



## PROJET VOIX ET LEADERSHIP DES FEMMES (VLF)

### 67TH COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW) 2023 - HIGH LEVEL PANEL: DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN IN WEST AFRICA AND THE DIASPORA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

March, 14<sup>th</sup>, 11:00 a.m. EDT (-4 GMT) venue to be specified by ARDN, New York-USA

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE

##### I. INTRODUCTION.

The 67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) will be held in New York from 6 to 17 March 2023 under the theme "Innovation and Technological Change, Education in the Digital Age to Achieve Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls". To this end, the Women's Voice and Leadership Project (VLF-Sénégal), through a delegation composed of representatives of its 25 partner organisations as well as the project implementation team, will take part in the initiative. In addition to its participation in the planned activities, the VLF-Senegal project will organise a high-level panel entitled "*Digital empowerment for women in West Africa and the Diaspora: challenges and opportunities*". This meeting, which will be held on March, 14<sup>th</sup>, at 11am will see the participation of non-state actors, state actors, research institutions and technical and financial partners. This will be done in collaboration with the African Renaissance and Diaspora Network (ARDN) based in New York.

##### II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

###### A. Gender discrimination in the labour market in West Africa

Women face social, economic and political barriers that limit their coping capacity<sup>1</sup>. Even though women are affected the most, some groups are more affected than others. The Declaration of Beijing states that the intersectionality of gender and racial discrimination causes higher vulnerability and systematic violations in all areas of social life for women. It is the case of women of African Diaspora and African women that face systemic discrimination and lack access to many basic human rights at all levels of society. Countries in LAC have made momentous strides in increasing female LFP, especially in South America. And while the female LFP rate has traditionally been very high for some countries— for example in the Caribbean— gender gaps still exist throughout the region. To some extent female LFP depends on economic development, but policies also matter. For a given development level of a country, there is evidence that improvements in policies such as childcare and protected leave from work after childbirth can increase female participation in the labour force (Novta and Wong, 2017)

Laws, regulations and policies as well as gender-related social norms and practices affect women's power of self-determination, including their economic empowerment. Socio-cultural traditions and norms in particular affect women's participation in the labour market and partly explain the gender discrimination they face.

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[https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate\\_change/downloads/Women\\_and\\_Climate\\_Change\\_Factsheet.pdf](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf)

Male-dominated sectors and professions are significantly more productive and better paid than those occupied by women. Similarly, the disproportionate distribution of resources and domestic work within the household, as well as the socio-demographic trends that determine household size, very often constitute additional barriers to women's empowerment. Unpaid domestic work and care work can significantly restrict women's career aspirations by depriving them of time and bargaining power. In West Africa, women spend three to five times as much time as men on unpaid domestic work (Charmes, 2019).

This affects productivity and wealth creation if the majority of the population does not have access to decent and fairly paid work. Moreover, West Africa's dependence on agriculture also makes it extremely vulnerable to climate change. Women, the vast majority of whom use natural resources for their unpaid productive and care activities, are thus exposed to the adverse effects of climate fluctuations. These various obstacles considerably reduce their mobility and constitute a major constraint to seizing economic opportunities. The magnitude of the climate emergency will thus compel West African countries to move towards a green economy transition in order to create high-level green employment opportunities for women. Renewable energy, sustainable construction and infrastructure, and the circular economy will generate.

It was also noted that Africa is the continent where the largest proportion of the population does not have access to the internet and new technologies. However, technological innovation must be seized as an opportunity; the example of mobile banking and solar energy are assets to accelerate the empowerment of women.

On the education front, knowledge has become democratic and accessible but there are still areas in Africa without internet or electricity. Girls' education still faces socio-cultural, structural, infrastructural, programmatic and innovative challenges.

#### The Situation in Senegal

Senegal's population is young, ethnically diverse and predominantly female. In 2020, the country's total population was estimated at 16.74 million, of which 51.20 per cent were women and 42.59 per cent were under the age of 15. Gender-biased social norms prevent women from taking full advantage of opportunities. Although they are relatively healthier, better educated and better represented politically, harmful practices such as child marriage persist in Senegal, with 30.5% of girls married before the age of 18. In addition, women have less access to the resources needed to transform their human capital into productive livelihoods. The lack of time for women who are traditionally restricted to household chores and childcare keeps the gender parity score (GPS) for labour participation at around 0.6, the lowest in ECOWAS.

