



Inaugural Meeting of the Council of Traditional Leaders (COTLA) / Conseil des Autorités Traditionnelles D'Afrique (CONATA)

11th February 2019; Skylight Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



**Summary Report
February 2019**

Introduction

UN Women in collaboration with the COTLA/CONATA held an inaugural meeting on 11th February 2019 at Skylight Hotel in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 10:00 am to 17:00 pm. This followed a successful side-event which was hosted by the President of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency Edgar Chagwa Lungu on 10th February, 2019 at the Sheraton Hotel – Addis Ababa on the side-lines of the 32nd African Union Summit for Heads of State and Government. At the side event, in addition to securing and renewing commitments from AU, governments and Traditional and Cultural Leaders to escalate efforts to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa by 2030, the event provided space for the launch of the Traditional and Cultural Leaders movement to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa – Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA)/ Conseil des Autorites Traditionnelles D’Afrique (CONATA). His Excellency President Edgar Chagwa Lungu also committed to lobbying for a permanent seat for Traditional and Cultural Leaders at the African Union.

Objectives of the Inaugural Meeting

The inaugural meeting aimed to:

- Approve COTLA/CONATA organisational and governance structure
- Agree on next steps and actions for COTLA/CONATA

Expected Outcomes

The major expected outcomes of the meeting are as follows:

- Proposed organisational and governance structure for COTLA/CONATA approved
- COTLA/CONATA next steps and actions agreed upon

Background

The year 2018, marked important milestones in the AU’s continental agenda to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa. With support from UN Women, Traditional and Cultural Leaders across Africa committed to support the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa (which was extended to 2023), and initiated their own movement to eradicate and transform harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM/C and promote gender equality. Traditional and Cultural Leaders committed to engage with the AU and AU Member States at various levels in efforts to end child marriage and FGM/C.

Following the UN Women led multi-country analytical study on child marriage in Africa which covered ten countries, and the AU Commission/UN Women/Plan International supported review of the AU Compendium of Marriage Laws in Africa updated in 2018, it was apparent that socio-cultural factors play a significant role in determining the nature of laws that are developed, and whether these will be enforced. UN Women therefore facilitated Africa-wide dialogues and consultations with over 300 Traditional and Cultural Leaders and institutions to devise transformational approaches that address negative and harmful cultural practices, stereotypes and patriarchy that perpetuate child marriage and FGM/C in the continent. Participants during the dialogue stated that while socio-cultural factors play a significant role in perpetuating child marriage and FGM/C, Traditional and Cultural Leaders have generally been left on the side-lines of the mainstream initiatives to end child marriage and FGM/C, and in most cases, being on the receiving end of the blame as perpetrators. While some Traditional and Cultural Leaders have been involved in various activities, in most cases these have been isolated and not cohesive, denying them the opportunities to contribute significantly, and provide a unified voice on transforming culture, norms, stereotypes and traditions in line with gender equality and human rights principles. It was evident that Traditional and Cultural Leaders recognise that times have changed, culture is dynamic and evolves overtime, and with a new generation of progressive leaders on board, it was high time that as custodians of culture and customs, they take leadership in ending harmful practices especially those affecting girls and women.

Besides making declarations and commitments to end child marriage and FGM/C, Traditional and Cultural Leaders proposed to dialogue with Heads of State and Government at the AU to commit their support to the AU Campaign to end child marriage and efforts to end FGM/C in Africa. This was an opportunity to seek AU recognition of their commitments through the launch of COTLA/CONATA, an Africa-wide social movement of Traditional and Cultural Leaders and institutions, that focuses on the harmonisation of customary norms (by-laws) with statutory laws, the transformation of social and cultural norms to eliminate harmful practices, and

the scale up successful Traditional Leaders' led approaches intended to end child marriage, FGM/C and other harmful practices, and promote gender equality.

Meeting Summary

Morning Session 10:00 – 13:00

The overall chair of the meeting was the Interim Convenor General of COTLA/CONATA, HRM (ARC) King Adedapo Aderemi. The opening ceremony was chaired by *His Royal Highness Chamuka VI (Zambia)* who provided a summary of the processes and dialogues that took place in 2018 from Nairobi via Blantyre, Cairo and Lagos to Addis Ababa where it culminated to the dialogue with the AU Presidential Champion on ending child marriage, the President of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency Edgar Chagwa Lungu and the AU Commission, and the launch of COTLA/CONATA. Chief Chamuka said that the meeting was an important milestone for COTLA/CONATA as it maps out the plans to set up the structures and the next steps in ensuring Traditional and Cultural leaders have a platform for engaging and moving forward with their efforts to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa.

