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**New Continent-Wide Initiative for
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

Theme: Industrialization for inclusive and transformative development in Africa

I. Background

1. The call and the push for Africa's structural transformation is motivated primarily by the urgent need to shape the pace and the pattern of the continent's growth towards inclusive social, economic and human development. This process requires a positive change in the determinants of the continent's productivity and growth prospects, with a shift in focus from high levels of dependence on raw materials to a diversified and more productive economy. Such an economy should be underpinned by Africa's numerous potentials, such as the natural resources and commodities that can be a base for diversification. The setting in motion of structural transformation in Africa needs to be a holistic process that encompasses the development and nurturing of a highly educated, skilled and healthy human capital capable of utilizing new methods and techniques of production, including new technologies, in order to transform Africa's abundant natural resources into value-added goods and services. Related to this is the movement of labour, services, resources and expertise across the various sectors of the economy. The process leading to structural transformation on the continent will, at the same time, lead to changing the traditional and underperforming African agriculture sector into a modern and productive one capable of ensuring food security and food sovereignty across the continent. This will also result in solid agribusiness that can help to maximize African regional integration. Strategic interventions that will empower local firms to position themselves and compete in regional and global value chains are therefore imperative, in the form of policies that facilitate forward and backward linkages for economic transformation. Such policies should be part of the design of national development strategies.

2. The structural transformation of Africa needs to harness Africa's human capital as well as its natural resources. Special attention must be paid to women and young people, who form the majority of the continent's population, and to transforming gender relations in order to unleash the potential of women as key economic actors and agents for change.

3. African women will inevitably be at the centre of Africa's structural transformation because of their crucial economic and social contribution which, unfortunately, is yet to be fully acknowledged and valued. Women are the backbone of the productive sectors in Africa, including agriculture, yet their rights to factors of production and resources are not fully protected. The "gender dimension" hinders their productivity, and reduces their contributions to the productive sectors and to the achievement of broader economic and social development goals. Addressing gender dimensions in the productive sectors would result in significant gains for society by increasing productivity, reducing poverty and hunger, and promoting economic growth. Moreover, the majority of African women are engaged in the informal sector and therefore have very limited job security and social protection or none at all, which makes them more vulnerable to risks, compared to men.

4. In response to the call and the push for structural transformation by African leaders, civil society organizations, academics and others, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has refocused its mandate in order to tailor its interventions to this new agenda and to put Africa first. As a development arm of the United Nations in Africa, ECA will provide African member States with accurate statistics to document Africa's narrative and to articulate the development discourse and prospects of the continent. This change in ECA's interventions requires a sharpening of the Commission's normative work, its knowledge base and its policy advice, in order to focus more on the enablers and drivers of Africa's structural transformation, which include industrial development and are underpinned by the continent's commodity base. It is against this background that ECA's African

Centre for Gender and Development (ACG) has developed its new strategic focus. This strategic refocusing exercise takes stock of ECA's past work as well as the results already achieved in the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment. It takes into account the key gender and development issues and the interconnections between gender equality and Africa's structural transformation. This exercise has led to the development of ECA's New Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

II. Overview of key gender and women's issues in Africa's development

5. In recent years, African countries have made significant progress in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment. Various regional and international commitments have been developed and have been integrated into constitutions, policies and legislative frameworks. The implementation of policies, plans and strategies to achieve these commitments has produced some notable results, particularly in the areas of education and women's political participation.

6. However, important gender gaps still persist. The enrolment of girls in secondary and tertiary education remains low relative to that of boys. On average, 18 per cent of women have attained some secondary schooling as compared to 28 per cent of men. The corresponding figures for tertiary education are 5 per cent for women and 8 per cent for men.¹ In addition, maternal deaths, although declining, remain relatively high. Notably, the continent still has the largest burden of maternal mortality in the world, with 56 per cent of maternal deaths occurring in Africa. Furthermore, 1 in 22 women in sub-Saharan Africa have a life-time risk of maternal death.²

7. The vast majority of women are still employed in low-productivity, low-paying vulnerable jobs with little security: as casual agricultural labourers, or performing unpaid family work, assembly-line work in urban factories, and the domestic sectors, both nationally and outside their own countries. It is estimated that women make up 70 per cent of the informal economy in areas such as crop production, animal husbandry and food processing. Women are less likely to be in paid employment than men, and earn less than men for equal work. There are still large disparities between women and men in land and asset ownership, with women in some countries having no legal rights to own land or property or to conduct business independently, which constitute a major hindrance to women's economic empowerment in Africa. For instance, men control and operate, on average, 85 per cent of agricultural landholdings in sub-Saharan Africa, and as much as 95 per cent of agricultural landholdings in North Africa.³ Furthermore, women continue to shoulder the heavy burdens of unpaid work, leaving less time to spend on income-generating activities.