Persistent customary inheritance practices prevent women from inheriting land or other property, which is an obstacle to securing loans from banks as is often required. These factors lead to gender inequalities in business ownership and income; Senegalese women earn on average half the estimated income of Senegalese men, resulting in a GPS of 0.49.

While access to finance is the main obstacle to the development of income-generating activities for women, the gender-based discrimination they face in their activities also limits their success. Overall, Senegalese women earn, on average, less than half the income (from employment or self-employment) of Senegalese men. This is not only a result of the pay gap that women face in the labour force as wage earners, but also of the obstacles they face as entrepreneurs, such as (i) social and

gender-based norms and stereotypes that require them to marry and do all the domestic work while men work outside the home, which often exposes women in the workplace to questioning of their skills, sexual harassment and intimidation by their male partners; (ii) limited access to business networks to share experiences and business information reduces the ability of women entrepreneurs to access markets; (iii) the lack of tax and non-tax incentives specifically for women entrepreneurs does not encourage them to formalise or expand their businesses and compete with more established firms. Women entrepreneurs often do not take the opportunity to expand their businesses due to lack of confidence.

Digital technology is new and is an everyday reality, and women's limited access to new technologies affects their productivity.

#### Women's entrepreneurship

Minority women in Tech would bring a significant impact in changing the face of Tech dominated by white male to one that reflects and embraces the disruptive innovation that diversity brings to the industry. Activists recognize the transformative power that technological access has in increasing the economic power of minority communities. In Brazil, less than 1% of minority women are in tech. However, they are the main victims of online violence and discrimination. The event aims to discuss the promotion of digital justice for minority women as an opportunity for economic growth and assistance in addressing racial and gender discrimination.

Senegal is underperforming when it comes to supporting female entrepreneurship and financial inclusion. Senegalese women face low levels of financial inclusion and an insufficient supply of financial services for women-owned businesses, which limits the development of female entrepreneurship. However, it must be acknowledged that in recent years, the Senegalese government has launched several initiatives to stimulate women's entrepreneurship.

To facilitate access to credit and strengthen female entrepreneurship, the government has launched initiatives, including the Délégation générale à l'entrepreneuriat rapide des femmes et des jeunes (DER/FJ) in 2018, which aims to mobilise resources and finance business creation projects, particularly for women (all women over 18 years old) and youth (18-40 years old).

Since its inception, DER/FJ has provided \$103 million (CFAF 60 billion) in credit, with 50% of the beneficiaries being women-owned businesses.



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### Digital inclusion of women

While the penetration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) promotes greater participation of women in the economy, Senegalese women have limited capacity to use digital tools. ICTs can potentially play an important role in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Through ICTs, women and girls can access important information, network, market their products, find jobs and benefit from other services. However, poverty, illiteracy, lack of computer literacy and limited access to reliable internet are all factors that prevent women from taking advantage of digital tools.

To strengthen women's participation and access to media and ICTs, the Senegalese government adopted the "Senegal Digital 2025" strategy in 2016. This initiative aims to (i) develop women's leadership in the ICT sector by supporting the existence of women's associations in the ICT field; (ii) finance and support women's start-ups; and (iii) empower girls to pursue a career in the ICT sector. In addition, many private, civil society and TFP initiatives exist to (i) train women in digital tools, functional literacy, e-commerce, among others.

Although Senegal has undertaken many initiatives in favour of the financial and digital inclusion of women to empower them to be entrepreneurs, this has not translated into an improvement in gender parity. More needs to be done to change the mindset of both men and women to eliminate discrimination against women in business and to build women's self-confidence to succeed in entrepreneurship.

The VLF-Senegal project, aims to promote a strategic partnership for women's empowerment, equity and equal opportunities between the sexes, intends to support the organisation of this international panel on "digital technology for the empowerment of women in West Africa: challenges and prospects" during 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which will be held from 06 to 17 March 2023.

This high-level panel will bring together participants from different countries who will already be on site, representatives of the 25 partner organisations of the project, the Ministry of Women, Family and Child Protection, the presidents of the national REPSFECO units present in New York, representatives of regional platforms (Mano River Women for Peace : REFMAP), the G-5 Sahel Women's Platform, the West African Network of Young Women Leaders (ROAJELF), the other VLF projects that will be present in New York.