HRH Maiguzo Mahaman Mansour (Niger) thanked UN Women, the Government of Zambia, and the AU Commission for making the event in Addis Ababa possible. He emphatically said that regardless of what the world may say, Traditional and Cultural leaders have a big role to play in addressing socio-cultural factors to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa. He reiterated his personal commitment to doing whatever it takes to end child marriage and FGM/C in Niger and beyond. He said that he was not amused at all to be coming from a country where statistics show that it has the highest rates of child marriage in Africa. This only motivates him to do more while recognising the massive challenge ahead. He looked forward to the action plans that COTLA/CONATA will develop and their implementation.

Paramount Chief Kgosi Mosadi Seboko (Botswana), who is also the Chairperson of the Botswana National Gender Commission, expressed her profound appreciation for the invitation to be part of this important dialogue, which should not only transform Africa, but should allow a Continent or People to realise the Agenda 2063 of: good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law; an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics; and an Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially women and youth, and caring for children. She specifically commended UN Women for recognising the critical role that traditional and cultural leaders have in governance, especially in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. As the issue is close to her heart, she chose to share some experiences from Botswana relevant to the inaugural meeting. The governance system in Botswana has embraced traditional and cultural leadership commonly referred to as *Bogosi* in vernacular. When Botswana gained independence in 1966, her democratic and development foundations were hinged on the traditional and cultural Institutions including the *Kgotla* system; hence the modern Government of Botswana continues to recognise the importance of *Dikgosi* or traditional and cultural leaders.

The recognition of the importance of *Bogosi* (Traditional and Cultural Leadership) led to the Government of Botswana adoption of the *Bogosi Act* and established *Ntlo-Ya-Dikgosi (the House of Chiefs)* to facilitate the Institution to function effectively. Currently, Botswana has tribal administration offices, in which chiefs participate in certain aspects of local government and the judiciary. It is on this premise that Government has constantly been engaging with *Dikgosi* on various issues of national interest including on mainstreaming of gender into the Customary Justice System, an exercise that commenced in 2012. The 2012 *Pitso* (Public call) was attended by one hundred and twelve (112) *Dikgosi* who came up with Resolutions and recommendations which were their commitment on addressing gender inequalities and Gender Based Violence (GBV) in their communities. This led to significant progress in various areas across the country especially after *Dikgosi* also developed their National Action Plan in 2015 which they have since been implementing. The plan was reviewed in 2018 to establish progress, challenges and develop interventions.

She concluded by expressing her belief that the influence of traditional leaders especially in African communities prevails despite modernisation and urbanisation. Thus, such leaders are well positioned to play a positive role in addressing the socio-cultural factors that can mitigate the perpetuation of gender injustice particularly Gender Based Violence including other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage. It is important to emphasise the need for capacity building of traditional leaders so that they are knowledgeable about gender and development to keep pace with emerging issues. This will enable them to anticipate the risks

for, and effects of gender inequalities and discrimination in their communities. Where traditions and customs are positive and empowering, respectful and inspiring, they must be treasured and passed on to the younger generation and where they hurt or disempower, they must be altered or eradicated for positive impact. She called for an open dialogue on this important institution of Traditional and Cultural Leaders and its contribution in addressing gender inequalities and gender based violence. Let us all join efforts in transforming traditions, norms, customs and cultures to end gender injustices including child marriage and FGM/C.

Queen Mother Best Olimi of Tooro Kingdom (Uganda) said that the dream of Traditional and Cultural Leaders to have a platform that amplifies their voice and places them on the right side of history had finally come to reality. She said that she had been working hard for years for a day like this when COTLA/CONATA was launched and started to play a critical role on ending child marriage and FGM/C in Africa. She said that this was just the beginning of the hard work and Traditional Leaders need to demonstrate that they can go beyond commitment to real action.

HRM Igwe Nnaemeka Alfred Ugochukwu Achebe, the Obi of Onitsha (Nigeria) said that culture, customs and traditions are not static and these change and must always change with the changing times while focusing on improving the lives of society members. This is no longer time for talk but we need to walk the talk and shift to real action. This is why the action planning process should focus on realistic activities with clear and measurable targets and results. COTLA/CONATA takes away the excuse of using culture, customs and traditions as an excuse for carrying out harmful practices against girls and women.

