



Regional workshop on "Participation, Representation and Protection of Women in Electoral Processes in the Great Lakes Region"

CONCEPT NOTE

VENUE: AU Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

PROPOSED DATE: 12 to 13 November 2019

1. Context

Participatory democracy is a relevant feature of public governance in African states. It denotes the existence of a certain systemic political, qualitative differential between states according to the nature and level of their democratic transition or strengthening.

Indeed, « *There can be no democracy without a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of public affairs in which men and women act in equality and complementarity, mutually enriching each other with their differences* »¹. The Great Lakes region of Africa is not an exception. Since the 1990s, the Great Lakes region has undergone a wave of democratic processes with varying degrees of success from one country to another, based upon their socio-historical, systemic and cyclical peculiarities. Women's political participation in this region varies from country to country, particularly between those countries that are making more progress in this direction and those that need to do more in accordance with international standards.

In Africa, the late 1990s and early 2000s were characterized by internal conflicts with external ramifications that had a negative impact on electoral processes. Participatory democracy in favour of women's adequate representation has often been negatively impacted by these developments amongst others. Indeed, without peace, security and stability, there can be no viable pluralist democracy and no sustainable human development.

The level of women's participation is expressed in terms of the representativeness of women who have been elected to institutions, such as parliaments and governments that have emerged from elections. In this respect, it appears that women are more "attendants" than "actors" of positive change throughout the processes, including electoral processes. This, it seems, is justified by the persistence of socio-cultural barriers with, as a common denominator, the dominant patriarchal system in most African societies.

Globally, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) annual study on women in parliament, women's share in national parliaments increased by 0.9% in 2018 (24.3% in 2018 compared to 23.4% in 2017).

¹ **Universal Declaration on Democracy;** Adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 161st session; Cairo, 16 September 1997



In the Great Lakes region, the situation is promising, with an overall figure of 27%, compared to the global average of 24.3%. There are, however, huge differences between countries: Rwanda (61.3%), Tanzania (36.9%), Burundi (36.4%), Uganda (34.9%), Angola (30%), South Sudan (28.5%), Sudan (27.7%), Kenya (21.8%), Zambia (18%), Republic of Congo (11.3%), Democratic Republic of the Congo (10.3%) and the Central African Republic (8.6%). More efforts are needed for the Region to ensure that at least all States attain the minimum of 30% in the short and long term, and that they achieve the strategic objectives of the "50/50 Planet by 2030" and the "AU Agenda 2063".

2. Objectives and Expected outputs

❖ Objectives

- Bring together national experts, representatives of electoral commissions, judicial authorities in charge of electoral disputes, representatives of international organizations and civil society to discuss the root causes of electoral instability in the region; the low participation of women in the electoral processes in the region, the participation and protection of women during electoral periods and the preventive mechanisms to be put in place;
- Facilitate the exchange of good practices and the review of relevant provisions between regional electoral institutions and Great Lakes participants to ensure that gender is a key element of the electoral process and agree on a jointly approved final document under the auspices of the AU;
- Define and implement strategies to support women candidates in the Great Lakes Region;
- Strengthen the civic and citizen capacities of girls and women through quality education to better prepare for the awakening of individual and collective consciences in order to promote excellent female leadership in public governance in States, including politics.

❖ Expected outputs

- Improve awareness on the need to provide safe spaces for women in electoral processes before, during and after elections, including the protection and participation of women not only as voters but also as candidates;
- Provide recommendations for measures and monitoring mechanisms to be put in place by the Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and other institutions involved to facilitate free competition (equality and equity) and access to the media for all, including women candidates;
- Recommendations are made to support women candidates in the elections through technical and financial means from the next elections and in the near future;
- Coordinated actions are developed to promote the involvement of girls and women in various efforts to promote participatory and inclusive democracy, human rights and peacebuilding.



3. Justification

In terms of normative references, States have made international commitments that require them to respect gender balance with at least 30% of women in decision-making bodies. These reference tools include international and regional human rights instruments, including:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes that: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and must act towards each other in a spirit of brotherhood" (Article 1);
- The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. "The State Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women in the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the present Convention" (Article 3). In addition, article 4, paragraph 1, of the aforementioned Convention prohibits, inter alia, any form of discrimination based solely on race, color, sex, language, religion or social origin.
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security has 4 pillars, one of which is devoted exclusively to women's political participation;
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides that "State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the State Party and, in particular, shall ensure that they enjoy the right, on equal terms with men, to the fullest extent possible, the right :
 - (a) to vote in all elections and public referendums and to be eligible for election to all elected public institutions;
 - (b) to take part in the formulation of State policies and their implementation, to hold public office and to perform all public functions at all levels of government;
 - (c) to take part in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country;
- The Maputo Protocol refers to the right to participate in the political and decision-making process (Article 9);
- SDG 5, namely: To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls and aim to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal access to leadership positions at all levels of decision-making, in political, economic and public life (Target 5.5).
- Article 6 of the ICGLR Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, adopted on 15 December 2006, enshrines women's voting and their inclusive participation in decision-making processes and bodies in States Parties. The Dar Es Salaam Declaration provides the legal basis for regional instruments that promote the free participation of women and girls in electoral processes, institutions and public policies (regional, national and local). These provisions are also based on the Beijing Declaration.



