

## Men as champions to end violence against women and girls in Africa: The African Union Positive Masculinity Initiative

### Context: Gender equality challenges in Africa

The GIZ Project “African Women Advancing Rights and Empowerment” (AWARE) collaborates with the African Union Commission Women Gender and Youth Directorate (AUC-WGYD) and other actors, including women’s networks to strengthen the implementation of continental commitments on gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) in Africa. These commitments take a human-centered approach, providing norms and standards to African Union (AU) Member States’ actions on GEWE. Focus is given to the promotion and protection of women’s rights, enhanced access to resources, and representation in decision-making processes – aligning perfectly with the 3Rs approach as advanced by the BMZ Feminist Development Policy.

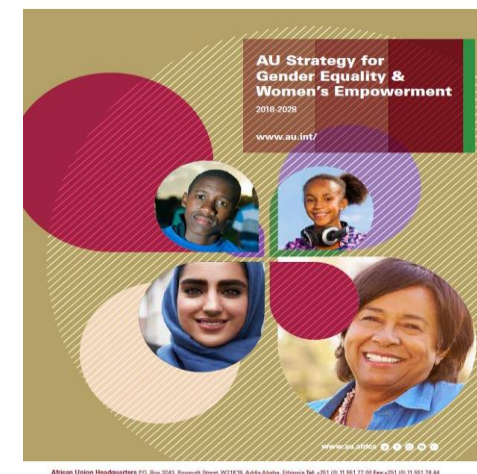
Despite the existence of these commitments, there are still challenges hindering the full realization of GEWE in Africa.

Women and girls continue to face discriminatory social norms and practices grounded in systems of unequal power between women and men. The high prevalence of gender-based violence, harmful practices, and violations of human rights in Africa continue to demonstrate women’s and girls’ vulnerability. Relatedly, gender-based discrimination stemming from discriminatory laws and practices continues to alienate women from social, economic, and political spheres of life, further exacerbating their exclusion in decision-making processes.

To address these challenges, over the years, AU has adopted normative and policy frameworks, focusing on the attainment of GEWE in all spheres of life, including the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa<sup>1</sup> (Maputo Protocol); the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa; and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Policy frameworks have included Agenda 2063 and its attendant aspirations – 3 and 6<sup>2</sup>; and the AU Strategy on GEWE (2018-2028). They provide guiding frameworks for implementing policies and programmes that address issues related to women and girls’ rights, advocate for their protection and prohibit violence and harmful practices, and other detrimental social norms.



An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa



Based in these frameworks, Member States and other non-state actors have adopted additional laws and strategies at national and regional levels to address the existing and emerging challenges to GEWE. For instance, most AU Member States have constitutions that forbid discrimination based on gender, and 44 out of the 55 Member States have since ratified the Maputo Protocol, while 50 have endorsed ACRWC. In Addition, 52 States have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, while many are undertaking measures to implement Agenda 2023 Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 5.

<sup>1</sup> The Protocol was adopted on 11 July 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique, came into force on 25 November 2005 and so far, 44 AU Member States have ratified it.

<sup>2</sup> Aspiration 3 envisions an African of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law, while Aspiration 6 envisions Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.

Based on the above background, the GIZ Gender Competition 2024 provides an opportunity for the AWARE project to showcase its cooperation with the AU towards **growing a movement for positive masculinity and meaningful engagement of men and boys in advancing gender equality and women's rights in Africa**. The measure demonstrates how men in decision-making positions across different spheres can be brought on board as gender allies, not only to effect change at the family level but also to become gender champions in their workspaces, ecosystems and at the highest political level. The **AWARE project fosters a gender-transformative approach** by engaging with political decision-makers, policy-making structures and institutions on the continent to initiate a trickle-down effect, influencing policies at regional, national, and sub-national levels, while ultimately benefitting the daily lives of women, girls and other marginalized groups on the continent.

### **The African Union Positive Masculinity Initiative**

World over, both men and women are victims, survivors and perpetrators of violence. However, statistics show that overwhelmingly, violence and discrimination are directed more towards women and girls.

The most common forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) reported and documented in Africa, include, intimate partner violence, which manifests in physical, sexual or psychological abuse by an intimate partner; female genital mutilation; early child and forced Marriage; and sexual violence in conflict, including rape, sexual assault, kidnapping, sexual slavery and forced prostitution.

To address the scourge of violence against women and girls in Africa, in 2020, the AU established a High-Level Presidential Initiative on Positive Masculinity in Leadership to End VAWG in Africa. The initiative aims to **mobilise political commitment and action at the highest level of the AU leadership and decision-making to prevent and end VAWG in Africa**. It is operationalized through the Annual AU Men's Conference and the multi-stakeholder pre-conference consultations with citizens led by the AUC WGYD and the Office of the Special Envoy of Women, Peace and Security, in collaboration with the African Women's Leaders Network (AWLN).

The **Men's Conferences on Positive Masculinity** focus on involving men in positions of leadership and influence to engage other men and boys in efforts to eliminate VAWG and end gender inequalities, as a critical means to transform structural and institutional inequalities.

