



Evaluation of the Partnership Between UN Women and the African Union Commission

Final Report

Submitted to UN Women Liaison Office to the African Union and
African Union Commission

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September 2024

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AfCFTA	Africa Continental Free Trade Area
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AUGO	African Union Gender Observatory
AWLN	African Women Leaders' Network
COMESA	Common Market for East and Southern Africa
COTLA	Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa
CSW	Convention on the Status of Women
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EVAWG	Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
GFPs	Gender Focal Points
GIMAC	Gender is My Agenda Campaign
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	Member States
NEPAD	New Partnerships for Africa's Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAPS	Political Affairs, Peace and Security
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SI	Spotlight Initiative
SIARP	Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme
SN	Strategic Note
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights
STC	Specialised Technical Committee
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WEE	Women Economic Empowerment
WGYP	Women, Gender and Youth Directorate
WICBT	Women in Informal Cross Border Trade
WPS	Women Peace and Security

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the African Union Commission (AUC) engaged an independent consultant to conduct an evaluation of the partnership between the two institutions operationalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in December 2020 for a period of three years (2020-2023). The evaluation was conducted between December 2023 and June 2024. This report presents the key findings of the evaluation, key conclusions, and recommendations on the way forward.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Since 2005, UN Women and the AUC have collaborated to advance Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) in Africa. Their joint efforts involve integrating GEWE into policy discussions, monitoring policy implementation, sharing best practices, and supporting UN system initiatives aligned with African Union priorities related to GEWE. The AUC has a mandate to support and advance the integration goals outlined in Agenda 2063. On the other hand, UN Women, as a global advocate for GEWE, actively strives to enhance the lives of women and girls across various regions in Africa. Through its offices in different African countries, UN Women collaborates with governments and civil society to develop and implement laws, policies, programs, and services that directly benefit women and girls. Additionally, UN Women plays a global role in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aligning with the African Union's Agenda 2063 to advance the rights and well-being of women and girls.

In December 2020, UN Women and the AUC signed an MOU to strengthen their partnership and accelerate the achievement of GEWE in Africa. The MOU outlines several key areas of cooperation, including: (a) Economic Empowerment-focusing on initiatives that enhance economic opportunities for women; (b) Promotion of Women's Leadership through encouraging women's effective participation in decision-making roles; (c) Working together to eliminate all forms of violence against women; (d) addressing women's rights in conflict, post-conflict, and humanitarian situations; (e) advocating for women's reproductive health and rights; (f) Jointly advocating for the ratification, domestication, and implementation of global and regional norms related to gender equality; (g) Strengthening gender mainstreaming and monitoring capacity within the AU and its organs; (h) Creating an enabling environment for women and girls' engagement in Information Communication Technology (ICT); and (i) Collaborating on joint resource mobilization for GEWE programs. The MOU also mandates the development of work plans and program documents to effectively implement their joint initiatives. In February 2023, UN Women and the AUC launched a joint strategy outlining their priorities for implementing the AU's GEWE Strategy.

As the MOU's duration is nearing completion, the two institutions agreed to evaluate progress in the implementation of the priorities in both the MOU and the Joint Strategy on GEWE which constitute key actions under the agreement.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which the goals and objectives of the partnership were achieved between 2020 and 2023. The findings and recommendations from this evaluation will inform strategic-level discussions, the review of the existing MOU, and the development of planning and programming documents for future cooperation frameworks. Additionally, these findings will contribute to the ongoing development of the second ten-year implementation plan for Agenda 2063.

The specific objectives of the evaluation were: (a) To assess the progress and achievements of the collaboration under the MOU; (b) To evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implemented areas of collaboration; (c) To examine the relevance and sustainability of results in alignment with continental and global GEWE commitments; (d) To identify lessons learned, gaps and propose strategies to enhance ongoing cooperation; (e) To inform strategic-level dialogue, MOU review, and supplementary planning/programming documents; and (f) To contribute insights for the development of Agenda 2063's second ten-year implementation plan.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation employed the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, Coherence, and Sustainability. The evaluation also applied Human Rights and Gender Equality, as additional criteria. Data for the evaluation was gathered through desk review and virtual interviews with key informants from the AUC and UN Women. Qualitative data from desk review and key informant interviews was analysed using deductive thematic content analysis.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Relevance

Conclusion: *The MOU's goal, objectives, and priorities were highly relevant and remain relevant to the global and continental GEWE context and were aligned with the GEWE needs and priorities of UN Women, AUC, RECS, Member States and women and girls who are marginalised and vulnerable to gender-related injustices and discrimination across the African continent. There is however need for further realignment of the Joint Strategy with both the MOU and the SDGs, particularly in the areas of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), unpaid care work, and gender equality in humanitarian and conflict situations which are missing from the Joint Strategy.*

Women in Africa continue to grapple with injustices, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), lack of representation in decision-making and leadership roles, and disproportionate impacts related to unemployment, limited access to health services, climate change, disasters, and the burden of unpaid care work. The priorities outlined in the MOU and the Joint Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) align well with global commitments on GEWE as articulated in the SDGs, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). Further, the MOU and Joint Strategy priorities are also largely aligned with those of UN Women and AUC. Stakeholders interviewed all concurred that the partnership between AUC and UN Women remains very pertinent given: the GEWE gaps that still exist in Africa (which are in some cases widening); increasing gender inequality and VAWG challenges posed by emerging issues such as climate change and human-induced humanitarian disasters; and the high possibility that the continent will not meet its SDG 5 targets without increased investments in GEWE programming and stronger partnerships.

The MOU is also aligned with the global call for partnerships among development stakeholders in the fight for gender equality espoused at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg. The AU Agenda 2063 (Aspiration 7.63) similarly underscores mutually beneficial relations and partnerships in implementing its objectives and action plan. However, further realignment of the Joint Strategy is necessary to fully integrate sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), unpaid care work, and gender considerations in humanitarian contexts. There is a further need to constantly align the priority areas of the MOU and the Joint Strategy with the decisions, declarations, and resolutions of the AU, which are reviewed annually.

Effectiveness

Design of the partnership framework

Conclusion: *The design of the partnership was largely fit for purpose. However, the absence of an Implementation Plan and a Monitoring and Evaluation framework led to ad-hoc activity and event-driven engagements between AU and UN Women.*

Overall, the design of the partnership agreement, as espoused in the MOU, Joint Strategy and SOP, was generally fit for purpose as it outlined areas of focus, and articulated specific objectives, guiding principles, and guidelines for ensuring accountability. However, some of the guidelines were not activated and stakeholders interviewed from both the AU and UN Women acknowledged that no Action Plan with specific timelines for implementing the Joint Strategy was developed. Without an Action Plan, it became difficult to operationalise the Joint Strategy in a programmatic manner. There was also no budget set aside to support the implementation of the Joint Strategy. Most stakeholders interviewed felt that the Joint Strategy was not developed inclusively, as some key

stakeholders were not involved, and some were not even aware of the existence of the strategy. Although the design of the partnership framework was largely fit for purpose, it lacked tools for operationalisation leading to non-implementation of the Joint Strategy and activity-based engagement between UN Women and the AU.

Achievement of Goals and Objectives of the MOU

Overall Conclusion: *the partnership between UN Women and the AUC, operationalised through the MOU, has contributed significantly towards the achievement of GEWE goals and objectives of the two institutions.*

Through capacity-building initiatives, advocacy, awareness creation on women's rights and harmful gender norms and practices, strategic policy dialogue engagements, development and distribution of knowledge products including accountability frameworks and data collection tools, working with Women's Rights Organisations (CSOs), engaging African traditional leaders through COTLA and pitching GEWE issues at the highest level through the Champion Presidents concept, the partnership between UN Women and the AUC made significant contributions towards the GEWE goals and objectives espoused in the SDGs Agenda 2030 and the AU Agenda 2063. Through the work of these two partners, the GEWE discourse has been elevated to the highest platforms at Member States, regional, continental, and global levels in the areas of Women Economic Empowerment (WEE); Women Peace and Security (WPD); Women's Leadership and Political Participation; Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG); and gender transformation of normative frameworks among others.

Factors that enhanced the effectiveness of the partnership include: mutual trust between the two partners and alignment of mandates; complimentary strengths and attributes; political will and commitment to pursue the GEWE agenda; and the institutional capacity strengthening initiatives that were implemented. However, the effectiveness of the partnership could have been enhanced more through: improved coordination; the development and implementation of an Action Plan for the MOU, with clear indicators, targets, timelines, and accountability mechanisms; and adequate financial and human resources for both partners.

Strategic Objective 1: Accelerate Women's Economic Empowerment

Conclusion: *the gender equality discourse within AfCFTA has been elevated to the highest platforms at continental, RECs, and country levels through increased advocacy, development of knowledge products and policy dialogue engagements facilitated jointly by AUC, UN Women and CSOs, leading to increased awareness of the need to mainstream gender in the AfCFTA by stakeholders.*

Working jointly with the AUC, UN Women has supported the women and youth economic empowerment initiatives through co-convening continental conferences on women and youth in trade; and advocating for greater investment in women's economic empowerment, skills building, and women-led SMEs throughout the value chains so that they can compete and reap the benefits of regional integration and intra-African trade. Through the development of knowledge products and advocacy, UN Women, the AU, and partners have managed to promote gender priorities in the AfCFTA continental regional trade & integration agenda. The advocacy work and dialogue platforms have elevated the voices of women as advocates and as entrepreneurs to influence dialogue on AfCFTA at continental, regional, and country levels.

Strategic Objective 2: Promote women's leadership and voice

Conclusion: *Through AWLN and the establishment of its national chapters, the AUC and UN Women together with other partners, have empowered and enhanced the visibility of women leaders, promoted and capacitated a young generation of women leaders, and amplified the call for women leadership in politics, governance, and peace and security at country, continental and global levels.*

UN Women and AU's work on promoting women's leadership was anchored in the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) initiative which was launched in 2017 as a continental platform to galvanize women's leadership towards lasting peace and sustainable development in all sectors and at all levels, building on, and working with, existing women networks. The Network builds on African women's leadership to increase women's participation in decision-making through peer learning and mentoring, enhanced solidarity, advocacy, and capacity-building among other strategies.

By pursuing the WPS agenda through AWLN, UN Women and AU have elevated the issue of women's leadership consistently across the years. This has heightened discussions on women's role in mediation, conflict prevention, and humanitarian contexts. This has also raised the visibility of gender equality challenges and lessons learned in WPS programming. AWLN, with the support of UN Women and the AUC, has organised solidarity visits to women in fragile countries or those in conflict situations. The visits were meant to express solidarity and raise the profile of the situation of women in conflict, fragile, and humanitarian situations, including highlighting their exclusion from peace processes in their respective countries. These issues were amplified at country and continental levels and brought to the attention of rights bearers. Recommendations from the solidarity visits were read to the Peace and Security Council of the AU. The solidarity missions played a key role in elevating the WPS issues in the visited countries to regional and global levels.

UN Women and the AU have supported AWLN's annual intergenerational dialogues in different countries. These intergenerational dialogue sessions have enhanced the capacity of women leaders as they learn from each other and through mentorship sessions. Stakeholders interviewed reported that they noted an improvement in the voices of women after the mentorship and intergenerational sessions, particularly during AU sessions and CSW meetings.

At a global level, UN Women is supporting the AWLN initiative through funding from Germany. UN Women works closely with the AU Mission to the United Nations in New York and with the office of the Special Envoy on WPS to implement the AWLN programme at global level. UN Women has seconded a technical expert to the AU Mission in New York to support the implementation of the AWLN initiative, which fits into the 2018 UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security. Stakeholders interviewed confirmed that the secondment of the technical expert has greatly enhanced coordination between UN Women, the AU Mission to the UN, and the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS in the implementation of the AWLN initiative.

The global influence of the AWLN initiative has been enhanced through the establishment of the AWLN Group of Friends in New York led by South Africa and Germany. The group of friends organise high-level meetings and platforms for AWLN members to present their agenda and showcase their activities to an international audience. The Group of Friends has assisted AWLN to occupy dialogue spaces at global events such as the CSW annual meetings in New York. This has helped to open up spaces at the global level for women leaders.

UN Women also provided technical support in the development of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)'s WPS Strategy and Action Plan and is also supporting the East African Community (EAC) in developing its Regional Strategy and on WPS. UN Women is thus playing a key role in the institutional strengthening of WPS actors.

Strategic Objective 3: Dignity, Security and Resilience

Conclusion: *The AUC and UN Women have elevated the issue of VAWG to top priority level at national, continental, and global levels.*

Through consistent awareness creation on harmful norms and practices; capacity building of stakeholders including MS, NGOs, and traditional and cultural leaders through the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA); lobbying and advocacy for domestication and implementation of international, regional and national commitments on EAWG; establishing accountability frameworks; and the creation of strategic partnerships among other initiatives, UN Women and the AUC have enabled the issue of VAWG to consistently remain on the agenda of the continental body and MS. UN Women and AU also played a pivotal role in the implementation of the European Union-funded Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme (SIARP), a multi-stakeholder initiative involving UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA), UNECA, NGOs, and CSOs. The regional programme provided support to the AUC to enhance existing capacities and mechanisms for eliminating VAWG and harmful practices (such as child marriage and female genital mutilation) and promoting Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), life skills education and empowerment. UN Women seconded a programme specialist to the AUC's WGYD to provide technical support during the implementation of the regional programme. The programme's implementation focused on strengthening legislation and policy processes on ending EAWG, harmful practices and SRHR, generating good-quality and reliable data, and supporting women's movements and relevant CSOs.

Through UN women and AUC support, the capacities of MS, CSOs and other partners were enhanced to enable them to strengthen and implement legislation and policies on ending sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. An AU harmful practices accountability framework was

developed as well as a continental report on FGM. The programme also supported the development and implementation of national action plans and funding for EVAWG in Africa. High-level missions were undertaken to several AU MS by the AUC in partnership with CSOs to advocate the ratification, domestication, and enforcement of the Maputo Protocol and the implementation of initiatives aimed at curbing harmful practices. This has resulted in countries such as Egypt and Morocco to start working on the ratification process together with CSOs, while in other countries, the status of implementation of the child marriage initiative using general guidance from the African Union perspective was reviewed.

Through the regional SI programme, the AUC developed the first-ever Regional Action Plan for Africa on EVAWG with a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. The Action Plan will guide regional partners in implementing global and regional commitments on the EVAWG. Further, the capacity of media personnel and journalists to help end VAWG and harmful practices through reporting, advocacy, and media coverage was enhanced with the support of the SI. This has resulted in increased media coverage of VAWG and harmful practices issues.

The AUC and UN Women facilitated the creation of the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA) in 2021. COTLA is a pan-African movement of progressive traditional leaders committed to ending harmful practices by 2030. These leaders are positioned to protect children and advocate for the elimination of harmful practices. Since its formation, COTLA has been publicly condemning all cultural and traditional practices that harm women and girls. Specifically, it has called for the continued ban on FGM in countries such as Gambia and Nigeria. COTLA commits to preventing and eliminating harmful practices across African communities. In 2022, COTLA expressed its commitment to Generation Equality. COTLA collaborates with government efforts and partners, including the joint EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, to end child marriage and FGM.

The partnership between UN Women and AUC has elevated the issue of VAWG consistently across the years. There has been substantive traction to heighten attention among member states and stakeholders on VAWG as a continental challenge in its different forms across Africa.

Strategic Objective 4: Promote Strong Institutions: Strengthen the capacities of institutions to effectively implement laws and policies.

Conclusion: *The capacity-building initiatives led by AUC and UN Women have revitalized efforts toward implementing the Maputo Protocol and have strengthened accountability mechanisms and frameworks for collecting and utilizing data on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), harmful practices (HPs), female genital mutilation (FGM), and child marriage.*

The partnership between AUC and UN Women sought to strengthen the capacities of institutions to effectively implement laws and policies aimed at ending violence against women and girls. Regional capacity-building workshops were conducted through SIARP to enhance the capacities of national and regional governments, regional CSOs and other partners to assess gaps, draft new and strengthen existing legislation and policies, and enforce existing legislation on ending SGBV, FGM and child marriage. Through various engagement activities, MS who had not ratified the Maputo Protocol were called to ratify the protocol, resulting in South Sudan and Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic ratifying.

Through the capacity-building support of AU, UN Women, and other UN agencies, MS have made progress toward the development and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs), including financing and investments on EVAWG. Thirty countries have developed NAPs on Implementing UNSCR 1325. However, only 15 of these countries have costed budgets for their activities. Eleven Member States have UNSCR1325 NAPs that are outdated and require revision while 20 countries have a National Strategy for Ending Child Marriage. Twenty countries have a NAP on FGM. UN Women also supported the development of the AU Gender Policy, which provides a framework for mainstreaming gender in the AU and in programmes implemented by the AU and its partners.

Other capacity-building achievements through AUC-UN Women and SIARP support include: the strengthening of the Gender Scorecard initially developed in 2025, which will be utilised as a tool for evaluating efforts made by African Union MS in promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and addressing gender-based disparities; the development of the first-ever Regional Action Plan for Africa on EVAWG which will guide regional

partners in implementing global and regional commitments on EVAWG; the creation of the African Union Gender Partners Group which has brought together for the first-time gender partners to discuss gender priorities on the continent and how to coordinate better; development of a standardized and harmonized data collection toolkit on VAWG, harmful practices, and SRHR to ensure the production of good-quality, reliable, and timely data aimed at informing policy development, evidence-based decision-making, and advocacy; establishment of the African Union Gender Observatory (AUGO) which serves as an essential platform for monitoring and reporting on gender-related efforts across AU member states; and capacity strengthening training for 121 regional and national partners to enable them to collect, analyse and use SGBV, child marriage, and FGM data in line with international and regional standards.

Despite the above efforts by the two partners, stakeholders interviewed both within the AUC and UN Women felt that there is a lack of a structured coordination mechanism for the two partners to support accountability for gender mainstreaming. Although UN Women has supported the AUC with gender mainstreaming capacity-building training for its Gender Focal Points (GFPs), stakeholders noted that there are still gender mainstreaming gaps within the AUC and its structures.

Strategic Objective 5: Mobilise and sustain high-level political commitment for GEWE in Africa.

Conclusion: *the AU Heads of State Gender Champions have played a critical role in: elevating EVAWG (FGM, child marriage, positive masculinity) issues at continental and global platforms; advocating for policies, mobilizing resources, and creating an enabling environment for GEWE in Africa.*

AU Heads of State have been selecting their counterparts to become Champions for AUC-specific thematic areas to lead and spearhead the achievement of AU agendas for the selected thematic focus areas. This initiative is aimed at enhancing collaboration and increasing interaction between heads of state and government as they spearhead Africa's development agenda. It also promotes ownership of African Union programmes and activities at the highest level and facilitates peer learning and review. The GEWE areas of focus by the President Champions include women and gender development, Peace and Security, ending child marriage in Africa, and elimination of FGM.