Madame Hanna Serwaa Tetteh, Special Representative to the African Union and Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union said that the establishment of COTLA/CONATA gave her the confidence that change is possible in Africa. One of the best approaches of ending child marriage, where Traditional Leaders can significantly contribute, is by ensuring girls access to education and that they stay in school for as long as possible. She appreciated the President of Zambia, His Excellency Edgar Chagwa Lungu for hosting the dialogue with Traditional and Cultural Leaders. Dialogue with the Heads of State and Government is very important as it ensures that the traditional governance system is contributing to the national development efforts including the transformation of culture, customs and traditional to improve the lives of the people on the continent. With the launch of COTLA/CONATA and the action planning in progress, she said that this was the best time to appreciate the positive aspects of culture, that defines us as Africans while transforming or eradicating harmful practices that do not respect the human rights and dignity of girls and women.

An intervention from the floor – *Ambassador Habonimana Balthazar (Burundi)* emphasized the need for continued momentum after Addis Ababa to ensure that all efforts in setting up COTLA/CONATA are not in vain.

Overview of COTLA/CONATA

Chief Madzimawe (Zambia) presented an overview of COTLA/CONATA, the Traditional and Cultural Leaders movement to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa, and how the consultations and dialogue from Nairobi, Blantyre to Lagos laid the foundation for its establishment. He stated that this was a Traditional Leader led initiative, and it was fully hatched in Lagos following the zero tolerance and full condemnation of child marriage and FGM/C by Traditional and Cultural Leaders. The Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA)/ Conseil des Autorites Traditionnelles D’Afrique (CONATA) is a pan African platform of male and female Traditional and Cultural Leaders primarily set up to galvanise the voices and actions of these Leaders across Africa to embrace positive culture and transform or eradicate negative cultural practices that harm girls and women in Africa. The platform establishment was based on the need to create an institutionalized dialogue between Traditional and Cultural Leaders and the AU, regional bodies and governments on preservation of, and harnessing the positive aspects of culture, and transformation or eradication of negative cultural practices in order to end child marriage and FGM/C, informed by deep shared values of human rights and gender equality. The movement was set up to provide space for addressing other emerging issues relevant to their jurisdictions in fast changing world. It is up to all Traditional and Cultural Leaders to make COTLA/CONATA work.

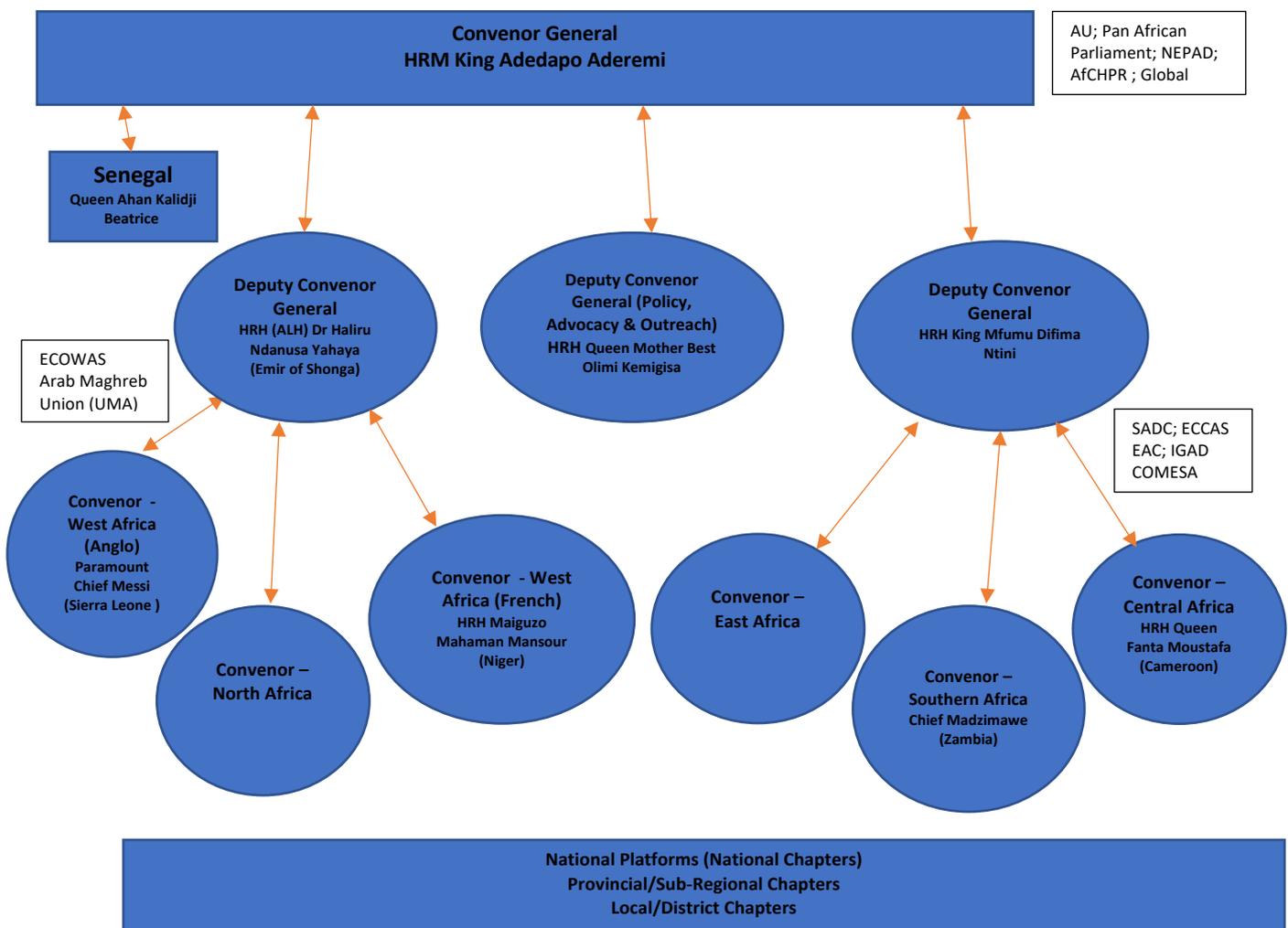
COTLA/CONATA Inaugural Organisational Structure

