NGO CSW
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African Women's CSW65 Advocacy Position and Recommendations

"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."

The *African Women's CSW65 Advocacy Position and Recommendations* were developed following a virtual consultation with over 300 women's and civil society organizations, feminists and advocates from more than 48 African countries and the diaspora that met on the 15th February 2021 to deliberate on the Africa CSOs position on the theme of the CSW65.

FEMNET as a co-chair of the NGO CSW/Africa convened the drafting working group which included:- Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), SERVITAS Cameroon, Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), Gender Links, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), Women for A Change, Cameroon (Wfac), Zamara Foundation, KADIRAT, and Khafagy, Tha'era, Arab Women Network for Parity and Solidarity.

We would like to acknowledge the participation and contribution of all the women and girls in their diversity with special mention of the young women, women with disabilities, gender non-conforming persons and women living in rural and informal settings that provided written submission. We note the diversity of the continent and vastness of the issues that the CSW65 theme and the COVID-19 context provides, and while we might not have included every contribution made, an effort was made to cover and be inclusive as much as possible.

These *African Women's CSW65 Advocacy Position and Recommendations* were presented to the Africa Virtual Regional Consultation on CSW65 convened by the UN Women, the African Union Commission (AUC) and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) on 22nd – 23rd February 2021 for the gender technical experts consultations and the Ministerial Consultation on 26th February 2021.

We would like to thank the usual support from the AU Gender Directorate, UNECA and UN Women in ensuring women's and civil society organizations and feminists networks participate in and contribute to the resulting outcomes of the Africa Virtual Regional Consultation on CSW65.

Preamble

We, African women and girls in all our diversity, in solidarity with representatives of civil society organizations working for advancement of women and girls human rights, gender equality, reproductive, economic, ecological and social justice and political transformation, have gathered virtually for the pre-CSW65 Africa conference on 15th of February 2021.

In this time of rising global inequalities, exacerbated by COVID-19, the very slow pace on the continent in increasing the number of women in leadership and decision-making positions. There is evidence of continued multiple barriers to women and girls' effective participation in public life; growing fundamentalism and conservatism. COVID-19 also revealed increased rates of violence against women and girls; increased burden of unpaid care and domestic work, massive loss of jobs for women in the informal sector and unemployment for young women and women with disabilities growing insecure land rights and limited control over natural resources for women and girls, shrinkage of spaces for civil society, violent extremism and preeminence of and re-enforcement of patriarchy. Therefore, this current CSW65 theme of "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" could not be more prescient if these commitments are to be realized by 2030.

It is the time to address the structural inequalities manifesting themselves through economic models which are not equal, not inclusive and not sustainable which discriminate and marginalised women particularly rural women and those living in urban informal settlements. In fact, women's full participation in decision-making and empowerment of all women and girls in their diversity is central to ensuring gender justice and fulfillment of women's human rights.

CSW65 theme is not new and has been explored several times over the years, many projects were conducted with the aim of increasing women participation in the decision making and leadership positions, yet women remain underrepresented across the different levels of leadership and violence is still a burning issue affecting women from all social and economic backgrounds. This year's theme is, in fact, a multi-layered theme and there is a need for new innovative ways to increase women's leadership and decision making positions.

The participation of women in decision making and leadership positions and the elimination of violence against women and girls cannot be addressed without its linkages and intersection with other issues such as economic justice, reproductive justice, bodily autonomy, sexuality, access and control over land and natural resources, climate change, access to technological developments, development and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that negatively impact African women and girls in all their diversity.

It is critical in reviewing the theme of CSW65 to recognise that it places emphasis on women's FULL and EFFECTIVE participation in PUBLIC LIFE. This therefore must recognise the role of women beyond holding an elective or appointive roles in public office. It includes all the ways in which women and girls can exercise their voice and agency as they meaningfully participate in public life as citizens, as rights holders, experts and technocrats, contributors and consumers of public policy and public services. The role of women and girls in communities and local institutions of society is as important as the national roles, just as we equally seek to recognise the role of women in diplomacy and the international multilateral institutions.