8. The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women are also important in bringing about economic development and structural transformation. The increased inclusion of women in the economy, by narrowing the gender gaps in education, health, capital, jobs and markets, is vital. Labour migration has become more and more feminized as women continue to travel out of Africa to

¹ African Development Bank, African Union Commission, United Nations Development Programme and Economic Commission for Africa (2013). *Assessing Progress in Africa towards the Millennium Development Goals, 2013. Food Security in Africa: Issues, Challenges and Lessons*.

² Ibid.

³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2011). *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–2011. Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development*. Rome.

seek employment opportunities. However, the employment of women, particularly as domestic workers, is fraught with discrimination related to remuneration, and with abuse.

9. A large percentage of the population on the continent does not have access to social protection, and of this percentage, the majority are women, leaving them with no access to critical services such as health care. This has implications for maternal and reproductive health. It is therefore imperative to put in place gender-responsive social protection policies and measures.

Summary of ECA's achievements

10. Over the last decade, ECA has been at the forefront of developing cutting-edge tools grounded in Africa's developmental and gender contexts, thereby responding to Africa's specific needs.

11. The African Gender and Development Index was developed to provide African countries with a statistical tool to monitor gender equality and women's empowerment, and has been recognized as the first of its kind in Africa. To date, the Index has been implemented in more than 30 African countries and has resulted in a comprehensive set of gender-disaggregated data that can be used as a policy and advocacy tool to tackle gender inequality. An independent external evaluation carried out in 2012 recognized the value of ECA's gender tools – including its African Gender and Development Index and its knowledge platforms such as the African Women's Rights Observatory and E-Network – and their appropriateness for use by member States.

12. Another area in which ECA's work has been highly valued is unpaid care work, especially that carried out by women and girls. ECA's work on unpaid care work, including time-use studies and gender-aware economic modelling, has culminated in the development of a comprehensive *Guidebook on Mainstreaming Unpaid Care Work and Household Production in National Accounts, Policies and Budgets*, and in assistance to at least five African countries with collecting, analysing and using time-use data to value and reflect women's unpaid care work in national accounts and socioeconomic policy frameworks.

13. Despite remarkable efforts having been made to tackle women's and gender issues in Africa, much still needs to be done to curb persistent gender inequalities with a view to unleashing the potential of women as key actors in Africa's structural transformation, which depends to a large extent on the empowerment of women and the recognition of their economic contribution.

III. The ECA New Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

A. Strategic objective of the New Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

14. The New Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is a breakthrough initiative that aims to ensure that the work of ECA has an effect on the life of every woman in Africa, irrespective of her geographical location (urban/rural), status, ethnic group and so on, while building on the positive interconnections between women's socioeconomic and political development and Africa's structural transformation.

Specific objectives:

- To ensure that the economic contributions of women are given due value;
- To foster women's economic empowerment through the promotion of women's entrepreneurship within Africa's commodity-based industrialization (agriculture, extractive industries);
- To promote women's socioeconomic and political rights;
- To ensure appropriate delivery of quality social services, including social protection and social security, to women.

15. The initiative will address three interlinked components, namely economic empowerment, women's human rights, and the social sector. Each component will be informed by in-depth research and data collection to analyse the key bottlenecks, opportunities and trends to inform policy measures and actions.

B. Value added of the New Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

16. A key value added of this new initiative is that it will fit into Africa's structural agenda, and will develop interlinkages between this agenda and the empowerment and well-being of women.

C. Component 1: Economic empowerment

17. This component is informed by the economic contribution of women on the continent. African women are key economic actors, contributing to agriculture, trade (particularly cross-border trade), the extractive industries (especially mining), climate change mitigation and adaptation, and so on. Women constitute the majority in the informal sector, and are the primary caregivers nurturing the human capital that is essential to other sectors' performance and, indeed, to the structural transformation of the continent. Studies carried out in Africa suggest that, on average, women's workdays may be 50 per cent longer than those of men and that their work is closely integrated in household production.⁴

18. Promoting women's economic empowerment requires several actions, from measuring and recognizing their contribution to Africa's economies, to harnessing their entrepreneurial potential, as well as responding to their social needs, including in the areas of health and welfare, and addressing their vulnerability.

