



Virtual briefing with the Pan-African Parliament Women's Caucus COVID-19 and Gender-Based Violence

Parliamentary support to gender-responsive COVID-19 National plans

Webinar Summary Report:

10 September 2020



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Introduction

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020. The UN's Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to the COVID-19 crisis asserts that the COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis, it is affecting societies and economies at their core. While the impact of the pandemic will vary from country to country, it will most likely increase poverty and inequalities at a global scale, making achievement of SDGs even more urgent. Profound and far-reaching socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 are already being felt at global, regional, national, and household levels. Markets and supply chains have been disrupted, businesses have either closed or scaled back operations, and millions have lost their jobs and livelihoods.

Emerging evidence on the impact of COVID-19 suggests that women's economic and productive lives have been affected disproportionately and differently from men. Across the globe, women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs, and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector. They have less access to social protections and are the majority of single-parent households. Their capacity to absorb economic shocks is therefore less than that of men.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimated that due to the COVID-19 crisis, 48 percent fewer people could be lifted out of poverty in the continent. Africa will lose half of its GDP with growth falling from 3.2% to about 2 % due to a number of reasons which include the disruption of global supply chains and the continent's interconnectedness to affected economies globally.

The impact on gender equality has been severe, as women are often disproportionately found in the least well-paid occupations, often in part-time and seasonal work - alongside their many household responsibilities including family healthcare - and in occupations with the least employment protection or social security entitlement (many women are in informal employment as well).

COVID-19 has increased the vulnerability of many groups of persons in the society, such as children, women, and youth. It has worsened existing inequalities for women and girls, and deepened discrimination against other marginalized groups. The pandemic has compounded existing gender inequalities. Restrictions to freedom of movement, combined with the fear, tension and stress related to COVID-19, and the negative impacts on household incomes has resulted in growing reports of increased gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in Africa and around the globe, even as related services for prevention and response are under pressure.

UNFPA, in its seminal studies, demonstrated that the pandemic will result in millions more cases of sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation and unintended pregnancies. And if health systems redirect resources away from sexual and reproductive health services, women's access to family planning, antenatal care and other critical services could suffer. This forecast has proven true.

Continental Strategy

The African Union-led Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 aims at coordinating efforts of member states, African Union agencies, World Health Organization, and other partners to ensure synergy and minimize duplication. It also aims to promote evidence-based public health practice for surveillance, prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and control of COVID-19. Africa CDCs under the ambit of the AU is leading the surveillance, emergency preparedness and response to COVID-19 including direct emergency response and the scientific aspects of a continental pandemic response.

To complement the continental strategy, the African Union Commission and partners developed a framework document to enhance awareness about the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), and to provide guidelines to member states on gender-responsive interventions to COVID-19 on the continent. Additionally, the African Union Commission formulated the African Union Comprehensive Socio-Economic Response to the COVID-19 Health Pandemic to offer guidance to member states on comprehensive policy and programming options to handle the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

The Pan-African Parliament (PAP), one of the nine organs of the African Union, joined continental leaders in the tireless fight against the devastating effects of the pandemic. The Pan-African Parliament committed to putting in place all necessary means to ensure implementation of continental leadership initiatives at national level, and called on all Pan-African Parliamentarians to make necessary efforts in their states to allow the continent to overcome current challenges brought on by the pandemic. The Women Caucus of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), with the primary responsibility of fulfilling an oversight role regarding women's rights and gender issues on the African continent, called upon Member states of the African Union to adequately respond to the increase in violence against women specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Women Caucus of the PAP called upon national parliaments to intensify work at the national level to end all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls and denounce violence against women and girls in all forms; to create public awareness campaigns on violence against women and girls especially during the COVID-19 pandemic; and to support and work with relevant Civil Society Organizations at the national, local and grassroots levels on projects to eliminate domestic violence against women and girls.