We strongly encourage the Commission to adopt strong language that acknowledges the centrality of human rights for women throughout their life cycle, from girls to young women to adults and to older women, in the Agreed Conclusions. We demand a holistic, crosscutting, human rights-based approach to the challenges that affect African women and girls in all their diversity.

We, therefore, urge the African Member States to uphold the following principles and values including those in the Africa Feminist Charter in the Agreed Conclusion:

► Member states should promote the rights of women and girls across their life-course through promoting access to effective gender-transformative public services, social protection systems and sustainable infrastructure that aim to tackle the root causes of gender inequality – such as unequal power relations and discriminatory norms and practices.

► Member states should facilitate the shift of power from predominantly male domination to shared roles and responsibilities with women, in order to achieve gender equality, development justice, and peace through material and structural change towards women and girls' human rights, social, political and economic transformation in all their diversity.

► Member states should recognise patriarchy as a deep seated structural and an predominantly underlying negative value system that must be dismantled in order to achieve gender equality.

► Member states should acknowledge that the current capitalist and neoliberal economic model and structures rob women the value of their labour and contribution to the economy and do not recognize the value of the unpaid care, thus keeping invisible domestic labor of African women and girls in their diversity. Member states must develop and implement policies that recognize the central role of the labor of women and girls, especially reproductive care and domestic work and reduce exploitation of women and girls in particular the most vulnerable and marginalized.

► Member states must commit to regularly carry out national time use surveys and the resulting data should be factored into the Systems of National Accounts. This will inform decision making processes, lead to evidence based and informed processes of developing and resourcing gender-responsive policies and budgets, and valuing unpaid care as a main contributor to the country's GDP.

► Member states must commit to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work .They must have representation of african women and girls in decision making spaces as they repritoritize care and decent work in our economies and societies.

► Member States should ensure equal participation of women and girls in securing land tenure and control of natural resources as fundamental to their heritage, identity and important for advancing peace, economic justice and managing effects of climate change in the content.

► Member states should acknowledge that the current capitalist and neoliberal economic policies often support patriarchy by shrinking resources women own, access and control hence resulting in marginalisation of women and shrinking of resources they own and control such as land, forest and water.

► Member States should guarantee that all women and girls in all their diversity obtain civil status, an essential key to the full participation of women and girls in public life, these documents (birth certificate, national identity card , marriage certificate or document, etc.) make it easier for girls to enroll in school and for women to draw up files to run for elected office or to choose their representative.

Emerging Issues and Priorities for African Women and Girls in all their Diversity

We have identified the following as critical and emerging issues for African women and girls in all their diversities;

🔴 *Women and leadership*

Leadership in Africa for women and girls' in all their diversities' is still lacking due to many barriers such as; restrictive laws, cultural diversities and practices, retrogressive and negative attitudes towards women's leadership, institutional barriers, as well as disproportionate access to quality education, healthcare, and resources. Reversing these discriminatory practices is not impossible, and can be achieved by implementing the right mechanisms across the continent. Beijing Declaration Platform for Action in its critical concern of women in power and decision-making calls for government measures in ensuring equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making and calls for the inclusion of political quotas to increase women in decision making. Quotas should be complemented by programmes to prevent future gender discrimination and harassment, and include policies that ensure employers and human resource departments will work with the policebetter use law enforcement than 'Police' to report crimes of violence and harassment where it is desired by the victim. Criminalization alone can work, governments through relevant line ministries, departments and agencies must work with civil society actors and communities to address and shift negative gender and social norms that contribute to leadership gaps. The current electoral and political systems are designed to exclude women, women are silenced and expected to tow the party line and it is exclusionary and expensive to mount a credible campaign and enter the political fray. Furthermore, women's and girls' continue to face barriers which affect their active and meaningful participation at all stages of the peace and reconciliation processes in the region remains limited, and that their priorities and experiences are not given due attention.