1. Measuring and valuing the economic contribution of women

19. The key policy issue in this area is the limited recognition and undervaluing of the economic contribution of women. This includes the unpaid care work that they undertake, and is not reflected in national accounts, which determine policy interventions and programmes. The main activity under this component will be measuring and valuing the economic contribution of women. This will be done through comprehensive research and surveys that will be carried out in order to collect accurate and empirical statistics on women's economic contribution in each sector and the importance of this

⁴ World Bank (2006). *Gender, Time Use and Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Blackden, C.M. and Wodon, Q., eds. Working paper No. 73.

contribution to Africa's structural transformation. In doing so, support will be provided to African countries to develop satellite accounts of household production to factor such contributions into the macroeconomic modelling and macroeconomic frameworks that inform government policies and programming. This will assist in defining appropriate strategies and policy responses for investment in labour-saving infrastructure that will enable women to use their time for productive and economic-empowerment activities. The body of evidence from the time-use and related studies will support the promotion of effective policy responses to be accompanied by concrete actions, so as to address the other main impediments to women's economic empowerment, namely limited access to and control over economic opportunities.

2. Promoting women's entrepreneurship

20. Agriculture and the extractive industries are critical sectors for harnessing Africa's commodity-based industrialization. This is correlated with the availability of experienced and highly skilled human capital (both women and men) capable of providing the required expertise, and of increasing the quality and productivity in these sectors. While women are key agents in both sectors, their contribution remains invisible and undervalued compared to that of men. Unlocking their potential in these sectors is critical to shaping Africa's structural transformation via commodity-based industrialization. The promotion of women's entrepreneurship will aim to recognize and scale up their contributions as key economic agents. The work in this area will cover a number of interventions including access to resources and technology and providing requisite data via evidence-gathering and research.

The agricultural sector

21. One of the goals of Africa's structural transformation is transforming agriculture into the more productive sector of agribusiness. In this area of work, the emphasis will be on nurturing women's entrepreneurship in agribusiness. Attention will be given to ensuring that women have access to and control of land and that their rights to land are protected (this will be linked up with ECA's ongoing work on land policy). Opportunities and economic prospects will be broadened by exploring ventures that will facilitate new ways for women to access agricultural assets, including, among other things, selected seeds, irrigation, and extension services. In addition, special focus will be put on enhancing women's contributions to and benefits from the agricultural value chain. Related to this will be building women's entrepreneurial capacity through access to finance, the use of new technologies, facilitating access to information on markets, understanding market signals, and benefiting fully from regional integration processes.

The extractive industries

22. Women are involved in the extractive industries, and especially the mining sector, although they lack visibility, largely due to an absence of data and information. The involvement of women in mining is, to a large extent, in artisanal and small-scale mining, which in some countries is considered illegal. Their involvement in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is significant and varies within and between countries, with women taking up roles in activities such as prospecting, exploration and actual mining, as well as marketing. This involves performing in a range of functions, including wage labourers, labourers paid by production, distributors (assured buyers), licence-holders, cooperatives, dealers, and supporters (financiers, who are often licence-holders). Conservative estimates indicate that

women make up between 40 and 100 per cent of the ASM workforce in Africa.⁵ The majority can be found in artisanal mining, where the working conditions tend to be lower than in industrial mining. However, women can also be found throughout the total value chain of mining, which includes prospecting and exploration, mining, processing, beneficiation/value added, marketing, and management. Gender issues exist at each stage in the mining value chain, and will be addressed in this component of ACG's work by looking at issues of rights; working conditions; discrimination against women in the workplace; violence against women; pay equity; economic empowerment, especially within small-scale mining; the participation of women in senior decision-making roles in the mining sector; and health issues. Work in this area will include building evidence and strategies to support the transformation of artisanal and small-scale mining into commercially viable enterprises using a business model that involves facilitating women's access to, control over and benefit from productive resources (land and concession rights). Most of this work will be informed by Africa Mining Vision and by the African Minerals Development Centre, and will be undertaken within the context of mainstreaming gender into ECA's work. Partnerships will be forged with the private sector in the mining arena to provide more insights on women in mining. This information will be used to influence legal and regulatory frameworks, as well as the accompanying institutional mechanisms and resultant sector-specific support modalities, with the objective of creating decent jobs for African women in mining.

Other sectors

23. While the main focus will be on the sectors mentioned above, attention will also be given to the informal sector, where the majority of women are traders, employers and employees. Information on this sector is limited. Innovative ways of generating data and evidence will be defined in partnership with the African Centre for Statistics and the data centres of the subregional offices. Attention will also be given to other business ventures, looking at financing, marketing and related products.