Several Champion Presidents have actively advocated for ending child marriage. Their efforts include raising awareness, implementing legal reforms, and promoting education and empowerment for girls. By prioritizing this issue, they contribute to improving the lives of young girls and ensuring their rights are protected. Champion Presidents have also taken a stand against FGM, a harmful traditional practice affecting millions of girls and women. Their advocacy includes awareness campaigns, legal measures, and community engagement to eradicate FGM. The concept of President Champions promotes the visibility of Africa's development priorities at regional, continental, and global levels.

Efficiency

Conclusion: *Assessing efficiency and cost-effectiveness was difficult owing to a lack of an Implementation Plan, Budget and Resource Allocation Plan, Results Framework and an M&E Framework for the partnership. However, several factors that contributed to inefficiencies were identified.*

The lack of an implementation framework for the partnership made it difficult to assess the efficiency of the partnership. While UN Women and the AUC jointly implemented interventions prioritised in the MOU and Strategy, this was more by default than by design because of a lack of an implementation plan for the MOU. Without a well-defined implementation plan, there is no clear roadmap for executing the program. Key steps, responsibilities, and timelines remain ambiguous. Without an implementation plan and a results framework that outlines specific objectives, indicators, and targets, stakeholders lack a shared understanding of what success looks like and how progress will be measured. However, factors that contributed to inefficiency in the partnership included poor coordination, inadequate human and financial resources, internal bureaucracy, and leadership change transitions within both UN Women and AUC.

Impact

Conclusion: *Although it is still too early to assess the impact of the 3-year MOU, the activities implemented under the partnership have established a foundation for medium and long-term GEWE impacts. Potential for increased impact can be enhanced through developing and implementing an Action Plan for the MOU and accountability mechanisms and increasing human and financial resources for GEWE programming.*

The joint GEWE activities implemented by UN Women and the AUC triggered transformations that will ultimately lead to long-term GEWE impacts. At the normative level, the ratification, domestication, and implementation of the Maputo Protocol have been accelerated through joint efforts of the partners and this has triggered discussions by MS, CSOs, and development partners on how to expedite the ratification process for the remaining 11 countries yet to ratify the Protocol. Two of the MS ended up ratifying the protocol.

The two partners have also capacitated MS, RECs and CSOs to develop and implement gender-responsive policies, legal reforms, and institutional frameworks that prioritize GEWE. By integrating gender considerations into national and regional policies, the partners are driving long-term GEWE transformation across the continent. Furthermore, the High-level engagements resulting from the MOU and Joint Strategy have influenced political leaders. Champion Presidents and other stakeholders advocate for GEWE, leading to policy shifts and increased political will. Their commitment ensures that gender equality remains a priority on the agenda of the AUC, RECs, and MS.

Awareness campaigns targeting communities have increased their level of knowledge on gender equality, women's rights, and harmful practices. This knowledge is a community asset that will continue to be shared for a long time to come and in the process shifting norms and practices towards GEWE. The engagement of traditional and cultural leaders through COTLA will further contribute to long-term shifts in norms among communities as traditional leaders play a significant role in upholding and influencing the norms and values of communities. These efforts create lasting social change within communities.

By promoting financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and access to resources for women through the WEE component, the partnership contributes to sustainable economic growth and empowerment of women. Economic empowerment enhances the well-being of individuals and communities. The MOU and Joint Strategy also facilitate technical assistance, capacity-building workshops, and knowledge-sharing. Strengthening institutions and enhancing technical skills ensures long-term sustainability in achieving GEWE goals.

Overall, the work done by UN Women and the AUC has catalysed long-term transformations by aligning policies, empowering communities, building institutional capacities, and fostering collaboration. However, for increased impact, there is need to come up with an implementation plan and an accountability mechanism to monitor and evaluate the partnership.

Coherence

Conclusion: *The MOU and Joint Strategy are compatible and complement existing global, continental, regional, and MS GEWE commitments, strategies, and interventions.*

The MOU and Joint Strategy are aligned with AU's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations SDGs. The development of the Joint Strategy was informed by the UN Women Strategy for Africa (2.0), the AU's Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) Strategy 2018-2028 and the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights. The Joint Strategy therefore seeks to enhance the goals of the GEWE commitments of the AU and UN Women. They reinforce and enhance ongoing efforts by integrating gender considerations into broader development programs and policies. The AU also collaborates closely with RECs, which play a critical role in regional integration and development. The MOU and the Joint Strategy is highly coherent with and complemented current GEWE efforts at global, continental, regional, and MS levels.

Sustainability

Conclusion: *A foundation for sustainability of the MOU and Joint Strategy initiatives was established through capacity building of stakeholders, generation of political will at the highest level, and empowerment of*

communities through awareness creation and engagement of traditional leaders. Threats to sustainability include weak coordination, human and financial resource constraints, lack of a joint resource mobilisation strategy, and inadequate capacity to mainstream gender within the AUC.

The MOU and Joint Strategy focused on capacity-building, knowledge sharing, and technical assistance. Strengthening institutions and empowering stakeholders ensures sustainable GEWE efforts. Further, the Joint Strategy supported community-based initiatives. By empowering women, and engaging communities and traditional leaders, lasting norm-transforming change is achieved at the grassroots level. The MOU and Joint Strategy also laid a strong foundation for long-term GEWE impacts by fostering collaboration, aligning policies, and mobilizing resources. Their legacy will extend beyond specific timeframes, benefiting individuals, communities, and institutions across Africa.

However, despite building a strong foundation for sustainability, several threats exist. These include changes in leadership and staff turnover within the AU and UN Women which could affect the commitment to implementing the MOU and Joint Strategy. This could also result in a shift of priorities. Without sustained political will, resources and efforts may wane over time. Organizational restructuring, leadership turnover, or changes in administrative processes can also disrupt the implementation of joint initiatives. Ensuring continuity despite institutional changes is therefore critical. Other threats to sustainability include: a lack of a supporting budget for the implementation of the MOU and Strategy; weak coordination between the partners; and resistance to GEWE owing to patriarchal attitudes and norms.

Gender Equality and Human Rights Integration

Conclusion: *Gender Equality and Human Rights were well integrated in the design of the MOU and Joint Strategy which sought to advance GEWE through implementation of global and continental commitments on gender equality and the human rights of women.*

The Joint Strategy was designed as a Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Initiative aimed at creating an enabling policy and legal environment and empowering women to enable them to claim their women and human rights in the areas of leadership and participation in decision-making, women economic empowerment, Peace and Security and to live a life free from all forms of violence. The Joint Strategy's design was thus focused on entrenching the human rights of women through a number of strategies including engendering the legal and policy framework, empowering women through creating economic opportunities, awareness creation, capacity strengthening of CSOs and institutions, creating high-level political commitment, engaging traditional leaders so that they can recognize, appreciate, respect and advocate for the rights of women and girls, and empowering duty bearers to create institutions and frameworks that promote and enforce the human rights of women. Gender and human rights considerations were well integrated in the design of the MOU and Joint Strategy.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT

- Lack of a validated implementation framework for an MOU leads to activity-based engagement between the partners and ad-hoc implementation of activities.
- Bringing all key MOU stakeholders together to develop and validate an implementation framework in an inclusive and participatory manner is key to creating ownership and accountability in the implementation of the MOU and Joint Strategy.
- Where an implementation plan, results framework and an M&E are lacking in a partnership framework, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of that partnership.
- A well-structured coordination framework, with clearly defined roles for each stakeholder and with inbuilt accountability mechanisms, developed and validated through an inclusive process involving all key stakeholders and signed by the leadership of the partnering institutions, is key in enhancing ownership and effective and efficient coordination in a partnership framework.
- Institutional change and capacity-building on gender mainstreaming takes a very long time. Short-term and ad hoc activities aiming to enhance institutional capacity do not guarantee sustainable change within the institution, unless they are part of a sufficiently long-term and unremitting approach, solidly anchored within the institution, owned by its leaders, and supported by internal technical capacities.

- Secondment of technical staff, requires a formal framework where roles and responsibilities are clearly defined to avoid conflict of priorities and overwhelming the seconded persons who have to respond to the needs of several institutions to which they are answerable.
- Where there are significant human and financial resource constraints in a partnership, coordination and implementation are negatively impacted.
- Engaging Heads of State as champions of the various components of GEWE elevates the issues to continental and global levels, where they attract attention, funding, and partnerships.
- Building strong women's networks through capacity building involving advocacy and lobbying, is effective in elevating women's voices in their demand for their rights.
- Engaging Traditional and Cultural Leaders who are the gate-keepers and custodians of cultural values and norms, is key in dismantling norms, values, and practices that perpetuate harmful practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Overall:** Renew the MOU between the AUC and UN women for a longer period of around five years incorporating recommendations from this evaluation for improved partnership effectiveness.
- **Developing new MOU:** Develop the new MOU through a participatory and inclusive process, informed by an evidence-based situation analysis which will help in identifying key priority areas of focus.
- **Alignment:** Anchor the MOU priority areas in the AUC decisions, declarations, and resolutions for increased alignment with the AUC GEWE agenda. In addition, increase alignment of the Joint Strategy with the MOU priorities and SGD GEWE priorities by including SRHR, unpaid care work, and gender equality in humanitarian and conflict situations that are missing from the Joint Strategy.
- **Institutionalising the planning and operationalisation of the MOU & Joint Strategy:** Through an inclusive and participatory process, develop and validate corporate tools to guide implementation of the MOU and Joint Strategy i.e Implementation Plan; Results Framework; Monitoring and Evaluation Framework; Resource Mobilisation Framework; and an Implementation Budget for the Joint Strategy, and ensure that all key departments and programmes in AUC, UN Women, RECs and key stakeholders participate in the process for ownership and accountability.
- **Coordination:** Strengthen the coordination mechanism of the partnership by developing, validating, and implementing a Partnership Coordination Agreement (PCA) (with a mechanism for accountability) through an inclusive, consultative, and participatory process where all key stakeholders and relevant departments within the UN system and the AUC (e.g WYGD; Office of the Special Envoy on WPS; and PAPS) are involved. The coordinating entry points for AUC (i.e. GWYD) and the UN System (UN Women) should be well defined and protocols for engagement established and implemented.
 - Evaluate the PCA annually and address any gaps identified,
 - Provide a budget for partnership coordination.
- **Strengthening Gender Mainstreaming:** Conduct a Gender Audit for all the AUC departments; Develop a concrete long-term gender mainstreaming capacity-building programme, solidly anchored within the institution, owned by its leaders and supported by internal technical capacities of the AUC and UN Women; Develop an on-line module on Gender Mainstreaming and make it mandatory for all AUC staff (old and new) to go through the course; and Revitalise the concept of Gender Focal Points within the AUC and capacitate the GFPs through gender mainstreaming training.
- **Resource Mobilisation:** Develop a joint resource mobilisation strategy, guided by the priority areas in the MOU and Joint Strategy, to support implementation of the MOU Action Plan.
- **Technical staff:** increase the number of technical support staff for both AUC and UN Women to enable the two partners to cope with their huge GEWE mandates.
- **Secondment of Technical Staff to AUC:** Develop a formalised framework for seconding technical staff to the AUC, with expectations, roles and responsibilities clearly defined.

1. OBJECT AND CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION

1.1 Object of the Evaluation

This report presents findings of an evaluation of the partnership between the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (hereinafter referred to as UN Women) and the African Union Commission (AUC), operationalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in December 2020 for a period of three years (2020-2023). The evaluation was conducted by an independent consultant between December 2023 and April 2024. The report is presented in six sections. The introduction section provides a background to the partnership between UN Women and AUC; Section Two discusses the background and methodology of the evaluation; while Section Three presents and discusses the key findings of the evaluation. In Section Four, the key lessons learned, and conclusions are discussed while Section Five provides recommendations from the evaluation.

1.1.1 MOU Background

Since 2005, UN Women and the AUC have been working together to promote Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) in Africa. They do this by integrating GEWE into policy discussions, tracking policy implementation, sharing best practices, and supporting UN system efforts to align with African Union (AU) priorities related to GEWE. The AUC has a mandate to support and advance the integration goals of the AU, as outlined in Agenda 2063. This agenda emphasises the importance of women, youth, and children in Africa's development. The AU recognises that gender equality is a fundamental human right and essential for regional integration, economic growth, and social development. The AU has developed a strategy for GEWE to ensure women's inclusion in Africa's development agenda. The AUC's Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate (WGYD) is responsible for leading these efforts and ensuring African countries uphold the AU's commitment to gender equality.

UN Women, as a global champion for GEWE, is actively working to improve the lives of women and girls in Africa through its offices in different regions of Africa. UN Women collaborates with governments and civil society to design and implement laws, policies, programs, and services that benefit women and girls. UN Women also works globally to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the AU's Agenda 2063 for women and girls.

To strengthen their partnership, UN Women and the African Union Commission signed an MOU in December 2020 to intensify cooperation and collaboration to accelerate the achievement of GEWE in Africa. This MOU aims to enhance cooperation in several areas, including: the economic empowerment of women; the promotion of women's leadership and effective participation in decision-making positions; the elimination of all forms of violence against women; the protection of women's rights in conflict, post-conflict and humanitarian situations; the promotion of women's reproductive health and rights; joint advocacy for the ratification, domestication and implementation of global and regional norms; strengthening gender mainstreaming and monitoring capacity in AU and AU organs; promoting an enabling environment for women and girls engagement in Information Communication Technology (ICT); and forging joint resource mobilization for GEWE programs. It also mandates the development of work plans and program documents to implement their joint initiatives effectively. In February 2023, the partners launched a joint strategy outlining their priorities to implement the AU's GEWE Strategy.

This partnership has increased gender integration in AU policies and processes, improved monitoring and reporting on development goals, and collaboration on initiatives such as the Spotlight Initiative, Positive Masculinity Initiative, and African Girls Can Code Initiative. The two partners have also promoted women's leadership and engagement at community, national and continental levels and supported various networks and organizations working on GEWE. Joint initiatives such as the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) were operationalized continentally in 34 AU Member States to galvanize women's leadership towards lasting peace and sustainable development in both the public and private sectors and at community, national and continental level, building on, and working with, existing women networks. Efforts are underway to expand AWLN to all the continent's 54 countries. The partnership also facilitated the participation and engagement of women's organisations; GEWE Civil Society organisations, youth-led organisations, and their networks; traditional, cultural and religious leaders in continental and global normative and advocacy processes and initiatives.

As the MOU's duration is nearing completion, the two institutions agreed to evaluate progress in the implementation of the priorities in both the MOU and the Joint Strategy on GEWE which constitute key actions under the agreement.

1.1.2 MOU Theory of Change and Expected Results

The MOU between the AUC and UN Women did not have an explicit Theory of Change. However, based on the content and strategic objectives outlined, the implicit Theory of Change revolves around a partnership to accelerate gender equality and women's empowerment across Africa by leveraging combined resources, expertise, and institutional influence. The MOU focused on the following ten Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) strategic areas: Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE); Women's Leadership and Participation (WLP); Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG); Women's Rights in Conflict, Post Conflict and Humanitarian Situations and Women Peace and Security (WPS); Women's Reproductive Rights; Promoting ratification and strengthening implementation of normative frameworks on GEWE; Gender mainstreaming capacity strengthening within the AUC and its organs; creating an enabling environment for girls participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects; Strengthening the production and use of gender data and knowledge production; and Resource Mobilisation.

The expected results of the MoU focused on gender equality and women's empowerment across Africa, aligned with the AU's Agenda 2063 and the UN's Agenda 2030. The WEE strategic focus area was expected to increase women's access to financial resources, economic opportunities, and leadership in digital and green economies through gender-sensitive trade policies (in particular the African Continental Free Trade Area-ACFTA), advocacy for financial inclusion, supporting women-led SMEs, and capacity building for climate-smart agriculture. The WLP pillar was expected to increase the number of women holding leadership positions in politics, governance, and peacebuilding mentorship programs, leadership training, advocacy for gender quotas, and the establishment of networks for young women leaders. Through campaigns addressing toxic masculinity, strengthening the legal frameworks, and supporting continental movements aimed at transforming social norms, the Dignity, Security, and Resilience strategic focus area was expected to result in a reduction in violence and discrimination against women and girls and increased participation of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction. Strengthened

Institutions, through capacity-building initiatives, promoting gender-responsive budgeting, and the generation of gender-disaggregated data to influence policy decisions, were expected to have enhanced capacity to mainstream gender and to implement gender equality commitments and policies. Through increased cooperation and collaboration and joint efforts to pool financial and technical resources, the two institutions expected to raise funds for the joint implementation of GEWE programmes in Africa.

Together, these results were expected to transform gender relations across all Africa, ensuring that women and girls live free from discrimination and violence, while also enhancing their economic, political, and social participation.

1.1.2 Intended Beneficiaries of the MOU

The intended beneficiaries of the MOU included: the AUC; Regional Economic Communities (RECs); AU Member States (MS); Women's Rights Organisations; Women and Girls across Africa; and traditional leaders. The AUC was to benefit from the partnership through technical assistance and capacity-building support from UN Women to enhance its ability to implement gender-sensitive policies and programs across Africa. This included training on gender mainstreaming, the development of gender-disaggregated data, and the implementation of normative frameworks such as the Maputo Protocol. Through the MoU, the AUC was also to gain access to UN Women's global and regional expertise on gender equality and women's empowerment to help it align its gender strategies with broader international frameworks such as Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063.

The MOU was also intended to provide technical assistance and capacity-building support to RECs and Member States to enable them to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment across their regional and national policies and programs. This included guidance on gender-responsive budgeting, data collection, and the development of gender-focused strategies aligned with continental frameworks including Agenda 2063 and the Maputo Protocol. The RECs and MS were also to be supported through the MOU to better integrate gender equality across various sectors, such as trade, agriculture, and governance and to better implement gender-sensitive approaches in areas such as economic inclusion, climate adaptation, and peacebuilding, ensuring that women benefit from regional and national development initiatives.

Under the MOU, Member States were to receive technical support according to their needs to align their national gender policies with continental frameworks, such as the Maputo Protocol, the AU Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy (GEWE) 2018-2028, and Agenda 2063. Further, MS were to be provided with capacity-building support for their national institutions responsible for gender mainstreaming, including training government officials, creating accountability frameworks, and strengthening the skills of policymakers to integrate gender-sensitive approaches across various sectors.

Women's Rights Organisations and CSOs were also targeted beneficiaries of the MOU. The partnership aimed to strengthen advocacy for gender-responsive policies at both regional and national levels. Women's rights organizations and CSOs could use the increased attention to gender equality within the AU framework to influence policy changes and national legislative reforms on women's rights. The MoU was set to enhance the capacity of women's rights organisations and CSOs through training and

knowledge-sharing programs. These would empower them to better address issues related to gender inequality, violence against women, and economic empowerment of women.

The partnership opened up opportunities for funding from international donors and agencies for gender-related projects. Women's rights organizations could access new resources to carry out programs focusing on women's political participation, peace and security, economic rights, and ending violence against women. The MoU promoted the participation of women's rights organizations and CSOs in regional policy dialogues, ensuring that their voices and needs were represented in AU-led initiatives. This includes frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Women's Decade.