🔴 *Violence against women and girls*

Violence against women and girls is a violation of human rights and a significant barrier to women and girls' in all their diversity ability to thrive economically, socially and politically. Persistent and new forms of violence against women and adolescent girls in all their diversity are fueled by deep-seated patriarchy, radicalisation, conservatism, militarisation, extractivism, technology, and conflict, , socio-cultural constraints, violent extremism, climate change, which require multiple and multi-layered interventions by

different actors. Particularly vulnerable to multiple and intersecting forms of violence are sex workers, women human rights defenders, women of sexual and Gender minorities, women who use drugs, women living with HIV/AIDS, displaced, migrant and, women in domestic care work, refugee and internally displaced.

women and girls, indigenous and women in rural and conflict areas. Examples of this are criminalisation of marginalized groups; stigma as weapons of fueling violence against women and girls; harmful cultural practices; digital and cyber violence; and sexual harassment in public and private spaces, especially in learning institutions and the workplace.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly magnified the socio-economical and political situation of African women and girls to effectively live and fully participate in public life. COVID-19 pandemic-related measures and lockdowns, the need for household chores and care has multiplied demands for care and domestic work done by women and excaberated multiple forms of Economic based violence against women and girls. The COVID-19 global crisis has exposed the fact that the world's economies and our daily lives are made possible by the unpaid care work of women and girls, which is often invisible, undistributed,under-valued and under-appreciated. Furthermore, the economic fallout, including loss of jobs and livelihoods, is expected to push millions of additional people into extreme poverty – and women and girls especially those from marginalized areas stand to be the hardest-hit. Women's representation in crisis mechanisms and committees established to respond to the impact of COVID-19 is lacking, hence policies are not addressing the gender perspective with regards to the impact of COVID-19.

The right to access health

Women and girls in all their diversities are concerned that the enjoyment of the rights to the highest attainable physical, psychological and mental health has not been achieved in Africa. Maternal mortality remains a major public health issue in Africa; it is compounded by the many physical, economic, social, and psychological challenges especially for women and girls living in rural areas. Scattered settlements, poor health infrastructure, shortage of qualified health-care personnel, transportation, and health awareness, harmful practices such as early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation and low levels of income and education continue to bring forth negative health outcomes for women and girls in Africa. The accessibility, accessibility, acceptability, and quality (AAAQs) healthcare especially on sexual and reproductive health and rights services are lacking. The unmet needs for contraceptives for young women and girls are linked to the increased teenage pregnancies and unsafe abortion deaths contributing to maternal mortality. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are critical to ensure empowerment for women, girls, and young people.

♀ Access to Education

Women, especially girls and young women's access, retention and completion in schools is still of huge concern in Africa. High illiteracy levels are linked to negative outcomes such as poor leadership skills, harmfull and restrogressive cultural practices,negative attitides and stereotyping based on traditional gender roles and increased risks of violence against women and girls. <u>UNESCO 2019 reports</u> indicate that 9 million girls of primary school age will never spend a day in school compared to about 3 million boys. In sub-Saharan Africa, which has the highest rates and numbers of out-of-school children, 4 million girls will never set foot in a classroom compared to 2 million boys. And due to the impact of COVID-19, many of the girls who were in school will not be able to return to school due forced marriages, unwanted pregnancy and the failing economy. This reality calls for doubling efforts to ensure education is quality and equitable if we are to achieve the Aspiration of Agenda 2063 and Sustainable Development Goal on Education.

♀ Economic Justice/unpaid care work

Rising global inequalities are a threat to the human rights of women and girls in all their diversities, and are directly caused by macroeconomic policies such as conditional development lending, unenforced taxation and tax dodging, inequitable free trade agreements, deregulation, and extractivism.