24. Critical to promoting women's entrepreneurship in all of the above sectors is to ensure their access to and control of appropriate finance. In doing so, strategic partnerships with the private sector, including banks and other financial institutions, will be spearheaded across the continent in order to come up with a pan-African financial mechanism to address one of the major bottlenecks facing women entrepreneurs: access to and control over finance.

D. Component 2: Women's rights

25. In this research stream, ACG will seek to document the state of responsiveness of member States to addressing women's rights issues, and to support States in bringing about full protection of women's socioeconomic, political and human rights. The focus areas include, but are not limited to, issues of social protection, women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, violence against women (which is multi-dimensional), women's land rights, and the representation and participation of women in decision-making at all levels of society, including the household, local, national and international levels. Also included in this component will be monitoring of the implementation of global and regional commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment endorsed by African member States.

⁵ World Bank (2012). Gender dimensions of artisanal and small scale-mining: a rapid assessment toolkit.

E. Component 3: The social sector

26. The main thrust of this component is to enhance maternal health and women's reproductive health via access by women to quality health services, with a special focus on rural and remote areas. In this regard, ECA will look at universal coverage to enable women to access quality health services, linkages with social protection to cushion them from the financial consequences of ill-health and paying for expensive health services, making optimum use of the available resources, and ensuring that coverage is equitable.

1. Health and social protection: assuring women's social protection and security

27. Social protection is a relatively new policy introduced to support poverty-reduction interventions. As highlighted above, while African countries have registered steady economic growth, the key challenge is that such growth is yet to be translated into the improved well-being of the population. African growth has been accompanied by high levels of inequality, which suggests that growth is yet to fully benefit both women and men, and boys and girls. In many African countries, social security and social protection schemes are employment-based, leaving out those working in the informal sector on low incomes, as well as the unemployed, the majority of whom are women or young people. ECA's *MDG Report 2013*⁶ suggests that gender bias in wage-setting institutions weakens women's pay prospects. In addition, women are disadvantaged by individual workplace practices.⁷

28. Well-designed social protection policies that identify and address women's and men's differential constraints and vulnerabilities to risks can contribute significantly to addressing gender inequalities (and other forms of inequality) in the distribution of resources and access to social services and can, overall, improve women's pay prospects. Therefore, failing to design and implement gender-responsive social protection programmes can exacerbate gender inequality and discrimination against women.

29. Cross-country research will be carried out to collect accurate statistics that will inform the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender-responsive and pro-poor social protection policies and programmes and wide-ranging social security schemes. This research will be linked with support for the development and consolidation of capacity for collecting gender-disaggregated data that is related to social protection and is linked to ECA's ongoing work on gender and statistics.

30. Other initiatives under the social sector component will be linked to emerging work on the demographic dividend so as to harness the contributions of females, who make up half of all national populations. It is essential to address the gender dimensions of the demographic dividend, for different reasons. Firstly, the economic potential of women as paid workers in the labour force is an untapped potential of economic value in many parts of Africa. A recent International Monetary Fund study entitled "Women, work and the economy: macroeconomic gains from gender equity" reports that bringing women's labour force participation rates in line with those of men would increase gross domestic product (GDP), estimating a 34 per cent rise in GDP for Egypt, for example. Due to rising school completion rates, females aged 15 and over are an untapped source of skilled, quality human capital. Increasing the numerator with new female workers is an obvious means of attaining a more

⁶ See footnote 1.

⁷ See footnote 1.

favourable dependency ratio. Secondly, child mortality rates have fallen dramatically in some of the poorest countries in Africa, not only extending the life expectancies of both male and female children but also increasing the numbers of surviving children. For simple demographic reasons, the volume of eligible female workers will increase, all things being equal. Thus, the contributions of women are intrinsically linked to a country's prospects for a demographic dividend, offering improved quality of human capital, greater labour force participation, and increased household incomes over people's lifetimes, as well as enhanced parenting and schooling and improved health for children and young people to secure their futures and help bring about sustained national economic growth.

31. In this regard, ACG will initiate various kinds of evidence generation, such as collecting data by means of new technologies and drawing on the expertise on the continent to define the gender-related pathways for achievement of the demographic dividend.

