Breaking Barriers: Navigating Gender Rights in African Legal Landscapes

Introduction

Lawyers Hub, in partnership with UNESCO (East Africa office), hosted the 2nd webinar from the Gender, AI, and Law in Africa series themed **"Breaking Barriers: Navigating Gender Rights in African Legal Landscapes"** on 23rd May 2024. Speakers included Christine Okeno, Jacqueline Ingutiah, Favour Borokini, and Hlengiwe Dube, with Maria Mbeneka as the moderator. This article highlights the key findings and recommendations from the webinar. The event began with presentations from the speakers, followed by a panel discussion, and concluded with a question-and-answer session.

Speakers presentations

Maria Mbeneka (Moderator)

Maria emphasized the importance of addressing gender bias and promoting gender equality within the legal sector in Africa. Highlighting the impact of gender bias on women in the judiciary, emphasizing the need to address systemic challenges and promote inclusivity. She underscored the importance of following the leadership of trailblazers in advocating for gender equality and empowering women in the legal profession.

Christine Okeno

Christine highlighted the importance of gender equality laws in Africa, emphasizing common challenges like weak legal frameworks, negative cultural norms and practices, and discriminatory laws. She stressed the need for gender-responsive legislation. Addressed technology's impact on gender rights, emphasizing digital inclusion's potential to address inequalities.

Jacqueline Ingutiah

Jacqueline explored common legal challenges such as colonial legacies, legal pluralism, discriminatory laws, patriarchal social norms, and unresponsive justice systems. Highlighting strategies that have been implemented across the continent, including legal reforms, improved access to justice, and the ratification of international treaties. She further discussed the challenges and opportunities of using litigation to advance women's rights, supported by relevant case studies.

Favour Borokoni

Favour highlighted the importance of framing technology appropriately, acknowledging its influence on society and culture. Key issues included the digital divide, which limits access to technology for marginalized groups, and the need for greater diversity in tech design, as the industry remains male-dominated. Technology can significantly enhance access to legal services and information, especially in underserved areas. She recommended adopting a feminist approach, ensuring diverse representation, supporting local talent, and providing mentorship to women in technology.

Hlengiwe Dube

Dube highlighted the transformative potential of digital inclusion for addressing gender inequalities, enhancing access to education and healthcare, and creating entrepreneurship opportunities for women. She discussed challenges like limited infrastructure, cultural norms, and digital literacy gaps. Dube also emphasized

public-private partnerships as vital for promoting gender equality. She recommended creating an enabling policy environment, developing gender-sensitive technologies, and ensuring meaningful engagement of women in all stages of technology development and implementation.

Panel Discussion

The panel discussion highlighted challenges in implementing legal frameworks for gender equality in Africa, including a lack of political will and capacity issues, and a need to update laws to address emerging issues. Promoting STEM education for girls and ensuring digital financial inclusion were emphasized. Future focus should be on comprehensive legal frameworks, regional collaboration, and technology's role in access to justice.

Noted challenges like the gender digital divide and cybersecurity concerns emphasize the need for technology to be accessible to all. Capacity building for judicial officers and maintaining decisional independence with AI were highlighted, along with preserving openness and transparency in court proceedings.

Conclusion

The webinar highlighted critical challenges and opportunities for advancing gender equality in Africa. Speakers emphasized the importance of addressing gender bias, promoting gender-responsive legislation, and leveraging technology for women empowerment. The discussions underscored the need for comprehensive legal reforms, public-private partnerships, and digital inclusion initiatives. Despite challenges, there is optimism for progress through collaborative efforts and innovative solutions. Moving forward, it is crucial to prioritize gender equality in legal frameworks, promote diversity in tech, and ensure inclusive access to justice.