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FIVE YEARS OF GIMAC YOUNG WOMENS NETWORK

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About Us

GIMAC Young Women Network (GYWN) is a young people's network established in 2018 from the mother network Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC Network). The GYWN was formed to recognize and amplify young women's voices and their advocacy efforts in their communities, countries and region. The network is made up of over 130 youth organisations and movements across Africa, and is led by passionate young women and #HeforShe male champions who advocate for the rights of girls and young women in their different regions across Africa.

The network's advocacy work seeks to address gender inequality and promote women's active participation across the thematic areas of governance, peace and security, human rights, climate change, health, education and economic empowerment. The Network holds Bi-Annual Youth Advocacy Trainings on the margins of the AU Summit and RECs Coordination Meetings which bring young people together to discuss developmental issues within the continent and give recommendations to governments, partners, the African Union and RECs to having a more youthful and gender-responsive approach in tackling the challenges at hand.





OUR VISION

An Africa where gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are fully entrenched, promoted, supported and implemented in every State and institution.



OUR MISSION

To create a platform for the promotion of gender equality, the protection of women's and girls' rights and the participation of women in all decision-making process through engagement with state actors, policy makers, CSOs and influencers across the globe.



Chair's Note

Wow! 5 years and 10 Trainings Later!

Congratulations to the GIMAC Young Women Network (GYWN) for achieving this milestone. It has been an incredible 5 years of advocating for inclusion of Girls and Young Women. This milestone is a testament to their unwavering dedication in advocating for the inclusion of girls and young women at grassroots, national, and regional levels. When we look back at the progress the network has made, we are excited to see what the next years will look like. Where more energetic, talented vibrant, undeterred youth will continue to claim their spaces, use their resources and talents, explore their innovation and creativity to achieve The Africa we want! The Africa we desire!

As a network, we have continuously worked to create a platform where young women can use to amplify their voices on gender equality and women empowerment. The GYWN has played a significant role in mobilizing young people, engaging them in key issues affecting our continent as well as building their capacity to influence decisions affecting them and their communities. Every year, the network holds two Bi-Annual Youth Advocacy Trainings at the Margins of the African Union Summit. For the past 5 years we have organized and conducted a total of 10 youth advocacy trainings both physically in Addis Ababa and Virtually during the COVID-19 Pandemic. During these trainings we have reached out to Up to 1740 young people for capacity and movement building. It has been quite exciting to see these young people go back to their communities and carry out different campaigns and programs to address challenges affecting youth. We will be sharing these stories in this publication.

I am proud to have served this network as its First Ever Chair, what a joy it has been working with vibrant young people across the continent. In a special way, I want to extend my gratitude to my council members who supported me during my leadership; Ms. Yara Ouda (Egypt), Ms. Glory Ajayi (Nigeria), Ms. Ruwadzano Muzvondiwa (Zimbabwe), Ms. Dolapo Lawal (Nigeria), Ms. Caryn Dasah (Cameroon). Thank you for your service and all the vibrant energy you brought to the network.

On another note, there is a special group of young people who have tirelessly worked behind the scenes and poured in their immense support to ensure the network grows and continues to carry out its mandate. These include Ms. Juliet Kimotho, Ms. Farirai Gumbonzvanda, Mr. Keith Andere, Ms. Christine Odera, and Ms. Ruvarashe Miti.

This team played a significant role in mentoring the network leadership, resource mobilizing for the network and building partnerships to support the network's work. Well done! Special gratitude goes to the GIMAC Thematic leads for young people; Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) for also supporting the establishment of the network.

I look back with so much pride! As I hand over the mantle to the network's next leadership, I am confident that the network will continue to grow and contribute to development. Africa's biggest resource is its youth and I urge everyone reading this to make it a priority to invest in youth.

I warmly invite you to enjoy this publication and be inspired by the stories within.



Karen Ondwasi

— *GIMAC Young Women Chairperson*

Incoming Chair's Note

Being given the opportunity to lead the network as its next Chairperson for the next two years and represent the Southern African region has been such an honor. My predecessor, who was the first chairperson of the network, set a high leadership standard and commitment to the GIMAC Young Women's Network (GYWN). I intend to continue with the same spirit as the network grows and becomes stronger. In the next two years, I hope that the selected regional representatives and I will be able to connect with more networks and young people from countries that are underrepresented in the GYWN. We hope to broaden our engagement with the different regional economic communities (RECs) we belong to.

To ensure that young people in Africa can unify their voices regarding the issues that concern them, I eagerly anticipate establishing connections between the GYWN and new youth network organizations dedicated to advancing the agendas of human rights, peace and security, health, economic empowerment, education, and climate change. This will ensure young people are represented in all of their diversity, including young women living in grassroots and urban slums, young women with disabilities, and many other marginalized and minority groups of young people. The GYWN will serve as a forum for shared reporting and idea gathering so that they may be amplified collectively.

In addition to facilitating young women's understanding of the diverse themes and instruments of the African Union at a continental level and their significance for young people, I aspire to inspire and empower them to actively participate in practical lobbying and negotiation efforts with policymakers across different arenas. This will be backed up by the Girls and Young Women engagement with African Union toolkit that was created by the network to guide young people on how to engage in advocacy at different levels, including working with local ministries, other civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector in addition to the RECs and AU organizations. Additionally, I intend to support the GYWN members to develop policies and frameworks that are relevant to them and more accessible at the local level. This will involve the tasks of translating and simplifying complex documents to ensure comprehension and engagement among young women.

Finally, but crucially, to turn this vision into reality, it is essential to secure robust funding. I aspire to further strengthen our relationships with current partners who consistently support our efforts.

Additionally, I aim to provide support in fundraising for the Young Women's Network (YWN), enabling us to access greater resources for the implementation of our initiatives and to effectively engage in negotiations and lobbying across various platforms. I applaud the Outgoing GYWN Committee, the Incoming Committee, The GIMAC steering committee members, the GIMAC secretariat and most importantly the members of the network for their dedication and unwavering support. I hope that we may continue to forge synergies. The heart of the GYWN is its members, and I hope we can collaborate to further the gender agenda in influencing in Africa.



Melissa Kubvoruno
— GIMAC Young Women Incoming Chairperson



Our Presence in Africa



Be yourself, you're good enough, what you know is important what you do is important what you think is important. Participate! raise your voice! connect with other young people.

Dr. Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda

The Journey to GIMAC Young Women Network

My name is Dr Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda . I am Human Rights Lawyer and the founder and Executive Director for Rozaria Memorial Trust . I also served as the African Union Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage from 2014-2022. I serve as one of the women leaders who have been there since the founding of Gender is My Agenda Network (GIMAC) .My role within the GIMAC Young Women's Network is at the structural level, Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT) is a member of the GIMAC steering Committee of the GIMAC Board and RMT co-leads with the YWCA the Youth Cluster within GIMAC. Our main role is to support the leadership of young women within the GIMAC processes to ensure that young women and girls are effective leaders. So our role is essentially a mentorship and an advisory support .I see my role as opening doors and at times making some structures, systems and processes to understand and to prioritize the issues and the participation of young women.

he journey to GIMAC Young Women Network started when I was at the Old Young Women Christian Association at the YWCA as the world general secretary and I would come to GIMAC and realise that at GIMAC I was leading a global network of young women and girls and coming with young women and girls from across the YWCA movement in Africa. However, I noted that the space within GIMAC was predominately adults, professionals who are also in high level positions within their organizations and with government so it was very difficult to ensure that the voices of young women are finding their space.