By aligning with AU's initiatives for economic development, the MoU facilitated programs aimed at women's economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and leadership roles in business and politics. Women's organizations could benefit from greater access to markets and initiatives focused on women's financial inclusion. With the AU's strong mandate on peace and security in Africa, the MoU emphasized the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Women's rights organizations engaged in these areas could gain greater support and visibility for their work in implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security.

The MoU emphasized a joint effort to eliminate violence against women and girls. Women's organizations and CSOs working in this area could collaborate with AU and UN Women initiatives to address gender-based violence (GBV), including through campaigns and prevention programs. The MoU between UN Women and the AU provided women's rights organizations and CSOs with opportunities to advance their work on gender equality, access resources, influence policy, and collaborate on continent-wide initiatives aimed at improving the lives of African women.

The primary beneficiaries of the MOU were marginalised women and girls in Africa. The focus of the MOU was on improving the lives of women and girls across Africa by promoting gender equality, empowering them economically, and ensuring they live free from violence and discrimination. The MOU strategy especially emphasised marginalized women and girls, including those in vulnerable situations affected by social, economic, and political barriers.

1.1.3 MOU budget

The MOU and the AU-UN Women Joint GEWEE Strategy did not have a specific budget to support implementation, and this was one of the key gaps in the partnership arrangement. Article 7 of the MOU states that each party will bear the costs and expenses relating to or arising from, its participation in activities undertaken pursuant to the MOU.

1.1.4 Intended Users of the Evaluation

The intended users of the evaluation are UN Women management and programme staff at headquarters, liaison office, regional and country levels; UN Agencies; AUC management and the respective department participating in implementing joint partnership interventions; AU Member States; Donors; Civil Society Organisations (CSOs); Women's Organisations and Networks; and private sector partners. The evaluation findings will be presented to the stakeholders listed above for validation.

1.2 Africa GEWE Context

Africa, home to over 1.2 billion people of whom over 75% are below the age of 35, continues to face significant gender disparities across various sectors. Although progress has been made, women and girls in Africa still face numerous barriers to achieving full equality and empowerment. The intersection of economic, political, and social factors influences women's opportunities, with particular challenges in women's economic empowerment, leadership and participation, peace and security, and violence against women and girls.

Women in Africa are disproportionately affected by economic exclusion, with many engaged in the informal economy where job security, income stability, and legal protection are limited. Women face challenges in accessing financial services, markets, and land ownership due to discriminatory legal frameworks and socio-cultural norms. Traditional gender roles further restrict women's participation in more lucrative sectors like technology and green economies. With the growth of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), there are new opportunities for women to participate in cross-border trade and value chains. Digitalization and climate-smart agriculture are sectors where women can play pivotal roles if barriers to access are removed. Strengthening financial inclusion for women, particularly through gender-sensitive policies and programs, can catalyse women's economic empowerment across the continent.

Despite comprising over half of Africa's population, women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions, both in the public and private sectors. In politics, although some countries have adopted gender quotas, women still face structural barriers to equal participation, including gender biases, lack of support, and inadequate financial resources to campaign for political offices. Only two presidents in Africa are female; of the 10,510 parliamentarians in Africa in 2021, only 2,622 or about 25 per cent were female while only 24% of cabinet ministers are female¹. Cultural norms often discourage women from pursuing leadership roles. Several African countries are making strides in adopting affirmative action policies to increase women's political representation. Networks of women leaders are growing, providing mentorship and capacity building for young women aspiring to leadership roles. Increasing women's participation in leadership not only promotes gender equality but also leads to more inclusive governance and policy-making.

Women and girls in Africa are disproportionately affected by armed conflict, political instability, and crises. Despite global and regional frameworks, such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, women remain underrepresented in peace negotiations and conflict resolution processes. Moreover, women and girls in conflict zones are vulnerable to sexual violence, displacement, and exploitation. Regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) have prioritised the inclusion of women in peace processes. The implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda across Africa offers opportunities to increase women's participation in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. Programs that engage women as peacebuilders at the community level have shown positive results in reducing violence and fostering reconciliation.

Violence against women and girls remains a pervasive issue across Africa, manifesting in forms such as domestic violence, sexual assault, female genital mutilation (FGM), and child marriage. Gender-based violence is often underreported due to stigma, lack of legal protection, and inadequate support

¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2022

services for survivors. Patriarchal social norms and weak legal frameworks in some regions further entrench violence against women and girls. Legislative reforms in several African countries have strengthened legal frameworks to protect women and girls from violence. Campaigns, including those focused on positive masculinity, seek to challenge harmful norms that perpetuate violence. Efforts to empower women economically and socially are essential in breaking the cycle of violence, as they provide women with the resources and agency to leave abusive situations and advocate for their rights.

African countries and the African Union (AU) have committed to various international instruments on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), which provide the legal and policy framework for advancing the rights of women and girls across the continent. Key international instruments that most African countries and the AU have adopted or ratified include: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979) which provides a framework for gender equality in political, economic, social, cultural, and civil life; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) which outlines strategic objectives for achieving gender equality across 12 critical areas, including women's rights in education, health, economic participation, and ending violence against women; the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015), which include Goal 5 which is specifically dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls; and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace, and Security which calls for the inclusion of women in peace negotiations, post-conflict reconstruction, and the prevention of gender-based violence during and after conflicts.

At continental level, the AU and Member States have committed to the following instruments: The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) (2003) which is a legally binding regional human rights instrument that addresses women's rights in Africa; the African Union Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy (GEWE) (2018-2028) which aims to promote gender equality in Africa by focusing on key areas such as women's economic empowerment, political participation, and addressing violence against women and girls; the African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004) which commits African leaders to promote gender equality and women's rights, including the eradication of violence against women, ensuring women's participation in decision-making, and improving the status of women in Africa and increased reporting on progress towards gender equality; AU Agenda 2063 which includes Aspiration 6 dedicated to gender equality and empowering women and youth; and the African Union Agenda for Women, Peace, and Security (2020-2030) which complements UN Security Council Resolution 1325 by promoting the active participation of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes in Africa;

African countries and the AU have made substantial commitments to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through these international and regional instruments. These frameworks' continued implementation and monitoring are crucial for achieving transformative outcomes for women and girls across Africa. While Africa has made significant progress in addressing gender inequalities, much remains to be done to fully realize gender equality. Women's economic empowerment, leadership participation, peace and security involvement, and the eradication of violence against women and girls are key areas where concerted efforts are needed. Through targeted policies, institutional reforms, and cultural shifts, the continent can unlock the full potential of its women and girls, fostering more inclusive and sustainable development. It is in this context that the

AU and UN Women entered into a partnership, operationalised through an MOU, to promote GEWE in Africa.

1.3 Key Stakeholders of the MOU

The key stakeholders of the MoU between UN Women and the African Union (AU) included a range of actors across different sectors, each playing a specific role in advancing the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment across Africa. Below are the primary stakeholders and their roles:

(a) UN Women

UN Women was one of the main parties in the MoU, responsible for providing technical support, expertise, and resources to implement gender-responsive policies across Africa. As the UN entity for gender equality, its role was to collaborate with the AU on initiatives related to women's political participation, economic empowerment, ending gender-based violence, and peace and security. UN Women also facilitated capacity-building efforts for women's rights organizations and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

(b) African Union (AU)

The AU was the other principal signatory of the MoU, representing the regional governance framework for the continent. Its role was to align its regional policy frameworks, including Agenda 2063 and the African Women's Decade, with gender equality priorities. The AU worked to ensure that its member states adopt gender-responsive policies, particularly in areas such as peace and security, economic development, and governance. The AUC's Women Gender and Development Directorate was tasked with leading the gender-related efforts within the African Union, ensuring alignment with the goals of the MoU. It worked closely with UN Women to monitor the implementation of the AU's

(c) African Union Member States

As part of the AU, the 55 African Union member states were key stakeholders responsible for implementing gender policies at the national level. Their role included adopting and enforcing gender-sensitive laws, improving access to health, education, and economic resources for women, and ensuring women's representation in decision-making processes. Governments were tasked with integrating gender equality into their national development plans, supported by both the AU and UN Women.

(d) Women's Rights Organizations and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

These organizations were crucial for advocacy, grassroots mobilization, and monitoring the implementation of gender-related policies. They acted as intermediaries between communities and policymakers, ensuring that the needs and voices of women were reflected in national and regional policies. CSOs played a role in delivering on-the-ground programs, especially in areas like gender-based violence, women's economic empowerment, and legal advocacy for gender equality.

(e) Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

RECs, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), served as key regional implementers of gender equality frameworks. They worked with the AU and UN Women to coordinate gender equality initiatives at the

regional level, including cross-border issues such as migration, trade, and peacebuilding, ensuring women's inclusion in these processes.

(e) Women in Peace and Security Networks

Stakeholders involved in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, such as networks of women peacebuilders and mediators, were vital in advancing the MoU's goals in peace and security. Their role was to ensure the inclusion of women in peace negotiations, post-conflict reconstruction, and the implementation of policies related to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (on women, peace, and security).

(f) Private Sector Partners

The private sector was involved as a key stakeholder in promoting women's economic empowerment. Private companies were encouraged to provide resources, training, and opportunities for women entrepreneurs, as well as integrate gender-sensitive policies in their business models. The private sector's role included promoting financial inclusion and investing in women-owned businesses.

(g) Media and Communication Networks

Media organizations were responsible for raising awareness about gender equality issues, promoting the work of women's rights organizations, and highlighting the progress and challenges in the implementation of the MoU. They played a key role in advocacy and shaping public opinion around women's rights and empowerment in Africa.

(h) Youth and Women's Leadership Networks

These networks, particularly those focused on young women, were stakeholders in building the next generation of women leaders. They contributed to the MoU's goals by promoting youth engagement in governance and decision-making and by advocating for policies that empower young women in politics, business, and civil society.

1.4 Changes to Project Design and Implementation

The COVID-19 pandemic, which peaked globally in 2020, had a profound impact on the design and implementation of many gender-focused programs. The pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities and introduced new challenges, such as increased rates of gender-based violence (GBV), economic hardships, and disruptions to education and health services.

There was a shift in focus to address the gendered impact of COVID-19, such as providing more resources for women in healthcare, mitigating the rise in GBV during lockdowns, and ensuring that women's economic recovery was prioritized. Due to travel restrictions and public health concerns, in-person advocacy, training, and meetings were adapted to virtual formats, necessitating changes in how stakeholders communicated and coordinated.

As African economies faced downturns due to COVID-19 and other global economic challenges, a stronger emphasis on women's economic recovery and empowerment became necessary. Programs and initiatives were adapted to prioritize women's access to financial resources, markets, and entrepreneurship training to ensure their recovery and inclusion in economic recovery plans. Existing economic empowerment programs were redesigned to focus more on digital inclusion, access to

microcredit, and support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) run by women. The pandemic accelerated the need for digital solutions to continue the implementation of gender equality programs, particularly when it came to education, training, advocacy, and service delivery.

There was a greater emphasis on using digital tools for advocacy, communication, and training programs, enabling broader participation from women's rights organizations and civil society even in remote areas. Programs aimed at improving women's digital literacy and access to technology were prioritized to ensure that women could benefit from the increasing digitization of services and economic activities.

Political instability and conflict in certain African regions (such as Ethiopia's Tigray conflict, violence in the Sahel, and other areas of unrest) impacted the ability to implement peace and security initiatives, particularly those aimed at women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Attention was focused towards regions experiencing conflict, focusing on protecting women in conflict zones and promoting their inclusion in peace negotiations.

2. EVALUATION BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to enhance UN Women and AU's accountability for gender equality, human rights and women's empowerment commitments; learning; and to inform management and decision-making processes on GEWE interventions. The overarching objective of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the goals and objectives of the partnership have been achieved over the past three years (2020-2023). The findings and recommendations of the evaluation will inform strategic-level dialogue, the review of the existing MOU, and the development of supplementary planning/programming documents to inform future cooperation frameworks. The findings will also inform the development of the Agenda 2063's second ten-year implementation plan which is underway.

2.2 Objectives of the Evaluation

The objectives of this evaluation, as described in the Terms of Reference (Annex A), were to:

- a) Assess the progress and achievements of the collaboration under the MOU.
- b) Evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implemented areas of collaboration.
- c) Examine the relevance and sustainability of results in alignment with continental and global GEWE commitments.
- d) Identify lessons learnt, gaps and propose strategies to enhance ongoing cooperation.
- e) Inform strategic-level dialogue, MOU review, and supplementary planning/programming documents.
- f) Contribute insights for the development of Agenda 2063's second ten-year implementation plan.

2.3 Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation covered the entire duration of the MOU (2020-2023) and entailed the following:

- a) Review of MOU operationalization documents, work plans, and program/project documents.
- b) Analysis of joint strategies, initiatives, and flagship programs, including the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme (SIARP), Positive Masculinity Initiative, (African Girls Can Code Initiative (AGCCI), and the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN).
- c) Assessment of the impact on the mainstreaming of gender in AU policies, organs, and processes.
- d) Examination of multi-stakeholder partnerships and their contribution to global and continental processes.
- e) Evaluation of the participation and engagement of various stakeholders, including women's organizations, civil society, youth, and traditional, cultural, and religious leaders.

2.4 Evaluation Approach and Design

The evaluation was gender and human rights responsive, utilization-focused, consultative, and aligned with UN Women’s evaluation policy and United Nations Evaluation Group’s (UNEG) Norms and Standards. A mixed-methods approach was applied, involving a blend of qualitative and quantitative data collection, along with analysis of data from different data sources for consistency, validity, and reliability.

A UN Women gender-responsive evaluation approach was utilised in conducting the evaluation. The evaluation specifically focused on gender equality and women empowerment, examining how initiatives implemented under the MOU framework contributed towards: the adoption and implementation of normative frameworks that promote gender equality and women empowerment; the economic empowerment of women; increased participation of women in leadership and decision-making and in peace and security processes; elimination of violence against women and girls; and transforming norms from those that impact negatively on gender equality towards those that promote it.

The evaluation was designed to be as inclusive as possible, ensuring the participation of all key stakeholders, including organisations representing marginalised women and young women and persons with disability, during interviews and the validation of the evaluation results. In addition, the evaluation report provides actionable recommendations for improving gender equality in future projects.

2.5 Evaluation Criteria and Key Questions

The evaluation employed the OECD/DAC and UNEG evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, Coherence and Sustainability. The evaluation also applied Human Rights and Gender Equality, as additional criteria.

Table 1 below shows the key questions for the evaluation under each evaluation criteria:

Table 1: Evaluation Criteria and Key Questions

Evaluation Criteria	Key Questions
Relevance:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the MOU and its related strategies consistent with Global, Continental and Member States' needs and priorities on GEWE? • To what extent is the MOU in alignment with the GEWE priorities of UN Women, AUC, RECs and Member States? • Does the MOU remain relevant considering possible changes in the context, assumptions and emerging issues?
Effectiveness:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the partnership framework designed to meet objectives? • To what extent were the goal, objectives, outcomes, outputs and results of the MOU and the Joint Strategy on GEWE achieved? • What are the major factors that influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the results? • To what extent were the institutional risks identified under the Joint AU-UN Women Strategy on GEWE mitigated?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the implementation of the MOU and Joint Strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the MOU and Joint Strategy contributed to long-term policy, political, social, economic, technical, environmental changes for

	individuals, communities, and institutions in achieving the SDG and 2063 GEWE agendas?
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How compatible is the MOU and Joint Strategy on GEWE with other interventions on the continent, RECs, and member states?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are the impacts of the MOU and Joint Strategy on GEWE likely to continue in the long-term?
Gender Equality and Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has gender and human rights considerations been integrated into the MOU and Joint Strategy on GEWE design and implementation? • To what extent is disability mainstreamed in the MOU and its Strategy and implementation?

2.6 Sources of Data and Collection Methods

The evaluation gathered data using the following methods:

2.6.1 Desk Review

More than 20 documents were reviewed during the evaluation including: MOU document; UN Women and AU Joint Strategy on GEWE; Programme and project documents under the MOU, including SIARP, Positive Masculinity Initiative, AGCCI, and AWLN; UN Women Strategic Note (2023-2026); UN Women Strategic Plan (2022-2025); the AU Youth and UN Women's Youth Financial and Economic Inclusion; Policy Paper: Gender-Based Violence in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic; AU Handbook; Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want; AU annual reports and the 2021 African Union Gender Score Card among others. The documents were reviewed to have an in-depth understanding of the MOU background and context, goals and objectives, implementation framework and approach, expected outcomes, achievements, and lessons learned in the implementation of the MOU and the Joint strategy on GEWE.

2.6.2 In-Depth Key Informant/Stakeholder Interviews

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with partners participating in the implementation of the MOU and the Joint Strategy on GEWE. The purpose of the KIIs was to gain insights into how the MOU and the Joint Strategy were implemented, key achievements, lessons learned, gaps, and recommendations on how to improve the partnership between UN Women and the AU and its respective organs.

The key informants were purposively sampled based on their strategic location and involvement in implementing GEWE interventions outlined in both the MOU and its Joint strategy. The key informants were sampled from AUC departments that participated in the implementation of GEWE interventions and UN Women head office, regional offices and country offices that also participated in the strategic areas of the MOU and the Joint Strategy. Close to 40 were identified as key informants from UN Women, AUC, other UN Agencies, CSOs and donors. However, only 17 Key Informants from AUC and UN Women were available to participate in the interviews. All the interviews were conducted virtually and were audio recorded (upon consent by the key informant) and later transcribed into detailed notes for analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis

Qualitative data from desk review and key informant interviews was analysed using deductive thematic content analysis. Comparative analysis of qualitative data was used to systematically analyse evidence from the different evaluation components, taking into consideration relevant literature and findings from key informant interviews. The evaluation matrix provided the overarching framework for data analysis across all evaluation components.

2.8 Ethics

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the UN Women Evaluation Policy and the UN Evaluation Group Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System. These included: confidentiality and informed consent; voluntariness; independence and impartiality; credibility, integrity, transparency, and accountability; and avoidance of harm.

2.9 Limitations

The main limitation of the evaluation was the lack of timely availability of key informants, which delayed the completion of the assignment. Repeated reminders were sent to the targeted key informants which resulted in an increase in the response rate. However, the consultant is confident that the number of key informants that responded adequately represents the views of stakeholders that participated in the partnership between the AUC and UN Women.

3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings of the evaluation informed by the synthesized analysis of data from desk review of project documents and key informant interviews with project stakeholders. The evaluation results are presented using the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of Relevance; Effectiveness; Efficiency; Impact; Sustainability; Coherence; and Human Rights and Gender Equality.