♀ Young Women and Girls Rights

It is African governments which advocated for the prioritisation of the girl child in the Beijing Platform for Action. The future of Africa is young and female yet the face of the African girl remains globally as the face of poverty, inequalities, conflict and humanitarian crisis and lack of access to basic services including health and education. Negative harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, as gross forms of violence and violations of multiple rights for girls continue to limit their potential and ability to participate effectively and fully in public life. Yet, with education, access to quality health including SRHR services, protection, positive and enabling cultural and policy framework, Africa can unleash this demographic gender dividend for the development of our nations.

♀ Secure Land Tenure and Control Over natural Resources for Women and Girls

Majority of women and girls in Africa, especially those living in poverty rely on land based resources for their survival. The African union has taken commendable steps to put in place valuable policy, legal and institutional guidelines towards ensuring that sustainable exploitation of land and natural resources benefits the african citizens. Many african states are in the process of reviewing and putting in place appropriate infractures towards people centred land governance. Unfortunately gender inequality in decision making levels related to control over land and natural resources in both

traditional and statutory levels persists. Evidence continues to show that while 60-80% of women and girls provide farmbased labour in agriculture only an average of 5-10% of women own land. Violence against women that is related to control over land and natural resources continue to rise and in many cases they loose their productive assets forcing them deeper to poverty and insecurity .

♀ *Access to ICTs*

Access to technology is now a public good, and not just a tool that is good to have. With increased reliance on technologies in particular mobile technologies due to COVID-19, it is important to remember that digital gender divide in Africa still remains a cause for concern. Girls and women have less access and ownership of technology including mobile technology compared to men and boys, this is sometimes exacerbated by cultural obstacles and social norms where technology is seen as a preserve for boys and men. In the home set up, a boy is more likely to be given a phone or allowed access to a mobile phone by guardians as compared to a girl. Research has shown that early exposure to technology improves the likelihood of uptake of technology by women and girls later in life Additionally, as countries move land information from manual to digital system, it's essential to put in place mechanisms that ensure the digital divide does not further exacerbate womens and girls insecure land tenure. Research has shown that despite increasing internet penetration on the continent, the digital gender gap has widened. There's a need to reverse this gender bias through promotion of content that is attractive to women and girls, embedding gender in all ICT programs as well as gender disaggregated data to guide all interventions. This is in addition to women and girls being increasingly targeted for cyber bullying and violence which lead to 'fear' or lack of interest in technology and digital services, to the extent that some women and girls resort to using pseudonyms. A recent study by Policy found that" 28% of women interviewed in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Senegal, and South Africa had experienced some form of online harassment. Women and girls cannot afford to get left behind in this new technology age. COVID-19 has shown that technology could be a lifeline for all women and girls if they have access to it in terms of education, protection, economic stability and access to services.

Our Call to Action

We recognise that achieving gender equality and women empowerment is a shared responsibility of different stakeholders, we, therefore, call on the member states, development partners, state and non-state actors to:

Commit to increasing women's participation in all their diversities in leadership and decision-making positions;

► Implement gender quotas to ensure women's equal participation in leadership through the full implementation of the Maputo Protocol and SDGEA in their national and legal frameworks as well as their Constitutional quotas. Quotas should be complemented by programmes to prevent future gender discrimination and harassment, and include policies that ensure employers and human resource departments will work with the police to report crimes of violence and harassment where it is desired by the victim.

► Prevent the proliferation of small arms: Governments, arms companies and arms dealers must be held accountable for transferring arms in situations where they fuel conflict and grave breaches the Sustainable Development Goal target 16.4 which calls for a significant reduction in illicit arms flows by 2030. Continue to support the call to action by UN leadership urging all parties to silence the guns and end airstrikes, disarmament, arms control and shifting military spending to social investment so that together we can focus on defeating COVID-19 and building an equal and sustainable future for all. Parties should increase the representation and participation of women in negotiations; peace agreements with gender equality provisions are increased.

► Enhance women's political participation and influence; stimulate women's economic empowerment and working conditions; and decent work, strengthen national accountability on gender equality and women's empowerment.