Coincidentally, at that time was also when the first female chair of the African Union Commission was appointed Dr Kosazana Hlamini Zuma and therefore we had the opportunity to leverage on her role for us to have greater access into the African Union and in our program of advocacy within the YWCA. I then worked with many other in advocating for the voice of young women. So each GIMAC we would mobilise for more and more and more young women and girls to attend physically in Addis Ababa. We also would do side meetings and started to lobby for the GIMAC to include young women on the panel as speakers and am very excited that UN Women Ms Letty Chiwara and Monica Bilimeya were very supportive in this. Plan International on the other hand was instrumental in starting to put resource and funding to ensure that we met with the Young Women that we were able to have the girls and young women to come to Addis to have a Pre training sessions. Out of this we were able to craft a strategy document which was then adopted by GIMAC and which led to this systematic hosting of the advocacy workshops.

We then needed a structure and agreed to select leaders to guide the network, Am very excited that I was there when the first GIMAC Young Women's Network Committee was appointed with Ms. Karen Ondwasi coming on board as the first chair and her team of regional representatives. We worked very closely with FAWE Regional Secretariat led by Ms. Juliet Kimotho to guide and support the network growth and institutionalization. It has been a process to get here. When I came to the Rozaria Memorial Trust about six years ago we sustained the work around the GIMAC regional young women's network and am very proud and excited to see where it is today. So that was the journey of how the network was formed it now have structures, regional presentation Congratulations to Melissa Ruvimbo Kubvurono for being selected as the 2nd Chair of the network.

What would you Say Has been the role of the GIMAC Young Women Network

The GIMAC Young Women Network has created a space where girls or young women in Africa can add their voices to development issues within the continent. The network gives them a sense of power and belonging where their opinion matters. The network promotes collective influencing by girls and young women in African Union Processes guided by the yearly themes.

The network is also a mentoring space, GIMAC Young women's network mentors leaders, it grows leaders, it builds the confidence and enables girls and young women to make the connections which contribute to their personal and professional relationships. Thus, a powerful mentoring space for girls and young women to be in diplomacy, in public policy, to bring their experience from the village and communities in the public arena and to lead.

How do you see the network shaping up in the next five years?

In the next five years, I would like to see the GIMAC Young Women's network having a solid financial support so that within the secretariat there is a young woman dedicated to facilitating GIMAC Young Women Network and to see the network being able to influence the sub region both bodies like SADC, ECOWAS and EAC,IGAD, ECASS etc. This way, the network is able to engage with the RECS and be able to make the connections from the community, the country the regional economic commissions and at the continental level. I hope to also see the network bring the collective voices of African girls and young women into the global arena into the United Nations whether it is a at Human Rights Council or Commission on Population or Commission on the Status of women. I also want to see the network at continue to advocate for and sustain the issues that continent has been working on. The work I have done over the years and my experience is that the work on child marriage on ending sexual abuse and marriage is in the hands of the young women and the GIMAC Young Women Network is a powerful platform to champion for in collaboration with other networks.

What is your Advice to Young People?

My advice to young people is be yourself, you're good enough, what you know is important what you do is important what you think is important. Do not let language be a barrier speak in your own language, write in your own language. It's not about literacy it's about you being a young person who can shape the Agenda of the continent. Participate! raise your voice! connect with other young people.

From the GIMAC Steering Committee

How many young Africans are aware of Africa's history, its great civilizations, its inventions, African solutions, and what others have said and are saying about Africa? The will of young Africans to empower and transform Africa will depend on the power of their minds

Dr. Hellen Yinda

Who is Dr. Helene?

Member of the GIMAC Steering Committee. Born in Cameroon, Dr H el ene YINDA is an African theologian and religious researcher whose reflections, writings and actions are based on social issues from a perspective of social transformation and the liberation of women and men.

Briefly Take us through your journey in Gender advocacy from your youthful days till now where you serve as an advisor for young people?

In my first year at the Faculty of Theology, I was appointed Visitor of the Women's Prison at Mfou in Yaound  on behalf of the National Council of Churches. My role was to be the link between them and their families, to follow the evolution of their legal files, to animate the artistic workshops and to give them spiritual support.

After my License and my Master's degree in theology, I obtained my doctorate in theology in 2004 at San Francisco Theological Seminary, Advanced Pastoral Studies, San Anselmo in California in the United States, the subject of which was "Women and the Levirate Marriage among the Bassa of Cameroon, from an African Feminist Theology Perspective."

My academic and professional commitment and my field experiences were acquired within the ecumenical movement at the national level as Director of the Women's Department of the Cameroonian Presbyterian Church; at the regional level as Chair of the International Affairs Commission and member of the General Committee of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC-AACC) in Nairobi, Kenya; and internationally as a Gender and Development Consultant at the Reformed World Alliance (WARC) in Geneva, Switzerland and through work as Director of Programs for Africa and the Middle East (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine) at the World YWCA in Geneva, Switzerland for ten years.

This academic and professional commitment and my experience in the field led me to perceive the real dimension of social issues and their practices in the daily life of the 4 continents in which I studied and worked, structured my commitment to advocacy for women, young women and girls. In addition, I am the author of several articles and a few books.

Back in Cameroon, I founded and directed the Institute of Women and Girls Maria Yinda (IFEC), Professional Training Institute Approved by the Government with Specialties focused on Human Rights and Humanitarian Action; Gender and Sustainable Development; Culture of Peace and Citizenship; Business Creation and Female Entrepreneurship. I was awarded a Special Recognition of the 3rd Edition of the Human Rights Prize by the San Pio V Institute of Political Studies in Rome, Italy.

Currently, I am National President of the YWCA of Cameroon and Director of the Centenary Hospital of the Cameroonian Presbyterian Church in Sakbayeme in the Department of Sanaga Maritime, Littoral Region of Cameroon where I assume daily administrative, financial and managerial.

What role do you play in the GIMAC Young Women Network?

My role within the GIMAC Young Women's Network, as a member of the GIMAC Steering Committee, revolves around guidance, mentorship and strengthening the relationship between mother and daughter. This is rooted in intergenerational African cultural values, where the mother's primary role is to advise, accompany and pass on a heritage that will raise the daughter to a higher level than the mother.

As the African saying goes, *which I am paraphrasing here: if the daughter is taller, it is because she rests on the shoulders of a mother, who remains a source of inspiration, anchoring her in humanity.*

You advocate for inclusion of West African and Francophone Youth. Tell us why that is very important?

Young Africans, specifically those from French-speaking countries in West Africa and Central Africa, unfortunately remain almost absent or under-represented in the sphere of advocacy at the continental level in decision-making that concerns African youth. This could be attributed to the language barrier, particularly English, which is used predominantly in these different decision-making bodies, despite the interpretation provided at continental meetings. This is how we can note with frustration the absence of young French-speaking people in forums for exchanges or sharing of experiences in terms of innovations.

However, as youth have a major role to play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of Agenda 2063, which aims to transform Africa into a world power of the future, it is imperative to work towards the inclusion of young French-speaking Africans and offer them the same development chances and opportunities as those from English-speaking countries, for a prosperous, peaceful and dignified Africa in all areas of daily life.