3.1 Relevance

Question 1: *To what extent is the MOU and its related strategies consistent with Global, Continental, and Member States' needs and priorities on GEWE?*

Finding 1: *The partnership between AUC and UN Women is highly relevant to the GEWE context in Africa and is in alignment with the global and continental calls for strong partnerships in pursuit of SDGs and Agenda 2063. Although both the MOU and Joint Strategy are well aligned with global commitments on GEWE, alignment of the Joint Strategy with both the MOU and the SDGs was noted to be weak, particularly in the areas of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), unpaid care work, and gender equality in humanitarian and conflict situations, which are missing from the Joint Strategy.*

Gender inequality is not only a violation of fundamental human rights but is also a drawback to the socio-economic development of countries, particularly developing countries. Although progress has been made over the past decades toward addressing gender inequality, the SDG targets, in particular Goal 5, remain unlikely to be achieved by 2030. Women still suffer injustices across the globe including Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), under-representation in decision-making and leadership structures and processes, and are disproportionately affected by unemployment, limited access to health services, climate change and disasters, and the increased burden of unpaid care work among other challenges². Tackling these gender inequality challenges requires a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach, where partnerships are established to leverage each other's comparative advantage for more effective responses.

At the global level, there has been an increasing call for partnerships by development partners in the fight for gender equality. Such collaborative forms include alliances, coalitions, roundtables, public-private partnerships, and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg called for partnerships and collaboration between national or sub-national governments, regional organisations, and development partners, private-sector actors, and civil society in the pursuit of SDGs. Goal 17 in particular acknowledges that *"The achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals requires all hands-on deck. It requires different sectors and actors working together in an integrated manner by pooling*

² UN Women Africa, "What does gender equality look like today?", October 2021, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/10/feature-what-does-gender-equality-look-like-today>

*financial resources, knowledge, and expertise*³. Sustainable Development Goal 17, which reads “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”, recognizes multi-stakeholder partnerships as important vehicles for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies, and financial resources to support the achievement of sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries.⁴ The AU Agenda 2063 (Aspiration 7.63) calls for mutually beneficial relations and partnerships in the implementation of its objectives and action plan.

The MOU between UN Women and the AUC has therefore been framed in the context of a global and continental call for strong partnerships to accelerate the achievement of SDGs and Agenda 2063. The MOU itself prioritises collaboration and partnerships in the pursuit of the GEWE agenda. Staff from both AUC and UN Women interviewed during the evaluation concurred that the partnership is relevant and necessary as the two partners complement each other and leverage each other’s strengths and comparative advantages. While the AUC has, through the AU, the convening power and the mandate to spearhead GEWE in Africa and among Member States (MS), its efforts are hamstrung by limited human, financial, and technical resources to effectively deliver on its GEWE mandate. UN Women on the other hand is a trusted partner among MS, has technical capacity and expertise, and can draw from global experience to support the efforts of the AUC. The partnership is thus highly relevant to the context of each of the partners.

At global level, the GEWE priorities and needs are espoused in the SDGs, Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and other nine subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). The SDGs provide a guiding framework for the thematic areas that development partners have to focus on. In terms of Goal 5 on Gender Equality, the key thematic areas of focus include: Elimination of Violence against Women and girls (EVAWG); recognition of unpaid care work; women’s participation in leadership, governance, and decision-making processes in all spheres of life including political, economic and social spheres; universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (SRHR) by women, girls, men, and boys; Women Economic Empowerment (WEE); Women and ICT; and strengthening of the normative frameworks on GEWE.

CEDAW explicitly acknowledges that “extensive discrimination against women continues to exist” and emphasises that such discrimination “violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity”. Under Article 3, the Convention gives positive affirmation to the principle of equality by requiring States parties to take “all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men”. The Convention also devotes major attention to a most vital concern of women, namely their reproductive rights. It also gives formal recognition to the influence of culture and tradition on restricting women's enjoyment of their fundamental rights and provides a comprehensive framework for challenging the various forces that have created and sustained discrimination based upon sex.

³ United Nations, “Multi-stakeholder partnerships”, June 2023, <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/multi-stakeholder-partnerships>

⁴ Ibid

Adopted in October 2000, the UNSCR 1325 is the first resolution to link women to the peace and security agenda and acknowledge that armed conflicts impact women and girls differently from men and boys. It also acknowledges the need for women's active and effective participation in peace-making, including peace processes and peacebuilding. The resolution calls for the protection of women's rights during and after conflict; and the need to meet women's specific needs during repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction. The first group of subsequent resolutions on WPS promotes women's active and effective participation in peace making and peacebuilding while the second group of resolutions aims to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

The priorities in the MOU and the Joint Strategy on GEWE are well aligned with the global commitments on GEWE outlined in the SDGs, CEDAW and UNSCR on WPS. All the thematic areas in the SDGs are prioritised in the MOU and Joint Strategy except for SRHR, unpaid care work, and gender in humanitarian situations which, though prioritised in the MOU, are not areas of focus in the Joint Strategy.

Question 2: *To what extent is the MOU and Joint Strategy in alignment with the GEWE priorities of UN Women, AUC, RECs, and Member States?*

Finding 2: *The MOU and Joint Strategy priorities are largely aligned with those of UN Women and AUC. However, in some cases, the priority areas of the MOU and the Joint Strategy were not constantly reviewed to align with the annual decisions, declarations, and resolutions of the AU, which are reviewed annually.*

GEWE priorities of UN Women are articulated in its Global Strategic Plan (2022-2025) and the Strategic Note (SN) of the UN Women Liaison Office to AU and UNECA (2023-2026). UN Women places considerable attention on partnerships as a core approach and modus operandi. This is reflected in its key corporate documents. The Liaison Office Strategic Note, which is aligned with the Global Strategic Plan, places emphasis on Strategic Partnerships as they are an essential component of the successful implementation of the office's SN. Interviews with UN Women staff revealed that the organisation's work ethos strongly emphasizes the importance of strategic and innovative partnerships. UN Women has a broad composite mandate but is relatively smaller in size and has a thin resource base and therefore plays more of a catalytic role through strategic partnerships to achieve its GEWE goals. UN Women's partnership with the AUC falls within the broad strategic ethos and priorities of UN Women.

Both the MOU and Joint Strategy's priority areas are well-aligned with the priority areas of UN Women Global Strategic Plan and Strategic Note. UN Women's thematic focus areas of WEE, WLPP, EVAWG, WPS, normative work, capacity building of institutions, and gender data collection and management and monitoring and evaluation are all reflected in the MOU and the Joint Strategy. However, UN Women's priority areas of SRHR, unpaid care work, and gender equality in conflict and humanitarian situations, are not reflected in the Joint Strategy. The alignment of the MOU and the Joint Strategy with the priority areas of the UN Women Strategic Note contributes towards the realisation of UN Women's GEWE goals in Africa.

GEWE priority areas of AUC, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and Member States are elaborated in the AU's Agenda 2063, the AU Strategy on GEWE, African Women Decade (2020-2030), The African Union Gender Policy, The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and the Protocol on the African Charter on Human and People's on the Rights of Women in Africa among others. The RECs and Member States are expected to adopt and contextualise these instruments to suit their GEWE needs. The AU GEWE strategy emphasises that its successful implementation rests heavily on win-win partnerships, coalition building, innovation and risk-taking, focus and prioritization, rapid learning for continued improvements, and high-impact funding⁵. The partnership with UN Women therefore resonates with AU priorities on partnerships.

Question 3: *Does the MOU remain relevant considering possible changes in the context, assumptions, and emerging issues?*

Finding 3: *The partnership between AUC and UN Women remains very pertinent given: the GEWE gaps that still exist in Africa (which are in some cases widening); increasing gender inequality and VAWG challenges posed by emerging issues such as climate change and human-induced humanitarian disasters; and the high possibility that the continent will not meet its SDG 5 targets without increased investments in GEWE programming and stronger partnerships.*

Despite progress over the past decades towards GEWE, gender inequality persists on the African continent and women and girls continue to be subjected to injustices such as Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), child marriages, under-representation in leadership and decision-making processes and institutions and in employment, and over-burdened with unpaid care work. Women and girls are also disproportionately impacted by climate change and humanitarian disasters. The GEWE gaps that still exist in Africa make it unlikely that the continent will achieve the SDG targets, and in particular Goal 5 Targets on gender equality, by 2030.

The 2022 Africa SDGs report indicates slow progress across Africa towards gender inclusivity and recommends the enforcement of legal frameworks to protect women and girls against discrimination, domestic violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation⁶. Equality of fundamental rights between women and men is not yet a reality across Africa because of pervasive agender inequalities in the social, economic, and political spheres⁷. The 2020 Africa SDG Index and Dashboard Reports, show that all African countries are currently struggling to tackle different kinds of inequalities⁸.

Emerging challenges such as man-made and climate change-induced disasters have worsened the gender equality situation in Africa, with women and girls disproportionately impacted. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women and girls overwhelmingly bore the brunt of the pandemic including job

⁵ African Union, "Strategy for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment", 2018-2028

⁶ United Nations Development Programme, "Africa Sustainable Development Report", June 2023, <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/africa-sustainable-development-report-asdr-2022>

⁷ Gender in Geopolitics Institute, "Gender Discrimination and gender inequalities in Africa: what about equality between women and men?", May 2021, <https://igg-geo.org/?p=3863&lang=en>

⁸ The Sustainable Development Goals Centre for Africa and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, "Africa SDG Index and Dashboards Report", July 2020, https://sdgcafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020_africa_index_and_dashboards.pdf

loss, increased food insecurity, increased burden of unpaid care work, and a spike in SGBV⁹. In the East African Community, for example, there was a 48% increase in GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some countries such as the Central African Republic recording a 69% increase, Kenya (92%) and Nigeria (74%)¹⁰. Overall, VAWG remains unacceptably high on the continent, with 44% of women experiencing physical or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime, compared to 20% globally¹¹. Women also remain under-represented in leadership and political participation in Africa, holding only 26.2% of seats in the lower and upper chambers of parliament in sub-Saharan Africa¹².

Given the GEWE gaps that still exist in Africa highlighted above, and the challenges brought about by climate change and human-induced humanitarian disasters as well as the gender gaps in participation in politics and decision-making, more efforts are still needed for the continent to achieve its 2030 SDG targets. The GEWE work that UN Women and the AUC are doing through the MOU partnership remains pertinent to the continent. All the key informants interviewed from AUC and UN Women concurred that the partnership needs to continue and be strengthened as the continent is far from achieving its SDG 5 targets.

“The partnership between UN Women and the AUC needs to continue because there is still more work to be done to achieve the 2030 SDG and the Agenda 2063 targets. We are lagging in many spheres, and we need this partnership to be strengthened in terms of human and financial resources, coordination and the framing of the partnership for increased continent-wide impact”.

Excerpt from a Key Informant Interview

3.2 Effectiveness

The DAC/OECD effectiveness evaluation criterion assesses the extent to which an intervention being evaluated has achieved its goal, objectives, targets, outputs, and expected outcomes. In this evaluation, assessing the effectiveness of the Joint Strategy was challenging because of the absence of an implementation plan and a well-structured results framework, with clearly defined targets, output, and outcome indicators against which the performance of the Joint Strategy could be measured. In evaluating effectiveness, the focus was therefore mainly on activities implemented by both UN Women and the AU which are aligned to the objectives of the Strategy and the extent to which these activities are likely to lead to GEWE outcomes. Quantification of the extent of achievement was difficult given the lack of a result framework and specific indicators.

⁹ Damaris Parsitau, “Invisible lives, missing voices: putting women and girls at the centre of post-Covid 19 recovery and reconstruction”, January 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/invisible-lives-missing-voices-putting-women-and-girls-at-the-center-of-post-covid-19-recovery-and-reconstruction/>

¹⁰ UN Women, “Measuring the shadow pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19”, November 2021, <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/vaw-rga>

¹¹ WHO, “African Region Fact Sheet: Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates 2018 for the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Women Estimation and Data (VAW-IAWGED)”, 2018, <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/341591/WHO-SRH-21.7-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

¹² IPU Parline, “Global data on national parliaments”, April 2024, https://data.ipu.org/women-verages/?date_year=2024&date_month=04

Question 4: *Was the design of the partnership framework fit for purpose? How effectively and efficiently was the partnership framework implemented?*

Finding 4: *The design of the partnership was largely fit for purpose. However, operationalization tools for the Joint Strategy were not developed leading to non-implementation of the Strategy and event-driven engagements between AU and UN Women.*

The MOU between AUC and UN Women was designed to intensify cooperation and collaboration to boost the achievement of GEWE in Africa. The MOU is not the first collaborative framework that the AU and UN have entered. Other continental frameworks of collaboration include the UN-AU Joint Framework on Human Rights and the Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security (2018). Both partnership frameworks support the implementation of the SDG 2030 and AU 2063 agendas. This MOU was thus guided by the precedence of previous partnership frameworks between the UN and the AU.

UN Women is the lead agency of the UN tasked with spearheading and coordinating GEWE work globally and regionally. The choice of UN Women as a partner in the MOU for GEWE was thus strategic for the AUC given: UN Women's global GEWE mandate which is aligned to the AU's GEWE agenda; its powerful regional cross-sector partnerships in Africa, where it has established strong relationships with member states, regional bodies and economic communities, civil society, private sector and development partners and its capacity to bring all these actors around one common agenda; and its technical capacity and position as a global thought leader on GEWE. The AUC has three departments that all contribute towards GEWE outcomes of the continental body namely the Gender, Women, and Youth Directorate; the Office of the Special Envoy on Women Peace and Security; and the Office of the Youth Envoy. Other departments in the AUC also contribute towards GEWE outcomes by mainstreaming gender in their activities and programmes. The MOU thus sought to be all-encompassing, by ensuring that all the departments contributing towards GEWE outcomes participate in the activities outlined in the MOU.

The MOU clearly outlines the areas of cooperation and has specific objectives for each thematic area. The areas of cooperation were intended to contribute towards the achievement of GEWE goals of the African Union including those of the African Women's Decade (2020-2030); AU Strategy on GEWE; Maputo Protocol; African Union Gender Policy; Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa; Agenda 2030; and Agenda 2063. Under Article 3 of the MOU, the parties agreed to pursue 10 objectives in the areas of WEE; WLPP; EVAWG; Women's Rights in Conflict, Post-Conflict, and Humanitarian Situations, SRHR; Normative Work; Gender Mainstreaming; Women's participation in STER and ICT; resource Mobilisation; and gender data. The MOU spells out the areas of cooperation and has a clear set of objectives, a requirement for effective MOUs.

The MOU also states that a framework for the operationalisation of the MOU will be developed with specific subject areas and related activities, timeframes for all activities, and guidelines for the review and evaluation of activities to track progress and outcomes. The MOU highlights that joint projects and activities will be designed and implemented jointly by the two partners, who will also share

information and knowledge in the implementation process. Under the implementation mechanism (Article 6), the parties agreed to hold consultations and review meetings on a regular basis.

To operationalise the MOU, the two parties developed a Joint Strategy on GEWE. The Joint Strategy expands the objectives of the MOU and provides a list of indicative activities for each thematic area to be implemented to achieve thematic objectives. Principles for the implementation of the Joint Strategy are also elaborated and these include delivering the continental gender mandate as one; joint monitoring and evaluation of progress; strengthening institutional capacity and networks; and building MS capacity for implementation. The Joint Strategy further identifies potential risks for the partnerships, and these include lack of coordination and communication; differences in mandates and priorities; inadequate resources; and limited political support. The Joint Strategy proposes mitigation measures for the identified risks, which is key to the successful implementation of a strategy.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were developed to provide guidelines for operationalising the MOU and the Joint Strategy. The SOP outlines the roles and responsibilities of both parties within the partnership in the implementation of the joint strategy; provides a framework for effective communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution; and ensures accountability and transparency in the partnership. In the SOPs, workplans and their budget

“We have not implemented the strategy. We just developed a strategy, got heads of state to launch it and nothing happened after that. We did not sit together after that to say, how do we implement the strategy, what resources do we need to implement the strategy and how do we take it forward?. We are just implementing things as they come. The partnership is activity-based and not programmatic “.

Excerpts from interview with Key Informant

lines were to be aligned with the joint strategic plan and follow timelines consistent with the plans; and both institutions were to provide summary reports on the year’s progress on implementing the Joint Strategy. Quarterly coordination meetings were to be held at working and senior management levels, to discuss progress, challenges, and strategic direction. A joint monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress and impact of joint initiatives and objectives was to be developed, assessed and reviewed regularly. Both institutions were obliged to prepare an annual report outlining performance against the objectives outlined in the joint strategy document. The SOP was to be reviewed periodically, at least once a year, to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.

Overall, the design of the partnership agreement, as espoused in the MOU, Joint Strategy and SOP, was generally fit for purpose as it outlined areas of focus, and articulated specific objectives, guiding principles, and guidelines for ensuring accountability. However, there were specific gaps that impacted the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the partnership framework.

Although the Joint Strategy and SOP provided guidelines on how the Strategy was going to be operationalised into tangible actions, some of the guidelines were not activated. Stakeholders interviewed from both the AU and UN Women acknowledged that no Action Plan with specific timelines for implementing the Joint Strategy was developed. Without an Action Plan, it became difficult to operationalise the Joint Strategy in a programmatic manner. There was also no budget set aside to support the implementation of the Joint Strategy. In the SOP, a joint monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress and impact of joint initiatives and objectives was to be developed. There is no evidence that this framework was developed and there is also no evidence that quarterly coordination meetings were convened by the partners to discuss progress in implementation of the strategy.

“We did not have a proper planning process. What would have been ideal would have been to sit together and plan together our priorities to make the partnership more predictable. That did not happen, and I want to put it as a recommendation. This collaboration should be guided by a proper joint planning process. In the MOU, we were supposed to have a work plan, but it did not exist. It also required us to sit regularly to monitor progress, and that did not happen. There hasn’t been a very structured approach to the engagement because people are always saying they are swamped (with work). Working on an ad hoc and activity basis is not a new issue, but we hoped that this would be addressed by the MOU and the Joint strategy.”

Interview with Key Informant

Most stakeholders interviewed felt that the Joint Strategy was not developed inclusively, as some key stakeholders were not involved. Some were not even aware of the existence of the strategy. Stakeholders also felt that the Strategy should have been validated by all stakeholders, followed by the development of an implementation plan and an M&E framework through an inclusive and participatory process.

The lack of an implementation plan for the Joint Strategy led to the cooperation between UN Women and AU being on an ad-hoc and business-as-usual basis rather than being based on predictable and planned engagement. The engagement was activity-based instead of being programmatic, in alignment with the Joint Strategy. Although some of the engagements led to the achievement of objectives in the Joint Strategy, this was more by default rather than design.

Although the design of the partnership framework was largely fit for purpose, it lacked tools for operationalisation leading to non-implementation of the Joint Strategy and activity-based engagement between UN Women and the AU.

Question 5: *To what extent were the goals and strategic objectives of the MOU and the Joint Strategy on GEWE achieved?*

Strategic Objective 1: Accelerate Women’s Economic Empowerment

Finding 5: *Through advocacy, development of knowledge products, and policy dialogue engagements, UN Women, AUC, and partners have elevated gender issues within AfCTA to the highest platforms at continental, RECs, and country levels, leading to increased awareness of the need to mainstream*

gender in the AfCFTA by stakeholders and the empowerment of women to demand their rights and space in the implementation of AfCFTA and decision-making processes. The long-term impacts of these efforts, in terms of bringing tangible economic empowerment benefits to women entrepreneurs, are yet to be fully realised.