The COTLA/CONATA inaugural organisational structure was co-presented by *HRH Mfumu Difima Ntini (DRC)* and *Dr. Izeduwa Derex-Briggs (UN Women)*.

HRH Mfumu Difima Ntini (DRC) presented the COTLA/CONATA Inaugural Organisational Structure French version for feedback as well as adoption. He mentioned that the Inaugural COTLA/CONATA Structure was proposed by the Task Force that was set up in Nigeria to work out on the modalities for setting up the platform. This may not be perfect but it can help set up COTLA/CONATA into an operational movement that achieves its intended goals and it can be revisited after two or three years.

Dr. Izeduwa Derex-Briggs (UN Women) presented the COTLA/CONATA Inaugural Organisational Structure English version. She said that UN Women is just helping out as an interim Secretariat of COTLA/CONATA and that was why she presented the English version. COTLA/CONATA is not owned by UN Women but as the mandate for UN Women is to address socio-cultural factors around gender stereotypes and subsequent impact including child marriage and FGM/C, this is the best approach that has been agreed upon following the extensive dialogues that took place last year. UN Women is just facilitating the process hence Traditional and Cultural Leaders should take ownership and leadership. She explained that the considerations for the structure took into consideration language, gender, individual interest in moving forward COTLA/CONATA mission and others.

The inaugural organisational structure presented was as below:



The Inaugural Executive Committee will be in place for three years to lead the establishment and set up of COTLA/CONATA to ensure it is a functional institution and movement that works towards achieving its set goals. COTLA/CONATA will enter into partnerships at various levels with regional or national institutions and bodies in line with its objectives. Efforts to finalise the structures for North and East Africa will continue.

HRH (ALH) Dr Haliru Ndanusa Yahaya (Emir of Shonga) moved the motion for the proposed structure and proposed Executive Members to be approved by the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ambassador

Habonimana Balthazar (Burundi), Inkosi Ya Makhosi Gomani (Malawi), Chief Fortune Charumbira (Zimbabwe), HRH Prince Zolani Mkiva (South Africa), and Paramount Chief Kyungu (Malawi) who also provided inputs to the structure to ensure functionality. Feedback included: the need to learn from past mistakes from various structures of traditional leaders which have failed to move forward due to politics and structural issues; the need to ensure that post holders are personally committed to the cause and the survival of COTLA/CONATA; and the importance of the support from UN Women in the early stages to handhold COTLA/CONATA during the most difficult time of any organisation.

Action Planning Session

The Action Planning session was facilitated by *Oti Anukpe Ovwrah* and *Dr Mary Okumu (UN Women)*. Participants were divided into four groups as follows: West Africa (Anglophone), East Africa, Southern Africa and Francophone Group. North Africa was not represented at the meeting due to logistical challenges.