► Ensure that women and girls effectively participate in all the decisions related to the governance and administration of land and natural resources at the local, national and regional levels.

► Recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work so that young and senior women can be released to have time to engage in politics, trade and entrepreneurship as well as provide inclusive social protection for caregivers to mitigate the effects of the overload of unpaid care. It is high time that domestic and unpaid care work be recognized, reduced, redistributed and, ultimately, supported through concrete policy action, including through broad

investments in the care economy. Adequately remunerating care workers— the majority of whom are women— would be an important step in priming the pump of economies worldwide.

► Governments should conducting regular gender-audits in political parties, electoral management bodies (EMBs) and Government Departments should monitor progress towards gender responsive electoral laws that prevent women from becoming candidates in the elections.

► Safeguard women parliamentarian from all sexual assaults and threats against them online and offline.

Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls and harmful cultural practices

► Strengthen their response to all forms of violence against women and girls in all their diversity by, putting into action the measures outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Governments should pass laws to make sexual coercion and domestic violence illegal and should provide/offer.

► Survivors of GBV safe care spaces, with safe, affordable, accessible, and youth-friendly health services, including mental health services and sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion.

► Eliminate patriarchal and harmful practices such as early and forced child marriage, breast ironing, conversion therapy and female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C). Collaborate with faith-based, religious and cultural leaders to address harmful social norms and practices.

Access to Health

► Member States should prioritize spending towards health, in line with the respective legal instruments and commitments (In Africa the Abuja Declaration, which provides for 15% of national budgets to be dedicated towards health). especially mental health being that it the most under resourced.

► Mainstream SRHR in women's empowerment programmes in rural settings with special reference to young, poor, and women living with disabilities and women living with HIV/AIDs and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and fistulas.

► Promote health sector accountability, hybrid approach to health and harness digital technology to promote monitoring and accountability on health, gender transformative approaches and Sexual and Gender Based Violence.

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- ► Recognize and implement reproductive justice as a manner of guaranteeing access to available, acceptable, quality, youth-friendly and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services, especially for adolescent girls and young women in all their diversity.

- ► Provide access to contraceptives and safe and legal abortion without discrimination, especially towards women living with HIV, women with disabilities, Sexual and gender minority women,women who engage in sex work or domestic work, and/or migrant women, in order to reduce rates of maternal mortality and to recognize women's right to choose if, when and how to have children.

- ► Strengthen accountability frameworks and systematic monitoring and reporting on maternal and perinatal deaths surveillance and response noting 61% of maternal deaths occur in fragile states, many of them affected by conflict and recurring natural disasters worldwide.

⚲ Access to education

- ► Remove the barriers to completion, retention and transition for women and girls including pregnant girls, young mothers and differently-abled women and to provide comprehensive education inclusive of Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) and Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) within and beyond schools, grounded in human rights and gender equality.

- ► Adopt effective measures to reduce infrastructural barriers, high illiteracy rates prioritize the education of young women, adolescents and girls and strengthen policies and programmes that ensure equal access to longitudinal education for all young people. Optimize on digital learning: Given that in 2016, access to the internet was declared a human right, Member States should set up and amplify digital infrastructure. This also includes ensuring that the government zero-rate educational content and avoid taxing educational content delivery. We emphasize the importance of gender-inclusive and accessible quality education including comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and mentorship and skills development, which will prepare young women, adolescents, and girls for decent work, equitable employment opportunities, and entrepreneurship. We urge governments to train educators on gender-sensitive policies and practices to end discrimination and stigma in academic settings.

⚲ Economic empowerment

- ► Invest in women's economic empowerment to advance gender equality, eradicate poverty and promote inclusive economic growth that seeks to shift the economic power.

► Ensure equal access and control of land and natural resources for all as an important fundamental human right as well as a driver for economic justice for women and girls in Africa.