Tell us about your work with young women living in rural areas? And why it is important to have their voices included in regional spaces. After gaining international professional experience, I have been living in my village of Sakbayeme for five years. I strongly believe that our villages hold the key to building a new and meaningful future for humanity. True development of a country can only be achieved by focusing on its rural areas, particularly by harnessing the inherent potential of rural communities through their work on the land.

I advocate for people to discover and unleash their potential by working together and creating synergies through cooperative efforts. This led me to establish the "Mut bo Mut" association, which stands for "human being to human being." It serves as a place for rejuvenation, continuous learning, and self-discovery, aiming to help individuals realize their potential and strive for the collective good.

In addition to organizing holiday camps for children in the village and supporting their education with a focus on empowering girls, I also conduct various training sessions and educational talks on sexual and reproductive health. Furthermore, I distribute washable sanitary napkins and other hygiene products to young girls and single mothers.

By supporting the participation of girls and young women from our African villages in regional and continental forums and meetings, we can amplify their voices and develop objective and realistic strategies for sustainable development in our local communities. This will contribute to achieving genuine and lasting progress.

What recommendations do you have for young people in their advocacy journey.

I'd like to start by telling these young people that advocacy work is a long-term undertaking, and that you need patience, courage, determination and, above all, belief in your dreams to succeed. Many young people have innovative ideas capable of driving change and sustainable social transformation in our various African countries, but they must work together more to carry out their ideas and be supported in their advocacy projects.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022 Shows that Africa is making very little progress towards achieving the SDGs. Why do you think so?

The 2022 Africa SDG report highlights the limited progress in achieving five goals. The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted education, leading to school and university closures. It has also exacerbated violence against women and girls, causing physical, mental, and fatal harm. Gender equality has become a pressing issue post-Covid-19. Ongoing armed conflicts, such as the one in Ukraine, have hindered poverty and hunger eradication. Climate change's adverse effects are being acknowledged, but partnerships for sustainable development goals have been slowed down. Africa has faced all these challenges.

In my view, Africa's weak progress in SDGs presents an opportunity for reflection and redefining development. African leaders and experts advocate for new development models and paradigms. Africa's Agenda 2063, promoted by the African Union, provides a platform to advocate for the desired future of Africa with dignity.

How do you think young people can contribute in accelerating the progress towards achieving SDGs

It seems imperative to me that today's youth should be more responsible, with a firm desire to develop their continent and align themselves further with Agenda 2063, which aims to transform Africa into a future world power. However, how many young Africans are aware of Africa's history, its great civilizations, its inventions, African solutions, and what others have said and are saying about Africa? The will of young Africans to empower and transform Africa will depend on the power of their minds, which will bear fruit and serve the interests of future generations in Africa and the world.





GIMAC Engagement with African Union

Please tell us more about the AU youth division and the role it plays in youth engagement at AU level.

The Youth Division is the division responsible for Africa's Youth Agenda at the African Union Commission (AUC). The Division is in charge of addressing issues concerning:

- Youth policy development: the African Youth Charter;
- Legal frameworks for Youth development;
- Programmatic framework: African Youth Decade Plan of Action (2009–2018);
- Youth capacity building and enhancing employability skills through the African Union Youth Volunteers Corps (AU-YVC);
- Partnership building and resource mobilization;
- Promoting Youth participation through activities such as organizing Youth Forums and Celebrating the African Youth Day

The superpower of the youth division is that almost 95% of the colleagues who work and deliver on the work are young people and so we maintain a vested interest in ensuring our work is representative of the needs of youth. We do this through thematic consultations delivered through survey's, physical/online consultations and data analysis. The DNA of the youth division is to disrupt the status quo and develop new and dynamic ways to ensure our audiences are included and that youth affairs are systematically integrate into global conversations towards achieving optimal youth development into the work of all stakeholders.

How has the AU Youth Division engaged with the GIMAC Young Women Network

I can mention several joint engagements the Youth Division has had with the GIMAC Young Women Network, but to name a few, we collaborated on the development of a toolkit for "Meaningful Involvement and Engagement of Girls and Young Women in African Union Processes and Platforms." This initiative was led by the She Leads Pan African Regional Programme and GIMAC. This toolkit will give guidance to girls and young women on how they can engage with the AU through different capacities and ensure the work they do at the grassroot level contribute to the continental processes. We soft launched this tool during the 3rd



JANICE KHUMALO

Youth Engagement Lead -African Union

Pan African Youth Forum in November 2022 to commemorate Africa Youth day. This event took place under the theme under the theme "Breaking The Barriers to Meaningful Youth Participation and Inclusion In Advocacy". The aim of Africa Youth Day is to convene youth under the auspices of the Pan African Youth Forum and amplify a unified youth movement to transform youth inclusion in Africa.

As part of the AU Summit Pre- Summit Events, we co-hosted the Gender Pre-Summit Events with GIMAC and the UNDP Regional Office. This includes the 9th GIMAC "Youth Advocacy Training" which was held in February 2022 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and virtually, under the theme "Galvanizing the Role of Youth in AfCFTA Implementation." This engagement takes place bi-annually and is aligned with the AU's theme of the year. The Youth Training brought together 150 youth from different African countries to discuss their role in AfCFTA implementation and advocate for the inclusion of youth in decision-making and policy-making processes related to trade in Africa. The Youth Division continues to support other Youth advocacy trainings by providing knowledge and information about the AU processes and providing a

platform for young people to give their recommendations to the African Union. As the youth division sits in the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate we maximize on joint programming as the demographics are so cross cutting and this allows us to work with GIMAC network on issues of advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

How can networks like GIMAC support the AUC initiatives that promote youth

Empowerment and vice-versa.

As the most efficient way to promote youth empowerment towards achieving scale and impact is through mutual shared support. Networks can support AUC initiatives through amplification on multiple diverse platforms (online and offline) as well as galvanizing participation of youth (considering diversity and regional representation) in key spaces such as the commemoration of key dates and events (Africa youth month, Pan African Youth Forum etc). The AUC's support of youth network initiatives means we have to be accessible to the youth demographic and available to provide guidance, information or technical support. It will also allow these networks to leverage on our convening power and assist them in navigating our internal systems to engage and work with other AUC departments.

Africa is experiencing harsh economic times; youth have been most affected by this. What initiatives is AU youth division currently doing to promote youth economic empowerment?

The African Union (AU) has launched the Women and Youth Financial & Economic Inclusion 2030 Initiative (WYFEI 2030). This is a public-private-women and youth partnership that seeks to scale up women and youth financial and economic inclusion, spearheaded by African Union Commission Deputy Chairperson, Dr Monique Nsanzabaganwa and championed by H.E Nana Akufo-Addo President of Ghana. The initiative aims to build a resilient continental ecosystem that fosters impactful multi-level actions to improve women and youth's financial and economic inclusion. The Initiative aims at building and leveraging off of existing continental initiatives in conjunction with Member States, partners, and other relevant stakeholders towards achieving its objectives. The initiative's main objective is to unlock \$100 Billion USD for 10 Million Women and Youth by 2030 through leveraging and building on existing initiatives and financial instruments both in the public and private sector



Youth tokenism is still a big challenge when it comes to youth inclusion. How can we promote meaningful youth participation?

The idea of "meaningful" youth participation can mean different things and have different deliveries to different service providers, stakeholders and to the youth demographic itself..