It is against this background that the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) partnered with the Pan-African Parliament through its Women's Caucus to convene a virtual briefing meeting under the theme "COVID-19 and Gender-based violence (GBV): Parliamentary support to gender-responsive national plans". The meeting aimed at providing a platform for various stakeholders to discuss ways of engaging national parliaments in the 55 member states of the African continent, to address gender inequalities and the reported increase in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cases due to

Covid-19. The virtual briefing was also meant to support and enhance cooperation with the Pan-African Parliament in its oversight role of national parliaments in passing gender-responsive COVID-19 national plans.

The meeting was held on the 10th of September 2020 and attended by over 100 participants from diverse backgrounds via Zoom and YouTube live streaming. The following report aims to provide an overview of the various discussions and engagements that took place during the 3 hour webinar.

Opening Session

The Session was moderated by Ms. Josiane Wawa Dahab, Senior Assistant Clerk of the Pan African Parliament. The briefing session was officially opened by the Acting Pan-African Parliament President, Hon. Bouras Djamel.

Opening Remarks: Hon. Bouras Djamel, Acting President, Pan-African Parliament

In his remarks, Hon. Djamel reiterated the Pan-African Parliament Women's Caucus commitment to provision of expertise and technical advisory support on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment for all women and girls in Africa, in-line with the principles of the African Union (AU) as set out in Article 4 (1) of the Constitutive Act. Hon Bouras also recognized that COVID-19 had a direct negative impact on gender equality and that the crisis had exacerbated inequalities among all vulnerable populations with women and girls being the most affected in terms of health, safety and socio-economic conditions. He concluded his intervention by making a strong commitment on behalf of the Pan-African Parliament to put in place all necessary measures to ensure the implementation of key continental initiatives to address the negative effects of COVID-19 on women and girls with partners such as UNFPA.

Covid-19 and Gender-Based Violence: Parliamentary support to responsive Covid-19 national plans: Ms. Caroline Ngonze, United Nations Population Fund Liaison Office (UNFPALO)

Ms. Caroline Ngonze, Resident Representative to the African Union and United Nations Economic for Africa and Acting Chief of the UNFPA Liaison Office (UNFPALO), highlighted some of the milestone achievements and key commitments that gave foundation to the current programs of action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, which include the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), that was held in Cairo, Egypt from the 5th-13th of September 1994 and the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, China that also took place from the 4th -15th of September 1995. She emphasized that though the Programs

of Action for ICPD and the Beijing Declaration had made good progress in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment for women and girls in Africa, there still remained a lot of unfinished business in the fulfillment of both agendas as gender inequalities are still prevalent in most societies in Africa.

She then revealed how the COVID-19 pandemic had compounded existing gender inequalities and increased incidences of gender based violence due to lockdown measures by various countries that had also caused interruption of critical Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services. She further indicated that the current data by UNFPA revealed that 6 more months of lockdown could result in 31 million additional cases of Gender Based Violence (GBV), 2 million more cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) over the next decade and 13 million more child marriages.

As proposed solutions to the current challenges of gender based violence in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Ngonze called for immediate implementation of national policies and programs that address the practical needs of women and girls; creation of, and strengthening service provision in safe spaces like gender based violence shelters, safe houses and One-Stop Centers with integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health Services (SRH) to address safety and security needs of victims of GBV; provision of medical and psychosocial response services to victims; supporting judicial and legal recourse processes for victims; and supporting the economic empowerment of victims of GBV. Ms. Ngonze further suggested prioritization of access to information for excluded women and girls and inclusion of those with disabilities, accessible digital technology and lastly access to immediate psychosocial support/counseling on various platforms like Whatsapp and Facebook. She concluded by urging all stakeholders to accelerate efforts towards ending harmful practices and GBV through formulation and strengthening of legislation at national level that protects the rights of women and girls in the current crisis.

Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality on Women's Empowerment (GEWE)

African Union Commission, Directorate of Women, Gender and Development (AU-WGDD): Ms. Ilwad ElmiMohamed

Ms. Mohamed stressed that violence against women and girls was one of the main obstacles to the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa and the world. She asserted that the African Union Commission's Department of Women, Gender and Development had been working closely with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and prevention (Africa CDC) in the response against the Covid-19 pandemic in Africa. She further asserted the African Union recognized that women and girls were differentially impacted negatively in the socio, political and economic spheres by the Covid-19 crisis, highlighting that sectors with a disproportionately high representation of women such as health, education and agriculture were among the most affected. Ms. Mohamed stated that the Women, Gender and Development Directorate (AU-WGDD) had formulated guidelines in order to mitigate the impact of

the crisis on women and girls through implementation of gender-responsive actions at national levels.