Strategic Objective 1 of the Joint Strategy sought to accelerate Women Economic empowerment (WEE) through: positioning women's priorities in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) sectors; establishing market-driven value chains for women-led SMEs; and supporting the implementation of the AU Women and Youth Financial and Economic Inclusion Initiative (WYFEI) 2030.

UN Women has been working with regional bodies on the AfCFTA to address challenges that women face when trading and to position them more strongly in the future of intra-African trade¹³. Working jointly with the AUC, UN Women has supported the women and youth economic empowerment initiatives through co-convening continental conferences on women and youth in trade; and advocating for greater investment in women's economic empowerment, skills building, and women-led SMEs throughout the value chains so that they can compete and reap the benefits of regional integration and intra-African trade. The AUC and UN Women also generated knowledge on challenges that women encounter during trading.

In 2019, UN Women commissioned a study on *Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in the Context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)*. This study aimed to identify opportunities for women entrepreneurs with regard to the AfCFTA, focusing on three areas of interest: women in informal cross-border trade (WICBT), gender and value chain analysis, and affirmative action/preferential public procurement. The study further analysed challenges for women entrepreneurs in the context of the AfCFTA. The study looked at inter-linkages between trade, public procurement, value chains, and gender inequality. It assessed potential ways for improving regional integration frameworks from a gender perspective. It also analysed potential ways of integrating gender concerns into value chain development projects and programmes to help women maximize their profitability and competitiveness.

The Study Report is an illuminating knowledge product that highlights challenges and opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA. By identifying these challenges, the report provided valuable insights for WEE programming in Africa. The study identified opportunities that women and youth can exploit, including: AfCFTA provisions under the Protocol on Rules of Origin which permit access to cheaper raw materials and intermediate inputs that women and youth can take advantage of; and the AfCFTA's criteria for designating sensitive products and exclusion lists that take into consideration restrictive trade liberalization measures on specific products deemed essential for women's needs – e.g. reproductive health products, and agro-processing. AfCFTA also adopts preferential trade regimes facilitating smallholder farmers through measures that promote their integration into larger value chains which could benefit women farmers. Challenges that women face in trading under AfCFTA include: high transaction costs and border delays occasioned by informality, corruption and gender-

¹³ UN Women Africa, "Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in the Context of The African Continental Free Trade Area", June 2019, <https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Africa/Attachments/Publications/2019/Opportunities%20for%20Women%20Entrepreneurs%20in%20the%20Context%20of%20the%20African%20Continental%20Free%20Trade%20Area%20AfCF.pdf>

based sexual harassment, poor basic infrastructure and facilities, and weak trade associations; women's inability to access upstream segments of value chains due to low productive capacities and gender-based barriers to market access; and a lack of financing to cover required bid securities, complex tender requirements and women's limited opportunities to effectively network and access information.

The study also put forward recommendations that are key in mainstreaming gender in AfCFTA and these include: implementing AfCFTA in a way that ensures maximum trade benefits and that creates a win-win situation for women entrepreneurs despite the challenges facing them in cross-border trade activities; establishing strong agricultural value chain systems that effectively integrate women along all segments critical to AfCFTA implementation; enhancing women's productive capacities and enabling their effective participation in intra-regional trade through supporting them to produce goods and services with significant African content in terms of raw materials and value addition which will enable them to respond to the emerging preferential trade regimes under the AfCFTA; and improving availability of gender-disaggregated trade data. The report further recommended conducting comprehensive gender analysis and studies to support evidence-based AfCFTA policymaking; conducting advocacy and awareness raising on gender and AfCFTA issues; monitoring of AfCFTA processes to assess their response to gender gaps in trade; strengthening women's trade associations and networks; and promoting the use of ICT-based e-procurement systems. The study was thus a useful knowledge product critical in advancing gender mainstreaming within the AfCFTA.

UN Women developed advocacy messages on mainstreaming gender within the AfCFTA¹⁴. The messages were developed for use by UN Women country offices, (CSOs, and women's groups to advocate and ensure that the implementation of the AfCFTA creates an enabling environment for women and women-led businesses. The advocacy messages explain what the AfCFTA is all about, how it can work for women and how women can make their voices heard. Interviews with stakeholders confirmed that the advocacy messages were used during advocacy campaigns for gender mainstreaming in the AfCFTA.

Other knowledge products produced by UN Women include background paper on *Driving Gender Responsive Financial Inclusion Models in Africa (2016)*¹⁵. The paper highlights the current situation regarding gender-responsive financial inclusion in Africa and the key barriers that contribute towards creating and sustaining the gender gap in financial inclusion, including collateral challenges; the gender-blind approach to financial inclusion by financial institutions; asset ownership challenges among women; uncompetitive and high interest rates and bank charges offered by financial institutions; poor documentation and business history for accessing financial loan products by women entrepreneurs; and challenges of formalization of businesses by women entrepreneurs among others¹⁶. The paper also outlines concrete actions that all stakeholders and duty-bearers should take to address the gender gap in financial inclusion in Africa.

¹⁴UN Women Africa, "9 Advocacy Messages To Make The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Work For Women", June 2021, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/07/opportunities-for-women-in-the-afcta>

¹⁵UN Women Africa, "Driving Gender Inclusive Financial Models in Africa", 2017, <https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Africa/Attachments/Publications/2018/03/Background%20Paper%20on%20Gender%20Responsive%20Financial%20Inclusion%20in%20Africacompressed.pdf>

¹⁶ Ibid

UN Women also developed the following knowledge products: paper on *Opportunities for Youth in Rural Business and Entrepreneurship in Agriculture (2021)*¹⁷; a *Policy Brief on Improving Women and Young Women's Access to the Opportunities Created by AfCFTA: Opportunities and Key Action Areas (2022)*¹⁸; and *The Engine of Trade in Africa (2022)*¹⁹ among others. UN Women has further produced country-specific knowledge products including; *Understanding the AfCFTA and how it relates to Zimbabwean women in trade (2022)*²⁰; and *Preliminary, Enabling, and Essential Variables of Women's Business Success in Mal*²¹. A series of videos have also been produced on women in trade by UN Women (2022)²².

In partnership with UNDP, UN Women facilitated the development of the first Women in Trade Protocol of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for Tanzania in 2021. The protocol is aimed at supporting increased trade opportunities, and benefits for women workers, entrepreneurs, and women-led businesses, as well as expanding the participation of women in formal and informal cross-border trade²³. In partnership with AU, ECA, UNCTAD, and the Center for Accelerated Women's Economic Empowerment (CAWEE), UN Women also facilitated a high-level multi-stakeholder dialogue sessions on *"Unlocking Opportunities for Young Women Entrepreneurship in the AfCFTA"*²⁴ in February 2021. The dialogue was attended by 114 participants, bringing together experts and officials from the AU, AUC, ECA, UN Women, ITC, UNIDO, UNCTAD, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), associations of African women entrepreneurs, civil society organizations including CAWEE and FEMNET, development partners and young African people²⁵.

Through the development of knowledge products and advocacy, UN Women, the AU, and partners have managed to promote gender priorities in the AfCFTA continental regional trade & integration agenda. The advocacy work and dialogue platforms have elevated the voices of women as advocates and as entrepreneurs to influence dialogue on AfCFTA at continental, regional, and country levels. UN Women provided strategic leadership and tapped into expertise on WEE and trade from its regional and country resources. Through the dialogue platforms, UN Women has managed to broker partnerships, collaborations, and engagements between women entrepreneurs, policymakers, development partners, CSOs, and the private sector.

¹⁷UN Women, "Opportunities for youth in rural business and entrepreneurship in agriculture", 2021, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/10/opportunities-for-youth-in-rural-business-and-entrepreneurship-in-agriculture>

¹⁸ UN Women, "Improving Women's and Young Women's Access to the Opportunities Created by the AfCFTA: Opportunities and Key Action Areas", 2022, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/improving-womens-and-young-womens-access-to-the-opportunities-created-by-the-afcfta-opportunities-and-key-action-areas>

¹⁹UN Women, "The engine of trade in Africa", 2022, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/10/the-engine-of-trade-in-africa>

²⁰ UN Women, "Understanding the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and how it relates to Zimbabwean Women in Trade", 2022, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/understanding-the-african-continental-free-trade-area-afcfta-and-how-it-relates-to-zimbabwean-women-in-trade>

²¹ UN Women, *Preliminary, Enabling & Essential Variables of Women's Business Success*, 2020, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/preliminary-enabling-and-essential-variables-of-women-s-business-success>

²² UN Women Africa, "Women in Trade", <https://youtu.be/z1EjwQN5Ulw>

²³ UN Women, "The Women in Trade Protocol to Promote Women in Business", September 2021, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/09/feature-story---the-women-in-trade-protocol-to-promote-women-in-business>

²⁴ UN Women Africa, "Unlocking Opportunities for African Young Women Entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA", February 2021, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/12/the-road-to-an-inclusive-economic-recovery>

²⁵ Ibid

The long-term impacts of UN Women and its partner's work in the AfCFTA are still to be realised. However, elevating the discussions on the need for a gender-responsive AfCFTA to continental, regional, and country levels has created awareness at all levels and has empowered women to speak with one voice and to demand for the consideration of their concerns in the implementation of AfCFTA.

Strategic Objective 2: Promote women's leadership and voice

Finding 6: *Through AWLN and the establishment of its national chapters, the AUC and UN Women together with other partners, have empowered and enhanced the visibility of women leaders, promoted and capacitated a young generation of women leaders, and amplified the call for women leadership in politics, governance, and peace and security at country, continental and global levels.*

Under Strategic Objective 2, the Joint Strategy sought to enhance women's leadership in politics, governance, peacebuilding, and civic leadership, and to promote intergenerational mentorship through: the promotion of a young generation of women's leaders; supporting networks and platforms that strengthen capacities for women's leadership; and strengthening visibility of women leaders.

UN Women and AU's work on promoting women's leadership was anchored in the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) initiative. The AWLN was launched in 2017 as a continental platform to galvanize women's leadership of Africa towards lasting peace and sustainable development in all sectors and at all levels, building on, and working with, existing women networks with the support of the African Union and the United Nations. The Network builds on African women's leadership to increase women's participation in decision-making through peer learning and mentoring, enhanced solidarity, advocacy, and capacity-building among other strategies²⁶. Under AWLN, there are six different streams of work and UN Women is co-lead on the Peace and Security Pillar, which is the foundational pillar for the network.

The AWLN initiative is implemented through the WYGD and the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS. The main target is to ensure that AWLN is fully functional at both the continental level and at Member States level. UN Women Liaison Office supported the rolling out of AWLN national chapters by linking AWLN to country offices that in turn provided technical support in the setting up of national chapters. To date 35 Chapters have been established across the continent, ensuring that the initiative is grassroots driven. There are plans to launch more national chapters of AWLN.

²⁶ AWLN website, <https://www.awlnafrica.net/about-3>

UN Women has worked with the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS to heighten focus and interest in WPS through engaging the AUC Peace and Security Council and working with MS who are members of the security council. Over the past three years, there has not been an institutionalised collaboration with Political Affairs, Peace & Security Department but UN Women started to institutionalise the collaboration in August 2023. Using the UN system, UN Women and AU have started tracking the implementation of the UNSCR 3125 at the continental level and in MS. WPS priorities have also been promoted through AWLN.

By pursuing the WPS agenda through AWLN, UN Women and AU have elevated the issue of women's leadership consistently across the years. This has heightened discussions on women's role in mediation, conflict prevention, and humanitarian contexts. WPS discussions have gone beyond generalised conversations. UN Women has been called to provide expertise on WPS on AU platforms where its experts informed dialogue and conversation processes. This has raised the visibility of challenges and lessons learned in WPS programming.

AWLN Leaders led a solidarity mission in April 2019. UN Women, DPPA and EOSG, in partnership with the African Union and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), jointly supported the visit to Cameroon of Ms. Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2011 from Liberia, and member of both the Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation and of the African Women Leaders Network. The mission sought to advocate for the participation and leadership of Cameroonian women in ongoing initiatives to build peace and promote reconciliation and social cohesion in the context of the current anglophone crisis. Key outcomes of the visit highlighted the worsening yet largely invisible humanitarian crisis, existing opportunities for women to build a strong movement for peace, and the need to clarify the involvement of the diaspora in the crisis, and for the international community to speak with one voice, based on humanitarian principles.

Source: AWLN, "Peace and Security Pillar", 2024, <https://www.awlnafrica.net/private-sector>

AWLN, with the support of UN Women and the AUC, has organised solidarity visits to women in fragile countries or those in conflict situations. Solidarity visits were made to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria (2017); Chad, Niger, South Sudan and Cameroun (2019); and Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti (2019)²⁷. The visits were meant to express solidarity and raise the profile of the situation of women in conflict, fragile, and humanitarian situations, including highlighting their exclusion from peace processes in their respective countries. These issues were amplified at country and continental levels and brought to the attention of rights bearers. Recommendations from the solidarity visits were read to the Peace and Security Council of the AU. The solidarity missions played a key role in elevating the WPS issues in the visited countries to regional and global levels.

In Sudan, a co-technical group was established to develop a roadmap and strategy to engage stakeholders and to advocate for women to participate in peace processes. In this endeavour, UN women worked closely with the PAP and its commissioners to coordinate and plan for the engagement with rights bearers. This amplified the voices of women in Sudan, who demanded to be included in all peace processes taking place in the country. As a result of this advocacy, the three-person High-Level Panel on Sudan included a female, who is the former Prime Minister of Uganda. The core group regularly meets to evaluate the impact of its work. In 2022, the AWLN also conducted a Solidarity Mission to Kenya for the 2022 General elections.

²⁷ AWLN, "Women Peace and Security Pillar", 2024, <https://www.awlnafrica.net/private-sector>

UN Women and the AU have supported AWLN's annual intergenerational dialogues in different countries. These were mentorship programmes that mixed both young and senior women leaders. The most recent dialogue session was convened in Congo Brazzaville in 2023. The inter-generational retreat provided a platform for Africa's young and senior women to engage in meaningful dialogue as they navigated core themes and topics aligned with that year's overarching theme: *"Harnessing Africa's Young Women's Demographic Dividend towards an Effective Implementation of the AfCFTA."* At the meeting, AWLN aimed to explore how to leverage the opportunities presented by the AfCFTA and the ensuing impact on sustainable development, governance, and peace across the African continent²⁸. The meeting was attended by prominent and high-profile women including former presidents and the AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security. Young and senior African women leaders from across Africa and beyond, AWLN Young Women's Caucus, AWLN National Chapter members, AWLN Elders and Pioneers, and AWLN Congo National Chapter members and President Daniele Sassou Nguesso also attended the meeting.

These intergenerational dialogue sessions have enhanced the capacity of women leaders as they learn from each other and through mentorship sessions. Stakeholders interviewed reported that they noted an improvement in the voices of women after the mentorship and intergenerational sessions, particularly during AU sessions and CSW meetings. The Intergenerational sessions also fostered relationships between young and senior women and laid the foundation for connecting and empowering young African women through the AWLN platform. They also significantly strengthened and expanded relationships between generations²⁹.

UN Women has provided technical support in the production of critical resources such as the AUC Report on Peace and Security, which advocates for increased participation of women in peace and security processes. UN Women provided technical support in the development of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)'s WPS Strategy and Action Plan and is also supporting the East African Community (EAC) in developing its Regional Strategy and on WPS. UN Women is thus playing a key role in the institutional strengthening of WPS actors.

The participation of the WGYD was however limited in the WPS initiative. UN Women worked mostly with the Office of the Envoy on WPS and the Pan African Parliament (PAP). Given the gender gaps and dynamics in peace and security, the WGYD needed to play a leading and more prominent role in WPS, particularly regarding mainstreaming gender in WPS processes. The MOU is housed in the WGYD and hence the department should have been the entry point and coordinator for WPS initiatives.

At a global level, UN Women is supporting the AWLN initiative through funding from Germany. UN Women works closely with the AU Mission to the United Nations in New York and with the office of the Special Envoy on WPS to implement the AWLN programme at global level. UN Women has seconded a technical expert to the AU Mission in New York to support the implementation of the AWLN initiative, which fits into the 2018 UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security. Stakeholders interviewed confirmed that the secondment of the technical expert has greatly enhanced coordination between UN Women, the AU Mission to the UN, and the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS in the implementation of the AWLN initiative.

The global influence of the AWLN initiative has been enhanced through the establishment of the AWLN Group of Friends in New York led by South Africa and Germany. The group of friends organise high-level meetings and platforms for AWLN members to present their agenda and showcase their

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ AWLN, "5th Intergenerational Retreat", October 2023, <https://www.awlnafrica.net/post/5thintergenerationalretreat>

activities to an international audience. The Group of Friends has assisted AWLN to occupy dialogue spaces at global events such as the CSW annual meetings in New York. This has helped to open up spaces at the global level for women leaders.

Through the support of the AU, UN Women, Germany, and the Group of Friends, AWLN has managed to organise high-level events on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meetings. In the UNGA meeting in 2022, a high-level side event titled: *Women's Leadership in Multilateralism: Building Peace and Promoting Inclusive Development in Times of Crisis* was held during the 77th session of UNGA in New York. The high-level events have strengthened the visibility of women leaders at the global level.

Through AWLN, the African Women Leadership Fund (AWLF) has been established. This is an impact Fund that aims to strengthen the economic empowerment of women by accelerating the growth of African women fund managers. It is under the leadership of the UN Economic Commission for Africa and aims to strengthen the economic empowerment of women and accelerate the emergence of African women fund managers³⁰. The fund has an initial target capital of USD 500 million and expects to crowd in an additional US\$ two billion by the next decade, through and in partnership with African women fund managers.

Strategic Objective 3: Dignity, Security and Resilience

Finding 6: *The AUC and UN Women have elevated the issue of VAWG to a top priority level at national, continental, and global levels through: consistent awareness creation on harmful norms and practices; capacity building of stakeholders including MS, NGOs, and traditional and cultural leaders through the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA); lobbying and advocacy for domestication and implementation of international, regional and national commitments on EVAWG; establishing accountability frameworks; and the creation of strategic partnerships among other initiatives.*

Objective 3 of the Joint Strategy was aimed at eliminating all forms of violence and ensuring that women and girls live a life free from all forms of discrimination. This would be achieved through accelerating the transformation of negative social norms including promoting positive masculinity; and mobilising funding and support for initiatives that tackle all forms of discrimination, harmful practices, and violence against women and girls.