The AUC youth division uses a youth engagement and leadership framework to deliver our programs that we call "MOCAAP" which highlights the importance of ;- Mobilizing youth for action around an initiative/campaign or project through multiple platforms including digital platforms, social media platforms and physical engagement at a macro and micro level. It is essential to build databases of youth on the continent to ensure the dissemination of targeted information such as employment opportunities, information on health and well-being, commemoration key dates etc.

Orientation which focuses on building the capacity of young people through training and skills development, especially 21st century skills necessary for youth to enter the workforce and participate in decision making positions in their own spaces. We do this in the youth division through delivery of the Youth Engagement and Development Toolbox. Facilitating Conversations between youth and between young people and duty bearers/thought leaders etc through multi platforms that ensure young people in rural communities, youth living with disabilities and other marginalized groups voices are amplified towards social accountability and inclusion.

Activation supports enabling young people to do things in their community, through proving funding, seed grants and paying forward what they learnt to build the capacity of youth in their ecosystem through Advocacy. Finally in order to reach youth at scale and impact, it is important to rely on shared value Partnerships and use a multi sector approach towards ensuring that youth are meaningfully participating in their development.

What is the African Union's commitment to youth?

The African Union's commitment to youth is to unleash their potential by achieving youth parity, enabling development and fostering meaningful engagement and participation. The foundation of this commitment lies in the 1 million Next Level Initiative. The initiative is concerned with scaling-up youth development and engagement strategies and initiatives for impact. It is a multi-stakeholder partnership involving the public and private sectors, and most importantly the young people of Africa. It seeks to provide tangible opportunities in the areas of Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Engagement and Health & Well-being – the 4Es and H – by the year 2030.

Plan International

Plan International will continue to support efforts of GIMAC Young Women Network until it becomes a strong global movement of our continent. We are impressed by the changes we have seen in girls and young women who have been exposed to this network



SAM NORGAH
Director Plan International African Union
Liaison Office

Please introduce yourself.

Sam Norgah, Director Plan International African Union Liaison Office. I would like to use this opportunity to congratulate the GIMAC Young Women Network on the occasion of your 10th anniversary – ayekoo.

You have been a vibrant He for She Advocate, What motivates you? I'm motivated by three things:

My upbringing plays a big role. My mother instilled in us that, there's no work assigned to boys or girls and that everyone is capable of performing any chores especially at home

ii. The issues of gender inequalities that we experience and are exposed to on a daily basis. I always wanted to make a difference

iii. I recognize everyone of us is change agent and so I need to be part of the solution and use my sphere of influence to make that change happen

What are the 5 key things you want to see achieved in relation to girls and young women rights in Africa?

i. An enabling environment for both boys and girls to thrive and achieve and live their dreams

ii. Allocation of resources to improve the quality of lives of girls

iii. A strong continental movement of girls and young women backed with strong advocacy that results in the implementation of legislations, laws and policies across the continent.

iv. The need to create and support platforms for girls and young women to be involved in decision making at different levels

v. Girls economic and political empowerment and activism – led by girls and young women

Plan international has played a significant role in the establishment of GIMAC Young Women network. Talk to us about that.

As an organization that strives for a just world that advances children's rights and equality for girls, we have been working with partners at all levels to improve the quality of lives of children particularly girls. Therefore, we intentionally collaborated and supported the development, institutionalization and strengthening of GIMAC young women Network. We believe in girls and young women and we do understand that, to address the cycle of poverty, discrimination, abuse and inequality, we need to create a platform for learning, sharing and dissemination of information for girls to make informed decisions about their lives, hence our commitment to the establishment of the GIMAC young women network. Plan International will continue to support efforts of GIMAC young women network until it becomes a strong global movement of our continent. We are impressed by the changes we have seen in girls and young women who have been exposed to this network

What recommendations do you have for the GIMAC Young Women Network as it grows and continues to reach out to more young people in Africa.

Firstly, I would like to thank the leadership of both GIMAC and the GIMAC Young Women Network for the productive engagement and successes we have achieved together over the years. I would like to make the following recommendations as the networks grows and expands:

- i GIMAC Young Women Network should continue to operate continentally however, there is the need to consciously include other network members throughout the continent, especially in regions that are underrepresented.
- ii. The need to institutionalize and create a platform for continuous learning and engagement so that, other GYW across the continent can access information that's generated through the Network
- iii. Create a strong follow up (accountability) mechanism to track progress made by participants who attend the GIMAC training in other to ensure a strong, influential and sustained network

One of the biggest challenges for youth networks in Africa is funding. Young people are advocating for flexible funding that is tailored to meet their diverse needs. What is your take on this?

Yes, I do agree that funding is a challenge especially for girls and youth networks. I would encourage the GIMAC GYW Network to reach out to other organisations to support the great work you are doing. Equally, it will be important to lobby respective Ministries that are responsible youth at the national level to support the work of GIMAC GYM Network. This will require that, the Network itself adopts a strategic and proactive initiatives for this to happen.

As an organisation, Plan International has instituted a Youth Resourcing Programme and influencing to support and promote the work of GYM through models such as:

- i Flexible Funding: This Fund reaches young people in ways that work for them and is flexible and responsive to their needs; funding is not project specific and youth can re-allocate resources to changed needs during the duration of the funding contract.
- ii. Money Plus Model: Offers direct funding and additional support based on identified needs by youth themselves. Build relationships over time, and value different forms of change.
- iii. The Annual Girls Advocacy Award: we just initiated this award (in collaboration with GIMAC) to support the work of young women across the continent. This is a competitive award that provide seed money for innovative advocacy work by girls. I'm glad this awards will be launched during this session

Plan is committed to this Network and will continue to engage and support young people. On a personal note, I would like to thank the Network for the cordial relationship and friendship I have enjoyed working with you over the years. I would like to use my final engagement (as a Plan AULO staff) to wish you the very best on this life-changing journey you are embarking on and promise to support this Network with my next organisation.

The Voice of #HeForShe

Gender issues do not primarily mean and insinuate that it is all about women. My learning has been that for us to achieve gender parity, Men ought to and must be involved in the movement.



KEITH ANDERE
African Youth Commission

My Name is Keith Andere from the African Youth Commission. I had the rare privilege to attend the first ever Youth Advocacy Workshop and fortunate enough to be part of the planning team that worked on the structure and the format of the workshop. I had very great experience working both as a planner for the event as well as a facilitator of some of the sessions.

The first cohort of the training was very lively and charged to grow the network as the training was a great platform to learn various ways to engage with the African Union as well as understand lobbying and influencing strategies to employ on the pre – summit as well as other advocacy processes.

How long have you collaborated with the network and What Kind of Support have you given to the GIMAC Young Women Network?

Since the inception 5 Years ago, the African Youth Commission as an established Pan African Youth Network has provided technical support and expertise to the organization and the growth of the GYWN. I had the pleasure to support the management and leadership of the GYWN with technical expertise which included management of Communication and Technical Aspects during the trainings and served at the advisory committee member. I have also had the pleasure to support the network with partnerships, resource mobilization and project proposals that landed them one of the projects that they are currently implementing in several African countries.

As a #HeforShe Champion, What role have you played in advocating for Gender Equality in Africa?

I have been privileged to support the advocacy for Gender Equity in Africa in various capacities. The GIMAC Network, (mother Network of the GYWN) is a CSO led Network that convenes the Pre – Summit CSO consultations on the sidelines of the African Union Heads of States and Government Summit meetings. GIMAC Network was founded in 2002 during the transformation of the OAU to AU to champion for Gender Mainstreaming in the African Union.

