

# ***An Urgent Call to Action for Young Women: The AU-CEVAWG is Your Convention, Your Future***

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The African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG), adopted in February 2025, is a specialized, modern treaty that represents a critical, long-awaited upgrade to the continental legal framework.

As an organization dedicated to women's human rights, Baobab for Women's Human Rights (BAOBAB) recognizes that the CEVAWG directly addresses the new realities of violence—digital, economic, and institutional—that older instruments simply could not foresee. Young women, whose lives are disproportionately impacted by these new threats, must urgently engage with and advocate for the CEVAWG's immediate ratification and progressive implementation.

## **Part I: The Foundational Legal Framework**

Young women's struggle for rights is built on decades of advocacy, codified in several key instruments. Understanding these foundations highlights why the CEVAWG is essential:

- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979):** The global treaty defining

discrimination against women and establishing an agenda for national action to end it.

- **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) (1981):** The core African human rights document, establishing non-discrimination principles and the right to freedom from violence.
- **Maputo Protocol (Protocol to the ACHPR on the Rights of Women in Africa) (2003):** The landmark African treaty securing broad rights, including explicit bans on Female Genital Mutilation (Article 5) and setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 (Article 6).

The CEVAWG is an immediate policy lever. Your engagement can help bypass decades of stalled implementation of these older treaties and push for immediate legal action on the issues that affect you right now.

## Part II: Why the CEVAWG is Your Convention: Addressing Unique Forms of Violence

The CEVAWG directly confronts high-risk realities that young women experience disproportionately and which older laws often fail to define or prosecute:

### 1. The Digital Battlefield: Comprehensive Cyber Protection

Young women are statistically more likely to be victims of online harassment, non-consensual image sharing (revenge porn), and sextortion. Significantly, the harm from these online acts is experienced *offline* (shame, job loss, physical threat).

**The CEVAWG Solution:** Articles 1 and 3 define and extend the convention's scope to cover violence in cyberspace. However, the CEVAWG goes further by mandating an offline response. Article 12 (Access to Justice) and Article 11 (Protection and Assistance) require States to:

- Investigate and prosecute cybercrimes through the traditional justice system.
- Provide onsite services (shelters, medical care, legal aid) to survivors whose victimization began online, ensuring the digital crime is treated as a physical threat demanding an offline, institutional response.

### 2. Lethal Violence: The Threat of Femicide

Young women are often victims of intimate partner violence and gender-based killing that escalates quickly. The lack of a specific legal distinction between general homicide and femicide hinders targeted prevention and data collection.

**The CEVAWG Solution:** Article 1 (Definitions) explicitly includes and recognizes Femicide as a distinct crime. Your advocacy ensures that national laws are updated to target this specific crime, forcing governments to implement specialized prevention strategies.

### 3. Protection in Your Workplace: The Informal Economy

Young women entering the workforce are highly concentrated in the informal economy, lacking formal HR policies and recourse, leaving them highly vulnerable to sexual harassment and economic exploitation by employers or clients.

**The CEVAWG Solution:** Articles 8 and 9 explicitly extend State obligations to end violence against women and girls in both the formal and informal world of work. This is vital for securing protection and justice regardless of your employment sector.

### 4. The Power of Enforcement: The Safeguard Clause

While we acknowledge political omissions in the CEVAWG, the treaty

provides the ultimate legal remedy to enforce the highest standards.

**The CEVAWG Solution:** Article 15 (Safeguard Clause) mandates that any legal interpretation that "most favours the realisation of ending all forms of violence shall prevail." This is your legal weapon to demand the application of the strongest standard—whether it is the Maputo Protocol's explicit ban on FGM/Child Marriage or the progressive use of the Maputo Protocol's "other status" clause to protect all vulnerable women.

### Part III: How Young Women Can Engage with the CEVAWG (A Collaborative Strategy)

Your engagement should move beyond simply calling for ratification to actively shaping its interpretation and implementation. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) is the body responsible for monitoring compliance with the CEVAWG (Article 14).

#### 1. Mobilizing Young Men as Partners

The CEVAWG mandates prevention, which requires shifting social norms, a task that cannot be achieved without young men. **Article 6 (Guiding Principles)** refers to promoting "positive masculinity." Young women should lead initiatives to engage young men in the following ways:

- **Co-Advocacy for Ratification:** Recruit young men as champions

to lobby their own male leaders in government and parliament, shifting the narrative from a "women's issue" to a societal imperative.

- **Digital Responsibility:** Work with young men's groups to develop peer-led codes of conduct for online behavior, training them to call out and report cyber violence (Article 3) and non-consensual image sharing.
- **Budget Accountability:** Partner with young male activists to jointly lobby for the funding required by **Article 5 (Budgeting)**, making the case that violence is an economic barrier for the entire nation.

#### 2. Direct Advocacy to National Authorities

- **Public Education & Lobbying:** Launch high-impact campaigns using social media and local youth platforms to clearly explain the CEVAWG's modern definitions (cyber violence, femicide). Mobilize public pressure that compels Ministries of Justice, Gender, and Foreign Affairs to ratify immediately.
- **Advocate for Guidelines:** Push the Ministry of Women Affairs/Gender and/or Justice to adopt CSOs-developed guidelines

that translate CEVAWG principles (like the Survivor-Centred Approach and Gender-Responsive Budgeting) into mandatory, standardized training for police, prosecutors, and healthcare workers, ensuring progressive implementation.

Every day of delay leaves young women exposed to violence the Convention is designed to stop. Secure your present and future by mobilizing now!

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### 3. Engaging with the African Commission (ACHPR)

- **Contribute to Shadow Reports:** Young women's networks, alongside supportive young men's groups, must work with national CSOs—including organizations like BAOBAB—to prepare "Shadow Reports" for the ACHPR. These reports provide the Commission with an independent, youth-focused assessment of where the government is failing to implement the CEVAWG.
- **Demand Thematic Guidance:** Petition the ACHPR to issue specific General Comments or interpretive guidance on how the CEVAWG should be applied to new issues and how Article 15 must be used to enforce the strong standards of the Maputo Protocol.

### Contact

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### **BAOBAB's Final Call to Action**

The AU-CEVAWG is your opportunity to codify safety and accountability into African law. We call upon all young women to rise and use this instrument.