2. Migration

32. Migration has increased steadily in tandem with the process of globalization. Migration brings important economic benefits both to migrants' countries of origin and to their countries of destination. The remittances sent to developing countries in 2012 were estimated at \$406 million – an amount three times the size of official development assistance. A notable change in migration trends is the increased number of women who migrate in search of work and a better life. Worthy of note are the enormous risks related to migration, particularly of women, who all too often face numerous challenges such as exploitation in domestic jobs, vulnerability and violence. The report of the Secretary-General entitled "Violence against women migrant workers",⁸ submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations at its sixty-eighth session, states that many women migrant workers face discrimination, violence and exploitation at all stages of migration. Africa has seen increasing numbers of its women migrants from different social groups (skilled, semi-skilled and not educated) whose rights are violated. Many young women fly to middle-income countries, including in the Middle East, to engage in domestic work without having any knowledge of their basic human rights. Cases of discrimination, violence including rape, acid attacks, and other forms of torture have been widely documented, which calls for urgent concrete policy actions. In addition, many women who are left behind by their migrant husbands face gender-related challenges, including mistreatment by families-in-law.

33. Working closely with sections in ECA's Social Development Policy Division, in-depth empirical and secondary research on women and migration will be carried out to document the challenges facing women migrants, with a view to informing the development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of appropriate policy responses.

IV. Modalities for implementing the ECA New Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

34. To implement the ECA New Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, the Centre will adopt the following strategies and approaches:

(a) Cutting-edge research and evidence generation, which will inform each of the three components of the ECA New Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's

⁸ A/68/178.

Empowerment as well as the work on gender mainstreaming. Empirical and secondary research will be undertaken using innovative IT-based methods of data collection. This will be done in close collaboration with the data centres of the subregional offices and with academic and research institutions. In addition, the data gathered will be used to factor in gender indicators to support the country profiles to be generated by the subregional offices. The African Gender and Development Index will be central to this work.

(b) Undertaking country-specific comprehensive studies that will provide information illuminating the different issues identified above to inform initiatives and programmes that can be developed to support, for example, women's economic empowerment;

(c) Critical analyses of data from sources (a) and (b) above, as well as from other sources, such as the Demographic and Health Survey, to inform evidence-based programming by member States and various stakeholders;

(d) Generating innovative ideas based on (a) and (b) above to support initiatives, including, for example, financing of women's entrepreneurship (initial fact-finding discussions are under way with Equity Bank in Kenya);

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(e) The use of existing tools such as the African Gender and Development Index for data collection, and monitoring the performance of member States in addressing the above-mentioned issues as well as the commitments endorsed by member States;

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(f) The development of transformative tools and approaches to shape conventional policymaking and implementation in Africa towards an equitable, inclusive and sustainable structural transformation of the continent;

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(g) Knowledge management: effective and timely use of research results to inform policymaking and policy dialogue, as well as setting knowledge platforms for information-sharing;

(h) Hands-on capacity-building and tailored advisory services to member States: this will be carried out in partnership with the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning using the outcomes of the research undertaken on each of the components of the ECA New Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

V. Mobilization of resources

35. The implementation of ECA's New Continent-Wide Initiative for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment will require sufficient resources to undertake cutting-edge research that can lead to the development of appropriate informed policies and programmes relating to each of the components of the initiative. ECA will mobilize resources within and outside Africa. A first step will be to officially launch the programme. The launch will bring together member States and traditional as well as non-traditional development partners.

VI. Partnerships

36. In implementing the new initiative, ECA recognizes and values the work carried out by other organizations and will reach out to the various institutions to partner with them.

37. In order to leverage both additional technical competencies and financial resources, and to enhance synergies in capacity development and the delivery of outputs, ACG will forge new partnerships and strengthen existing ones, within ECA and with other United Nations agencies, as well as with global, regional and national institutions that focus on the promotion of gender equality, women's empowerment and development. ACG will also initiate new strategic alliances with the private sector. The private sector potentially offers opportunities for women's economic empowerment that the Centre has not explored before.

38. Within ECA, the Centre will work closely with all the Divisions and will also ensure that gender is mainstreamed in their work.

39. The external partners will include the African Union Commission's Directorate of Women, Gender and Development to jointly monitor the implementation by member States of key regional commitments on gender equality, including the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. In order to foster greater coherence and provide a unique forum for African women to forge common positions on how to address key gender equality challenges, the Centre will also work closely with other United Nations bodies and related agencies that deal with gender issues, especially the United Nations Development Programme, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund and UN-Women, through the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa, which enhances United Nations system-wide coherence, coordination and cooperation to "deliver as one" in support of the African Union and its NEPAD programme. ACG will forge new partnerships with relevant national and regional institutions, such as research institutions and academic institutions, non-state actors and the private sector in order to facilitate and deepen the reach of its activities.