Ms. Mohamed also indicated that, the guidelines were designed in line with Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Agenda 2030, which both place at the center of their objectives, gender equality and women's empowerment as an accelerator for the achievement of sustainable development both at continental and global levels. Ms. Mohamed urged the Pan African Parliament Women's Caucus, African countries and all stakeholders, to adopt some of the good practices that were proposed within the guidelines which include: gender mainstreaming and integration; sex-disaggregated data; gender-specific budgeting; scalable and high-impact programmes synergized and owned at continental, regional and national levels; strategic partnership and multi-sectoral approaches; effective and full inclusion of women; enforcing existing commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment; as well as documenting and sharing what works, finding new and innovative ways of measuring success, and affirming good practices. She described these methods as strategic and important in the fight for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa.

In concluding her presentation, Ms. Mohamed shared some of the current initiatives the Directorate of Women, Gender and Development is currently undertaking. These include: intensifying of efforts towards strengthening the integration of gender-responsive perspectives to Covid-19 within the African Union Commission, carrying out a series of consultations in various African Union member states at Ministerial level to advocate for advancement of women's equal rights, and capacity building training of civil society in national and regional economic communities. The department has also relaunched the African Union Campaign to End Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Lastly she highlighted that the Directorate of Women, Gender and Development was working closely with other UN agencies through a series of consultation meetings that aimed at assessing the impact of Covid-19 on women and girls.

Experience Sharing:

Response to GBV in the Context of COVID-19

UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office (UNFPA ESARO): Ms. Julie Diallo

Ms. Diallo began her intervention by highlighting the current situation in East and Southern Africa in terms of the impact of Covid-19 in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment. She indicated that the current crisis had resulted in limited health service delivery for reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH); as well as Covid-19 testing capacity. She further revealed that the situation on the ground had created the "Shadow" pandemic as reported cases of Gender Based Violence (GBV) were on the rise.

Ms. Diallo then showcased the current holistic approach that UNFPA ESARO has



undertaken to tackle challenges of GBV in the midst of Covid-19. She stated that the Regional Office was currently supporting the strengthening of GBV coordination, prevention and response services for women and girls who were experiencing violence and were also at risk of Covid-19 from the grassroots level in rural and urban areas. For instance she shared a case study of the work that they are supporting in Isange one stop Centre in Nyangatare, Rwanda. She also stated that advocacy and inter-agency initiatives were at the heart of their drive to respond to GBV. Some of the initiatives that UNFPA supported included: radio talks, social media outreach and also TV adverts that all carried a message against Gender Based Violence and aimed at raising awareness to communities.

In her closing remarks she called for a “Building back Better and differently” plan. In this plan, she recommended the recognition of GBV services as essential services under the Covid-19 national response plan for all African member states. She further stated that building back better and differently would require inclusion of women and girls in all planning processes at all levels to ensure that no one is left behind and that their practical needs are addressed in the plans. Lastly, she reiterated the need for social protection mechanisms and economic stimulus packages that would properly respond to the specific needs and demands of women and girls. She highlighted the significance of government and other partners in making the economic stimulus a reality through formulation of policies and national guidelines that would support the provisions for building back better.

UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office (UNFPA WCARO): Mr. Idrissa Ouedraogo

Mr. Ouedraogo gave a brief overview of the current Covid-19 situation in West and Central Africa. In his intervention, he concurred with previous speakers in their assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on gender equality and access to services on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). He stated that the data available indicated that cases of gender-based violence were rising sharply, evidenced by the case study in Mali and Nigeria which were conducted in the months of April 2020. The study revealed that there was a 11% increase in cases of gender-based violence. He further stated that UNFPA WCARO was working tirelessly to support implementing partners in providing care for survivors of GBV. At the time of the webinar, the Regional Office had supported a total of 2544 GBV survivors to access information on available GBV services, medical care and psycho-social support. He emphasized the need for accelerated actions in fighting GBV and harmful practices like Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation especially in the present crisis in order to consolidate the gains of previous years.