Technical and financial partners will be invited to take part in this meeting, notably the ECOWAS Human Development and Social Affairs Commission, the ECOWAS Centre for Gender Development (CCDG), the Peacebuilding Commission, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Representatives of the missions of West African countries to the United Nations and other missions of countries represented at the United Nations (Canada, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Italy, United States, Japan, China...) and the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nations will also participate.

Participants will include key persons from ministries in charge of social protection, peace, security, gender, parliamentarians, bi/multilateral agencies and organisations and NGOs.

### **III. GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

To create a space for discussion between policy makers, researchers, practitioners, development partners and civil society organisations on issues related to women's economic empowerment in Africa and the Diaspora through economic and digital inclusion in order to raise awareness on policies and find solutions that reflect gender and race diversity at all levels as one of the fundamental strategies for an efficient and equal transition to a just and sustainable planet.

### **IV. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

1. Initiate conversations between public, private, community and civil society actors on the issue of women's and girls' empowerment and their financial inclusion ;
2. Share experiences and good practices on women's economic empowerment through digital literacy;
3. Enhance synergy and the creation of alliances among actors working on women's economic empowerment;
4. Promote the use of data in decision-making on women's economic empowerment;
5. Develop a roadmap to enhance advocacy for reforms for women's economic empowerment in Senegal and in West Africa.
6. Engage stakeholders in the issues of concern to women of the African diaspora and Africa
7. Share innovative initiatives that aim to promote women's human rights across the globe

### **V. EXPECTED RESULTS**

1. Conversations are held between public, private, community and civil society actors on the issue of women's and girls' empowerment and their financial inclusion;
2. Experiences and good practices are shared on women's economic empowerment through digital literacy;
3. Enhanced synergy and created alliances among actors working on women's economic empowerment;
4. The use of data is promoted in decision-making on women's economic empowerment;
5. A roadmap is developed to enhance advocacy for reforms for women's economic empowerment in Senegal and in West Africa.

## **VI. METHODOLOGY**

- This half-day meeting will be structured around four panels for discussion, sharing of good practices by stakeholders and recommendations.
- These panels will be moderated by two experts in protection and gender.
- The opening ceremony of the Panel will be chaired by the Minister of Women, Family and Gender of Senegal.
- With the effective presence of the Danish Ambassador to the United Nations, the panel will include two introductory interventions by :
- The Commissioner of the ECOWAS Commission for Human Development, Social Affairs and Gender
- The Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations
- The Head of the Peace and Security Section of UN-Women in New York

The VLF Delegation proposes to organise four panels around themes presented by the national presidents of the beneficiary organisations of the VLF project and distributed according to the following agenda below.

## **VII. March 14<sup>th</sup> at 11 am EDT (-4 GMT) place TBD**

## **VI. ABOUT**

### **THE WOMEN'S VOICE AND LEADERSHIP PROJECT IN SENEGAL (VLF-SENEGAL)**

The VLF-Senegal project of the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI), implemented by CECI Senegal and funded by the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada (GAC), aims to support women's civil society organizations (CSOs) and CSO/F networks for a period of five years by strengthening their organizational capacities, optimizing the scope and quality of their services, and improving the effectiveness of their advocacy for women's and girls' (F/F) rights.

The project is being implemented in thirty-three (33) countries around the world and has the ultimate goal of enabling Women/Girls to fully enjoy their rights and advancing equality between women and men in Senegal. The project is working on three advocacy themes, notably the consideration of two discriminatory provisions within the family code, namely article 111 on raising the legal age of marriage and article 196 on the prohibition of paternity suits. The third advocacy theme concerns the involvement of women in the governance bodies of local content extractive resources.

The VLF-Senegal project through its " Learning by doing strategy " has designated the ECOWAS Women's Peace and Security Network (REPSFECO), one of the 25 partners of the project to coordinate this activity.



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### ABOUT THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE AND DIASPORA NETWORK (ARDN)

ARDN is an international NGO that advocates for & supports UN development goals related to Africa & the African diaspora. Based in New York with representations in numerous countries around the world, some of its key achievements are as follow: In 2010, it served as coordinator of the US delegation to the Third World Festival of Black Arts and Culture, the largest global gathering of luminaries of African descent, including artists, writers, filmmakers, intellectuals, government officials, and scientists.