I have been part of over 14 Pre Summits supporting the advocacy in various ways as a volunteer, speaker and session moderator, communication lead as well as a mentor to many. It's through the mentorship agenda that we supported the formation and strengthening of a youth network that can ensure we consistently bring in new voices and amplify what many youths are doing on the national and community levels.

How can we encourage more young Men to advocate for gender equality in their communities, countries, and Regions?

Gender issues does not primarily mean and insinuate that it is all about women. My learning has been that for us to achieve gender parity, Men ought to and must be involved in the movement. To this end, I would encourage men to get close to these kinds of conversations as they stand to make the community better when they stand for the wholistic development agenda for the benefit of our communities.

As one of the founding Members of the network, what do you hope to see the network achieve in the next 5 years.

In my view, the GYWN has done and achieved such a milestone. In just first five years they were able to set up the network, build the structures, vote in leadership, conduct the advocacy workshops and trainings, attract donor funding, and implement the program in various African countries. This just shows how relevant and how much potential the network has for the future.

In the next five years, I would envision the network having had strong institutional systems and capacity to attract more donor funding, National chapters that are strong and with the ability to implement activities and lobby and advocacy at the national level. I would also wish to see the Youth Advocacy training be cascaded down to the national level to ensure capacity building at the national level.

What is your advice to young people actively involved in advocating for change in Africa?

Advocacy and policy influencing is a long process. It is important to understand various advocacy processes that provide the platform for engagement. Content is important in advocacy. It is what makes an engagement meaningful. There is need to be consistency and acknowledgement of the small milestones and wins that happen as slow as it may seem.





Our Activities / Projects



Past Projects



SRHR related programs/Projects



COVID-19 Gender Responses Campaign July- August 2021



Replication of the Accelerated Action for Maternal and Neonatal Mortality Reduction Project to meet Agenda 2063 and SDGs Targets in Kenya; June to December 2021



She Leads Africa Regional Project - July 2021 to June 2025



Bi- annual Youth Advocacy Trainings 2018- present



Nhanga



Africa Young Women Beijing+25 Mobilization



FEM - FOSTER. ENABLE. MOBILIZE Campaign- October and November 2020



Africa Youth Front on Corona Virus

African Youth Front on Coronavirus was a multi-stakeholder's advocacy group of youth and intergenerational networks to support the implementation of the African Continental Strategic Plan for COVID-19 pandemic. The group was an African Union framework that engaged African youth in decision-making and a seat at the table to contribute youth-led solutions and co-lead Africa's response to the pandemic.

The GIMAC YOUNG Women, led by the office of the African Union Special Envoy on Youth Organized, mobilized, and united Youth and Grass-root civil society to raise awareness on Africa CDC preventive measures from experts. The network coordinated the Virtual African Union Youth Consultations Series on COVID-19 to regularly inform, brief and engage youth constituencies and address the needs of especially marginalized youth.

Through these consultations, Youths highlighted key challenges they were facing during the pandemic including increase in gender-based violence and scarcity of Reproductive healthcare education and services. Lastly the project raised awareness about Africa CDC preventive measures and empowered youth with continental information from experts. The Consultations led to an Africa Youth Led Policy Paper





COVID-19 Gender Responses Campaign July- August 2021

GIMAC, supported by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) launched a digital campaign dubbed “#COVID19GenderResponses” in the month of August that ran every week to raise awareness on COVID19 recovery efforts in Africa and scale up actions on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) in AU members’ states. The online campaign series brought together organs of African Union Commission, United Nations Agencies, Institutional leaders, renowned women leaders, young women and civil societies, in a well- designed citizen’s engagement model that creates a platform for open and frank discussions on the progress and milestones achieved in Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, the existing and emerging challenges such as COVID19 that threatened to reverse or decelerate the accumulated gains.

Through this #COVID19GenderResponses campaign, the network held discussions on impact of COVID on peace and security, access to education, access to Sexual Reproductive health services and economic empowerment. Through the weekly twitter chats young people shared the challenges they faced in accessing healthcare services and came up with youth led solutions. On Twitter, the central platform of the campaign, the network registered an overall impression of 1,685,856 people, with posts reaching 535,111 people. These translated to direct total engagement of 46,139 people during the report period of the campaign. The network tweets were retweeted 260 times translating to 86 new followers. The Zoom platform attracted 567 registered participants of all the registered participants 372 participated. During the Live session, we were able to provide simultaneous interpretation in English and French which made the engagement very inclusive. We were able to livestream the sessions on Facebook where they registered cumulative viewership of 620views. This livestream broadcast allowed participants who were unable to connect at the time of the meeting to catch up on the deliberations later.

She Leads Africa Regional Project July 2021 to June 2025

She Leads Africa Regional Program is a joint program of Plan International Netherlands, Defence for Children – ECPAT the Netherlands (DCI-ECPAT), African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), and Terre des Hommes the Netherlands (TdH). Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands from January 2021- December 2025. Being Implemented in 7

countries in Africa namely: Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Africa Regional Program is being implemented with AUC and RECs like EAC, ECOWAS, and IGAD.).

GIMAC Young Women is currently implementing the project in the 7 She Leads countries. which are heavily characterized by discriminatory gender and age-related social norms deny and restrict civic space for GYW, limiting their rights to move freely, voice opinions and engage in public life.

At regional Level such as the African Union, there is still under representation of girls and Young women leaders. GYW lack adequate knowledge on how to interact and engage at such high levels and are sometimes intimidated. There has also been lack of proper linkage or rural women networks to such a platform. This therefore prevents GYW from taking up leadership positions and influence policies that affect them. Through the network, the project will empower young women to advocate for issues such as SRHR both in their communities and at regional level.



Replication of the Accelerated Action for Maternal and Neonatal Mortality Reduction Project to Meet Agenda 2063 and SDGs Targets in Kenya; June to December 2021

GIMAC Young Women Network with support from MSD for Mothers (MfM) organized continent-wide advocacy to support and promote a strategic engagement for national and regional advocacy for accelerated action for maternal and neonatal mortality reduction in Africa to meet SDG 3.1 target (which is to reduce the maternal mortality rate below 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030). This project targeted first Nigeria, Senegal and later replicated in Kenya and Zimbabwe). GIMAC Young Women Network Conducted the National Baseline Report, documented I Lived experiences of women to influence policies during the 2022 Regional Policy Dialogue on Maternal Health. And also developed communication and knowledge products to guide youths on healthcare advocacy.



Bi- annual Youth Advocacy Trainings 2018 - present

The GIMAC Young Women holds Bi-Annual Youth Training before the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa. The Youth training aims to build capacity, knowledge and expertise of young women and girls for their effective involvement and contribution to the agenda on gender equality. The training is divided into the sex thematic areas of Health, Education, Governance, Peace and Security, Economic empowerment, and Human Rights. Each of these sessions is facilitated by young people from partner organizations. The training gives a platform to increase and strengthen young women and girls including those living in the rural areas participation, commitment, leadership, and partnerships in activities at the regional level. At the end of the training the youth come up with recommendations which feed into the GIMAC Outcome statement that is shared with the African Union.