In his conclusion, Mr. Ouedraogo recommended the provision of safe houses/shelters/spaces for GBV survivors to avoid confining them in the same physical location as their abusers/perpetrators due to the lockdown regulations. He further added that the safe houses/shelters/spaces were optimal in supporting the mental

and physical recovery of the GBV survivors. He also called for refresher training courses on Gender Based Violence for law enforcement agencies and the judiciary who handle the legal response to gender-based violence.

He called on the Pan-African Parliament to ensure that they influenced national parliaments to advocate for implementation and enforcement of legislation that protects women and girls in the national Covid-19 response plans.

Examining Policy Solutions to Address the Impact of Covid-19 on Women

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa: Ms. Thokozile Ruzvidzo

Ms. Thokozile Ruzvidzo shared the experience of UNECA in mitigation and prevention of GBV in the context of Covid-19. She asserted that, “In any emergency or crises, whether conflict-related or disease outbreaks, pre-existing toxic social norms and gender inequality vulnerabilities worsen”. She went on to explain how the current global restriction of movement created a situation of ‘imprisonment’ for survivors of GBV with perpetrators; and limited access to essential sexual and reproductive health services. Ms. Ruzvidzo commended frontline health workers in Africa for their unwavering support and efforts in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. She further urged stakeholders to support healthcare workers who constitute of a majority of women as indicated by a study that revealed 65% nurses in Africa are women.

Ms. Ruzvidzo then proposed implementation of concrete policy solutions that address GBV in the context of Covid-19. She also urged countries to adopt dedicated healthcare services for women and other vulnerable populations and also were possible to “ring fence” the health budgets on essential services such as sexual and reproductive health services and GBV support services through subsidies. She stressed the need for financial assistance to women and girls who were among the hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic through implementation of social protection systems such as cash transfer programmes through digital payment. She also advocated for economic rescue measures targeting women-led businesses to cushion them from the adverse effects of the pandemic on their livelihoods.

In the education sector, Ms. Ruzvidzo called for the formulation and implementation of policies on digital access to education and distance learning which ensure that every learner has the opportunity to continue learning through digital platforms like the radio, internet and television. She concluded her intervention by calling for accelerated efforts towards community sensitization targeted at community gate keepers like chiefs, traditional and religious leaders to undertake awareness raising on the importance of educating the girl child.

UNFPA Arab State Regional Office (UNFPA ASRO): Ms. Hanan Rabbani

Ms. Hanan Rabbani also shared the experience of the UNFPA Arab State Regional

Office. She highlighted various factors that made the Arab Region complex in geo-political, socio and economic terms. She further explained that 8 out of 22 countries in the region were in the midst of conflict, making it difficult to implement programs that seek to address Gender Based Violence and Harmful Practices against women and girls. She backed this assertion by sharing the current statistics that gave evidence to these lived realities as follows. Despite making up 5% of the world’s population, the Arab region currently hosts 50% of the global refugees in the world. 37% of Arab women within these settings also experience a form of violence in their lifetime. In regard to harmful practices, she highlighted that 14% of Arab girls are married under the age of 18 years, there by showing a rampant problem of Child Marriages.

She also stated that despite the recorded and noticeable improvements in the field of health and education for women, lack of participation in the labour force remained unacceptably high at an average of 20-26%. The same scenario applied in political participation where the engagement of women and girls was stifled by various cultural and social norms. She also emphasized her concern over national laws in the Arab states that also systematically limit the rights of women and girls. In some countries, it is stipulated in law that women are not allowed to pass-on their nationality to their foreign spouse or children.