The groups presented their proposed Action Plans (see attached) in the plenary. *Prince Adeleke Adeleye Rasheed (Nigeria)* presented on behalf of the West Africa (anglophone group); *Ato Hiluf Weldosilassie (Ethiopia)* presented on behalf of East Africa; *HRH Chief Madzimawe (Zambia)* presented on behalf of Southern Africa; and *Queen Ahan Kalidji Beatrice (Senegal)* presented on behalf of West and Central Africa (Francophone). It was agreed that further discussions will be conducted to finalise the proposed plans in coming weeks.

Adoption of the Addis Ababa Communique

HRM (ARC) King Adedapo Aderemi led the session to adopt the Addis Ababa Communique (see attached) which was shared earlier for review. The Communique was adopted following some feedback and suggestions. Through the Communique, the African Kings, Queens, Royalties and Senior Traditional Leadership of Africa reaffirmed their commitment to provide continental leadership in the efforts to end child marriage, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices. They appreciated the African Union Presidential Champion on Ending Child Marriage, His Excellency, President Edgar Chagwa Lungu, President of the Republic of Zambia for hosting a high level event together with the African Union Commission and UN Women, which reaffirmed our role in the campaign to end child marriage, as the continent accelerates its efforts to implement Africa's Agenda 2023. They applauded the formal launch of Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa (COTLA)/ Conseil des Autorites Traditionnelles D'Afrique (CONATA) as a continental platform enabling traditional and cultural leaders to bring their collective voices, influence, authority and critical action to redefining the role of culture and traditional institutions in the urgent effort to fight child marriage and female genital mutilation, which practices have no place in our societies. They endorsed the appointment of an inaugural executive committee to facilitate and coordinate their work comprising the Convenor General, three Deputy Convenors General and six Regional Convenors, taking into account regional, gender and age diversity.

Through the Communique they also called on the African Union to formally recognise COTLA, ensuring they have a seat at the African Union including representation in the coordination efforts related to ending child marriage, female genital mutilation, and changing the narrative about African culture, customs and traditions, their transformation and the furtherance of human rights and dignity. They requested COTLA members to initiate or strengthen coordinated efforts to end child marriage at local, national and regional level in furtherance of their commitment. They agreed to meet annually on the margins of the AU Summit, and convene at other strategic moments in order to share best practices in our countries, especially on removing culture and tradition as basis of child marriage in law; promote girls education, and speak against these practices in our communities. They extended their appreciation to the UN Women for the technical and financial support towards our efforts, the AU Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage, and they requested other partners to join in with our efforts.

Closing Remarks

HRH King Maiguzo Mahaman Mansour (Niger) chose to not speak but gave the floor to *Queen Fanta Moustafa (Cameroon)* to say some closing remarks. This was a positive gesture and a shift from past norms where a male royalty handed over one of the powerful moments to a female royal. Queen Fanta thanked UN Women for making the event and meeting in Addis Ababa possible. She was proud to be part of the process from Nairobi to Lagos up to Addis Ababa. The whole process had enlightened her and she felt much more confident in her efforts to end child marriage and FGM/C. She requested UN Women to continue supporting COTLA/CONATA as the support was more needed more now than ever. She looked forward to working with everyone in moving COTLA/CONATA forward.

Inkosi Ya Makhosi Mswati Gomani (Malawi), was pleased to be both part of the event hosted by the President of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency Edgar Chagwa Lungu and the inaugural meeting of COTLA/CONATA. He said that he was more motivated than ever before to be part of the core team in Malawi to hold a national Indaba and move forward COTLA/CONATA work. He acknowledged that Malawi does not have national structures for Traditional and Cultural leaders and the indaba would be one of the opportunities of exploring how they can move forward with this important initiative. He said that the Malawi Government has been in the forefront to supporting Traditional and Cultural leaders efforts to end child marriage and other harmful practices including efforts of Senior Chief Kachindamoto. He concluded by saying that this is not the time for talking, but for action and doing the work.

Chief Siansali (Zimbabwe) appreciated to be part of the inaugural meeting and the launch of COTLA/CONATA. He said that the Zimbabwe National Council of Chiefs was fully on board and will work towards the COTLA/CONATA goals and end these barbaric acts of child marriage and other harmful practices. He concluded by saying that Traditional and Cultural Leaders from Zimbabwe could not wait any longer on acting of the commitments and they look forward to working with UN Women and other stakeholders.

