



## EVENT BRIEF



# DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE UN WOMEN

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND YOUNG AFRICAN WOMEN AND MEN

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## Introduction

On 26 January 2017, Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of UN Women met with 33 inspirational young African leaders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The dialogue focused on young women's leadership and economic empowerment and rights, particularly young women's entrepreneurship.

The participants comprised young entrepreneurs, politicians, athletes and gender equality activists and women peace and security advocates. They spoke freely and shared personal stories, motivations and aspirations for the future. They also brought out ideas on how UN Women can partner with young African women and men to advance gender equality and women's rights particularly in the context of UN Women's Youth and Gender Equality Strategy.

The discussion was facilitated by Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Goodwill Ambassador for the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage.

### Box 1 AU Gender Pre-Summit and Pre-CSW61

The event took place against the backdrop of the 9th African Union (AU) Gender Pre-Summit focused on the AU theme for year 2017 "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth" and the Africa Ministerial Pre-Consultative Meeting on the Commission on the Status of Women Sixty First (CSW 61) under the theme "Women economic empowerment in the changing world of work".

**"Any young person, who is not active and associated is missing something which can make you a better person. The power of belonging is critical."**

Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women Executive Director

## Opening of the dialogue

The UN Women Executive Director opened the dialogue by expressing her heartfelt desire to change the perception the world has of African women. Rather than being the poster girls of poverty, she challenged the participants to help change this damaging and demoralizing stereotype.

Dr. Mlambo-Ngcuka was pleased to see young women and men with a positive attitude not waiting for help but standing ready to contribute to the growth and development of Africa. She encouraged them to strive for excellence, so that they can be success stories and role models that challenge the prevailing negative stereotypes and narratives, of Africa of being a war-torn, poverty-ridden and aid-dependent continent.

In introducing themselves, the participants shared their ambitions and life goals speaking candidly about their dreams, some of which included becoming the first female President of Liberia, owning the leading organic cosmetic brand in Africa, and transforming how communities respond to people living with HIV.

## Box 2

### Reflections from the life of UN Women Executive Director

Dr. Mlambo-Ngcuka was invited to share her life story and her own path to success with the young women and men. She encouraged them to enter into relationships with people who show them love and respect and bring out the best in them.

She also recommended that young women and men should join an organisation and support a cause they feel passionate about, so they can be part of something bigger than themselves. Based on her own life experience, Dr. Mlambo-Ngcuka also encouraged the young men and women to be flexible and open to the sometimes surprising path they may find themselves on.

## Panel discussion

In a panel discussion three young professional women spoke of their distinct areas of expertise.

**Rudo Nyangulu-Mungofa**, a lawyer by profession, discussed the challenges young entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe encounter, including lack of a support system and favorable national policies to encourage startups. She had recognized an existing gap for advisory and incubation services for young businesses in the country. As a solution, she created an entrepreneurial business hub called Stimulus that runs Zimbabwe's first innovation centre. Through her work with the hub, she established the Stimulus Women's Network, which has led to founding of a national platform called *Choose Women: Buy Local*, an initiative that aims to give women owned businesses access to markets, capacity development and smart finance.



Mame Fatou Toure Konare expressing her views on the importance of sports in empowering young women.



Kessy Martine Ekomo-Soignet sharing her experiences on youth participation in peacebuilding.

**Kessy Martine Ekomo-Soignet**, a peace and security activist from the Central African Republic, spoke of the need to include young men and women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes. She explained that for peace to be sustainable it is imperative to have the participation of young men and women at local and national conflict prevention and reconciliation efforts.

**Mahlet Afework**, an Ethiopian Fashion Designer, explained how she was touched by Dr. Mlambo-Ngcuka's opening remarks on the need to change perceptions of African women. Ms. Afework explained that her own inspiration in becoming a fashion designer was rooted in her desire to change perceptions of her country on a global scale and share Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage. She has already enjoyed success in this regard, as her designs have been featured in renowned fashion and lifestyle magazines.

**"My dream is to see all girls in this room and girls in every corner of Africa to be empowered and be more powerful than ever before. Sport has the power to empower. I used to be a shy girl. Sport gave me self-confidence. I have not been out of my country before. Sport brought me to the Gender Pre-Summit. Sport has helped me a lot."**

Mame Fatou Toure Konare, Senegal, a SEED Project scholar – a global organization that uses sport (basketball) and education to empower the next generation of young African leaders.





Mahlet Afework introducing herself during the opening.

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## Closing remarks

Dr. Mlambo-Ngcuka closed the event by highlighting two important initiatives created by UN Women, which she hoped will help empower young women and men: (i) a virtual school, which will provide accredited courses and certificates, and (ii) a mentoring programme, which matches young leaders with mentors in UN agencies, and is open to the participants of the event.

The dialogue ended with a resolution to create a Young African Women's Business and Entrepreneurship Advisory Council or an Innovation Council.

## Strategies and recommendations

**The young women and men shared ideas on how to increase the impact of their individual initiatives and contribute to the broader aim of achieving gender equality:**

- Strengthening campaigns to end sexual harassment in schools and workplaces.
- Advocating for and implementing national and local policies to ensure young women from rural communities are not left behind.
- Strengthening initiatives supporting young women's access to business opportunities and financing.
- Advocating for the role of civic education in school curriculums, so young women and men understand their rights and the benefits of political participation.
- Creating women's leadership academies to strengthen the confidence and skills of young women to assume leadership roles in all spheres of their personal and professional lives.
- Implementing programmes to increase women's participation and empowerment through sports.
- Creating platforms for peer to peer learning for young policymakers and entrepreneurs.

## Requests to UN Women

- UN Women to support a side event on Young African Women's Entrepreneurship at the Commission on the Status of Women Convention in New York in March 2017, in order to create a platform for young African women in business and entrepreneurship.
- UN Women to support the creation of opportunities for young women to engage with and work in UN agencies.
- The creation of a Young African Women's Innovation Council.

### Box 3

#### Outcomes of the 29th GIMAC Meeting

The participants spoke about their participation in and the key recommendations of the 29th Gender is my Agenda Campaign GIMAC Civil Society Consultative Meeting on Mainstreaming Gender Equality in the African Union and Member States.

Among the recommendations to the African Union Heads of State and Government were the full implementation of the Maputo Protocol; investing in young Africans through the promotion and protection of their rights; ensuring functional educational policies and programmes for livelihood skills, innovations, science and technology and peaceful coexistence as well as support to entrepreneurship development.

The GIMAC meeting also called for increase in budget allocation for national HIV/AIDs and SRHR programs to harness demographic dividends and recommended the appointment of a special envoy on youth.



The Executive Director and Izeduwa Derex-Briggs, UN Women Regional Director for ESAR listening to Anny Tengamendite Modi, Executive Director and co-founder of AFIA MAMA from DRC presenting the GIMAC outcomes.

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