Nhanga

Nhanga is cultural traditional space which is also known as a women-only safe space. Through GIMAC Young Women Partners, Rozaria Memorial trust, the network holds this space every quarter. Nhanga was traditionally used as an intergenerational space of women-mentorship in the Shona/Bantu culture. A space where girls could discuss various matters at the age of adulthood, from private topics including marital conduct, to broader topics of moral virtues.

This women-only zone which translates to 'girls' room' offers those who take part confidentiality and protection from anyone who may pose risk – even parents. The network implements Nhanga to ensure young women from the communities get to discuss matters that are often considered private such as sex education, reproductive healthcare, menstruation. Through this space, the network aims to educate girls from rural communities and also attempt to change harmful social norms and practices, including child marriage to empower women, and facilitate counselling support.



FEM - Foster. Enable. Mobilize Campaign October & November 2020

The African Union (AU) Office of the Youth Envoy (OYE) in collaboration with AU Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) with the support of strategic partners, convened Five Africa Young Women Beijing+25 Regional Consultations and Global Intergenerational Dialogue to develop Africa Young Women Manifesto. 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) - the most progressive global blueprint for advancing women's rights. In line with this GIMAC Young Women Network in Partnership with the office of the Youth Envoy worked together to mobilize African Young Women through 5 Regional Consultations and Global Intergenerational dialogue and Produced an African Young Women Manifesto, with 10 practical demands which were presented at the Generation Equality Forums in 2021. The consultations were conducted under the themes of Gender-Based Violence, Economic Justice and Rights, Bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); Feminist action for climate justice; Technology and innovation for gender equality; and Feminist movements and leadership.



Highlights from the past trainings





GIMAC Young Women Shared experiences





Vickjune Excel

Wutoh

Liberia

I have dedicated my youth to serving my country's women and girls community for over ten years as a female student politician and a voice for women and girls in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence »

My name is Vickjune Excel Wutoh; I come from Liberia, West Africa, and am the Founder of the Initiative for Youth Empowerment and Economic Development (IYEED Inc)., an economic empowerment hub that promotes gender equality through advocacy and programs. As a local NGO, IYEED has focused on leadership and empowerment, sexual reproductive health and rights, community service initiatives, and human rights advocacy.

I learned about GIMAC Young Women Network through its Chair, Karen Ondwasi, a young women-centric leader. Since joining GIMAC Young Women Network, I have physically attended two (2) advocacy training workshops in Addis Ababa and Lusaka. I am passionate about meeting new people and learning from them because I believe we can build on each other's stories and experiences for the better. I experienced this during the GIMAC meeting, I met some of the most powerful African women who have laid the foundation of advocacy for women's rights. This was a lifetime experienced which motivated me to keep advocating for girls and young women in my community and country.

After attending the trainings, the GIMAC young women Network, supported IYEED in implementing three programs, two outreach activities, and one advocacy training that benefited over 500 young women and girls, including community leaders and other stakeholders in Liberia.

As a young Gender Equality activist, I have dedicated my youth to serving my country's women and girls community for over ten years as a female student politician and a voice for women and girls in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence. I am committed to continuing this path and making a lasting impact on the lives of young women in the years to come.

Glory Orejesu

Ajayi Nigeria

With the influence of the network that I have built over the years from GIMAC, I was able to do my internship with the African Union Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYDD) after my Masters program and this helped me to put to good use the knowledge gained from the program



I joined GIMAC in 2017 after my undergraduate degree. I was young full of life and had questions about my career path. At the time, we didn't have a youth group, but it was created as African Union began to focus on the youths.

GIMAC became a springboard for my career path today as every meeting I attended added more to my knowledge about women, international development, and the daily issues plaguing the world. GIMAC not only helped me understand these issues but opened me up to opportunities beyond my imagination and continuously gave me reasons to expose myself and go for the best. Some of them are I became a Champion for ONE.org and this helped me transfer and put to use some of the advocacy skills I had learnt from GIMAC.

I set up an NGO that helps children understand and identify any forms of abuse, and this was communicated to them through experiential learning methods which impacted 1,700 children in western Nigeria. This would not have been possible if i hadn't picked up some skills and knowledge on how to run an NGO from GIMAC.

In addition, I attended fully funded conferences on various thematic areas which gave me an opportunity to learn. I also got an opportunity to attend the 57th UN Commission on Status of Women (CSW) in New York which greatly impacted on me to advocate more for the rights of women. I later won a Commonwealth Scholarship to study Gender and International Development at the University of Warwick United Kingdom. With the influence of the network I have built over the years from GIMAC I was able to do my internship with the African Union Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYDD) after my Msc program and this helped me to put to good use the knowledge gained from my Msc program. GIMAC will forever be a part of my story and life because I have benefited from our leaders who continuously fight for the rights of young women and girls all over Africa and serve as a source of information and hope for the younger generation.

My advice to Young people is "Riding on the wings of giants and elders who have gone ahead of you will help you move and fly faster in life and make fewer mistakes," and this is what GIMAC is and represents.



Ruwadzano Muzvondiwa

Zimbabwe

My first experience with the GIMAC Young Women Network started in 2016, when it was just a mere thought, an idea and a fantasy. It all started with a vision of young women who wanted their voices heard in the regional space.



My name is Ruwadzano Muzvondiwa the Director and Founder of Oscar and Winnie Foundation in Zimbabwe. GIMAC was the best experience of my life when I was working for Rozaria Memorial Trust in Zimbabwe as the Gender Justice Officer. My first experience with the GIMAC Young Women Network started in 2016, when it was just a mere thought, an idea and a fantasy. It all started with a vision of young women who wanted their voices heard in the regional space. Our participation encouraged us to be part of the voice of advocacy and a voice for young women across Africa. The first GIMAC training in 2016, Dr Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda asked all the young women in the room,

‘How are you representing other women in the Region, what is your role as a young women to empower your peers and communities’

This experience opened my eyes and allowed me to effectively represent young women and girls in my communities. It marked the beginning of a movement where young women aspired to become leaders and make a greater impact in their communities. I was honoured to be chosen as the Southern Africa Representative in the GIMAC Young Women Network. Through various platforms, we advocated for the empowerment of women and girls through our dedicated advocacy work.

Through the work with GIMAC and Rozaria Memorial Trust platforms such as Nhangwa were done giving women and girl’s spaces to share their stories and inspire each other. It was also a platform for sisterhood and connections. More so, we managed to work with traditional leadership and policy makers to end child marriage and advocate for access to health, education and end gender based violence.

The best part of this journey was also becoming an entrepreneur and a founder of an organisation with the skills I learnt from GIMAC. To the young people I advise them to take each opportunity and use it wisely, If it wasn’t for the opportunities of the GIMAC youth Network then I wouldn’t be where I am today. I am forever grateful of the spaces that I managed to not only be part of but also the lessons I learnt from the experience.



Hayat Roda

South Sudan

Create a supportive community. Collaboration in advocacy is vital, as no one achieves success alone. A strong team will provide support, feedback, and organization, leading to effective initiatives. They also offer a space for discussion, reflection, and sharing accomplishments. Working together and sharing the workload leads to stronger outcomes to help us build the future of Africa

I am Hayat Roda Shaban, a 24-year-old woman from South Sudan. I volunteer with the Eve Organization for Women Development, a partner of Plan International South Sudan under the Leadership of Peace project. One of the most remarkable youth trainings I attended was the 9th GIMAC Youth Advocacy training in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, held on February 12, 2023. The training focused on the role of youth in implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It was an amazing experience where I had the chance to meet and discuss with international peace advocates and fellow young people from different African countries. We exchanged ideas, shared challenges, and explored solutions in the scope of AfCFTA.