Ms. Hanan reiterated the commitment of UNFPA in the region to work towards ending GBV in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic. She stated that as part of that commitment, UNFPA developed an Essential Services Package (ESP), which was piloted in two countries, Tunisia and Egypt, in partnership with UN Women and other UN agencies. She also highlighted that UNFPA began a campaign for sensitization and awareness raising of communities on GBV, working with civil society organizations on the ground.

She concluded by recommending the provision of digital response services such as GBV hotline platforms, case management via telephones and also WhatsApp. She called on stakeholders to support national TV and radio campaigns that raise awareness on the impact of Gender Based Violence. In her closing remarks she appealed to the Pan-African Parliament to assist in the accelerated formulation of national legislation that was gender responsive and also ensured provision of essential health services like reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH), while also protecting whistleblowers against Gender Based Violence and Harmful Practices.

Covid-19 and harmful practices (Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage)

African Union Commission, Department of Social Affairs: Ms. Nena Thundu

Ms. Nena Thundu, Coordinator of the African Union’s Campaign to End Child Marriage and the AU Saleema Initiative on Female Genital Mutilation, thanked

all the participants for their commitment to ending all forms of harmful practices such as Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation. She outlined that the strong commitment and drive by the African Union Commission to end all forms of harmful practices in line with Agenda 2063 and 2030, saw the African Union launching the campaign against Child Marriage in Africa in 2014 and the Saleema Initiative against female genital mutilation in February 2019 during the AU Summit as an Assembly decision 737. This resulted in the appointment of the President of Burkina Faso as the AU Champion on the Elimination of FGM and the President of Zambia as the Champion against Child Marriages.

Ms. Thundu expressed her concern over the Covid-19 pandemic and revealed that the crisis had already disrupted programming on child marriage and FGM through delaying some of the slated activities for the two campaigns, while in some cases other workplan activities had been cancelled. She however expressed optimism that despite the Covid-19 crisis, the campaigns would seek to continue to achieve their objectives through the amendment of all work plans in order to respond to the present situation. For instance most of the consultations for the ongoing AU Child Marriage Strategic Plan 2019-2023 will take place virtually.

Parliamentarians Interventions

The webinar was also marked by interventions from various members of the PAP Women's caucus including Hon. Workya ROUAMBA (Burkina Faso); Hon. Lucia Dos PASSOS (Cabo Verde); Hon. Rosemarie BANGURA (Sierra Leone); Hon. Khady BA (Senegal); and Hon. Carole AGITO (DRC). They shared experiences from their respective countries and called on national Parliaments to pass legislation aimed at protecting women and children during the Covid-19 pandemic as well as in the formulation of gender-responsive national plans. The Parliamentarians also reiterated their commitment to continuously work towards improving the lives of women and girls in Africa in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic to accelerate achievement of Agenda 2063 and UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable development.