UN Women and AU played a pivotal role in the implementation of the European Union-funded Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme, a multi-stakeholder initiative involving UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA), UNECA, NGOs, and CSOs. The regional programme was implemented through two streams, which both provided support to the AUC to enhance existing capacities and mechanisms for eliminating VAWG and harmful practices (such as child marriage and female genital mutilation) and promoting Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), life skills education and empowerment³¹. UN Women seconded a programme specialist to the AUC's WGYD to provide technical support during the implementation of Stream 1 of the regional programme. The programme's implementation focused on strengthening legislation and policy processes on ending EVAWG, harmful practices and SRHR, generating good-quality and reliable data, and supporting

³⁰ AWLN, "Finance Pillar", 2024, <https://www.awlnafrica.net/private-sector> <https://www.awlnafrica.net/private-sector>

³¹ Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme, "Annual Narrative Progress Report, January 2022 to December 2022, <https://spotlightinitiative.org/sites/default/files/publication/2023-07/Spotlight%20Initiative%20Africa%20Regional%20Programme%20Annual%20Report%202022%20%281%29.pdf>

women's movements and relevant CSOs. The implementation was also guided by the African Union's Agenda 2063, the priorities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), and the Maputo Plan of Action for the Operationalization of the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

Under the regional programme, the AUC and UN Women worked together to strengthen the capacities of MS, CSOs and other partners to strengthen and implement legislation and policies on ending sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. An AU harmful practices accountability framework was developed as well as a continental report on FGM. The programme also supported the development and implementation of national action plans and funding for EVAWG in Africa. High-level missions were undertaken to several AU MS by the AUC in partnership with CSOs to advocate the ratification, domestication, and enforcement of the Maputo Protocol and the implementation of initiatives aimed at curbing harmful practices. This has resulted in countries such as Egypt and Morocco to start working on the ratification process together with CSOs, while in other countries, the status of implementation of the child marriage initiative using general guidance from the African Union perspective was reviewed.

The regional programme further developed and validated a facilitators' training manual to strengthen the capacity of regional partners and CSOs. The manual is used for training parliamentarians and CSO representatives to encourage member states to draft and review laws and policies related to women's rights and empowerment. The AUC developed the first-ever Regional Action Plan for Africa on EVAWG with a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. The Action Plan will guide regional partners in implementing global and regional commitments on the EVAWG. The regional programme has also built the capacity of media personnel and journalists to help end VAWG and harmful practices through reporting, advocacy, and media coverage. This has resulted in increased media coverage of VAWG and harmful practices issues.

After conducting a series of dialogue sessions facilitated by UN Women, involving more than 300 traditional leaders from various countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, the COTLA was officially established in February 2019. These dialogues brought together influential traditional leaders to discuss critical issues related to gender-based violence, child marriage, and FGM. COTLA is a pan-African movement of progressive traditional leaders committed to ending harmful practices by 2030. Its primary focus is on eliminating child marriage, FGM/C, and other harmful practices that disproportionately affect women and girls in Africa. COTLA recognizes that traditional and religious leaders play a crucial role in shaping cultural norms and practices. These leaders are positioned to protect children and advocate for the elimination of harmful practices. COTLA represents a collective commitment by traditional leaders to champion gender equality, protect women and girls, and dismantle harmful practices. Their efforts contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals related to health, education, gender equality, decent work, and economic growth.

Since its formation, COTLA has been publicly condemning all cultural and traditional practices that harm women and girls. It commits to preventing and eliminating harmful practices across African communities. COTLA collaborates with government efforts and partners, including the joint EU-UN

Spotlight Initiative, to end child marriage and FGM. Traditional institutions mobilize community-based approaches to address the social dynamics perpetuating harmful practices.

COTLA has played a significant role in transforming social norms and promoting positive masculinity by calling for the continued ban on FGM in countries such as Gambia³² and Nigeria³³. In the later, traditional and religious leaders have been at the forefront of the abolishment of harmful practices, including the Money Wife practice in Ebonyi, East Nigeria; abolition of female genital mutilation in Osun, Southwest Nigeria, and a pronouncement on deposing of leaders found to harbour perpetrators and hide cases of SGBV. The COTLA membership in Nigeria, through the support of UN Women, has developed a work plan to support engagement in ending GBV³⁴.

In November 2022, traditional and religious leaders of Africa met in Addis Ababa in preparation for the African Union “2nd Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity” where they confirmed their commitment to taking bold actions to end child marriage, FGM, and other harmful practices in Africa. At the end of the meeting, African leaders agreed to follow the newly launched “Partnership Guidelines” with key recommendations to traditional and faith leaders to respond to gender-based violence in Africa³⁵. The meeting also provided a platform for traditional leaders to voice their Generation Equality commitment.

UN Women and the AUC have also been collaborating to commemorate important days such as International Women’s Day and 16 Days of Activism Against GBV. These commemorations continue to create awareness on VAWG and harmful practices and keep the EAWG agenda on the priority list of the AUC, regional organisations, and MS. The technical support that UN Women has been providing to the AUC has been valuable with the latter describing the former as the AUC’s trusted partner. UN Women supported the AUC in preparing conventions, declarations, and conferences including the Dakar declaration.

With support from UN Women, the Framework for the African Union Campaign on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (2021-2030) was developed in 2021. The framework is aimed at accelerating the implementation of agreed obligations to prevent and end VAWG. The campaign will build on past experiences and ensure inclusiveness in terms of targets and partnerships to break the cycle of VAWG in Africa³⁶. The campaign is premised on the following pillars: prevention; service delivery; humanitarian response; resource mobilisation; research/knowledge development and reporting; and is anchored within the continental and global development frameworks, i.e. Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals. The framework contains key strategies and an action plan;

³² AWLN, COTLA, Womanifesto, “Statement of the Repeal of The Women’s Amendment Act (2015) Prohibiting FGM In The Gambia”, https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/statement_-_cotla_awln_womanifesto_on_ending_fg_240408_182943.pdf

³³ UN Women Africa, “Traditional Leaders and Clergies Renew Commitment to Curb Violence against Women and Girls in Nigeria”, May 2023, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2023/06/traditional-leaders-and-clergies-renew-commitment-to-curb-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-nigeria>

³⁴ UN Women Africa, “Traditional Leaders and Clergies Renew Commitment to Curb Violence against Women and Girls in Nigeria”, May 2023, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2023/06/traditional-leaders-and-clergies-renew-commitment-to-curb-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-nigeria>

³⁵ UN women Africa, “Traditional Leaders and Clergies Renew Commitment to Curb Violence against Women and Girls in Nigeria”, May 2023, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2023/06/traditional-leaders-and-clergies-renew-commitment-to-curb-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-nigeria>

³⁶ AU and UN Women, “Framework for the African Union Campaign on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls”, 2021, page 4

an advocacy and communication strategy; a resource mobilisation strategy; and a monitoring and evaluation framework.

The partnership between UN Women and AUC has elevated the issue of VAWG consistently across the years. There has been substantive traction to heighten attention among member states and stakeholders on VAWG as a continental challenge in its different forms across Africa.

Strategic Objective 4: Promote Strong Institutions: Strengthen the capacities of institutions to effectively implement laws and policies.

Finding 6: *Capacity building efforts of the AUC and UN Women have renewed efforts towards implementation of the Maputo Protocol and strengthened accountability mechanisms and frameworks for the collection and use of data on SGBV, Harmful Practices (HPs), FGM and child marriage. However, more still needs to be done to ensure that the remaining countries ratify, domesticate, and implement the Maputo Protocol and other GEWE international and regional commitments as wide gaps still exist across the continent. Further, gender mainstreaming capacity gaps exist within the AUC and across departments.*

Under this strategic objective, the partnership between AUC and UN Women sought to strengthen the capacities of institutions to effectively implement laws and policies aimed at ending violence against women and girls. A regional assessment was conducted in 2021 to determine the extent of domestication and implementation of human rights instruments as well as the development and implementation of national action plans and financing of EVAWG in Africa. The assessment provided an overview of the extent of domestication and implementation of EVAWG commitments in 55 countries and an in-depth analysis of 18 countries. The assessment established that 44 countries (or 80%) of the AU have ratified the Maputo Protocol; 52 countries (or 95%) have ratified CEDAW; all 55 countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); and 33 countries have ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR)³⁷.

The two partners have worked together on the ratification, domestication, and implementation of continental normative frameworks, including the Maputo Protocol and the Beijing Platform for Action. Through the Spotlight Initiative (SI), the capacities of national and regional governments, regional CSOs and other partners to assess gaps, draft new and strengthen existing legislation and policies, and enforce existing legislation on ending SGBV, FGM and child marriage were enhanced through regional capacity building workshops³⁸. At the regional workshops, stakeholders were trained on how to advocate for and influence member states on the ratification, domestication, implementation, and reporting of human rights instruments related to EVAWG and SRHR. The training used the standard facilitators' training manual on the ratification and domestication of human rights instruments related to EVAWG. The training fostered cross-learning among regional partners, member states, and CSOs

³⁷ African Union, "Regional Evidence-Based Mapping and Assessment Report on the Status of Domestication and enforcement of Laws and Policies, and National Action Plans in line with Global and Regional Human Rights Commitments on EVAWG", March 2023, <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/evidence-based-mapping-and-assessment-status-domestication-and-enforcement-law-and-policies-and-national-action-plans>

³⁸ Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme, "Annual Narrative Progress Report, January 2022 to December 2022, <https://spotlightinitiative.org/sites/default/files/publication/2023-07/Spotlight%20Initiative%20Africa%20Regional%20Programme%20Annual%20Report%202022%20%281%29.pdf>

on best practices in the ratification, domestication, and implementation of international and regional human rights instruments on EVAWG³⁹.

During the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Maputo Protocol, several activities were lined up by the AU's WGYD with support from UN Women in line with the indicative activities in the Joint Strategy. Other stakeholders that supported the celebrations included Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa (SRRWA) of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR), the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN-OHCHR). Celebratory activities included the Maputo Protocol Diplomatic Advocacy Week in Addis Ababa and Nairobi. A high-level Diplomatic Dialogue session was organised in Addis Ababa by the WGYD in collaboration with UN partners and CSOs. Thereafter, advocacy visits were conducted targeting embassies of AU Member States that had not yet ratified the Maputo Protocol to lobby them to push their respective countries to ratify the Protocol by the end of 2023.

A High-Level Hybrid Conference was also held in Nairobi, Kenya to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Maputo Protocol. The event was attended by grassroots women leaders, including young women from across the African continent, rural women, women living with disabilities and women living with HIV/AIDS; AU Ministers in Charge of Gender and Women's Affairs; AU Organs; AU Specialized Agencies; Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RMs); CSOs (women's rights organizations, young women's organizations, Community-Based Organisations (CBOs)); Members of the Diplomatic Corps; UN Agencies and International Organisations; International Development Partners and Private Sector Partners. The High-Level Conference was used to launch the African Women's Decade on Financial and Economic Inclusion (AWD-FEI) 2020-2030 Roadmap.

The objective of the 20th Anniversary of the Maputo Protocol celebrations was to take stock of achievements made in Africa in the promotion and protection of women's human rights over the 20 years since the adoption of the Maputo Protocol, reflect on key challenges and some of the emerging women's rights concerns and agree on impactful solutions and strategies to accelerate better action and outcomes for the African women's human rights system⁴⁰. The commemorations also sought to Call to Action the 11 AU Member States that have not ratified the Protocol to do so, and those who have ratified to domesticate and implement and for relevant States Parties to withdraw their reservations.

Two countries that had not ratified the Maputo Protocol have since ratified through support from AU, UN Women country offices and CSOs. The two countries are South Sudan which ratified the protocol in February 2023 and the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic which ratified in March 2022⁴¹.

Through the capacity-building support of AU, UN Women, and other UN agencies, MS have made progress toward the development and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs), including

³⁹ African Union, March 2023

⁴⁰ African Union, March 2023

⁴¹ African Union, "List of countries which have signed, ratified/acceded to the protocol to the African charter on human and people's rights on the rights of women in Africa", June 2024, https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-sl-PROTOCOL_TO_THE_AFRICAN_CHARTER_ON_HUMAN_AND_PEOPLES_RIGHTS_ON_THE_RIGHTS_OF_WOMEN_IN_AFRICA.pdf

financing and investments on EVAWG. 30 countries have developed NAPs on Implementing UNSCR1325; however, only 15 of these have costed budgets for their activities. 11 Member States have UNSCR1325 NAPs that are outdated and require revision while 20 countries have a National Strategy for Ending Child Marriage. However, only Guinea and Zambia have costed budgets. 20 countries have a NAP on FGM⁴². UN Women also supported the development of the AU Gender Policy, which provides a framework for mainstreaming gender in the AU and in programmes implemented by the AU and its partners.

The African Union Accountability Framework on Eliminating Harmful Practices was developed and endorsed by the African Union Specialized Technical Committee (STC) in 2022. The framework was developed to enable the AUC to support and hold the Governments of MS accountable for the domestication of key decisions and legal instruments, which Member States have ratified to eliminate harmful practices and, promote and uphold the human rights of women and girls. The framework expounds on and complements the processes and work of AU Human Rights Organs, including African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). It is aimed at strengthening the delivery of MS's reporting obligations on key regional human rights instruments regarding commitments to eliminate harmful practices.

The purpose of the Accountability Frameworks is to ensure that good performance measurement and monitoring practices are in place to track progress on the elimination of harmful practices by AU Member States. The framework will also catalyse the use of data and evidence to conduct regular assessments of progress across the continent while facilitating engagement and contributions from non-state actors (including civil society organisations) to advance and accelerate action and strengthen accountability on eliminating harmful practices in Africa⁴³.

In partnership with UN Women and through the SI, the AU strengthened the Gender Scorecard developed in 2015. The Scorecard provides a comprehensive assessment of gender-related progress and challenges across the African continent. This scorecard evaluates the efforts made by African Union MS in promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and addressing gender-based disparities. It serves as a valuable tool for monitoring and advocating for positive change. The 2021 edition of the African Gender Scorecard, supported through the SI, was an improved version, as it focused on recent country data and covered a wide range of indicators. The scorecard focused on four clusters, namely: VAWG; SGBV; HPS; and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights (SRH&RR). The scorecard provides an overview of the performance of MS in tackling different forms of SGBV and in addressing SRHR deficits. In line with the objective of the Joint Strategy of strengthening the Gender Scorecard, UN Women and the AU have managed to strengthen the scorecard by providing a more detailed analysis for better-informed programming.

⁴²Ibid

⁴³ African Union, "The African Union Accountability Framework on the Elimination of Harmful Practices", 2022, <https://Docs.Google.Com/Document/D/1xe0nz9glekwmtrofImp7d30wqp6yhub/Edit>

Through the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme, the AUC developed and validated the first-ever regional action plan for Africa with a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework on EVAWG. The Action Plan will guide regional partners in implementing global and regional commitments on EVAWG. The plan was produced through a collaborative process, involving MS, RECs, UN agencies, CSOs, and development partners drawn from international, continental, and national levels.

One of the strategies for strengthening accountability in the Joint Strategy was to create a hub for gender equality knowledge for the continent. UN Women spearheaded the creation of the African Union Gender Partners Group with the support of WGYD. The platform has brought together for the first-time for gender partners to discuss gender priorities on the continent and how to coordinate better. Although this platform exists, it is still early to determine its effectiveness as it is in its infancy. However, the initiative puts the AU and UN Women on the right track towards building a platform of key stakeholders for sharing knowledge, experiences, and good practices as well as for improved coordination.

SIARP, in partnership with the AUC, developed a standardized and harmonized data collection toolkit on VAWG, harmful practices, and SRHR to ensure the production of good-quality, reliable, and timely data aimed at informing policy development, evidence-based decision-making, and advocacy⁴⁴. Capacity strengthening training was conducted for 121 regional and national partners to enable them to collect, analyse and use SGBV, child marriage, and FGM data in line with international and regional standards. The data will be used to inform laws, policies, and programming in EVAWG.

To further strengthen the generation of gender-disaggregated data, UN Women, in collaboration with the AUC's WGYD and UNECA, supported the development of the 2021 African Union gender scorecard report and the finalization of the African Union Gender Observatory (AUGO). The gender scorecard report was validated and endorsed by the member states. The scorecard provided data on the performance of AU countries in EVAWG.

The AUGO serves as an essential platform for monitoring and reporting on gender-related efforts across AU member states. AUGO compiles national data and provides a continental and regional perspective on the status of women. It serves as a repository for gender-related information, allowing for evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation. AUGO monitors and reports on member states' efforts toward implementing gender equality commitments. It focuses on key areas such as VAWG, HP, and SRH & RR⁴⁵. AUGO acts as an online knowledge management platform, facilitating information exchange, best practices sharing, and collaboration among AU member states, RECs, and CSOs. It supports the AU's commitment to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, as outlined in Agenda 2063. The African Union Gender Observatory plays a critical role in advancing gender equality by providing data-driven insights, promoting accountability, and fostering collaboration across the continent.

⁴⁴Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme, "Annual Narrative Progress Report, January 2022 to December 2022," <https://spotlightinitiative.org/sites/default/files/publication/2023-07/Spotlight%20Initiative%20Africa%20Regional%20Programme%20Annual%20Report%202022%20%281%29.pdf>

⁴⁵ African Union, "What is the African Union Gender Observatory?", June 2024, <https://go.au.int/en/why-join-us>

The AUC and UN Women have played pivotal roles in advancing gender mainstreaming across the African continent. UN Women has been a driving force in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) globally. At the continental level, UN Women collaborates closely with the AUC to integrate gender perspectives into AU policies, programs, and initiatives. UN Women provides technical assistance, capacity-building, and resources to enhance gender mainstreaming efforts at regional and national levels. UN Women supports the AUGO, which serves as a knowledge hub for gender-related data and analysis. This collaborative effort strengthens gender mainstreaming by ensuring evidence-based approaches.

UN Women conducts capacity-building workshops, training sessions, and knowledge-sharing events. These initiatives enhance the skills of policymakers, CSOs, and other stakeholders in integrating gender perspectives. In September 2023, the AUC's WGYD with support from German Development Cooperation (GIZ) validated a Framework on Gender and Youth Mainstreaming⁴⁶ which is intended to facilitate mainstreaming of gender and youth throughout the AU and its MS. The validation workshop was attended by Pan African Women Organization; UN WOMEN; UNECA, UNDP; ECOWAS; COMESA; SADC; AUDA-NEPAD and GIMAC Young Women Network.

Despite the above efforts by the two partners, stakeholders interviewed both within the AUC and UN Women felt that there is a lack of a structured coordination mechanism in the UN system to support accountability for gender mainstreaming. Although UN Women has supported the AUC with gender mainstreaming capacity-building training for its Gender Focal Points (GFPs), stakeholders noted that there are still gender mainstreaming gaps within the AUC and its structures. During the UN Women supported gender mainstreaming capacity training conducted for AU GFPs in Kampala, Uganda in 2019, it emerged that many GFPs did not understand what gender mainstreaming is, and how it could be applied in their work and many lacked a basic understanding of gender concepts⁴⁷. After the training, it was recommended that online gender mainstreaming training be made available and mandatory for all AUC staff so that there could be a basic understanding of gender mainstreaming across the AUC structures and how it could be applied in the programming work of these departments. The evaluation established that the recommended online mandatory gender mainstreaming training has not been established and that many departments still exhibit a lack of understanding of gender mainstreaming.

UN Women has started consultations on gender mainstreaming in early warning mechanisms within the AU and RECs. There is also a push to have the gender mainstreaming online training module developed for the AUC. It was difficult to establish the extent to which MS have progressed in building their gender mainstreaming capacities because of a scarcity of data at that level.