The Conferences seek to strengthen accountability by men, who also become better role models for boys, by urging them to be champions of change. They provide a platform for **engaging male leaders across different sectors, including Heads of State and Government; men in the private sector; religious and traditional leaders; civil society organisations; academia; and the youth**, intended as a strategy to accelerate the prevention and elimination of VAWG in Africa at all levels. Women leaders are equally engaged to ensure inclusivity in the efforts. The Inaugural Men's Conference was held in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo in November 2021, under the leadership of H.E. Felix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, the first AU Champion on Positive Masculinity. The Second Conference was held in November 2022 in Dakar, Senegal, under the leadership of H.E. Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal.

Drawing from the outcomes of the two conferences, the AU Heads of State and Government during the 36th Assembly held in February 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, adopted a historic decision, tasking AUC to negotiate **the AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU CEVAWG)**. The AWARE project supported the convening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity in Pretoria, South Africa from 27-28 November 2023 as it provided a platform for deepening the understanding of structural drivers of VAWG and consolidating commitments towards AU CEVAWG.

The Conference was co-hosted by the 2023 AU Chairperson H.E. President Azali Assoumani of the Union of the Comoros and H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa. Once adopted, **the AU CEVAWG will be the first continental legal instrument for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, showing African leadership in efforts to eliminate VAWG globally.**



### Applying Gender Transformative and Human Rights Approaches to AU Positive Masculinity Initiative

In Africa, like in all other parts of the world, gender equality efforts over the years have mainly been driven by women, for women and with women, seeking to address the vices mostly propagated by men. However, in recent times, there has been a greater realization that sustainable impact can only be achieved **through collective actions and response mechanisms that involve men and boys.**

Premised on this realisation and in alignment with the BMZ Feminist Development Policy, that the AWARE project is facilitating the integration of the gender transformative and human rights-based approaches into the AU positive masculinity initiative. The approaches are leveraged to interrogate and understand men and masculinities, as well as analyse experiences, attitudes, roles and responsibilities of men and boys and how these influence behaviour, social norms, policymaking, and gender equality in Africa.



In addition, the AWARE Project supported the development of an **AU Position Paper on Positive Masculinity**, which provides empirical perspectives of reshaping masculinities in ways that seek to challenge gender inequality by transforming harmful gender norms, roles and relations, while working towards redistributing power, resources, and services more equally.

The Paper is ultimately intended to inform the **Common African Position (CAP) on Positive Masculinity**, elaborating on African parameters of engaging men and boys to support the broader movement for GEWE, including ending all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls.

### Multi-Level Cooperation on Positive Masculinity: From Policy to Practice

The AU circle of champions for positive masculinity is led by 11 Member States – Congo Republic, DRC, Comoros, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Togo. These States are committed to ensuring that necessary policies and measures are put in place to address any form of impunity, while at the same time advancing participatory and intergenerational approaches to engage all stakeholders and amplify the call to action to end harmful and discriminatory practices in societies. In advocating for positive masculinity, all actors agree that women's rights are human rights, and within this context the AWARE project supported the participation of representatives of over 25 AWLN National Chapters in the 2023 Women Leaders Consultation on Positive Masculinity that was held in Moroni, Comoros.



Also, to facilitate experiences and local knowledge sharing, the AWARE project supported the participation of Dr Tapiwa Rweyemamu from AUC WGYD in an interactive panel session at the 2023 GIZ-Wide Gender Network Meeting that was held in Berlin, Germany. Dr Tapiwa shared her insights into the work of the Directorate on Positive Masculinity and AU intersectional approaches to gender. She invited GIZ colleagues to join the consultations in the run-up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Men's Conference and subsequently shared virtual links to the pre-stakeholder consultations with the private sector, academia and youth on positive masculinity. In addition, the participation of the Directorate in the Gender Network Meeting not only strengthened the relationship between the AWARE project and WGYD but also opened doors for possible collaboration between the Directorate and other GIZ projects and entities.



In the spirit of multi-stakeholder engagement towards the promotion of gender equality, as envisaged by the BMZ Feminist Development Policy, the AWARE project has facilitated several exchanges between AUC WGYD and OECD towards the co-creation of a joint measure on masculinities. In principle, WGYD agreed to collaborate with OECD on masculinities, supporting the AU positive masculinity initiative. The pilot measure is envisaged to support data collection on positive masculinities in two AU Member States, providing empirical data sets to inform transformative policy formulation and actions towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa.

The AWARE project is currently the only GG2 project in the GIZ-AU portfolio, guided by the BMZ Feminist Development Policy and focusing on the 3Rs Approach – Rights, Resources and Representative. The Project also has established cooperation with continental women's networks as well as non-governmental organisations working on gender equality and women's rights in Africa. Focus is given to enhancing the capacities of these networks and organisations to sustainably advance gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa.



The project serves as the internal focal point for the coordination of the GIZ engagements with AU on GEWE. It also represents GIZ in the AU Partner Group for Gender composed of over 35 development partners based in Addis Ababa, including representatives of diplomatic missions, UN Agencies, AUC-WGYD, AU Youth Envoy and International Organizations and agencies working on GEWE. The Group was conceived as a coordination platform to streamline and structure the partnership with the AU on GEWE initiatives, including the positive masculinity initiative, to maximize impact, avoid duplication of efforts, and ease the burden of partnership management on the different AUC Departments and Organs.



**GIZ Gender Competition 2024 submission by GIZ-AU AWARE Project – Sophia Gallina, Rizzan Nassuna & Rebecca Minkus**