



**THE ROLE OF AFRICAN  
WOMEN LEADERS IN THE POST  
2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA &  
+ BEIJING REVIEW PROCESS**

**Urgent Action Africa for Women's Human  
Rights**



## ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS: THE ROLE OF AFRICAN WOMEN LEADERS IN THE POST 2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA & +20 BEIJING REVIEW PROCESS

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### Introduction

Urgent Action Fund–Africa (UAF-Africa), under the *Women Steering Innovative Leadership in Africa dialogue series*, in partnership with The Human Rights Program at Harvard Law School and Ford Foundation, are convening round table discussions on **The Role of African Women Leaders in the Post 2015 Development Agenda and the +20 Beijing review process**. The two day convening scheduled for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2015 in the USA, will bring together fifty dynamic African women leaders (prioritising young women) from across the socio- economic and political arena; women’s rights advocates, femocrats, academics, human rights champions, United Nations (UN) representatives, corporate & media women and thought leaders from across the US political, business and human rights arena and beyond to galvanize success stories, struggles, innovations, knowledge, history, networks and connections that articulate, advance and ground women’s leadership as a landmark agenda for global integration, development and social change.

The convening will prioritise and attempt a methodology that gets participants out of the mosttravelled ways of thinking, to stimulate women leaders to be more curious and explicit about experiencing their leadership differently-we all know that reproducing the same old strategies will not likely transform society. The convening participants will be encouraged to embody new ways of being, seeing, thinking and acting in order to plant and ultimately harvest transformational change in their spheres of influence and countries. The thinking behind the convening is to coalesce new and dynamic constituencies into this domain-untraditional thinkers and actors who challenge and inject new energies and perspectives to women’s leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The intention should be to bridge theory and practice in ways that nurture collective understanding and practices that inform, enhance and elevate women’s

leadership, in Africa. It is envisaged that through engaging in this high level multi-disciplinary women leaders constituency, the platform can bring about visible innovative strategies and patterns that could ultimately lead to a tipping point in further developing and sustaining the capacity of women leaders to create more equitable internal and external impacts for gender equality.

### **Background: Beijing Platform for Action**

The world has changed in important ways for women's rights and gender equality since the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995, an epic event that produced a globally agreed 'roadmap' to gender equality and that remains a reference point for governments and for women's movements alike until today. Changes have been uneven at best, mirroring the complex path that social transformation requires and the call to action for a more holistic approach. Today the world is struggling with conflicts that are seeking to establish Islamic States. Ebola is raging and affecting women in destructive ways, climate change is threatening livelihoods. These issues took centre stage at the 69th UN General Assembly (UNGA). They are complex issues that require multifaceted and difficult solutions. At the UNGA, it quickly became apparent that without equal participation of women, the world stands no chance of tackling these global quandaries or mitigating future ones from surfacing.

As the world marks 20 years since the adoption of the Platform for Action, the review process coined Beijing +20 is an opportune moment to critically assess progress, detours as well as remaining gaps and challenges. It is a galvanizing process that has the potential to reaffirm and strengthen political commitment, mobilize old and new actors, and advocate for the investments required across the spectrum to realise gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment. Nonetheless the review has to be grounded, realistic and contextualized as there is the risk of achieving a statistical success and moral failure.

There is no doubt that gender equality and women's rights agenda are experiencing a deep crisis of implementation. There is also no argument for not believing that the operating environment for gender equality has shifted for the positive, albeit, in variable degrees. Feminist activism and coalitions of the willing have resulted in more than 125 countries enacting legislations criminalizing violence against women, more than 178 countries with laws requiring paid maternity leave, and more than 40 countries with electoral quotas for women. Heaps of action plans and policies to advance gender equality have been developed, together with thousands of jobs worldwide for "gender advisors" for governments, multilaterals agencies, International NGOs (INGOs), private companies and donors. Studies have shown, however, that lack of accountability and entrenched patriarchal practices often thwart the bestintentioned efforts, leaving gender discrimination as the prevailing norm. Technocrats in the women's rights sector often say, "We know a lot about why and too little about how to advance gender equality". Surprisingly, a considerable number of prestigious institutions; the World Bank to Goldman Sachs, Deloitte & Touché – have entered the 'women's empowerment' space,

generating data and positing that 'investing in women is smart economics' and good for development. The internet has become a formidable vehicle for influencing ideas and cultivating knowledge, showing us how millions of women and men pour out onto the streets of Delhi to protest the rape and death of a young woman student; how the harassment of women activists by Islamists in Egypt and Sudan generates outrage and solidarity with men. New actors and actions are essential for progress on gender equality; at the same time, their actions leave the deep structures of inequality largely intact, with women either instrumentalized as 'engines' of development or as 'victims' needing protection.

