



# African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) Consultation on Response to COVID-19

**Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2020 | Online**

**From 07:00 to 10:00 a.m. (New York) | From 02:00 to 05:00 p.m. (Addis Ababa)**

## **Background**

The year 2020, marking key milestones in the African and global calendar for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, was to witness pro-active engagements from women and feminist actors worldwide to take stock on achievements and scale up impact to push for progress.

In Africa, **the African Women's Decade (AWD)**, which started in 2010 came to an end. Globally, 2020 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)** celebrated under the theme "**Generation Equality.**" The year 2020 also celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the landmark **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security** and the fifth anniversary of the global commitment to the Sustainable Development Agenda. In February 2020, during the high-level meeting on gender equality and the empowerment of women in Africa on the sidelines of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU), women leaders of Africa and the African Union (AU) adopted the Declaration on the New African Women's Decade 2020–2030, Focusing on the Financial Inclusion of African Women and launched the African Women Leadership Fund (AWLF) in partnership with the AU, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), UN Women and the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN). The year also marks the third anniversary of the AWLN and its accomplishment in localizing 25 national chapters throughout the continent.

In the midst of scaling up actions on gender equality and women's empowerment, the world has been devastated by a highly contagious and alarming disease caused by the most recently





discovered Coronavirus COVID-19, declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020.<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic is on the verge of reversing decades of progress in the fight against gender inequality and all forms of violence against women. The pandemic exacerbates poverty, inequalities and gender-based violence (GBV), while increasing vulnerability by impeding on people's access to employment, food and other resources with particular effects on women and girls.<sup>2</sup>

COVID-19 poses the risk of seriously rolling back the significant gains made to advance gender equality and women empowerment in the past decades across all sectors. Progress was recorded in health care systems, economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, peace and security, political participation and social protection. GBV is increasing exponentially for women who are in home-based social distancing or quarantine, and in conflict zones and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. The potential spread of COVID-19 in IDP camps and refugee settings may exacerbate the already high risk of sexual violence in such situations. These include increased intimate partner violence, potential of trafficking, child marriage, forced prostitution and sexual exploitation as quarantine and other social distancing measures impact economic and livelihood activities, as well as impede the delivery of basic humanitarian services.

The ongoing response throughout Africa and the world to COVID-19 is also a reminder of the essential contribution of women across sectors and generations<sup>3</sup>. Women are playing a strategic role in responding to the disease, including as frontline healthcare workers, caretakers at home and community leaders (often unpaid) and mobilizers. Young people, especially girls, are organizing themselves through intergenerational networks to support the implementation of a continental African strategic plan to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>4</sup> The contribution of women to national and global economy is also significant. In addition, many women-headed households rely on their income, coming mainly from the informal economy, to survive. Notably, the global response has called on all actors to inscribe the gender dimensions and women's leadership and the specific

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) COVID-19 timeline: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/08-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>

<sup>2</sup> "Update on the United Nations Secretary-General's Appeal for a Global Ceasefire, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2020.

<sup>3</sup> AWLN Conveners Solidarity Message on COVID-19, African Union: <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200324/awln-solidarity-message-african-women-covid-19>

<sup>4</sup> <https://auyouthenvoy.org/ayfocovid19/>



impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, the integration of gender and women's perspectives remain weak in the response plans.

### **Objectives and Expected Outcomes**

In support of the global and continental efforts to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, AWLN is convening a **Virtual Consultation on African Women's Response to COVID-19 on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2020**. The consultation will aim to better understand the impact of COVID19 on women in Africa, share their knowledge and undertakings to feed into scenario planning and orient responses at policy and action levels, now and in the recovery period. The meeting will also focus on recording and compiling the best practices and lessons learned on the ground from women at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic across Africa. The meeting will further seek to feed into the various continental and global platforms and ensure African women's equal participation in all COVID-19 responses.

The consultation will build on the outcome of the virtual meeting organized with national chapters on 25 March 2020 and further seek to look at how the AWLN platform can enhance undertakings at country level in response to COVID-19; how African women can lead, and gender be mainstreamed in all efforts.

### **Specific objectives:**

1. Briefing by representatives of the African Union and the United Nations on COVID-19 and impact on women and girls;
2. Engage and compile lessons learned and best practices from AWLN women at the forefront to mitigate transmission and impact of COVID-19 particularly at community level (National Chapters, women in health sector and young women);
3. Outline the tools necessary for women to stay safe and/or respond to COVID-19 while in conflict zones, refugee or IDP camps, in quarantine and working in essential services sectors;
4. Ensure proper access to information pertaining to COVID-19.

### **Outcomes:**

The AWLN virtual consultation will produce an outcome document that will feed into the various continental efforts and be shared with the African Union and UN Women and other platforms to influence gender positive responses to COVID-19 and support the implementation of guidelines and other policies and strategies developed by the African Union Commission.

