4th High Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance in Africa: Trends, Challenges and Prospects

Women's Equal Participation and Leadership in Political Parties

Outcome Statement

7-8 December 2015 | Kigali-Rwanda

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THEME:
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Introduction

1. The Fourth Annual High Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance in Africa was held in Kigali, Rwanda from 7-8 December 2015 under the theme; *Women's Equal Participation and Leadership in Political Parties in Africa*. The theme was informed by the decision of the 23rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU that was held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, in June 2014, which declared 2015 as the Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063. The principal aim of the Dialogue was to examine and take stock of trends, challenges and prospects of enhancing women’s equal participation and leadership in political parties in Africa.

2. The Dialogue was attended by representatives of Political Parties from African Union (AU) Member States, Bureau of the Permanent Representatives Committee, African Governance Architecture Platform Members (AU organs, institutions and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), United Nations agencies, development partners, think tanks, civil society representatives, including women's rights organizations, youth-led organizations, eminent African personalities and academics.
3. The Dialogue was convened by the African Union Commission, through the Department of Political Affairs, in collaboration with the Government of Rwanda through the Rwandan Governance Board and supported by several partners.

4. This Outcome Statement is a summary of the key issues and recommendations that emerged from the High Level Dialogue.

**Emerging Issues**

5. The dialogue acknowledged that Africa has made significant progress in strengthening democratic governance. However, despite the notable progress in consolidating democracy, women remain largely excluded in political parties which are the main vehicles for access to leadership and governance. The meeting examined challenges, prospects and opportunities for ensuring effective women’s participation in political parties. It was noted that political parties have great potential and promise to provide a firm foundation for the effective participation of women at every level of governance structures to ensure that women’s views, concerns and challenges are acknowledged and addressed.

6. The Dialogue highlighted the various African Union Shared Values instruments and several regional and national legislative, administrative and judicial laws and pronouncements that seek to promote women’s participation in leadership and decision making. The Dialogue further examined the role of political parties in promoting, popularizing and ensuring the implementation of AU Shared Values on gender parity through their internal policies, strategies and practices.
7. The Dialogue facilitated a comparable lessons sharing and exchange on each of the following key issues with specific recommendations as outlined in the sections below:

a. Policy and institutional frameworks
b. Intra-party politics, culture and structures
c. Women's leadership in political parties
d. Women's leagues: Challenges, achievements, practices and prospects
e. Resourcing and enabling women's participation in political parties
8. The High Level Dialogue acknowledged that realizing an enabling space within political parties for women's equal participation and leadership requires concerted efforts from Member States in order to improve norms ratification, domestication and implementation. Participants noted that continental standards such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa popularly known as the Maputo Protocol alongside other AU Shared Values instruments provides a firm basis and minimum standard for Political parties in AU Member States to ensure that women play a pivotal role in the attainment of the African Union Agenda 2063 goals by prioritizing the participation, representation and leadership of women in internal party policies and processes.

9. In addition to implementation of policy and institutional frameworks, the dialogue reiterated engendering intra party politics, internal party culture and structures as key to improving the space for women's equal participation and leadership in political parties. Shifting of prohibitive and patriarchal norms and practices, creation of enabling environments for women's representation, participation and leadership, resourcing mechanisms, capacity building initiatives and institutionalization of quota systems were identified as key programs that should be strengthened and deepened for improved participation of women in political parties. Specific recommendations are consolidated below:

**Policy and Institutional Frameworks**

10. Member States should renew their commitments to ratify, domesticate and implement AU Shared Values, particularly the Maputo Protocol that ensures women’s meaningful participation, representation and leadership in politics.

11. Member States were called upon to establish (where applicable) and strengthen appropriate national structures that support all political parties to enhance equal
participation of women in leadership and decision making. The experience of Rwanda in the creation of a gender monitoring office supported by appropriate legal framework is a comparable good practice that can be considered for inspiration and possible replication.

12. Member States should implement the gender parity quota provisions of the Maputo Protocol and ensure constitutional backing, political will and fiscal appropriation in national budgets for its effective institutionalization within the governance processes across the continent.

13. Member States should ensure effective oversight and appropriation for effective delivery and implementation of various national, regional, continental and global laws promoting women’s equal participation and leadership within political parties.

14. African Union should establish a program within the Department of Political Affairs to institutionalize engagement with political parties in Africa in collaboration with Members of the African Governance Architecture Platform and relevant actors such as the Conference of African Political Parties as a platform for documenting and sharing comparable lessons, home grown solutions and good practices from Member States through regular convening, interaction, exchange programs amongst political parties on the continent.

15. The Government of the Republic of Rwanda to champion the establishment of an African Centers of Excellence to deepen and widen strategic thinking and interventions with regards to women’s equal participation and leadership as a way to spur innovation and cooperation.

16. The Dialogue applauded the decision of the AU to dedicate the year 2016 as the Year of Human Rights with special focus on the Rights of Women as an opportunity to take stock of progress in the last decade and accelerate momentum moving forward. It called upon all stakeholders particularly Members States, Members of
the AGA Platform, political parties, think tanks, civil society and partners to promote women’s right to equally participate and lead political parties as part of the flagship initiatives of Project 2016 on Human Rights.