Strategic Objective 5: Mobilise and sustain high-level political commitment for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) in Africa.

⁴⁶ African Union, "Validation Workshop on the AU Commission Gender & Youth Mainstreaming Framework", September 2023, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20230915/validation-workshop-au-commission-gender-youth-mainstreaming-framework>

⁴⁷ UN Women, "Gender Mainstreaming Training Report, Kampala, Uganda", October 2019.

Finding 7: *the AU Heads of State Gender Champions have played a critical role in: elevating EVAWG (FGM, child marriage, positive masculinity) issues at continental and global platforms; advocating for policies, mobilizing resources, and creating an enabling environment for GEWE in Africa.*

AU Heads of State have been selecting their counterparts to become Champions for AU specific thematic areas to lead and spearhead the achievement of AU agenda for the selected thematic focus areas. This initiative is aimed at enhancing collaboration and increasing interaction between heads of state and government as they spearhead Africa’s development agenda. It also promotes ownership of African Union programmes and activities at the highest level and facilitates peer learning and review⁴⁸. The AU Champions garner political support and advocate for AU activities at the highest level possible, promoting political buy-in as well as full ownership by MS, thereby facilitating the implementation of key programmes of the Union⁴⁹. During AU Summits, the Champions submit progress reports on their respective areas of focus to update on their achievements and share their challenges for further consideration and recommendations by the Assembly⁵⁰.

The GEWE areas of focus by the President Champions include women and gender development, Peace and Security, ending child marriage in Africa, and elimination of FGM. The concept of President Champions promotes the visibility of Africa’s development priorities at regional, continental, and global levels. Félix Tshisekedi, President of DR Congo, was appointed in February 2020 as the champion for the positive masculinity programme; while Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, the former President of Burkina Faso was appointed Champion on FGM; and Edgar Chagwa Lungu, the former President of Zambia, was appointed champion on ending child marriages.

Several Champion Presidents have actively advocated for ending child marriage. Their efforts include raising awareness, implementing legal reforms, and promoting education and empowerment for girls. By prioritizing this issue, they contribute to improving the lives of young girls and ensuring their rights are protected. Champion Presidents have also taken a stand against FGM, a harmful traditional practice affecting millions of girls and women. Their advocacy includes awareness campaigns, legal measures, and community engagement to eradicate FGM. By championing this cause, they protect the health and well-being of African girls and women. Champion presidents have consistently advocated for gender equality across all sectors. Their commitment to women’s rights, representation, and participation contributes to a more inclusive and equitable Africa. By prioritizing gender-responsive policies and programs, they drive positive change for women and girls.

Question 5: What factors enhanced the effectiveness or otherwise of the partnership?

Finding 8: *Effectiveness was enhanced through the strong relationship between UN Women and AU, which has created mutual trust and political will and commitment towards the GEWE agenda by the leadership of the two partners. The two partners’ capacity to deliver is however hamstrung by financial and human resources limitations as well as coordination gaps within both the UN system and the AUC.*

⁴⁸African Union, “Share: The African Union Champion Heads of State: Pushing the Continental Agenda at the Highest Levels”, 2014, [Champion Presidents | African Union \(au.int\)](#)

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

The evaluation identified several factors that enhanced progress toward the achievement of the Joint Strategy Objectives. The evaluation also identified factors that were constraints to the effectiveness of the partnership and therefore need addressing in the next phase of the MOU.

Enabling factors

- (a) Mutual Trust and Alignment of Mandates:** the UN Women and the AU have a long history of working together in the pursuit of GEWE goals in Africa. Through this journey, the two partners have developed mutual trust and leveraged each other's comparative advantages to achieve their GEWE objectives. The AUC has convening power and has the mandate to support AU MS and partners for accelerated implementation of GEWE policies and programmes across the whole continent. The AUC has established a specific directorate for Women, Gender, and Youth mandated to unleash the potential of Women and Youth in Africa, through establishing parity of these demographics, enabling their development, and fostering their meaningful engagement in society, drawing its mandate from Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063. The Directorate is responsible for youth and gender transformative programming; strengthening the foundations of gender, women, and youth programmes; catalysing action in countries for scale and impact; and gender and youth mainstreaming. UN Women, on the other, is the UN agency with the global mandate on GEWE and works through regional cross-sector partnerships, has been accepted globally as the thought leader on GEWE, has convening power of GEWE partners, has strong accountability structures and technical capacity to mainstream GEWE, and has the capacity to mobilise resources for GEWE. The alignment of mandates and complementary capacities has enabled these two institutions to work together over a long period. Stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation acknowledged the mutual trust between the two institutions and this has acted as one of the enabling factors towards the achievement of the MOU goals. In the Joint Strategy, differences in mandates and priorities had been identified as one of the key risks to the partnership which could present challenges in aligning efforts. This risk did not materialise owing to the alignment of the AUC gender priorities (elaborated in the Agenda 2063 and the AU Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Strategy (GEWE) 2018-2028) and UN Women's Global Strategic Plan and Strategic Note for Africa. Both partners are also pursuing the global SDGs.
- (b) Political Will and Commitment:** In the Joint Strategy, limited political support from AU and UN Women leadership, which could undermine the authority and legitimacy of the cooperation framework, and hinder its implementation had been identified as one of the risk factors to the implementation of the MOU and Joint Strategy. On the contrary, stakeholders confirmed during the evaluation that there was commitment and political will at the highest levels in both the AUC and UN Women as evidenced by the various GEWE initiatives that the two institutions have pursued on the African continent. This political will and commitment were identified by stakeholders as one of the key drivers of achievements that have been recorded to date under the partnership.
- (c) Institutional Capacity Strengthening:** the MOU's thrust on institutional capacity strengthening has enhanced the capacities of MS, CSOs, AUC, UN Women, and other stakeholders in the areas

of advocacy and lobbying; norm changing; and accountability for GEWE results. However, more needs to be done to further strengthen the capacity of the AUC, MS and CSOs.

Constraining Factors

(a) Coordination: lack of coordination and communication were identified as risk factors for the effective implementation of the MOU and the Joint Strategy. The Strategy noted that poor coordination could lead to duplication of efforts, gaps in coverage, and confusion among stakeholders. To mitigate against this risk, the Joint Strategy proposed that implementation should adopt a shared value partnership approach focusing on mutual benefits, and areas of interest which will deliver for both organisations.

The coordination mechanisms are spelt out in the MOU, Joint Strategy and the SOP. Guided by the principle of *Delivering as One* and *Joint Monitoring and Evaluation of Progress*, the two parties agreed to hold regular consultations and review meetings on matters arising from the MOU for the smooth running of their operations. Coordination activities were to be decided upon by the Director AU WGYD and Special Representative of UN Women to the African Union, and both offices were accountable to the AUC Chairperson and the UN Women Executive Director. Quarterly coordination meetings were to be held at working and senior management levels, to discuss progress, challenges, and strategic direction. A joint monitoring and evaluation framework against which the progress and impact of joint initiatives and objectives were to be tracked was supposed to be developed, assessed, and reviewed regularly. Both institutions were supposed to prepare an annual report outlining performance against the objectives outlined in the joint strategy document.

UN women coordinated with AUC and CSOs to convene pre-CSW consultations to come up with a common position for Africa. This enabled African stakeholders to speak with one voice at the annual CSW meetings in New York. The two partners also organised important advocacy events together in partnership with ECA to track the implementation of SDGs and Agenda 2063, responding to the AU commitments on gender equality. The partners also coordinated for the implementation of Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030. Further, joint tracking of progress on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration was also conducted by the two partners. The parties used policy advocacy platforms, knowledge generation, coordination, communication and visibility to amplify voices of what has been happening in MS to inform continental processes.

Stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation identified coordination challenges that impacted on the implementation of the MOU and Joint strategy. Article 14 of the MOU stipulates that the channels of communication of the MOU shall be the WGYD for the AUC and the Ethiopian UN Women Country Office and later the UN Women Liaison Office to the AU. This implies that for the operation of the MOU, these two entities within the AUC and UN Women Liaison Office, were the entry points for coordinating implementation of the partnership framework between the two partners.

Stakeholders noted that implementation of the MOU activities was not always coordinated through these entry points, resulting in departments within the AUC and the UN system resorting to bilateral engagements in implementing MOU-related activities. For example, some

programmes within the UN system were collaborating and engaging AU departments bilaterally without going through the UN Women Liaison Office and the WGYD. This has resulted in the coordinating institutions (WGYD and UN Women Liaison Office) being unaware or not involved in some of the MOU-linked activities being implemented by departments within the AUC and UN agencies. This weakened the coordination process in the implementation of the MOU and SP and ultimately affected efficiency as possibilities of duplication were high.

We would have liked to see more collaboration with the Gender Directorate for the Trade Agenda, the Agriculture Agenda, and all the other work of the AUC because gender cuts across all sectors, but that did not happen because of coordination challenges and also because the Gender Directorate has limited human and financial resources. Bringing AUC departments to plan together, to monitor and address bottlenecks has not been possible. The coordination challenges are not new, but we were hoping that they were going to be addressed by the MOU.

Key Informant Interview

Stakeholders within UN Women noted that at times they were forced to collaborate directly with different departments in the AUC that were strategic so that they would not be left behind in implementing their programmes. Some UN Women programmes had to collaborate bilaterally with the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS and African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) to be able to push some of their priorities. A structured coordination mechanism in both the UN system and the AUC for the implementation of the MOU and the Joint strategy is lacking, leading to the identified coordination gaps. UN Women stakeholders acknowledged that enhancing coordination within the AUC is one of UN Women's priorities and that this priority is yet to be achieved. UN Women hopes to improve coordination through the newly established Gender Partners Group, where it has taken leadership alongside the WGYD, to step up coordination of the relevant stakeholders within the AU and to provide them with a platform to share what they are working on and jointly plan and monitor their activities.

Although the SOP for the MOU required the partners to meet on a quarterly basis to review implementation progress and address any challenges that emerged, stakeholders contended that such coordination meetings were not often held as planned. This was compounded by the fact that no implementation plan or an M&E framework was developed for the implementation of the strategy. Coordination meetings specifically for the implementation of the MOU and its strategy were not often convened.

The seconding of technical support staff to the WGYD and to the AU Mission in New York improved coordination between the two partners. In New York, initially, one UN Women technical staff was seconded to the AU Mission while the other was seconded to the office of the Special Envoy on WPS. This enhanced the coordination between the two parties and the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS as weekly meetings were convened. However, as noted by stakeholders, coordination slackened after UN Women stopped funding the seconded position in the office of the Special Envoy. This indicates capacity challenges within the AUC. Coordination is now through the AU Mission where the other seconded staffer is still placed.

While it is important for UN Women to second technical staff to the AUC to provide technical staff given the capacity constraints within the AUC, this needs to be done within a formalised framework, with defined expectations and obligations. Stakeholders noted that the seconding of staff to the AUC is not being done within a well-defined and formalised framework leading to the seconded personnel being overwhelmed by competing priorities, from for example, UN Women, AUC and Office of the Special Envoy on WPS. Some of the seconded staff indicated that they were finding it difficult to balance priorities, leading to burnout.

(b) Inadequate Financial and Human Resources: both the UN Women and the AUC admitted that they have inadequate human and financial resources that are not commensurate with their mandates and the scope of their work. Stakeholders noted that UN Women is one of the smallest UN agencies with the least budget and this has often impacted its capacity to coordinate and implement programmes in line with its mandate. UN Women has had to mainly rely on core resources to fund its activities, but these resources are very limited. At the Liaison Office, there are few technical specialists, and the office has had to rely on junior staff and interns to coordinate and implement its programmes. Stakeholders also noted that there is high staff turnover within the AUC, which affects continuity, as some of the staff trained in gender mainstreaming have left the organisation. This calls for continuous gender mainstreaming training to enhance the institutional capacity of the AUC.

The AUC's WGYD also has very few substantive experts and has had to at times rely on seconded staff to assistance. Stakeholders noted that the directorate has a very small budget compared to other directorates and departments and hence finds it difficult to fulfil its obligations, including coordination. This is despite the fact that the work that UN Women and WGYD are doing is resource intensive. In the context of resource limitations, the two partners have had to rely on donor partners to support their activities.

3.3 Efficiency

Question 6: Has the implementation of the MOU and Joint Strategy been efficient and cost-effective?

Finding 9: *Assessing efficiency and cost-effectiveness was difficult owing to a lack of an Implementation Plan, Budget and Resource Allocation Plan, Results Framework and an M&E Framework for the partnership. However, poor coordination, inadequate human and financial resources, internal bureaucracy, and leadership change transitions within both UN Women and AUC were identified as some of the factors that negatively impacted efficiency.*

As already highlighted in the preceding sections, there was no operational implementation plan or a results framework with targets, timelines and indicators for the MOU or the Joint Strategy. While UN Women and the AUC jointly implemented interventions prioritised in the MOU and Strategy, this was more by default than by design because of a lack of an implementation plan for the MOU. Without a well-defined implementation plan, there is no clear roadmap for executing the program. Key steps,

responsibilities, and timelines remain ambiguous. In addition, without a results framework that outlines specific objectives, indicators, and targets, stakeholders lack a shared understanding of what success looks like and how progress will be measured. A results framework includes performance indicators. Without it, evaluating program effectiveness becomes challenging. The absence of monitoring mechanisms leads to blind spots. Program managers cannot track progress, identify bottlenecks, or make timely adjustments.

The partnership framework lacked a specific budget and a resource allocation plan. Without resource allocation details, inefficiencies may arise due to misaligned budgets, inadequate staffing, or insufficient materials. A results framework helps allocate resources effectively by prioritizing activities that directly contribute to desired outcomes.

An Implementation Plan, a Results Framework, M&E framework, and a resource allocation plan are essential for efficient program implementation. The partnership framework lacked these documents and therefore it was difficult during the evaluation to assess the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of implementing the planned activities. Stakeholders interviewed however noted that poor coordination and inadequate human and financial resources led to inefficiencies in the implementation process. Bureaucratic processes and leadership changes within both AUC and UN women were also noted to have led to delays in some of the planned activities including following up on the gender action plans developed by AUC departments during the gender mainstreaming training in Kampala, Uganda in 2019, the training of Gender Focal Persons, the creation of an on-line gender mainstreaming course for the AUC and the development and implementation of the Action Plan of the partnership.

3.4 Impact

Question 7: *Has the MOU and Joint Strategy contributed to long-term policy, political, social, economic, technical, and environmental changes for individuals, communities, and institutions in achieving the SDG and 2063 GEWE agendas?*

Finding 10: *GEWE work done by UN Women and the AUC has catalysed long-term transformations by aligning policies, empowering communities, enhancing the capacities of institutions, and fostering collaboration. Impact could have been enhanced by operationalising the MOU and Joint Strategy through the development and implementation of an Implementation Plan, M&E Strategy, and Resource Mobilisation and Allocation Strategy.*

The MOU and Joint Strategy between the AU and UN Women have triggered transformations that will ultimately lead to long-term GEWE impacts. At the normative level, the partnership has promoted ratification, domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol and these efforts have resulted in the remaining 11 countries yet to ratify the protocol having discussions with CSOs and development partners on how to expedite the ratification process, and two of the countries ratifying the protocol. The two partners have promoted gender-responsive policies, legal reforms, and institutional frameworks that prioritize GEWE. By integrating gender considerations into national and regional policies, the partners are driving long-term transformation.

The High-level engagements resulting from the MOU and Joint Strategy have influenced political leaders. Champion Presidents and other stakeholders advocate for GEWE, leading to policy shifts and increased political will. Their commitment ensures that gender equality remains a priority on the agenda of the AUC, RECs and MS.

The community-level interventions supported by the MOU and Joint Strategy empower women and girls. Awareness campaigns, education, and community engagement address harmful practices (such as child marriage and female genital mutilation) and promote gender equality. The engagement of traditional and cultural leaders through COTLA will contribute to long-term shifts in norms among communities as traditional leaders play a significant role in upholding and influencing the norms and values of communities. These efforts create lasting social change within communities.

The Joint Strategy emphasizes economic inclusion for women. By promoting financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and access to resources, it contributes to sustainable economic growth. Economic empowerment enhances the well-being of individuals and communities.

The MOU and Joint Strategy facilitate technical assistance, capacity-building workshops, and knowledge-sharing. Strengthening institutions and enhancing technical skills ensures long-term sustainability in achieving GEWE goals. Overall, the work done by UN Women and the AUC has catalysed long-term transformations by aligning policies, empowering communities, and fostering collaboration. Their impact extends beyond individuals to institutions, communities, and the broader African continent.

3.5 Coherence

Question 8: How compatible is the MOU and Joint Strategy on GEWE with other interventions on the continent, RECs, and member states?

Finding 11: *The MOU and Joint Strategy are compatible with existing global, continental, regional, and MS GEWE commitments, strategies, and interventions. Their collaborative approach enhances GEWE outcomes across Africa. There was however limited collaboration with the Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS), to which some North Africa countries belong.*

The MOU and Joint Strategy are aligned with AU's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations SDGs. The development of the Joint Strategy was informed by the UN Women Strategy for Africa (2.0), the AU's Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) Strategy 2018-2028 and the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights. The Joint Strategy therefore seeks to enhance the goals of the GEWE commitments of the AU and UN Women.

The MOU and Joint Strategy are intentionally designed to align with existing GEWE initiatives, including the EU-funded Spotlight Initiative. They reinforce and enhance ongoing efforts by integrating gender considerations into broader development programs and policies. The AU collaborates closely

with RECs, which play a critical role in regional integration and development. The MOU and Joint Strategy ensure that GEWE efforts are harmonized across RECs, avoiding duplication and promoting synergy.

Member states implement various GEWE programs and policies. The MOU and Joint Strategy focus on providing technical support, capacity-building, and coordination to enhance member states' efforts. The MOU and Joint Strategy facilitate resource mobilization by leveraging both AU and UN Women networks. They coordinate efforts to maximize impact, avoid fragmentation, and pool resources for GEWE initiatives. The MOU and Joint Strategy offer technical assistance to Member States and RECs. They strengthen institutional capacity, knowledge sharing, and best practices for sustainable GEWE outcomes. The AUC has been working with the RECs and UN Women regional and country offices to implement the SI and to pursue the WPS agenda. An MOU on cooperation in Peace and Security has been signed between the AU, RECs and the Coordinating Mechanisms of the Regional Standby Brigades of Eastern and Northern Africa⁵¹.

The evaluation concluded that the MOU and the Joint Strategy were highly coherent with and complemented current GEWE efforts at global, continental, regional, and MS levels. However, there was limited collaboration between the AUC and the UN Women Liaison Office with the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States and the Arab League to which some of the AU Member States such as Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco belong.

3.6 Sustainability

Question 9: To what extent are the interventions and impacts of the MOU and Joint Strategy on GEWE likely to continue in the long term?