Recommendations

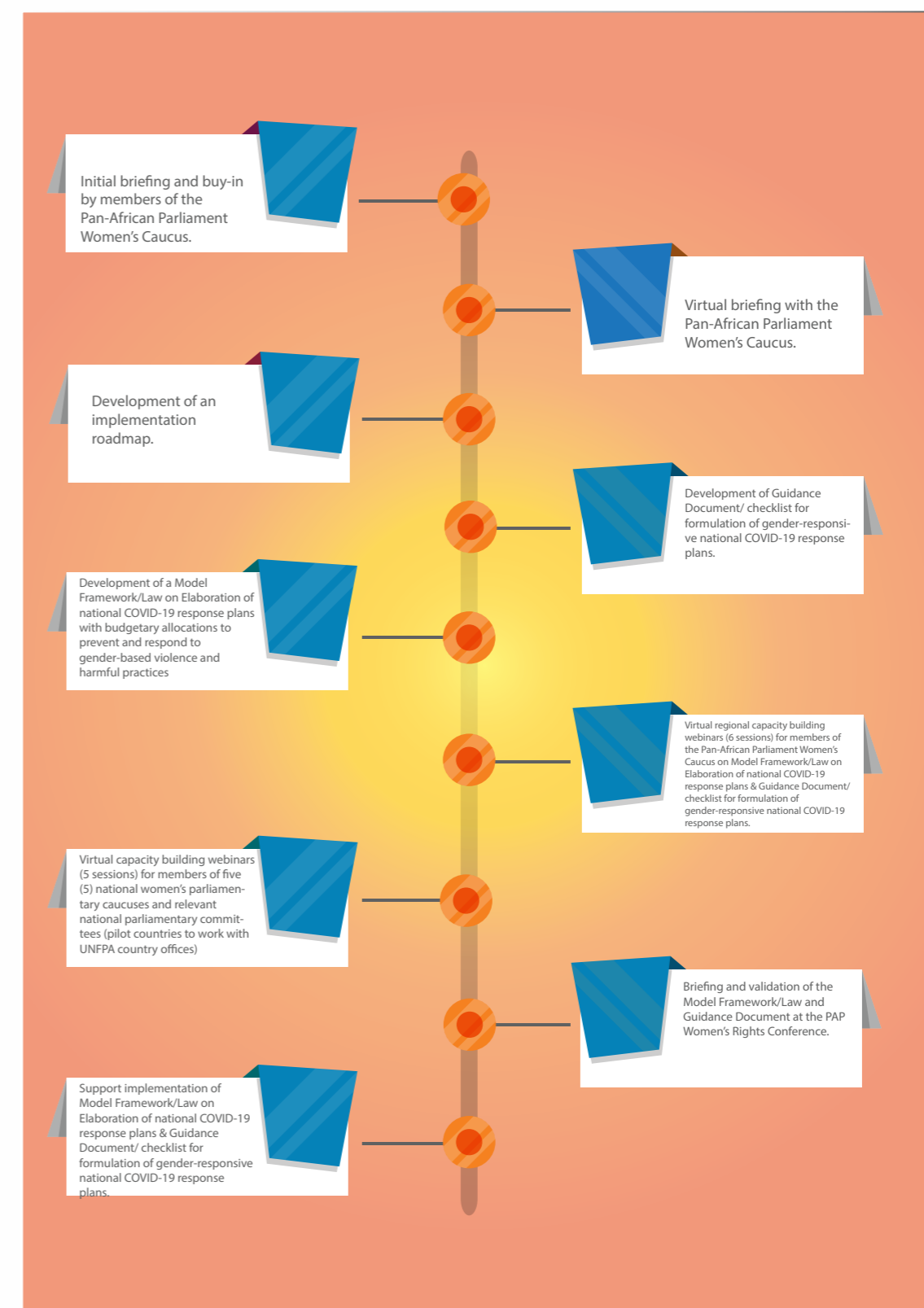
The recommendations included:

- Implementation of multi-sectoral and interagency advocacy mechanisms in addressing GBV in the context of Covid-19 from grassroots to continental level.
- Capacity building of healthcare workers in member states as part of health system strengthening.
- Inclusion of women and girls in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation process for national plans on Covid-19.
- Formulation and implementation of gender-responsive legislation at national parliament's level that protects women and girls rights.
- Strengthening or creation of one-stop centers with integrated SRHR services

for survivors of gender based violence.

- Provision of economic assistance to women and girls in implementation of social protection systems designed to address their specific needs as reflected in national budgets..
- Acceleration of community sensitization and advocacy against gender based violence and harmful practices.

Proposed Activities and Timelines



Social Media Outreach

@UNFPAELO twitter handle

No.	Twitter Handle	Twitter Reach	Twitter impression
1.	@UNFPAELO	9,000	13.0K

Major Contributors

No.	Twitter Handles	Tweet Impressions
1.	@UNFPANigeria	104.8k
2.	@AfrikParliament	10k
3.	@nomoreslaves	46.7K
4.	@UNFPA_ESARO	35.9k
5.	@diakatop	30.2k
6.	@DrDahir	20.1k
7.	@UNFPAKen	26.4k
8.	@JulittaOnabango	1708k
9.	@UNFPAELO	17.1k
10.	@EducateGirlsNow	10.7k

Youtube Platform

No.	YouTube Cannel	Number of Impressions	Number of Views
1.	UNFPA-LO Ethiopia	77	75



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