CSO) and community-based organizations have closely related goals but they fail to work together. The same challenge was detailed regarding Ministers in charge of Ministries of Gender, Education, Health, and Finance who have linked objectives, but also fail to collaborate to achieve similar desired outcomes.

Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi highlighted the lack of engagement from the domestic sponsors/donors and Private sector, which if reversed, is key to meeting the socio-economic needs of children and resolving the challenge of inadequate funding on the continent. She also accentuated the failure to work within close proximity of the educational and learning environment, which if addressed, is vital to harness the economy’s dividends from the ground up in the continent.

Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi denounced counterproductive conversation circulating on social media platforms, which state that investments in girls are being made at the detriment of investments in boys. She insisted that the Girl child was strongly disadvantaged on the continent and aimed to reassure that Gender equality programs were to the benefit of both boys and girls in African society.

Dr. Fatima Delladj-Sebaa highlighted the important alternative of making use of measures available at grass roots levels. The country case of the Republic of Malawi was provided, where a young
woman worked together with traditional Chiefs to keep girls in school, pay for their schooling at grass root levels and helped to curb the rate of Child marriages in the nation. Dr. Fatima equally put emphasis on the role to be played by governments in reinforcing law enforcement mechanisms at grassroots level to target offenders and protect the victims against Child Marriage.

1.3. Section 3: Recommendations

In the last section, Dr Rita requested the panelists:

i. to suggest what are the most creative and innovative ways to give girls equal access to Education and
ii. in which ways the international development communication can help to ensure that girls access and stay in schools.

The Imbuto Foundation mentioned its support for the girls, in paying for their tuition and organizing school visits with invited Role models (female leaders and experts in their own fields). The Imbuto Foundation explained such visits aimed to remind the girls of the importance of schooling as well as inspire them with greater vision and values toward what they can be possible of achieving in all areas of their life.

Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi first, highlighted the educational projects that focus on critical skills acquisition and develop basic, intermediate skills development through TVET and Education training and that aim at gearing pupils towards employment creation and entrepreneurship. AfDB’s has invested of 1.6 billion $ usd in 36 educational projects with the view to reform current Educational systems, across low and medium income level countries of Africa at the Primary and Secondary Education.

The necessity to engage in better decision-making activities was also emphasized by Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi with regards to Governments, Public and Private Financing, as well as the international development community. Opportunity costs and Return on Investment were underlined as measuring tools to evaluate different budgetary allocations (such as, salaries, school materials) in the sector of Education. And, such decisions should be taken holistically in consideration of other main issues such as, water and sanitation, moving infrastructure, child marriage...

Last, the necessity of knowing why children are not in school was put forward by Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moloketi. To that effect, governments should institute accountability mechanisms targeting the parents. Besides, Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moloketi also reiterated the importance of instituting school visits with Role models to retain pupils and keep them inspired particularly of the possibilities available in ICT and Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) subjects.

Ms. Doroba provided various recommendations to engage the different actors on the continent. Firstly, developmental partners can help promote girls Education by investing more in the Information Systems in order to the right and gender-sensitive data to work with. Secondly, African Member States ought to align girls’ Rights with core elements of gender inclusiveness and parity. Member States should also provide specific facilities for better learning environments that are gender-responsive as well as safe and free from Gender Based Violence. Lastly, the different CSOs can come together in order to further collaborate in the monitoring activities of the commitments made by African Member States.

Dr. Fatima underlined the importance of making school compulsory and free in African Member states. She also explained that Governments and relevant Ministries of Education should increase budgetary allocations in targeting high indirect costs of schooling (such as buying of uniforms, school learning materials...) and ensuring retention of girls and boys in school.
1.4 Conclusion

In conclusion of the session, Dr. Rita welcomed the recommendations from the floor and the Ministers of Gender offered the following key recommendations:

- Food security, Nutrition and school Feeding programs have to be acknowledged for their positive externalities into girls and boys education and societies on the continent.
- A Coordination Committee should be established including the Ministries of Education, Gender, Health for girls and women education in Africa.
- Key Sanitary Facilities and premises should be availed to ensure safe schooling learning environments that are free from sexual harassment, corruption and endangerment to girls.
- Direct and Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes should be availed for young mothers with children enrolling in school, completing schooling, getting regular check-ups at the doctor’s office and receiving vaccinations.
- Sensitization campaigns should be launched for the benefits of girls education across Africa.
- Law enforcement mechanisms have to be strengthened to support the protection of girls. Boys and men equally have a role to play in securing and supporting the girl child.

It is worth noting that the Chair of the Specialized Technical Committee on Gender and Women Empowerment and also Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare of the Republic of Malawi assured all in attendance that the main recommendations derived from the 3rd AU HLP will be considered, with prior consultation with the Minsters of Foreign Affairs, to the Permanent Representatives Council and afterwards, to the Heads of States and governments of the Member states during the African Union Summit also held in Kigali, Rwanda.

A questionnaire was circulated so that the members of the audience can equally contribute their recommendations to the session. The recommendations consolidated from the circulated questionnaire are attached Appendix A.
Appendix A.

The recommendations consolidated using the circulated questionnaire from the public in attendance in terms of recurrence are as follows:

1. Education from primary to secondary school should be free and mandatory for all children.
2. School Feeding programs should be supported in encouraging poor families to keep their children in school.
3. Review discriminative laws and policies and make room to promote, support, and encourage good practices.
4. Create more awareness at the grassroots level targeted at traditions and support leadership that challenges negative cultural practices.
5. Scholarships should be provided for girls at secondary and university levels.
6. Encourage Girls only hostels in secondary and university levels.
7. Build separate toilet facilities in schools for girls, provide sanitary towels and reintroduce Family Life Education and Adolescents Reproductive Health and Rights programs.
8. Initiate programs and activities, which bring change and improve the livelihood of women.
9. Identify strategies to enable pregnant women to continue with their Education.
10. Develop follow-up mechanisms and plans for every child until completion of university.
11. Identify means to finance and support Gender Ministries in their guiding and leading roles of projects.
12. Encourage the Media to highlight the main issues hindering the progress and promotion of girls and women.
13. Urge the African Heads of states to invest in girls’ and women Education in the view of women empowerment.
14. Special focus should be put into war affected areas and intervention methodologies including Free education, Feeding in school, mobile school...
15. Promote career guidance programs to enhance career development for children.
16. Provide appropriate teaching and learning materials that should incorporate Innovation and Technology aspects to encourage girls and boy to stay at school.
17. The Government, the Private sector and Faith based-organizations should work together to support girls in their completion of the secondary education level.
18. Permanent centers should be developed to train on Human Rights with a focus on women’ rights in each country.
19. Adult and continuing Education programs should target older adolescents and women.
20. Creation of an inter-ministerial joint committee to solve harmonization problems related to school dropout.
21. Role models should be encouraged in schools and in organizing school camps.

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1 Pictured from left to right: Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Special Envoy on Gender, African Development Bank; Two young girl awardees—pictured 2nd and 4th from left in the picture (Ms. Valerienne Marie Maltemps and Ms. Patricie Uwase) of the Imbuto Foundation of H.E First Lady of the Republic of Rwanda, Mrs Jeannette Kagame; Dr. Rita Bissoonaauth—pictured 3rd from left on the picture Coordinator of the AU International Centre for girls and Women Education in Africa; Ms. Hendrina Doroba, Executive Director, Forum for African Women Educationalists; and H.E Dr, Mrs. Fatima Dellaďj-Sebăa, AU Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriage.