



AFRICAN PRE-CSW61 CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON THE THEME:

***“Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work:
Challenges and Opportunities in Africa”***

26-27 January 2017, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

BACKGROUND PAPER

Appreciation to the ECA’s Africa Center for Gender for compiling this Background Paper

INTRODUCTION

The world of work has been changing at a very rapid pace, in tandem with the globalisation of the economy. Such a changing landscape is shaped by innovation and the related rapid development of information and communication technology. Also of note is the emerging green economy which is gaining momentum in order to mitigate and adapt to climate change which offers job opportunities for women. While these changes open employment opportunities for women, they also pose multiple challenges to them because of the technical skills requirement which the majority of the women do not have.

Labour migration also presents a separate set of opportunities and challenges. African women are among the many migrants who leave their countries seeking more and better job opportunities in developed economies as well as in other African countries. However, they also suffer from discrimination in labour markets where they normally do not have the same labour rights as native workers. They are usually concentrated in labour intensive employment especially in the social care and health sectors, receiving minimum pay and are not always covered by social protection schemes because they are not always granted with the required work permit.

Those emerging issues exacerbate the many structural challenges to gender equality and discrimination against women which characterise the world of work in Africa. .

Access to decent and paid employment is a basic human right enshrined in a number of global and regional human right frameworks including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) especially its Article 11 and its Optional Protocol; the international Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (articles 6 and 8); the International Labor Organisation (ILO) Conventions on employment; the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; the Protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (The Maputo Protocol), among others. Unfortunately, despite the existence of important normative frameworks, the majority of African women do not fully enjoy their basic right to decent employment.

Discriminatory social and cultural norms, gender inequality in education, discriminatory labour laws are among the many gender inequalities which hamper women's access to decent employment in Africa, impeding their economic empowerment. Yet, such discriminations will ultimately affect Africa's growth prospects, structural transformation and sustainable development processes.

This background paper has been developed for the Africa's Pre-CSW 61st Consultative Meeting scheduled on 26-27 January 2017 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to define Africa's priorities for the 61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2017.

The paper does not aim at analysing all the issues related to women in the changing world of work in Africa in an exhaustive manner. Rather, its purpose is to stimulate the high level policy dialogue among African Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs and experts.

In this vain, the paper first set the stage by analysing the positive linkage between women's employment and their economic empowerment in Africa in Part 1. Part 2 analyses, the trends in

the labour market in Africa from a gender perspective, followed by an analysis of the main gender inequalities and discriminations against women in the world of work in Africa. It concludes by recommending priority policy actions to protect and secure women's right to decent employment to be considered by African governments in Part 3.

PART I: WHY EMPLOYMENT MATTERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT?

Women's economic empowerment is defined as a process through which women are able to engage in and benefit from economic making processes leading to an increase in their agency and voice with positive impact on their well-being, self-confidence and self-esteem. In other words, 'a woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions'¹.

Thus, women's quality education and skills, and the availability of decent employment opportunities are critical determinants and pathways towards their economic empowerment. Quality education and skills are critical as they prepare women and enable them to respond to employment opportunities, to define their career paths through a number of channels and additional job opportunities. Yet being able to work and to access to and control over productive resources including finance and land is critical to promoting women's autonomous, livelihoods/wellbeing, enabling them to have more coping strategies and to skip from the vicious cycle of poverty, violence and discrimination. It enhances their voice and agency, that is, their ability to make decisions about their own lives and act upon them to achieve desired outcomes free of violence, retribution and fear². Empirical studies in other regions including in Bangladesh found evidence that "paid work particularly formal paid work makes a significant difference to women's ability across a range of significant income related decisions"³. The male breadwinner social norm entrenched in many African societies and which asserts that the husband should be the primary breadwinner for the family is one of the driving factors of women's dependency and their subordination to men.

To the extent that their activities generate income, women are also levers of the family economy and can participate in the life of their community and their country. Evidence from a wide range of countries shows that the share of household income controlled by women is spent to benefit children⁴. Women's access to formal productive employment and thus to income opportunities not only benefit them and their children/families, in addition it has important multiplier effects a country's productive and growth prospects. To the extent that their activities generate income, women are also levers of the family economy and can participate in the life of their community

¹ The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2011, "Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment. Definition, Framework and Indicators", p.4. Link: <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Understanding-measuring-womens-economic-empowerment.pdf>

² The World Bank Report 2014, "Voice and Agency. Empowering Women and Girls for a Shared prosperity"

³ Naila Kabeer, Simeen Mahmud and Sakiba Tasmeen, "Does paid work provide a pathway to Women's Empowerment? Empirical Findings from Bangladesh"

⁴ UNWOMEN Policy Brief "Decent work and women's economic empowerment: Good Policy and Practice", 2012

and their country. A study by McKinsey & Company found that companies where women are most strongly represented at board or top management are also the companies that perform best⁵.

With regards to the agricultural sector which employs the majority of workers in Africa with women constituting the backbone, enhancing their productive work by providing them with land and other agricultural assets would not only contribute to their economic empowerment but will have multiple positive effects on agricultural output and consequently on a country's gross domestic output. FAO estimates that if female farmers had the same access to productive resources as male farmers, they could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30%, raising total agricultural output in developing countries (including Africa) by 2.5 to 4%, thereby contributing to both food security and economic growth⁶. In fact, it estimates that equitable access to productive assets (land, fertilizer) could lead to a decline in the number of hungry people in the world from 12 to 17 per cent, or between 100 and 150 million people who can escape hunger.⁷

Despite the accumulating evidence that supports the positive linkages between women's economic empowerment and their access to decent employment on the one hand, and Africa's growth, structural transformation and sustainable development on the other, the majority of African women continue to suffer from a myriad of discrimination in the world of work across the continent. The following section analyses some of the most important of those.

PART II- MAIN GENDER INEQUALITIES AND DISCRIMINATIONS AGAINST WOMEN IN THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK IN AFRICA

Challenging the mainstream conceptualisation of work: From the outset, it is important to emphasise that African women work more than men if both unpaid and paid work are considered, because of the burden of unpaid care work that falls under women. However, the conventional definition of work and employment focuses mainly on employment in the market which overlooks women's important contribution to Africa's economy through their productive and reproductive work. Overall women face a number of discriminatory practices in the conventional/mainstream world of work and in the unpaid care sector. Therefore, reconceptualising the concept of work in order to better understand the whole spectrum and dynamics of women's work and contribution to Africa's economic is a priority policy issue which unfortunately cannot be dealt with fully in this background paper.

1. Marginal Increase in women's labour participation coupled with high unemployment

Women's participation in the labour force in Sub-Saharan Africa was estimated at 65 per cent compared to 75 per cent for men⁸. Their participation in the labour market has registered a marginal increase from 1995 to 2015, only 3.2 per cent over the last two decades⁹. Consequently,

⁵ McKinsey & Company, (2007), "Women matter. Gender diversity, a Corporate performance"

⁶ FAO, 2011, "The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011. Women in Agriculture, Closing the gender Gap for Development"

⁷ FAO, 2011 "The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011. Women in Agriculture, Closing the Gender Gap for Development"

⁸ United Nations Statistics Division, "The World's Women 2015"

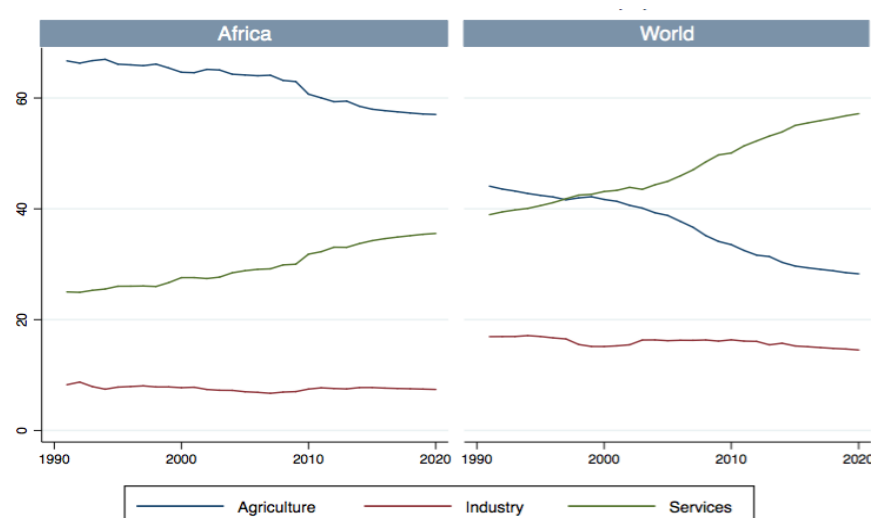
⁹ ILO, "Women at Work Trends 2016"

women, especially young women are more affected by unemployment in Africa than men and young men. Furthermore, women's labour participation rate hides their over representation in vulnerable jobs and in the informal sector as a result of high sectoral and occupational segregations that characterise the world of work in Africa.

2. Sectoral and Occupational segregations

The majority of women in the world of work in Africa are engaged in the agricultural sector where they represent 60 per cent of the labour force. As Figure 2 below shows, their share in the industrial and services is estimated at less than 10 per cent and about 20 per cent respectively as reflected in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Sectoral Evolution of Women's Work (%)



Data Source: ILO-KILM Database (1990-2020).

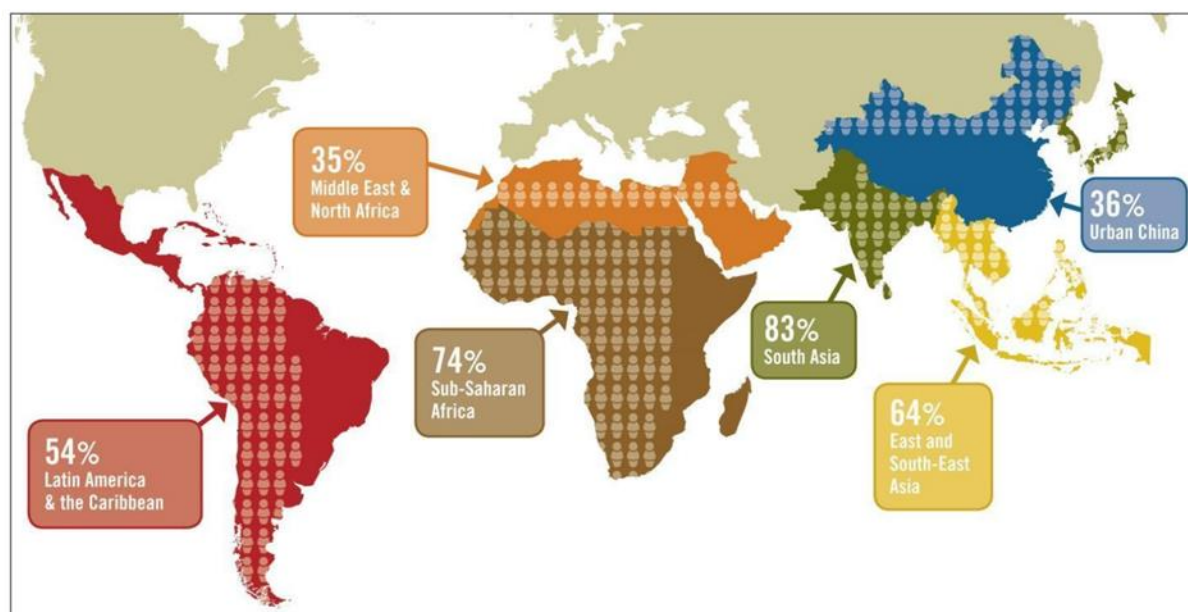
With regards to the industrial sector, a good illustration of the gender disparities is the mining sector where women are concentrated in the artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sub sector. An ECA's empirical study on "Women in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining" suggests that 74 per cent of women engaged in the mining sector operates in the ASM which is defined as activities in which "only basic hand tools and processing" are used.¹⁰ Employment in the ASM is a source of livelihood for women and it offers a relative ease of entry compared to the formal sector as it requires virtually no formal education or skills and little or no capital. However, several factors have prevented women from maximising gains from the sector; these include a shortage of skills, lack of technical assistance (including training) challenges to access to credit and capital, cultural challenges, limited knowledge and regulation and policies, among many others. Consequently incomes accrued from ASM and related activities tend to be greater for men because they own most assets (Eftimie et al., 2012)¹¹.

¹⁰ ECA, African Centre for Gender ; African Mining and Development Centre, 2015 "Women in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining"

¹¹ Ibid, ECA Report

Occupational segregations reinforce sectoral segregations. In all the economic sectors, women perform the lowest occupational categories that are time and labour intensive, characterised by low pay and lack of social protection and pension coverage. Furthermore, those activities are often performed in the informal sector where women are overrepresented especially in the non-agricultural informal employment with an engagement rate of 74 per cent as reflected in the map below.

Non-Agricultural Informal Employment: Women's Share*



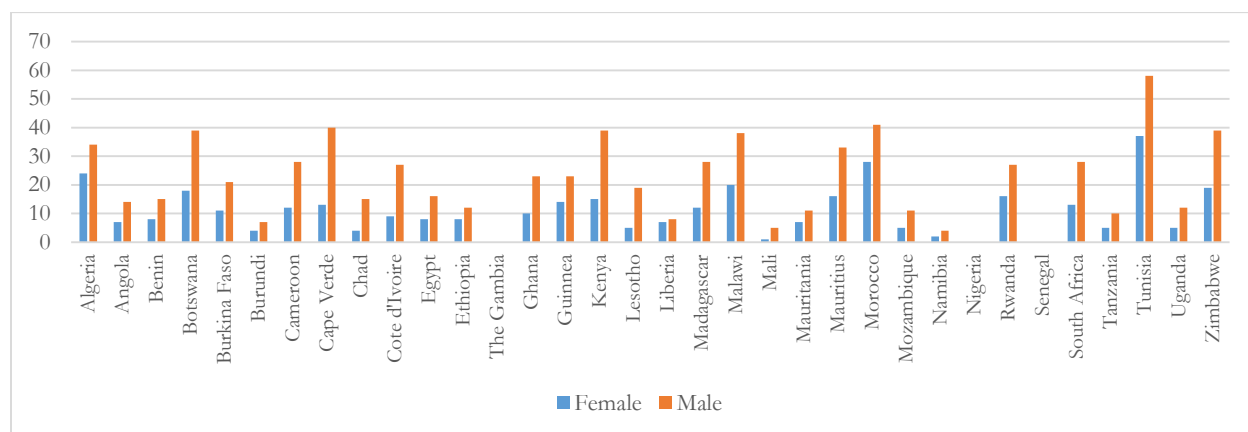
3. Low level and quality of education as a key driving factor

The profound and persistent sectoral and occupational segregations reflect women's persistent low skills match as the result of the slow progress registered in their levels and quality of education. The Global Gender Gap 2016 Report found that Sub-Saharan Africa ranked last on the educational attainment subindex with 12 countries having fully closed their gender gaps for primary education, 11 closed the gap for secondary education and 7 countries closed the gender gap for tertiary education. Social and cultural norms which value more male education over female's, poverty and exclusion, are among the root causes of women's poor educational outcome.

Yet, globalisation coupled with innovations and a very rapid development of new technologies have shaped the world of work worldwide including in Africa requiring high technical skills set that only a small proportion of women have. Evidence shows that women who are graduated in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) represent only 13 per cent of the total women graduates in Africa. They represent only 30 per cent of the Research and Development Sector.¹²

¹² UNESCO Statistics

Figure 2: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Graduates by Sex (%)