In 2011, ARDN led a US delegation to Senegal and facilitated the signing of two partnership agreements with the Government of Senegal and US based participating organizations. The first memorialized cooperation between mayors from Senegal and the US in seven areas of development: energy, youth, education, HIV/AIDS, agriculture, culture and twinning of cities. The second created a framework for cooperation between Universities in Senegal and the US in the areas of academia, research, development and exchanges.

In 2012, ARDN, through its youth arm, the Pan-African Youth Leadership Network, co-organized the Third Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit in Burkina Faso with a United Nations system organization, convening over 250 young people from Africa and the Diaspora. The Ouagadougou Declaration, the Summit's primary outcome document, has served as a springboard for several Youth Leaders to implement sustainable development projects in their communities.

In 2013, with the support of a United Nations system organization, it coordinated the Africa dimension of the Third World Summit of Mayors and Leaders from Africa and of African Descent, which was organized by the Government of the Republic of Colombia.

2014: The Pan-African Youth Leadership Network co-organized the Fourth Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit in Senegal in cooperation with two United Nations system organizations. The Summit resulted in the formation of two partnerships: first, a partnership between youth of Africa and the Diaspora; and second, a partnership between the Pan-African Youth Leadership Network and the Millennium Villages Project.

2014: ARDN supported the steering of a global HIV/AIDS awareness, advocacy and prevention campaign of a United Nations system organization, organized around the occasion of the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

2015: ARDN, in partnership with the Global Alliance and the Government of Ghana, organized the Fourth World Summit of Mayors. The Summit was convened within the framework of the International Decade for People of African Descent (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/237), and included thematic topics such as empowerment of girls and women, youth employment, health, education and infrastructure.

2016: ARDN provided strategic support to events centered around the 2016 High Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on HIV/AIDS. ARDN's work included facilitating the discussion of and commitment by municipal leaders towards achieving United Nations HIV/AIDS related objectives in the years 2020 and 2030, and supporting the organization of a discussion on the accessibility of HIV/AIDS medicines in Africa.

Time	Activity	Person/organization in charge
<b>10h30-11h00</b>	Participant's welcoming and installation	<b>ARDN</b>
<b>11h00-11h30</b>	<p><b>Welcoming remarks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ms Diago Ndiaye, Regional President of NOWEPSCO, Representative of the VLF-Senegal Project delegation</li> <li>- Mrs Oumy Cantome Sarr, Capacity building officer, VLF-Senegal,</li> <li>- Ms Fatou Sow Sarr, Commissioner of the ECOWAS Commission for Human Development, Social and Gender Affairs</li> <li>- ....., Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations</li> <li>- ..... Head of the Peace and Security Section of UNWOMEN in New York</li> <li>- Dr Djibril Diallo, President and CEO, Africa Renaissance and Diaspora Network (ARDN)</li> <li>-Ms Fatou Diané Guèye, Minister of Women, Family and Child Protection of Senegal</li> <li>-Ms Janice Mathis, Esq., General Council, National Council of Negro Women (NCNW)</li> <li>-Ms Sara Branco Alves, Attorney, Africa Renaissance and Diaspora Network (ARDN) Advisor and Manager for Brazil</li> </ul>	<p>Moderator:</p> <p>Director of the Peace and Security Section of UN-Women in New York.</p>
<b>11h30- 11h45</b>	<b>Session 1:</b> Women and Economic Empowerment: Strategies to reduce barriers for better access to economic resources. Local content, land and financing	
<b>11h45-12h00</b>	<b>Session 2:</b> What actions to strengthen the digital inclusion of women and girls for better productivity?	
<b>12h00-12h15</b>	<b>Session 3:</b> Synergies can be implemented by women to fight against inequalities?	
<b>12h15-12h30</b>	<b>Session 4:</b> Good practices in economic empowerment of women, members of CSOs.	
<b>12h30-12h50</b>	Q&A-Discussion	
<b>12h50-12h55</b>	Summary of discussions	
<b>12h55-13h00</b>	Closing remarks	
<b>13h00</b>	<b>End of the meeting</b>	