Mrs Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, AU Goodwill Ambassador for Ending Child Marriage in Africa said that she was honoured to be part of the processes and dialogue with Traditional and Cultural Leaders from Nairobi, Blantyre, Lagos up to Addis Ababa. She was impressed with the levels of dedication and commitment from the leaders. She was confident that with such level of commitment and dedication, significant progress will be registered very soon in ending child marriage and FGM/C in Africa. She thanked UN Women for supporting the initiative and she felt that this is a relevant approach to contributing to the attainment of the AU Campaign to end child marriage. She said she was available to provide any support to COTLA/CONATA and UN Women as the work continues to the next phase.

Next Steps

The following are the major next steps:

- UN Women in collaboration with COTLA/CONATA will review the proposed Action Plans and will provide appropriate feedback as soon as possible
- Participants should start planning for activities and actions at country level so that COTLA/CONATA achieves impact in respective countries
- Reports of the Addis Ababa event and meeting to be made available to all participants before the end February 2019

Action Plans

COTLA/CONATA Secretariat (Continental) Proposed Action Points

Activity	Expected Results	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Establish vision, mission, goal and objectives of COTLA/CONATA; Prepare articles of incorporation; Draft By-laws; Set up board of trustees; Develop operational and financial manual; Register COTLA/CONATA	COTLA/CONATA documents developed & approved by Board; Board set up & functional; Bank account opened;											
COTLA Delegation meet with AU Commission on a working session with AU Social Affairs Commissioner and request COTLA/CONATA to be a strategic partner on the two campaigns to end child marriage and FGM (joined by AU Ambassadors on ending child marriage & FGM/C)	MOU Signed with AUC & UN Women											
Board Meeting	Board Approvals; Minutes											
Convene a side event or present at a session at Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland(joined by AU Ambassadors on ending child marriage & FGM/C)	COTLA/CONATA's platform introduced and areas of collaboration identified											
Convene a side event with Heads of State or present at a session during the UN General Assembly Session in New York, USA (joined by AU Ambassadors on ending child marriage & FGM/C)	COTLA/CONATA's platform introduced and areas of collaboration identified											
Dialogue with the Pan African Parliament to develop a strategic partnership with COTLA/CONATA	MOU Signed with Pan African Parliament, AUC & UN Women											
Dialogue with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (AfCHPR) to develop a strategic partnership with COTLA/CONATA	MOU Signed with AfCHPR, AUC & UN Women											
Participate in Conference - Beyond Policy: Motivating, equipping and empowering leaders outside the political sphere to end FGM and CEFM. in Dakar, Senegal.	COTLA/CONATA contributes significantly to conference outcomes											
Develop and update continental database of COTLA/CONATA	Database developed and up to date											
General Council meeting	Council Approvals; Reports											
Provide ongoing support to regional and country level advocacy initiatives, and activities	Regions and countries are supported and implement their action plans											

COTLA/CONATA Southern Africa Region - Proposed Action Points

Activity	Expected Results	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
COTLA/CONATA Delegation meets with SADC in Gaborone to discuss strategic partnership with COTLA/CONATA on initiatives to end child marriage (joined by AU Ambassador on ending child marriage)	MOU Signed with SADC, AUC & UN Women											
Regional core meeting with Kings, Queens and Chiefs to revamp and re-activate SADC Council of Traditional Leaders and have it as the arm of COTLA/CONATA in Southern Africa that pushes for laws for child marriage without exceptions in the region	COTLA/CONATA in Southern Africa functioning											
Meet with COMESA in Lusaka to discuss strategic partnership with COTLA/CONATA	MOU Signed with COMESA & UN Women											
Convene a side event with Heads of State or present at a session during the SADC Heads of State and Government Summit (joined by AU Goodwill Ambassador on ending child marriage)	COTLA/CONATA's platform introduced and areas of collaboration identified											
Develop strategic partnerships with relevant regional bodies and institutions including religious groups, business, young women's groups, women's groups and others.	MOU Signed with Pan African Parliament, AUC & UN Women											

Lobby for the recognition and support of COTLA/CONATA to take into account issues related to early marriage and female genital mutilation.	COTLA/CONATA is a recognised entity and playing an important advocacy role on ending child marriage and FGM/C																		
Facilitate a merger of the Anglophone and Francophone countries	West Africa COTLA/CONATA works as one entity																		
Coordinate a regional dialogue to adopt a common position at the continental level on ending child marriage and FGM/C	Regional common position adopted and shared widely																		