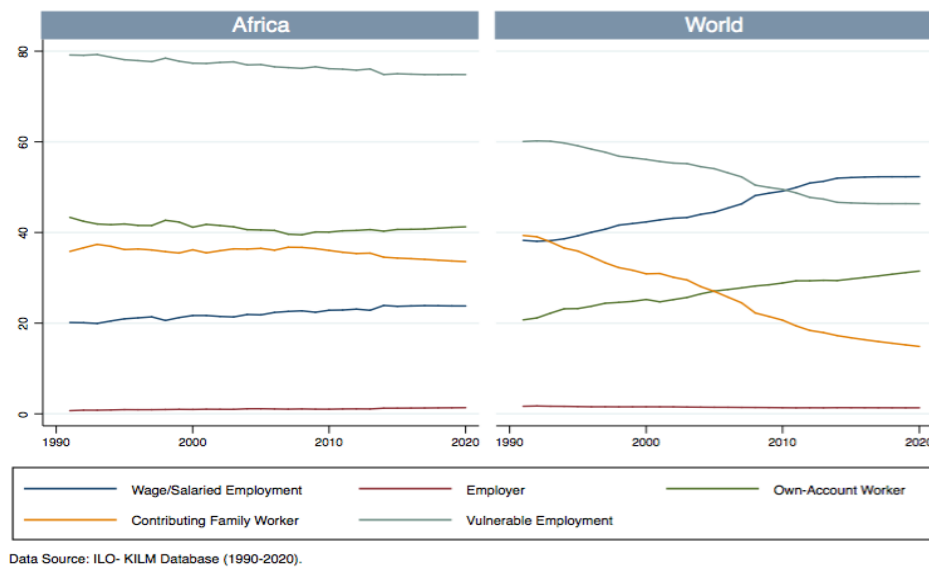


Data Source: The Global Gender Gap Report (2016). World Economic Forum

Figure 2 shows the proportion of women and men who graduated from tertiary education with STEM studies. Tunisia leads the way with about 37 per cent of female tertiary graduates who completed STEM studies. This figure drops to 28 per cent for Morocco, the second best performer. Half of selected countries have female STEM graduates less than 10 per cent of all female university graduates. Men are twice as likely as women to graduate from STEM studies. Given that the changing world of work implies more rapid job creation in technical and innovations related sectors and occupations, investing in girls' education in STEM at all levels is essential to drastically increase their decent employment opportunities.

Another important feature of women in the world of work in Africa is the low pace and path of change. As figure 3 below shows, little change is expected to occur in Africa by 2020 unlike the trends in other regions. Across the world, female contributing family workers have more than halved while the share of own-account workers as well as wage workers have increased significantly. Concomitantly, female vulnerable employment has been decreasing despite increasing female own-account workers. In Africa, such shifts have not yet occurred as suggested by figure 3. In addition, the share of women in agriculture is projected at 50 per cent in 2020, about 15 percent points decrease compared to the current rate. Such proportion is still important and points to women's limited mobility between sectors and occupations.

Figure 3: Trends in status of Female Employment (%)



4. Discriminatory labour markets laws in Africa

Women's right to decent employment and right at work enshrined in many international and regional human rights frameworks is yet to be effectively domesticated and enforced by African governments. The existence and effective enforcement of equitable national labour essential to ensuring that women's human right to decent employment is secured and protected. Unfortunately evidence points to important gender gaps and discriminations against women in the labour legal systems in Africa.

Statistics from The Women, Business and the Law Database (2016) provide insight into the labour law systems of all African countries except Somalia, using the following main determinants:

- Does the law mandate non-discrimination based on gender in hiring?
- Is it prohibited for prospective employers to ask about family status?
- Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?
- Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?
- Are mothers guaranteed an equivalent position after maternity leave?
- Are employers required to provide break time for nursing mothers?
- Are parents entitled to flexible/part-time schedules?

Overall only 40 per cent of those entitlements are recognised in African labour laws.

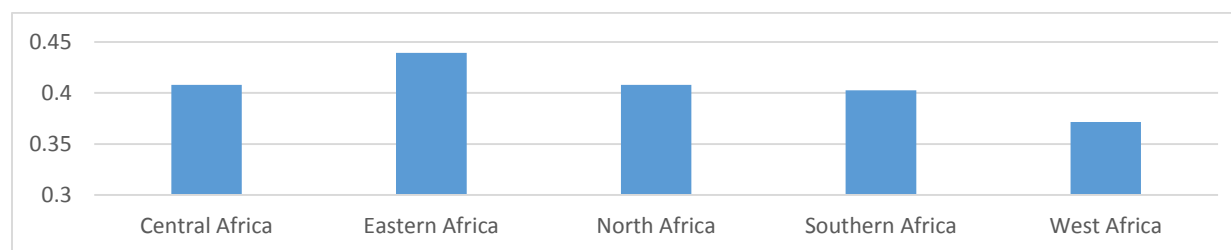
4.1 Discrimination based on gender in hiring

None of the 53 countries for which data is available prohibits prospective employers to ask about family status. This is quite relevant, as the ECA's 2012 African Gender and Development Report (AGDI) found that in one of the studied countries, companies often complained that women of

productive age are risky employees due to potential marital problems and childcare responsibilities.

Figure 4 below reflects a cross regional comparison of the situation of workplace rights with gender equality principle.