Finding 12: *The MOU and Joint Strategy have established mechanisms and a foundation for sustainability through capacity building of stakeholders, generating political will at the highest level, and building strong partnerships. However, poor coordination, human and financial resource constraints, lack of a joint resource mobilisation strategy, and inadequate capacity to mainstream gender within the AUC present threats to sustainability.*

The MOU and Joint Strategy have built mechanisms and a foundation for the sustainability of interventions and impacts. The partnership represents a formal commitment between two influential organizations—the AU and UN Women. Institutional commitment ensures that GEWE remains a priority in their agendas, even beyond specific timeframes. The strategies align with broader continental frameworks, such as Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By integrating GEWE into these overarching agendas, the impact extends beyond short-term initiatives.

⁵¹African Union, "Regional Economic Communities (RECs), 2024, [Regional Economic Communities \(RECs\) | African Union \(au.int\)](#)

The MOU and Joint Strategy also focus on capacity-building, knowledge sharing, and technical assistance. Strengthening institutions and empowering stakeholders ensures sustainable GEWE efforts. Further, the Joint Strategy supports community-based initiatives. By empowering women and engaging communities, they create lasting change at the grassroots level.

The MOU and Joint Strategy lay a strong foundation for long-term GEWE impact by fostering collaboration, aligning policies, and mobilizing resources. Their legacy will extend beyond specific timeframes, benefiting individuals, communities, and institutions across Africa.

However, although the MOU and the Joint Strategy have established a foundation and mechanisms for sustainability, several threats to sustainability exist. Changes in leadership or shifting priorities within the AU or UN Women could affect the commitment to implementing the MOU and Joint Strategy. This could also result in a shift of priorities. Without sustained political will, resources and efforts may wane over time. Organizational restructuring, leadership turnover, or changes in administrative processes can also disrupt the implementation of joint initiatives. Ensuring continuity despite institutional changes is critical.

Adequate funding and resources are essential for implementing GEWE programs. If financial support diminishes or becomes inconsistent, the initiatives outlined in the MOU and Joint Strategy may falter. Currently, the MOU and Joint Strategy do not have a supporting budget and have had to leverage other funded initiatives such as the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme. Without a specific budget or a well-defined resource mobilisation strategy, it will become difficult to operationalise the MOU and the Joint Strategy.

Effective collaboration between the AU and UN Women is essential. If coordination mechanisms break down or communication falters, the MOU and Joint Strategy may lose momentum. The evaluation established that there are coordination gaps between the AU and UN Women, and within the two institutions themselves. If these coordination challenges are not effectively addressed, the long-term sustainability of impacts and GEWE activities will be threatened.

Regular monitoring and evaluation are necessary to assess progress. If these mechanisms are weak or absent, it becomes difficult to track results and adjust strategies as needed. A gap in M&E was also identified by the evaluation. The M&E framework therefore needs to be developed and implemented by the partnership to track results and also ensure that activities are implemented as planned.

Resistance to Gender Equality is a threat to sustainability at both institutional and grassroots levels. Societal norms, cultural biases, and resistance to gender equality persist. Overcoming these challenges requires sustained efforts and awareness-raising.

Addressing these threats through continuous advocacy, resource mobilization, and adaptive management is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the MOU and Joint Strategy in advancing GEWE across Africa.

3.7 Gender Equality and Human Rights

Question 10: *To what extent have gender and human rights considerations been integrated into the MOU and Joint Strategy on GEWE during design and implementation? To what extent is disability inclusion mainstreamed in the MOU, Strategy and implementation?*

Finding 13: *Gender Equality and Human Rights were well integrated in the design of the MOU and Joint Strategy which sought to advance GEWE through implementation of global and continental commitments on gender equality and the human rights of women. However, disability inclusion was not specifically mainstreamed in the MOU, Strategy and implementation.*

The MOU and the Joint Strategy were anchored on global and continental GEWE instruments and commitments. These include the SDGs, CEDAW, and Maputo Protocol, among others. These global and continental GEWE instruments informed the development of UN Women's Global as well as Africa GEWE Strategy and the AU GEWE Strategy. These were merged into the Joint Strategy of the MOU.

The Joint Strategy was designed as a Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Initiative aimed at creating an enabling policy and legal environment and empowering women to enable them to claim their women and human rights in the areas of leadership and participation in decision-making, women economic empowerment, Peace and Security and to live a life free from all forms of violence. The Joint Strategy's design was thus focused on entrenching the human rights of women through a number of strategies including engendering the legal and policy framework, empowering women through creating economic opportunities, awareness creation, capacity strengthening of CSOs and institutions, creating high-level political commitment, engaging traditional leaders so that they can recognize, appreciate, respect and advocate for the rights of women and girls, and empowering duty bearers to create institutions and frameworks that promote and enforce the human rights of women.

The project focused on empowering duty bearers in AUC, government institutions, CSOs, women and women's groups and traditional leaders through a series of capacity-building initiatives and mentorship programmes. The ultimate goal of these empowerment efforts was the empowerment of women to enable them to claim their rights and live a life free from all forms of violence.

Overall, gender and human rights considerations were well integrated in the design of the MOU and Joint Strategy. However, disability has not been well mainstreamed in the MOU, Strategy and implementation.

3.8 Unintended Results or Outcomes

No explicit evidence of unintended results was noted during the evaluation. However, some of the design and implementation modalities of GEWE interventions could potentially lead to unintended outcomes. For example, the adoption of virtual means of communication and programme delivery during the COVID-19 outbreak potentially left out marginalised women and girls with limited access to digital technology such as the internet and mobile phones in contrast to Leave No One Behind principle.

While the focus of the MoU was on promoting women's empowerment and addressing gender inequality, an unintended outcome might have been the neglect of men and boys in these efforts. Some gender-responsive programs may not have sufficiently engaged men and boys in understanding and challenging harmful gender norms. This could lead to feelings of alienation or exclusion among men, potentially limiting the overall impact of gender equality initiatives.

4. KEY LESSONS LEARNT AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Lessons Learned

The following were the key lessons learned from the evaluation of the partnership framework between AUC and UN Women:

- (a) Operationalisation of a MOU and Joint Strategy:** The absence of validated tools to operationalise a MOU and its accompanying strategy such as: a costed Strategy Implementation Plan with targets and timelines; a Results Framework with objectives, activities, outputs, outcomes, indicators, and time-bound targets; and a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework indicating the frequency of monitoring activities, participants in the monitoring process and key milestones to be monitored and evaluated; leads to activity based engagement between the partners and ad-hoc implementation of not always strategic activities. It also leaves the relationship vulnerable to leadership and/or context changes.
- (b) MOU and Joint Strategy Ownership and Accountability:** Bringing all key MOU stakeholders together to develop and validate, in an inclusive and participatory manner, the Joint Strategy; Implementation Plan; M&E Framework; and Results Framework helps create ownership and accountability in the implementation of the MOU and Joint Strategy.
- (c) Monitoring and Evaluation:** Where an implementation plan, results framework and an M&E are lacking in a partnership framework, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of that partnership.
- (d) Coordination:** A well-structured coordination framework, with clearly defined roles for each stakeholder and with inbuilt accountability mechanisms, developed and validated through an inclusive process involving all key stakeholders and signed by the leadership of the partnering institutions, is key in enhancing ownership and effective and efficient coordination in a partnership framework.
- (e) Gender Mainstreaming Capacity Building:** Institutional change and capacity-building on gender mainstreaming takes a very long time. Short-term and ad hoc activities aiming to enhance institutional capacity do not guarantee sustainable change within the institution, unless they are part of a sufficiently long-term and unremitting approach, solidly anchored within the institution, owned by its leaders, and supported by internal technical capacities.
- (f) Technical support to the AUC:** Through the secondment of technical staff, requires a formal framework where roles and responsibilities are clearly defined to avoid conflict of priorities and overwhelming the seconded persons who have to respond to the needs of several institutions to which they are answerable.
- (g) Resource Limitations:** Where there are significant human and financial resource constraints in a partnership, coordination and implementation are negatively impacted.

- (h) **High-Level Engagement of Heads of State:** As champions of the various components of GEWE elevates the issues to continental and global levels, where they attract attention, funding, and partnerships.
- (i) **Women's Networks:** Building strong women's networks through capacity building involving advocacy and lobbying, is effective in elevating women's voices in their demand for their rights.
- (j) **Engaging Traditional and Cultural Leaders** who are the gate-keepers and custodians of cultural values and norms, is key in dismantling norms, values, and practices that perpetuate harmful practices.

4.2 Key Conclusions

The following are the key conclusions of the evaluation:

Relevance: The MOU's goal, objectives and priorities were highly relevant and remain relevant to the global and continental GEWE context. They were aligned with the GEWE needs and priorities of UN Women, AUC, RECS, Member States and women and girls who are marginalised and vulnerable to gender-related injustices and discrimination across the African continent. However, there is a need for further realignment of the Joint Strategy with both the MOU and the SDGs.

Effectiveness: The design of the partnership agreement, as espoused in the MOU, Joint Strategy and SOP, was generally fit for purpose as it outlined areas of focus, and articulated specific objectives, guiding principles, and guidelines for ensuring accountability. However, measuring effectiveness was made difficult by the absence of an Implementation Plan, Results Framework and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. This led to ad hoc and activity-based engagement in the partnership thereby making it difficult to assess the extent to which the objectives in the Strategic Plan were achieved. Despite these gaps, the cooperation between the AUC and UN Women led to: (a) elevation of gender issues within AfCFTA to the highest platforms at continental, RECs, and country levels leading to increased awareness of the need to mainstream gender in the AfCFTA by stakeholders and the empowerment of women to demand their rights and space in the implementation of AfCFTA and decision making processes; (b) increased visibility of women and young women leaders and amplified calls for women leadership in politics, governance, and peace and security at country, continental and global levels; (c) prioritisation of EVAWG at global, continental, regional and MS level through awareness creation on harmful norms and practices; capacity building of stakeholders including MS, NGOs, and traditional and cultural leaders; lobbying and advocacy for domestication and implementation of international, regional and national commitments on EVAWG; establishing accountability frameworks; and the creation of strategic partnerships among other initiatives; (d) intensified implementation of the Maputo Protocol and strengthened accountability mechanisms and frameworks for the collection and use of data on SGBV, HPs, FGM and child marriage; and (e) high level commitment on GEWE through engagement of Heads of State GEWE champions. For increased effectiveness going forward, there is a need to strengthen coordination; develop an implementation plan and an M&E framework and increased human and financial resource mobilisation.

Efficiency: Assessing efficiency and cost effectiveness was difficult owing to a lack of an Implementation Plan, Budget and Resource Allocation Plan, Results Framework and an M&E Framework for operationalisation of the partnership. Efficiency can be enhanced through improved coordination; and increased mobilisation and allocation of human and financial resources to the AUC and UN Women. .

Impact: Although it is still early to assess the impact of the 3-year partnership, the partnership initiatives has established a foundation for long-term GEWE impacts through: establishing accountability mechanisms for the domestication, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of global, continental and national commitments on GEWE; building the capacities of communities and institutions on mainstreaming gender; engaging traditional and cultural leaders to transform harmful norms, beliefs and practices; and fostering collaboration between stakeholders. Going forward impact could be enhanced through operationalisation of the Joint Strategy, human and financial resources and and improved coordination.

Coherence: The MOU and Joint Strategy are compatible with and complement existing global, continental, regional, and MS GEWE commitments, strategies, and interventions. Their collaborative approach enhances GEWE outcomes across Africa. There is however need to increase collaboration with the Regional Office for Arab States and the Arab League to which some of the AU Member States in North Africa belong.

Sustainability: The MOU and Joint Strategy have established mechanisms and a foundation for sustainability through stimulating political will and commitment at the highest levels; capacity building of institutions and communities; and establishing accountability frameworks for ratification, domestication, and implementation of global and continental commitments and obligations on GEWE. Sustainability can be enhanced through the development and operationalisation of a costed implementation plan with an M&E framework and improved coordination.

Integration of Gender and Human Rights: Gender Equality and Human Rights were well integrated in the design of the MOU and Strategy which sought to advance GEWE through the implementation of global and continental commitments on gender equality and the human rights of women. The gender and human rights framework of the MOU needs a more nuanced integration of persons with disability issues.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following table presents the key recommendations of the evaluation. The recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions derived from the evidence gathered and analysed for this evaluation and synthesised inputs from project stakeholders. The recommendations were validated by the Evaluation Reference Group.

Thematic Area	Recommendations	Justification/Rationale	Priority	Responsibility for implementation	Findings, conclusions, lessons linked to recommendation
Overall	Renew the MOU between the AUC and UN women for a longer period of around five years incorporating recommendations from this evaluation for improved partnership effectiveness	The AUC and UN Women have a good working relationship, based on mutual trust, dating back many years. Working together over the years has brought out significant GEWE outcomes for the continent and Member States as the two partners have aligned GEWE goals and have complementary mandates and capacities. The work of the two partners could be made more effective through an improved, well-defined, well-resourced, and operationalised long-term framework of cooperation which provides a structured approach to working together on joint initiatives, projects or programmes, allowing the partners to collaborate effectively. Long-term impacts such as changing norms and reforming policies and legal frameworks require long-term interventions and hence the need to further renew the MOU on a long-term basis as the partnership has so far produced promising results.	High	AUC and UN Women	Findings 1 & 3,
Developing new MOU	Develop the new MOU through a participatory and inclusive process, informed by an evidence-based situation analysis which will help in identifying key priority areas of focus.	Ownership of the MOU by some of the stakeholders was low as they did not participate in the development of the MOU and its strategy.	High	AUC and UN Women	Findings 1 & 3,
Alignment	Anchor the MOU priority areas in the AUC decisions, declarations, and resolutions for increased alignment with the AUC GEWE agenda	The MOU priority areas need to be strongly aligned to the live priorities of the AUC as reflected in decisions, declarations and resolutions for	High	AUC and UN Women	Finding 2

Thematic Area	Recommendations	Justification/Rationale	Priority	Responsibility for implementation	Findings, conclusions, lessons linked to recommendation
		increased relevance of the MOU and Joint Strategy to the prevailing context.			
	Increase alignment of the Joint Strategy with the MOU priorities and SGD GEWE priorities by including SRHR, unpaid care work, and gender equality in humanitarian and conflict situations that are missing from the Joint Strategy.	SRHR, unpaid care work, and gender equality in humanitarian and conflict situations that are missing from the Joint Strategy although they are prioritised in the MOU and SDGs.	High	AUC and UN Women	Finding 1
Institutionalising the planning and operationalisation of the MOU & Joint Strategy	Through an inclusive and participatory process, develop and validate corporate tools to guide implementation of the MOU and Joint Strategy i.e Implementation Plan; Results Framework; Monitoring and Evaluation Framework; Resource Mobilisation Framework; and an Implementation Budget for the Joint Strategy. Ensure that all key departments and programmes in AUC, UN Women, RECs and key stakeholders participate in the process for ownership and accountability. Annex all the above documents to the MOU for easy reference	The MOU and the Joint Strategy were not operationalised because of the absence of an Implementation Plan; Results Framework; M&E Framework; and a supporting budget. As a result engagement between the two partners was ad-hoc and activity-based instead of being guided by a work plan and a results framework.	High	AUC and UN Women	Finding 4
Coordination	Strengthen the coordination mechanism of the partnership by developing, validating, and implementing a Partnership Coordination Agreement (PCA) (with a mechanism for accountability) through an inclusive, consultative, and participatory process where all key stakeholders and relevant departments within the UN system and	Coordination in the partnership framework was noted by stakeholders to be poor leading to bilateral engagements between UN agencies and AUC departments and in the process bypassing UN Women Liaison Office and the GWYD. As a result, some departments or units were not aware what the others were doing even though they were implementing programmes with similar outcomes. This has the	High	WGYD and UN Women	Finding 8, 12

Thematic Area	Recommendations	Justification/Rationale	Priority	Responsibility for implementation	Findings, conclusions, lessons linked to recommendation
	the AUC (e.g WYGD; Office of the Special Envoy on WPS; and PAPS) involved. The coordinating entry points for AUC (i.e. GWYD) and the UN System (UN Women) should be well defined and protocols for engagement established and implemented.	potential to cause inefficiencies in programming including duplication of activities.			
	Evaluate the PCA annually and address any gaps identified	It is necessary to evaluate the partnership regularly to determine if it is producing the desired results and take course corrective action if there are gaps. This will strengthen the partnership.	Medium	WGYD and UN Women	
	Provide a budget for partnership coordination	Without a budget dedicated for coordination activities, it might be difficult to convene coordination meetings for partners.	High	UN Women	
Gender Mainstreaming	Conduct a Gender Audit for all the AUC departments	It is necessary to carry out a Gender Audit for all the AUC departments to assess gender mainstreaming capacity levels and gender mainstreaming training needs of these departments. The results of the audit will inform the development of a gender mainstreaming capacity-building strategy.	High	WGYD & UN Women Liaison Office	Finding 8, 12
	Develop a concrete long-term gender mainstreaming capacity-building programme, solidly anchored within the institution, owned by its leaders and supported by internal technical capacities of the AUC and UN Women.	Capacity to mainstream gender within the AUC is limited particularly for those units/departments that have not had formal training on gender. Stakeholders noted gender mainstreaming capacity-building training.	Medium	WGYD	

Thematic Area	Recommendations	Justification/Rationale	Priority	Responsibility for implementation	Findings, conclusions, lessons linked to recommendation
	Develop an on-line module on Gender Mainstreaming and make it mandatory for all AUC staff (old and new) to go through the course.		High	WGYD & UN Women Liaison Office	
	Revitalise the concept of Gender Focal Points within the AUC and capacitate the GFPs through gender mainstreaming training	Stakeholders noted that although the concept of GFPs has been introduced in the AUC, it has lost traction over the years and generally GFPs have limited capacity to mainstream gender.	High	WGYD	
Disability Inclusion	Mainstream disability inclusion in the next MOU, strategy and implementation in line with the Leave No One Behind Principle.	The MOU and its Strategy makes no reference to disability inclusion	High	WGYD	Finding 13
Resource mobilisation	Develop a joint resource mobilisation strategy, guided by the priority areas in the MOU and Joint Strategy, to support implementation of the MOU Action Plan.	There was no supporting budget for the implementation of the Joint Strategy. This is essential is the expected outcomes of the strategy can be realised.	High	WGYD and UN Women	Finding 8, 12
	Increase the number of technical support staff for both AUC and UN Women	The GWYD and UN Women staff compliment is not commensurate with the huge mandates of the two institutions. Human resources shortage and high staff turnover were noted to be some of the drawbacks to effective implementation of the Joint Strategy.	Medium	WGYD and UN Women	
Secondment of Technical Staff to AUC	Develop a formalised framework for seconding technical staff to the AUC, with expectations, roles and responsibilities spelt out	There were concerns that some of the seconded staff were overwhelmed by competing and at times conflicting priorities from the multiple institutions that they serve, leading to burnout.	Medium	WGYD	

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ANNEXES

Terms Of Reference



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List Of Key Informants Interviewed



List of key Informants
Interviewed.docx

Data Collection Tool



Key Informant
Interview Questionnai

Evaluation Matrix



Evaluation
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