17. In evaluating compliance and providing technical support to State Parties to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) by the AGA Platform, specific emphasis should be placed on the measures and mechanisms that support women’s political participation and leadership in political parties that could include specific institutional reforms, and administrative guides on gender equality, sensitivity and responsiveness.

18. Civil society organizations should partner, collaborate and support advocacy, capacity building and regular dialogue that strengthens the effective capacity of political parties in Africa.

**Intra Party Politics, Cultures and Structures**

19. Political Parties should develop gender responsive policies and manifestos that remove structural, institutional as well as cultural barriers that continue to inhibit women’s participation in political parties. In doing this, parties were encouraged to develop internal policies that provide a level playing field for women within political...
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20. Political Parties were called upon to institute and strengthen quota systems within their parties to enhance women's equal participation and leadership. Specifically, the dialogue reiterated the importance of quota systems as a means to further improve the critical mass of women needed for political culture reforms in political parties.

21. Political parties should implement reforms and measures aimed at enhancing the meaningful role of women in politics and political parties in Africa. Measures such as discipline and grievance mechanisms must be institutionalized to prevent and redress sexualization, harassment, discrimination, violence and other corrupt practices and impunity.

22. Member States should establish appropriate national structures to assess, monitor and evaluate gender policy outcomes on a regular basis such as registrar of political parties’ gender monitoring framework as exemplified by Rwanda.

Women’s Leadership in Political Parties

23. Political parties should be encouraged to establish and strengthen, where they exist, women leagues/wings for improved participation and as a recruitment conduit for leadership.

24. Political parties should ensure intergenerational exchange and transition for women and young people in women and youth wings respectively. The AGA Youth Engagement Strategy was identified as an important guiding framework for such engagement which should be implemented in close collaboration with Member States and political parties.
25. Civil society organizations should engage and initiate programs to support political parties towards the equal participation and leadership of women and young people within political parties.

26. The media and other institutions should identify, profile and celebrate outstanding African women and young people who are role models and inspiring the youth to engage and participate in political parties.

27. The media should adopt gender responsive policies that ensure objective and non-discriminatory assessments and coverage of women in political offices.

28. The African Union through the Gender Directorate and Special Envoy on the Rights of Women and Children should establish specific time bound initiatives in 2016 in line with the Year of Human Rights to promote women’s equal participation and leadership in political parties including establishing an Annual Award for exemplary women in leadership positions across all sectors on the continent.

Women’s Leagues: Challenges, Achievements, Practices and Prospects

29. Political parties should put in place measures to ensure young women participate equally in youth leagues as well as in women’s leagues, and are not marginalized in either.

30. Member States should put in place legal and institutional mechanisms including availing resources to political parties to establish and strengthen women leagues as vehicles to address obstacles faced by women politicians, activists and aspirants, paying particular attention to marginalized groups.

31. Political parties should ensure that Women’s Leagues serve as effective entry points to mainstream party politics and not to further marginalize women. To ensure their
meaningful participation, women should not be restricted to women’s leagues or wings and consequently isolated from other important platforms. Political parties should work towards mainstreaming women within all party and governance structures.

## Resourcing and Enabling Women’s Participation in Political Parties

32. Member States should provide incentives to political parties who institute gender parity practices and disincentives for those who do not in coordination with relevant national structures such as gender monitoring units.

33. Member States should avail adequate financial, training and technical resources to support women’s equal participation and leadership in political parties especially access to quality education, health care in addition to easing the burden of unpaid care all of which are key in ensuring that women strengthen their capacity to engage in governance and democracy consolidation.

34. Political parties should put in place institutional monitoring, evaluation and enforcement mechanisms to enable women to equally participate and take leadership positions in political parties.

35. Civil society should promote political awareness through civic and other forms of popular education for women, gender activists, political aspirants, candidates and office holders.

36. Member States and political parties should develop, or strengthen where they exist, specially earmarked financing for women’s political participation targeting aspirants, candidates and office holders, particularly those from further marginalized groups.
37. Member States should adopt and implement programs on gender-justice related to the broader rule of law, access to justice and human rights agenda.

38. Political Parties should deploy communication platforms including mainstream media and social media to promote women’s empowerment and end gender based violence and discrimination.

39. Resources such as financial and media support should focus on women’s contribution and various networks should be used to support women’s participation in politics and civic life.

Way Forward

40. The African Union Commission in collaboration with the Council of African Political Parties should develop a continental program to facilitate engagement and collaboration of political parties across the continent to promote women’s equal participation and leadership in political parties. Such a program should undertake inter-country exchanges, experience-sharing and lessons-learning initiatives. Such a capacity building program should be extended to young people in political party youth wings/leagues across the continent.

41. The implementation of the recommendations of the Fourth High Level Dialogue should form part of the milestones to be achieved during the implementation of Project 2016 on the Year of Human Rights with Special Focus on the Rights of Women.
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