Figure 4: Workplace Rights with Gender Equality Principle



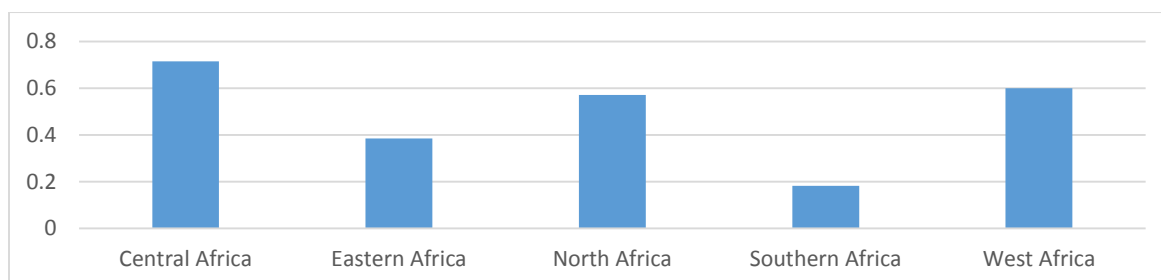
Data Source: Women, Business and the Law (2016). World Bank.

4.2 Maternity protection

Maternal protection is important to secure and protect women's access to employment but also their treatment at the workplace and their employment outcome. Parental leave schemes are extremely important for women's attachment and career advance in the labour market. According to the ILO, 830 million women worldwide are denied maternity leave and 80 per cent of these women live in Africa and Asia.

To respond to such huge discrimination in the world of work, two global conventions were enacted under the auspice of the ILO i.e. International Labour Convention of 1919 (C.3) and the revised Maternity Protection Conventions (C103, 1952 and C.183, 2000). Those Conventions are aimed at protecting women's right to combine their reproductive and productive roles without facing discrimination in the workplace.

Figure 5: Share of Countries with 14 Weeks of Paid Maternity Leave (%)



Data Source: Women, Business and the Law (2016). World Bank.

Figure 5 below suggests that such conventions are yet to be fully implemented in Africa.

ILO considers 14 weeks as the minimum standards for paid maternity leave. Only 25 out of 53 African countries offer paid maternity leave for 14 weeks or more. The Gambia leads the way with around 25 weeks of leave followed by South Africa with 17 weeks. Countries in the Southern and Eastern Africa regions offer much less weeks.

Paternity leave is less common across the continent. While all countries provide maternity leave, only half provide paternity leave for 3 days. Inconsistencies between maternal and paternal leave regulations may affect women's career opportunities and paths.

Worthy of note is that even where there is legislation, maternity protection remains elusive for female workers especially in the public and private sectors. There is need for Governments to put in place measures to expand the benefits to all women in the world of work in Africa. Appropriate measures should be taken for women in the informal and vulnerable employment.

4.3 Flexible part time schedules

Only in two countries, parents are entitled to part-time or flexible working arrangements which are critical for women's career advancement given their time constraints related to their burden of unpaid care work.

4.4 Access to childcare services

31 countries out the 53 – for which data is available- provide affordable childcare services with however, a strong urban bias. Childcare payments are deductible only in Mauritius. Yet, only 9 countries offer tax deductions or credits to men, and no African country offers similar incentives to women. This limited childcare services means that women especially those with low pay, have to reduce their time at paid employment (work shorter) to be able to take care of their young children.

4.5 Unpaid Care Work

Women's burden of unpaid care work constitutes an important challenge to their entrance in the paid, productive employment and therefore, it generates an important socio-economic opportunity cost. The intra-household unequal distribution of power and responsibilities leads to women's time poverty and their inability to improve their skills, to engage and remain in paid employment. Indeed, African women allocate a considerable amount of time to fetching water, collecting firewood and providing care to the children and elderly. Evidence has found that women in Sub-Saharan Africa spend about 40 billion hours a year collecting water. In countries like Guinea and Malawi, women spend respectively over three and eight times more than men fetching water.¹³ This means that women have less time balance on their time budget to engage in paid work and/or leisure, resulting in their time poverty. In many countries, evidence has found that a

¹³ United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs (UNDESA), International Decade for Action, "Water for Life. 2005-2015

reduction of women's unpaid care work yield a 10 per cent point increase in women's labour force participation¹⁴.

4.6. Representation and Voice

Another important discrimination against women in the world of work in Africa is their low participation in decision making organs and processes which shape their lives and interests. While African countries have made strides in terms of women's political participation and representation in National Parliament, their representation in companies and trade unions leadership organs is low.