However, with regard to the role of women in electoral processes, there is an under-representation of women in the exercise of elective functions in African countries in general. The gender balance in governing bodies, electoral committees or electoral commissions is an indicator of a level of women's participation and representation in decision-making bodies and electoral processes. In some countries, quotas of at least 30% women are observable, in particular in Burundi (3 women and 4 men in the CENI or 43%) and Rwanda (Article 7 of the Electoral Law which provides for at least 30% women), while in other countries, the gender balance is unmet, for example in the DRC (2 women out of 9 men or 18%) and elsewhere.

On the role played by women, we often overlook the role of women community leaders who act as a link between women in the community and women at the strategic level such as parliamentarians. It is these women who are at the heart of the mobilizing women in the communities to elect, and therefore to promote the eligible elite, including women leaders. They are generally the main electorate, as is the case in Burundi and Rwanda. The Network of Women Actors for Peace and Dialogue (RFAPD) is an example in the mobilization of women for peace and security, including for their empowerment and to elect and be elected, in the spirit of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

Gender disparities are also observed in terms of the number of women in management positions or on the staff of election management bodies (EMBs). There is also a significant lack of formal policy on equal opportunities or gender equality in terms of voter turnout, gender-disaggregated data. As a result, voter turnout rates are not broken down by gender, procedures and adjustments for voting are made do not take gender issues into account², etc.

On the program of elections in the Great Lakes region, the year 2019 will have seen elections in the DRC only (at the end of 2018 and during 2019). In 2020, elections take place in Burundi, Tanzania, CAR and Sudan. EMBs play an important role in gender mainstreaming, but also in stabilizing peace in the electoral and post-electoral period.

In view of this situation, a regional workshop will be held in Addis Ababa from 12 to 13 November 2019. This initiative is intended as a response mechanism for the active and meaningful participation of women in democratic governance and peacebuilding processes. The workshop will be jointly organized by: the AU Commission, the Office of the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the Office of the Special Representative of the African Union for the Great Lakes Region and Burundi, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), in partnership with the Office of the Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security of the AU, FemWise, UNOAU, political leaders and civil society organizations.

² UNDP and UN Women; Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Participation, 2015.



4. Methodology

The methodological approach includes the following steps:

The workshop will have four highlights:

- official opening followed by the media events: interviews;
- thematic presentations by experts;
- discussions and experience sharing in plenary sessions;
- closing ceremony with the reading of the main conclusions and the Final Communiqué.

5. Organization of the workshop

- Establishment of a task force to ensure the quality of presentations;
- Identification of participants, identification of resource persons and drafting of contracts, setting up a technical preparation team, sending out invitations, logistical organization: before, during and after the workshop, preparation of presentations, reading and validation, protocol and security, interpretation, drafting secretariat; etc.

6. Format and Structure

The workshop will be co-chaired by the United Nations Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, the AU Special Envoy, the Executive Secretaries of the ICGLR and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

7. Working documents

Working documents are to be selected according to the themes to be developed:

- the international reference framework for the integration of women in electoral processes;
- the state of electoral freedoms in the Great Lakes Region;
- securing electoral processes: the role of law enforcement and peacekeeping forces;
- Women and Election Observation: Issues, Challenges and Prospects in the Great Lakes region;
- gender-sensitive election financing: a few strategic orientations;
- state of women in EMBs
- the role of international and regional organizations in ensuring credible results;
- inventory of women's political participation in parliamentary and public institutions;
- the 1979 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG);
- the Maputo Protocol (Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa) and;
- the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).



8. Participants

Participants will be drawn from: Representatives of the electoral commissions and constitutional courts of the countries signatory to the Framework Agreement (12x2), the Speakers of the National Assembly of the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda, gender ministers of the countries of the Great Lakes region preparing for the elections as well as communication officers; the AU Special Envoy Office / Women in Peace and Security (WPS), the Political Affairs Department of the African Union Commission; the Peace and Security Department of the African Union Commission; the Special Representation of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission in Burundi, the Office of the UNOAU Special Representative, the United Nations Special Representative for Burundi; the United Nations Special Representative for South Sudan; MONUSCO and UNAMSICA; the Office of the UN/GL Special Envoy, UN Women (Burundi, DRC, CAR), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the Executive Secretariat of the ICGLR; the Executive Secretariat of the SADC, the National Oversight Mechanism of the Framework Agreement, the Secretariat of La Francophonie; African Union Organs, Women Leaders of the Women's Platform Advisory Committee for the Framework Agreement, including FemWise-Africa, representatives of regional civil society organizations (COCAFEM, FFC), religious representatives, the ICGLR forum (ICGLR Women's Forum, Parliamentarians' Forum, Youth Forum and Civil Society and Community Organizations and Independent Experts' Forum); international partners.

9. Secretariat

The secretariat of the meeting will be provided by a technical team composed of officials from the AU, UN, ICGLR and members of women's organizations in the Great Lakes region.