I am currently working to have a project like the 'She Leads' in South Sudan.

I learnt about the She Leads Project from the 9th GIMAC Youth Advocacy training since some of the African countries were already implementing it. I am therefore working hard so it can be extended to our country as well. This is because in South Sudan we need more youth especially women and girls in leadership "She Leads," a flagship program of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), works to empower women with the skills and knowledge to participate and take on leadership roles in political and electoral processes through a series of beginner, intermediate and advanced trainings. To date, "She Leads" has trained over 7500 women in eight countries and continues to expand. Each program is tailored to the cultural and contextual needs of the country, and reflects lessons learned from successful "She Leads" alumnae. As a result of the program, "She Leads" alumnae have developed formal and informal personal networks, increased their self-confidence and taken on leadership roles to advance women's political participation.

During the Training, I have learnt about the "Nhangas" concept, which is a cultural safe space for girls and Young Women. I strongly believe that this concept should be expanded throughout Africa. The "Nhangas" provides a welcoming environment for young people to openly discuss their issues and find solutions. Often, when it comes to discussing matters concerning youth, we are not given the opportunity to express ourselves, especially within the government. We are perceived as a threat, and decisions are made for us without involving us in the discussions. However, the best way to solve a problem is by involving those directly affected by it. Therefore, I am determined to bring the "Nhangas" cultural youth safe space to South Sudan, where it can provide a platform for young people to engage, express themselves, and actively participate in finding solutions to our challenges.

As young people, it's important to know that Each and Every Voice matter. And young people should not be afraid to speak up. Be clear on why you are advocating and what you are advocating for. I recommend a book Getting to Yes by Roger Fischer and William Ury. It will help build your negotiation skills.



Yara Ouda

Egypt

Enrich yourself with as much knowledge and skills as you can. We are lucky we are in the digital era where we have so much access to information. Network and Learn from each other You are leaders and leaders need to lead from a point of knowledge



I am Yara Ouda from Egypt. I am an experienced professional in international development, specifically focusing on various areas such as gender equality, economic development, sustainable development, peace and security, humanitarian diplomacy, conflict prevention, climate change and security, youth development and employment, and gender equality and empowerment.

In 2018, I had the opportunity to join GIMAC (Gender Is My Agenda Campaign). During my time as a liaison officer at the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, where I served as the liaison officer to the first ever African Union Youth Envoy. It was a rewarding experience to be surrounded by fellow young individuals during advocacy and capacity-building workshops. Together, we fostered a safe and supportive environment to share knowledge, experiences, and best practices, addressing numerous challenges facing young people in Africa. Subsequently, I was honoured to be selected as the first North Africa Representative to the Young Women Network under for two consecutive years (2019-2022). I have participated in and facilitated multiple training sessions, including two advocacy training events during GIMAC on the Margins of the African Union Summit. It has been a valuable experience to contribute to workshops focused on policy, advocacy, and capacity building for women leaders, youth, and civil society organizations. These sessions aim to promote gender equality and integrate women's empowerment in line with the African Union's themes. The workshops have provided an opportunity for youth to share experiences, learn from each other, and gain a better understanding of the continent's policies, challenges, and solutions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was particularly challenging to ensure the inclusion of young women and girls especially from rural and remote areas in our initiatives. However, GIMAC Young Women Network, in collaboration with the African Union Youth Envoy Ms. Aya Chebbi, successfully established connections with local NGOs and youth-led initiatives to ensure that no one was left behind. I was delighted to contribute to advocacy efforts focused on youth and women's healthcare, promoting COVID-19 precautions, and addressing the pandemic's implications on our lives through initiatives like #MaskUpStandUp. We also worked towards expediting improvements in education and healthcare systems at the national level. Engaging in discussions and debates, particularly with Generation Z, who are tech-savvy and filled with innovative and unconventional ideas, was truly enjoyable.

Whenever I have the opportunity to speak or moderate at events, I always feel enthusiastic about sharing my experiences within the GIMAC Young Women Network and all the good work we have done. I aim to guide and inspire the audience, especially young people involved in youth- and gender-led organizations, by highlighting opportunities for them to amplify their voices. Recognizing the importance of mentorship, I have proposed the creation of an advisory board of alumni who can serve as mentors for young women and girls in different areas of life. This way, we can promote knowledge and skill development among the network's new board members and candidates. I will continue supporting GIMAC to ensure North Africa actively participates in continental conversations.

My advice would always be, "Be patient, be good listeners, don't rush to become, enrich yourself with knowledge and skills as much as you can, and always look after your mental and physical health"



Elizabeth Omodolapo Lawal

Nigeria

My advice to young people would be something My dad always tells me “Never turn down any opportunity to serve, because you never know which one might favour you or which is aligned to your destiny” and this has always been my mantra. Cheers!

I am Elizabeth Omodolapo Lawal, I am currently a treasurer with YWCA local group Festival town, Lagos Nigeria. In the past I served as a youth chair with YWCA Lagos branch. I am a committed youth leader who advocates for social development and social engagement. My work includes advocating for gender equality in education, health care and community development. I am also a teacher with a background in Adult education.

I got to know about GIMAC Young Women Network from YWCA during a youth advocacy training that was organized in 2020. During the training I networked with other youth from different countries and other youth leaders. I learnt a lot through this experience and officially joined the GIMAC Young Women Network as an active member so that I could continue to pursue, my passion to advocate for the girl child.

I have attended 4 advocacy Trainings, 2 online and 2 physically which were held at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Lusaka, Zambia. Attending the physical trainings meant so much to me because it gave me the opportunity to physically interact with leaders from different forms, tribes, country, religion who had different beliefs, values, and practices. I got to interact and work with other youths from different countries in Africa and we shared our experiences and challenges we faced and discussed on how we could actualize sustainable development goals in our different capacities.

Through the knowledge from the training, I got to support in advocating for issues in the West African Region within the network. I also got to represent the network in different campaigns including the Africa Youth Front on Covid19 which was led by the African Union Youth Envoy, Ms Aya Chebbi. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I supported the youth in my community by creating awareness about the virus and advocating for healthy communities. Under my leadership, YWCA Nigeria donated face masks and sanitizers to communities to keep them safe.

Through the network, I also got a chance to attend the 3rd African Girls Summit in Niger, where I continued to advocate for inclusion of girls and young women in development processes and advocated for their rights. I am grateful to the network because, it has helped me build my network. I am now part of a network of young people who share a common goal, gender equality. I Have also been able to build my self confidence who can lead teams, organize campaigns, chair meetings etc. My highlight of my participation at GYWN was coordinating the 2023 Young Women election which was a huge success and demonstrated utmost transparency! This meant a lot to me because I was able to have a clear



Oyella Eunice

Anthony

South Sudan

The GIMAC Advocacy Trainings have equipped me with leadership skills and have been a source of inspiration. I have had the privilege of interacting and learning from influential individuals who have made significant contributions to advocacy, particularly in the areas of gender equality and women empowerment.