### **Post 2015 Development Agenda**

The United Nations' post-2015 development agenda is currently under discussion. Seventeen new goals are on the drafting board, including proposals to end poverty, eliminate hunger, attain healthy lives, provide quality education, attain gender equality and reduce inequalities, sustainable use of water and sanitation, energy for all, productive employment, industrialisation, protection of terrestrial ecosystems and strengthening the global partnership for sustainable development. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other targetbased, results-focused regimes have generated data on the results of investing in concrete resources for those most excluded from development. Women now constitute nearly 22 per cent of parliaments worldwide, up about 12 percent since 1997. At the same time, the quality and safety of education girls receive is variable, low-income rural girls in most countries too often fail to benefit, nearly two thirds of all employed women in developing countries work in vulnerable employment, and at the current rate of progress it will take close to 50 years to reach the parity zone in parliaments.

Therefore while attaining gender equality as a proposed goal is certainly welcome, more nuance and elaboration is imperative for gender equality to be a cross cutting theme across all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Amongst the issues that must be addressed under is women's control over assets and "securing food sovereignty based on the recognition of small holder farmers and fisherfolk, particularly women, as key economic actors whose right to use and own land and access rivers, lakes and seas should be protected against land and resource grabbing". The latter recommendation is among 22 vital recommendations that were issued by the Women's Major Group, which recognized women as one of the nine major groups of civil society whose participation in decision-making is essential for achieving sustainable development. It is pivotal that there be a specific focus on ensuring that the resources and political will generated by the post-2015 framework play a meaningful part in moving this agenda forward.

Another critical agenda whose relevance permeates throughout the eight agendas is conflict transformation, specifically conflict prevention. Conflict and violence have been perennial barriers to achieving the MDGs for women and girls. For example, in 2008, all eight of the countries with the highest maternal mortality ratios were in, or emerging from, violent conflict. In addition, 20 percent of the countries that the World Bank categorizes as 'fragile or conflict affected' have not been able to meet the basic poverty reduction target. In conflict affected and fragile

countries where over 1.5 billion people live and where there are the greatest levels of poverty and least progress towards the MDGs, conflict prevention, political stability, democracy and rule of law must be a priority. There is therefore a need to link conflict transformation, democracy, human development, and economic growth to gender equality for a more sustainable development framework.

The Post 2015 Agenda and +20 Beijing review process are therefore a critical spaces for African citizens, civil society organizations and particularly for African women, youths and other marginalized groups to engage. Women's organizations have been instrumental in ensuring that the Post 2015 consultations are driven, influenced and shaped by the voices and experiences of the millions of African citizens on the ground. As deliberations continue on the priorities for the Post 2015 development agenda, it is critical to be mindful and purposeful of inclusivity and particularly ensure that gender equality is central to the framework. Women need to lead and guide the discussions that essentially shape and orient their day to day lives. Gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment need to be integrated consistently across the entire framework through data collection disaggregated by sex and gender, sensitive targets and indicators.

Lessons from the MDGS indicate that it is not sufficient to have a gender-specific goal, but rather, goals that are dedicated to gender equality must be explicitly established, in addition to mainstreaming a gender lens throughout all the goals. Already, Urgent Action Fund- Africa has supported several organizations across Africa to ensure that the consultations are representative and reflective of the complex web of development contributing factors. We know for sure that whoever narrates the story shapes history. Therefore, African women, in partnership with their global women's movement allies need to collectively organize and strategise-elevating their voices and presence in strategic spaces of power, at home and internationally, hence the convening in Washington DC, at this time, in our history, aligned to the 59<sup>th</sup> UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to be held from 9<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2015.

### **Why are we going to Harvard?**

UAF-Africa is interested in building collaboration across large populations and disciplines by creating a web of multiple constituencies and stakeholders, engaging, involving, and mobilising until there is a critical mass of people who can move together on a common path that tackles huge mountains created by patriarchy, class, homophobia, religion and other differences. Even in the most technologically advanced world, we still need face to face meetings, communication and the opportunity for sharing information and responding personally to each other.

We are living in a complex world, the world has shifted and we need to enhance our own capacities by thinking beyond our local capacities; hence the importance of thinking locally, regionally and globally, seeing the interconnectedness of issues and then acting locally.

