



**WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (WPP) REGIONAL INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORSHIP
PROGRAMME LAUNCH**

SAFARI PARK HOTEL REPORT, 8TH MARCH 2021

2021 International Women's Day theme – "Choose to Challenge."

Objectives

1. Co-create the regional intergenerational mentorship program
2. Strengthen synergy for women in political arena around Africa

Climate Setting [Moderator] – Commissioner Winnie Lichuma

In her welcome remarks, Commissioner Winnie—while acknowledging the substantial milestones registered so far in gender equality and equity—emphasized that we continue to live in a fairly unequal world. Gender-based violence and patriarchal systems continue to plague our society hindering women's full participation in politics. The Commissioner encouraged the attendants to think of a key issue in WPP that they choose to challenge in line with the 2021 International Women's Day theme "***I celebrate but Choose to Challenge***". She further reminded the participants that in line with the Agenda 2023, the future of the continent rests on the skills and knowledge of young people. Unfortunately, young people remain alienated and marginalized from key processes in our societies and the situation is worse when consideration is given to young women political representation across Africa. Commissioner Winnie then posed three main questions to the audience:

- a) How can we use our voices and power of activism to mentor young people?
- b) Why the persistent disconnect between the younger generation of women and the older generation ?
- c) How can we work together to pull the younger women into political leadership?

Opening Remarks

Executive Director FAWE, Ms. Martha Muhwezi, welcomed the guests and thanked everyone for honoring FAWE and partners' invitation to the event. She called upon the participants to celebrate the day by reflecting on the women's past and their ongoing roles in promoting gender equality. In her remarks, she used FAWE, a pan African organization founded and led by women, as a key reference point for women's leadership potential. She underscored the fact that FAWE' interventions have not only enhanced education access to millions of girls and women, but also designed gender responsive policies at the National and Regional levels. Ms. Muhwezi urged the more experienced women political leaders in attendance to take up the challenge and hold the hands of younger women and provide them with the much-needed mentorship. According to Ms. Muhwezi, mentorship is the missing link in building a

successful generation of future leaders. She concluded by noting the fact that the world is increasingly becoming a global village and this provides an opportunity for women from various backgrounds to work together in building a more equitable, sustainable, and peaceful future.

Keynote Addresses

Dr. Pinkie Mekgwe – Senior Regional Advisor: Africa and West Asia, International IDEA labelled women as carriers of generations. Without a doubt, generations can only ever hold if the current works seamlessly with the yet to come. This is the imperative nature of intergenerational learning, but for us to learn we need to unlearn. Politics is designed to work on fragmentation and segmentation i.e. women, youth, people with disabilities and so on. This makes the mentorship program crucial as it seeks to counter these lines of differentiation and promote collaboration. Dr. Pinkie urged women leaders to assure the continuity of their leadership and pass on the wisdom they get from mistakes and experiences along the way to nurture the next generation of leaders.

Ms. Gloria AGEUHU,, President Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement (Network of women leaders for development) (Network of Young Women for Development Opportunity), RFLD Chairperson called the more experienced women to work closely with young women in the political arenas to enhance women's visibility.

Dr. Sylvia Wakene – Head of Department, Diplomacy, Development and International Security, Daystar University, Kenya emphasized the need to have women at the decision making tables to front their agenda from experience point of view and champion institutionalization through responsive policies and frameworks. As a representative of higher institutions, she challenged other academicians to take up the challenge to teach and guide the next generation of strong young female leaders. Dr Wakene also spoke about research in women in political participation. She concluded by reminding the audience that the future of the country and continent rests upon the hands of young leaders which can effectively be structured through deliberate mentorship with women political leaders.

Interactive Forum

For this session, the facilitator, Commissioner Winnie, engaged the participants in an interactive activity. She chose 4 of the young women in attendance to interact with the 4 female deputy governors. This activity was intended to kickstart the intergenerational mentorship by providing an immediate opportunity for the young women to interact with more experienced WPP and then introduce and usher them to the podium.

Tina Kendi, a Daystar University student, introduced H.E. **Deputy Governor – Taita Taveta, Majala Mlagui**. As the youngest female Deputy Governor in Kenya, she challenged the age versus leadership perception; *“a woman can neither be too young or too old to lead – leadership has nothing to do with age”*. She further noted that the first woman inaugurated as WTO president was portrayed as a grandmother in the media. S provided a synopsis on WPP to show that women political leadership is not new. More specifically, she noted that traditionally, women played key roles in active politics in their communities. Even during colonization, they were part of the rebellion movements and provided crucial support to Mau Mau

fighters. She went further to underscore the major footprints in the women political leadership including but not limited to the Beijing Conference, Maendeleo ya Wanawake formation, the Pan-African Movement of Women which helped shape WPP in the post-colonial era. Ms. Majala expressed disappointment seeing the rich history which formed the very foundation for today's opportunities for women leadership cast aside. She reminded the participants that since the inauguration of the Kenyan 2010 constitution, less than 20 women have been deputy governors and less than five have been governors. She concluded by challenging each one of us to give power and ability to women so that they can thrive in the political scene.