► Recognize and ensure the full and active participation of girls and women and vulnerable populations, including refugees and internally displaced persons in addressing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 including the provision of stimulus packages and gender-responsive social assistance programmes to cushion citizens. This includes creating an enabling environment that supports women decent work; better access and control over resources, and greater security, including protection from violence.

► Ratify CEDAW and remove any reservations, implement UN Resolution 1325 and urgently ratify ILO convention 190 and recommendations 106 on Violence and harassment in the workplace.

► Enhance women's political participation and influence; stimulate women's economic empowerment and working conditions; and decent work, strengthen national accountability on gender equality and women's empowerment.

► Recognized, reduced, redistributed domestic and unpaid care work and, ultimately, support investments in the care economy through concrete policy action.

► Government and private sector must continue investing in women's economic empowerment to advance gender equality, eradicate poverty and promote inclusive economic growth. This includes creating an enabling environment that supports women decent work; equal pay, better access and control over resources, and greater security, including protection from violence and other human rights violations.

► Member states must deliberately establish fairer fiscal systems by raising revenues and investing in time and labour saving infrastructure such as child care facilities, healthcare,education, and social protection that are much needed by societies to thrive.

COVID-19

► Consider the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's participation, as well as how women's leadership at all levels is contributing to decision making on COVID-19 response and recovery.

► Call upon Member States to strengthening the technical capacity of the CDC structures by assigning female Gender Experts whose responsibility will be to mainstream a gendered lens to all COVID-19 response, recovery, and resilience.

► Adopt a gender lens in the implementation of the economic recovery plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

► Invest in care systems such as health care, social protection, education, water and sanitation to address the disproportionate burden of unpaid care done by women and girls.

► All infrastructure projects factor in gender data gap and gender disaggregated data is collected and analysed in all project planning, execution and monitoring and evaluation.

⚲ *Access to ICTs*

► Member States must commit to regularly collecting and publishing gender disaggregated data in the technology sector to inform policies and assess progress towards closing the digital gender gap. Member States should use this gender data and analysis to inform the development of policies, strategies and ICT sector investments.

► Member States should make accessible raw data in open and reusable formats so that researchers and others can do further analysis on this data and support new initiatives on women and technology.

► Member States should ensure that women and girls have the opportunity to improve their digital skills and information literacy so they can access, use and evaluate information, and use ICT's to their full potential to improve their lives and participate in decision making in their communities.

► Member States must commit to making technology affordable for women and girls through broadband plans that promote lowering costs of access to digital devices, services, skills and literacy programs.

► Member States should adopt an intersectional feminist and gender lens when creating national strategy and action plans to support technology education, innovation and leadership for women and girls. This strategy supported by investments and programmes — should include time-bound gender equality targets to support early stage female entrepreneurs, technologists and content creators of all ages to grow and flourish as creators of digital content, infrastructure and systems.

► Member States must develop and implement robust and comprehensive privacy and data protection legislation that addresses women's safety online and in particular that protects them from online abuse, harassment and threats of violence and respects their right to privacy.

For more information on CSW get in touch with the co-chairs of NGO CSW/Africa

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Follow and engage online on Twitter using the handle @NGOCSWAfrica and @NGO_CSW_NY and hashtags #CSW65Africa #CSW65.

NGO CSW/Africa is one of the regional forums of Non-Governmental Organization Commission on the Status of Women established in 2013 as a substantive committee under the auspices Conference of NGOs (CoNGO). NGOCSW/Africa was created to increase the effectiveness of African Civil Society participation in the Commission on the Status of women. Since its establishment NGO CSW/Africa has provided leadership to African women in mobilizing women to participate in CSW and ensuring that women effectively engage and contribute to processes leading up to, during and after the Commission. Members of NGO CSW/Africa include FEMNET – African Women's Development and Communication Network, FAS - Femmes Africa Solidarité, Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), SERVITAS Cameroon, Gender Links, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), Women for A Change, Cameroon (Wfac), Zamara Foundation, KADIRAT, and Khafagy, Tha'era, Arab Women Network for Parity and Solidarity.

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