A recent cross country study by the African Development Bank (AfDB) provides compelling insights into the gender inequality in the representation of the board of many African companies. Women hold only 12.7% of board directorships that is 364 out of 2, 865 in 307 listed companies in 12 African countries. In addition, about one third (32.9%) of African companies have no women on board and other one third (33. 6%) have only one female director¹⁵.

With regards to Trade Unions, evidence shows that women are also under represented especially at leadership level¹⁶.

These gender inequalities mean that women do not have equal opportunity as men to defend and voice the specific needs and discriminations they face in the world of work in Africa, in order to advocate for change.

PART 3 - POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy recommendations are not exhaustive. Rather, some of the main actions needed to address the discriminations against women in the changing world of work are defined with the aim to taking them further during the Pre-CSW 61st Consultative meetings. While they apply to all African countries, governments need to tailor them to their specific contexts and take urgent yet bold actions to achieve transforming change in women's conditions in the world of work on the continent.

1. Ratify and enforce all international and regional conventions that secure and protect women's right to decent employment;
2. Undertake a thorough review of national labour laws to remove all discriminatory laws against women's right to decent employment.
3. Support and boost female entrepreneurship through sound and equitable entrepreneurship promotion programs that strengthen entrepreneurship skills through hands-on business start-up training.

¹⁴ OECD Development Centre, Issues Paper on "Unpaid care Work. The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcome", 2014

¹⁵ African Development Bank, 2015 "Where are the women? Inclusive Boardroom in Africa's Top Listed Companies?"

¹⁶ Africa Focus; African Trade Unions and Africa's Future: Strategic Choices in a Changing World, Summary report based on surveys and other research by Solidarity Center staff and consultants, March 1 - October 10, 2013, Solidarity Center, April 2014

4. Establish inclusive finance schemes that facilitate access to substantial finance by women entrepreneurs.
5. Address time poverty through affordable and good quality childcare services are needed both in urban and rural areas, not only to relax the time constraints mothers face but also help boys and girls stay longer at school with better non-cognitive skills.
6. Support women's transition to formal wage employment: Skills training programs combined with job search assistance in urban formal markets have recorded some positive impacts in Kenya and Ethiopia. Technical Vocational Education and Training programs combined with "Second Chance" policies supporting female dropouts from secondary and tertiary education can also help close the skill gap women face in the labour market.
7. Support women's participation and leadership and decision-making processes and organs including in governments, employers' and workers' organizations, trade unions through the implementation of the quota or parity systems and other affirmative actions;
8. Address unpaid care work using the three R strategy:

Recognition: fully recognize and value women's important burden of unpaid care work that is vital to Africa's economy and society. To that end, there is need to undertake time use surveys (which only few African countries have carried out) and to develop satellite accounts of household production;

Reduction: Appropriate measures to ensure provision of potable water to all households irrespective of their location and income, with special attention to rural and remote areas. Investment in time and labor saving infrastructure such stove, affordable rural electricity yield multiple positive effect.¹⁷

Redistribution: comprehensive awareness raising programmes including through the education system and curricula to address the social construction of unequal division of labor and intrahousehold unequal power relationship which is one of the root causes of the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work.
9. Take transformative measures (legal and programmes) to expand social protection and pension coverage to all women in the world of work with special attention to those in the informal and vulnerable employment.
10. Invest in the systematic collection, analysis and use of gender responsive data to inform inclusive and equitable policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In this regards, the current data revolution process offer an unprecedented opportunity.

¹⁷ Dinkelman, T. found that "when rural electrification was introduced in South Africa, the time spent on household decreased leading to a 9% in female labor participation" Dinkelman, T. (2011); "The Effect of rural electrification on employment. New evidence from South Africa". American Economic review 101 (7) pp 3078-3108

- 11.** Integrate gender and women's issues in national employment policies and programmes and ensure they are reflected in country action plans for the implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Conclusion

This background paper has set the stage for the high level policy discussion on the situation of women in the changing world of work in Africa. It has dealt with some key issues related to women in the world of work in Africa with the view to stimulate in-depth discussion and concrete, transformative actions to challenge the long-lasting status quo and to tackle the many and mutually reinforcing discriminations against women in the world of work in Africa. Such action would ultimately yield positive results for Africa's inclusive growth, structural transformation and sustainable development.

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