Tracey, a Daystar University student, introduced **Deputy Governor Makueni County H.E. Adelina N Mwau**. DG Adelina passionately discussed the value of having women involved in political processes. She indicated that of 30 MCA's in her county of Makueni, only one is a woman. Most women as such join the County Assembly through nomination which gives them very limited political mandate and powers. For instance, the nominated MCA's don't have development budget allocations and more often than not, they have limited information access. Ms. Mwau also brought up the issue of patriarchal structures that define local politics with masculine attitudes and behaviours. She called upon women leaders to defy the norms and focus on redefining values and structures that would change the masculine nature of today's politics. She concluded her remarks by highlighting that the Regional Intergenerational Mentorship Programme will go a long way in redefining women leaders' contributions and roles.

Wangechi, a Daystar University Student introduced **H.E. Susan Kikwai, Deputy Governor of Kericho County**. In her remarks, her Excellency emphasized the importance of having men as allies. She gave the example of her governor who is male but understood the value of including women in politics. He selected her as the Deputy Governor despite the fact that the community he is leading is heavily patriarchal. According to DG Kikwai added that, it is critical to include women in leadership because they understand and are best placed to articulate and amplify their issues and voices and those of the society at large. She noted that the election of women has dwindled in recent years posing a threat to the realization of the SDG5 on Gender Equality.

Maureen, a Daystar University student, introduced HE **Dr. Yulita Cheruiyot, Deputy Governor of Nandi County**. Her Excellency said stereotypes such as women are weak or need to be tough for them to succeed in politics are greatly misleading. They have often discouraged potential aspirants from running for office. However, the presence of women in politics is crucial because it forms part of the solution to social challenges. Women should not be intimidated into staying away from politics– they should instead enter the field with the goal of providing solutions. In politics today, people don't respect boundaries and as such women in politics should be ready to face numerous challenges but together they can overcome and achieve their goals.

Panel Discussion:

The panel was a hybrid of one on one and virtual panelists.

Hon. Paulette Missambo – Founder Member FAWE emphasized the need for good advocacy as well as support from donors and governors in rolling out key programs. She reminded the young women about

the unlimited opportunities to influence the law-making process. However, success calls for audacity to challenge and take up the space. She concluded by highlighting that “*power is not given, it is taken*”.

Professor Sarah Agbor – Vice Chair FAWE Africa – Prof. Sarah’s remarks focused on the skills that women need to venture into highly political positions. She highlighted a number of aspects including but not limited to: Literacy skills without which exclusion comes in; communication skills – especially the ability to advocate; team spirit – ability to nurture and learn from others as well as being accessible. She concluded by reminding the audience that one is not successful unless her successor succeeds.

Faith Oneya – Editor for Daily Nation addressed the role of the media in promoting WPP and how women can gain better media access to grow their political image. She was fast to remind the audience of the “**Power of the Word**” – for her, the words we use carry a lot of power. For instance, we use the word female leader instead of just leader because we know there are gaps and having a woman in a leadership position is still seen as an exception rather than normality. Ms. Faith advised WPP to stop feeling shy and take a stand on issues without being afraid of creating a buzz. Women should call out the media for stereotypes so that they can change how women are covered in the media. She concluded by saying that it is time to stop lamenting and start acting.

Anika Jane Dorothy- EA Coordinator, Amplify Girls – Youth Representative to the core group – Generation Equality Forum said that its time young women in NEC political parties come out and sit on the decision making table for the political parties . **Farirai**, an aspiring young woman politician from Zimbabwe emphasized the need to funds and hold each other’s hand while focusing in capacity building. **Amel Samoud Khamari, Founder and President of Tunisian Association for Governance and Equal Opportunities between Women and Men in Decision Making Positions** gave picture of the reality in Tunisia towards women empowerment. In conclusion, **Emma Stella Likassa, Chargée de programmes FAWE Gabon** gave the closing remarks.

SUMMARY

Key issues that attendants chose to challenge:

- Fear of young women entering political space because of male domination, lack of finances, and lack of confidence in our own capabilities.
- Poverty and economic disempowerment that women are facing. Lack of or inadequate resources is one of the biggest challenges hindering WPP.
- Notions that women are enough in space. There is room for everyone.
- Stereotypes that women are weak and can’t handle the pressures of political spaces.
- Bias that a woman is either too young or too old for politics.

Key Recommendations

- Educate and empower male allies to support the efforts of women in WPP.
- Civil Societies need to be more vocal especially in taking a stand when it comes to issues of WPP in the country.
- Those in leadership positions should be open and accessible to offer mentorship. Each Deputy Governor in attendance should choose a young woman to mentor and support.

- We should stop lamenting and start taking action.
- All efforts must be aimed at ensuring women take part in decision making at all levels.
- FAWE should include a BBI interpretation session during the validation event.

Key Takeaways

- Presence is very key; even without resources, WPP has to be visible and present.
- The media should do better. Use of sexist and patriarchal language and approach can influence the new agenda by focusing on trivial things about women e.g. how a woman dresses, the lovers she has, etc. This diverts attention from real issues.
- We need to appreciate feminine values in politics. For instance, good communication by women brings empathy to the table and makes a big difference in leadership - we should appreciate these feminine values
- Women should not take pride in humility, they should not do great things and keep silent; instead they should aim to speak out loud about their achievements and be seen.
- Women should not be afraid of making a buzz. Call out the media for stereotypes so that we can change how women are portrayed.
- To be successful, we should work collaboratively to complement and learn from each other to increase the impact of women in political participation.
- We should re-emphasize the inclusion of young women in politics and continuously challenge the status quo.
- We should not only focus on positional leadership but also other stages e.g. campaign managers.
- Power is not given, it is taken.
- Failure to prepare young women to take up positions in active political participation is failing the agenda.