Harvard is strategic. The Human rights programme at Harvard plans [events](#), directs international conferences and roundtables on human rights issues and publishes [working papers](#) and [books](#). It also works closely with the International Human Rights Clinic, as well as human rights organizations in the United States and abroad, to bridge theory with practice and reflect on the current state of human/women's rights. The Harvard's Human Rights Program extended their hand to UAF-Africa to co-host a two day dialogue related to African women's leadership.

The convening is an opportunity because it is taking place during CSW 59th Session; it is a platform that we need to take advantage of. It will also help us to enhance what we started in Malawi where we convened women and men from over 30 African countries working in diverse fields and thematic areas to discuss the role of women in shaping the discourse of 'African Women's leadership'.

### **Who is going to be there?**

Women leaders (and a few men) who have knowledge and influence, understand Africa, our values and how our different thematic areas of economic justice, media and strategic communications and political leadership consisting of conflict transformation and democratic governance interact with each other.

### **What we want to achieve?**

- Create a robust platform, lead debates and discussions on critical issues affecting the African woman such as militarisation and insecurity, and what we believe the role of African women should be and are doing, thus setting up a position for ourselves.
- Engage more multi-sectoral/disciplinary allies and hence increase the culture of collaboration, including the integration of global voices and the sharing of ideas, information, practices and experiences needed for transformative leadership development.
- Be a source of knowledge and influence by telling our own narrative regarding how social investment in women's leadership can re-shape local, national and global approaches to critical issues such as militarisation and illicit Financial Flows from Africa. In the process, correct the views of the media and the way they continue to portray African women as the poorest of the poor, waiting to be rescued by the donors.

### **Convening Strategy**

This convening is set to be a think space, a coming together of thought leaders and transformative actors who transcend geography, age and sectoral divides to reflect and map the stage for women's engagement and leadership in 2015 and beyond. Building on the two frameworks that shaped and instructed our thinking and actions on women's leadership, the convening will affirm and reclaim gender equality as a powerful requisite towards sustainable development. We will reflect and strategize on positioning women as a leadership reserve with grounded experiences from across the globe that epitomise the power that exists in women's leadership. Under the auspices of UAF-Africa's Women Steering Innovative Leadership in Africa initiative and Wilson's Center Global Women's Leadership Initiative, we are combining efforts and leveraging global knowledge and experiences for a deeper and wider impact on women's leadership across the globe.

The convening will also bring the valuable opportunity to meet, discuss contemporary and pertinent trends and issues, network and build contacts among women leaders in an environment that sparks and fosters knowledge generation.

### **About Urgent Action Fund- Africa**

As the first Rapid Response Fund in Africa, UAF-Africa adds value to the work of women's rights activists and organisations through provision of critical financial and technical resources to support the power of women to activate social change. This enables activists to take actions that are time-sensitive and to embark on innovative and bold initiatives that are often catalytic in surfacing issues while promoting and supporting broad dialogue and debate on the issues. The discourse between development and human rights, particularly women's human rights, has been increasingly disparate, with organisations working exclusively on development agendas or on human rights agendas. Women's human rights defenders find they are speaking parallel to other discourses on development, democracy, governance, politics, economics and others.

Inspired by the ongoing Post 2015 Development Agenda conversations and the +20 Beijing review process; UAF-Africa is embarking on innovative and bold initiatives to make a greater difference in her work and that of her partners and grantees. The Women Steering Innovative Leadership in Africa initiative is invigorating the approach to leadership by boldly bringing together several concepts; pan-Africanism, feminist, some human rights sensitive business approaches to leadership, drawing examples from "traditional" and "non-traditional" leadership sources, and women as equally vested members of community who can speak to all areas of society and development. The initiative is infusing new energy and prompt, bold and daring ideas among UAF-Africa partner organisations. The activities and partnerships are crafted to ensure a healthy skills exchange, capacity enhancement for the young women leaders as well as for partner organisations. In addition, UAF-Africa's Rapid Response Grant making work, her core business, will incorporate a focus on catalyzing and enhancing organic womenled initiatives to enhance

women's leadership and contribute to economic and human growth spearheaded by African women for Africa.

### **About the Ford Foundation**

The Ford Foundation supports visionary leaders and organizations on the frontlines of social change worldwide. The Ford Foundation Eastern Africa's goal is to advance reforms in land, livelihoods, rights, media and civic participation, particularly for women and youth. They support efforts to build a more democratic environment as well as to advance women's rights and reproductive health, agriculture-based rural development, and free expression.