I would like to express my gratitude to Plan International for their ongoing support to me and the youth in South Sudan. Since 2018, I have been actively engaged with Plan International, starting as a member of the Champion of Change at Fulla Secondary School in Nimule. Currently, I hold the position of Speaker of the Children and Young People Parliament. Thanks to Plan International, I had the opportunity to attend two advocacy trainings outside of South Sudan, in Mombasa and Addis Ababa, in February 2022 as part of the GIMAC conference. These trainings have equipped me with leadership skills and have been a source of inspiration, as I had the privilege of interacting with influential individuals who have made significant contributions to advocacy, particularly in the areas of gender equality and women empowerment.

As a result of the advocacy trainings I have attended, I am now leading a group of young girls and boys who are actively involved in a campaign against gender inequality, peacebuilding, early and forced marriages, and the prevention of illicit drug consumption among youth. I currently hold the position of Honorable Speaker of the Children and Young People Parliament, where I connect young individuals with elected representatives at the state level through the annual Youth People Forum. We also hold quarterly parliamentary sessions that bring together stakeholders to address and discuss issues concerning children and youth.

Young people possess immense energy and have the potential to be catalysts for the change they aspire to see. It is crucial to provide them with a safe space to exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities.



Nokutenda N. Magama

Zimbabwe

For those in rural set up just like myself, let us continue to advocate for digital inclusion so that we are not left behind during this era of digital revolution. Our voices matter and they should be heard'

I am an aspiring development practitioner currently studying towards an undergraduate degree in Development Studies at Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe. I am a passionate young woman who works with girls and young women from rural marginalized areas and have been doing advocacy work for the past four years paying particular attention to ending harmful cultural activities working with traditional fraternity.

The first-time I got to know GIMAC through Rozaria Memorial Trust. I went on doing further research to understand how it operates through visiting its social media handles. I reached out and during the 2020 Youth Advocacy Training, I presented in the Education Cluster. The presentation allowed me to share my experience of girls and young women from rural aread during the Covid 19 pandemic. Due to Covid 19 my presentation was dwelling much on the importance of Nhanga as a safe during the pandemic time. As a leader of Nhanga I cascaded the information I got to my community Nhanga's so that they understood about regional advocacy, its process, and its importance.

Through the youth training I acquired skill on how to use social media as a powerful tool to lobby. I immediately put this to practice during the main GIMAC Session where myself together with more than thirty girls used twitter to convey our message to policy makers. For more information kindly check my twitter handle @MagamaNokutenda.

Last year during the mid-year Youth Advocacy training , I managed to physically attend the convening in Zambia, Lusaka. This was an amazing experience through interacting and networking with young people from all over Africa as well as sharing the experience of girls and young women with regards to unpaid care work and nutrition which was part and parcel of the theme. The GIMAC space shed light to the fact that African countries are facing same problem especially in rural areas women are victims of different forms abuses and there is high rate of malnutrition. I also facilitated a dialogue space at the regional level with traditional leaders, policy makers and young people around Africa sharing experiences on good practices in trying to eradicate negative cultural practices that hinders development in Africa. This boosted my confidence. I was excited because I was bringing the voices of Young People from my community to such a platform ensuring no one is left behind.

My advice to young people who want to venture into advocacy work is that criticism is the order of the day within the space. Be bold enough to face the world and make change. It starts with you as an individual, use social media as much as you can to advocate for different issues partaking in your respective countries. For those in rural set up just like myself use, let us continue to advocate for digital inclusion so that we are not left behind during this era of digital revolution.



Joy Shammah

Ajuang

Kenya

"Vijana Tuzidi sana" loosely translated as let's keep on keeping on! We, the youth, have the power to influence the change that will carry our continent forward. Tuzidi sana!



Joy Shammah Ajuang is a 25 year old lady who is deeply passionate about community work, specifically community health. I am the founder and Executive Director of a community-based organisation called Footprints of Hope. I work with the youth and women at grassroot level to address menstrual hygiene management issues, reproductive health, addressing teenage pregnancies in society and youth empowerment programs. The main SDGs in our scope of work are SDG 1, 3, 4, 5 and 17.

I first attended the GIMAC Youth training in February 2022 during the 7th GIMAC Youth Advocacy training in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I really enjoyed the training. It's always amazing and encouraging to see, meet, interact, network and learn from fellow youth who are also doing impactful work in their own capacities. I loved the intergenerational aspect where we got the chance to also learn from the women and men who laid the foundation for us in advocacy. I was privileged to be part of the team that gave recommendations to the AU on matters governance and how we can integrate gender equality and nutrition in Africa.

I took home so many lessons from the two training programs that I have been able to attend. Our programs at Footprints of Hope have been upgraded courtesy of the interactions I had with fellow young directors. For instance, we have the Nhangas sessions in the teen mums program, a session that allows the teen mums to interact with young women and adult women too, promoting intergenerational learning. I got the idea of the Nhangas sessions from the Rozaria Memorial Trust sessions at the training in Zambia.

After the GIMAC Youth Advocacy training I was also privileged to be part of the 4TH GIMAC RECS meeting where the discussion was centered on how to use Africa's agro-system framework to achieve food sovereignty and nutritional security for women, economic empowerment as a factor that enhances resilience in nutrition and time poverty. The insights I got therein have enabled me to introduce economic empowerment Programs to the youth and young women in my community through agriculture. The youth are involved in farming of indigenous crops like cassava, nuts, sesame and indigenous vegetables. I have also been able to co-host an event under the She Leads program in my community together with fellow members of the GIMAC Youth Network. We hosted a stakeholders dialogue and a community awareness walk that to highlight issues of GBV in Western Kenya.

My advice to young people actively involved in advocating for change in Africa would be a Swahili statement that goes "Vijana Tuzidi sana" loosely translated as let's keep on keeping on. Don't stop believing that we, the youth, have the power to influence the change that will carry the continent forward. Tuzidi sana!



Rehema Malole

Uganda

Looking back, it is interesting to note that all this happened just because I sent a simple twitter message to GYWN and reached out to the chair and expressed my desire to be part of the network, Crazy! Right? If I were to give advice to other young women, I would tell them, “Don’t be hesitant to reach out!”

My name is Rehema Malole, a team leader at My People and Culture Association in Uganda. I have a passion for community work. My day-to-day work involves interacting with girls and women in the community. I advocate for gender equality and constantly work with community leaders to create awareness on women’s rights.

I got to know about GIMAC Young Women Network through twitter and reached out to be part of it. Since joining GIMAC young Women Network, I have attended 5 GIMAC Young Women Trainings both online and physically in Addis Ababa and Lusaka. Attending the physical trainings were eye opening. For the first time, I got to interact and work with other youths from different countries and share our experiences and journeys in advocacy work. I got to interact with Youth Representatives from the African Union and learn how the African Union works. After the trainings, the GIMAC Young Women network gave me an opportunity to represent it in meetings in Uganda including the 3rd Africa Peer Review Mechanism Youth Symposium. Through the knowledge from the training, the network involved me in, I learnt how to use social media as an advocacy tool to share information, mobilize other young people and create awareness.

I am also supporting the network in Implementing The She Leads Project activities in Uganda with focus on Outcome 1 of the project; African leaders, (influential, religious and traditional figures, celebrities, African online influencers) and the media are playing active role in creating positive culture for girl’s activism

I have organized 5 community trainings which were attended by with over 350 young women and girl’s beneficiaries. Through these trainings, I was able to share my knowledge and skills that I had acquired from the network. I also have carried out 7 campaigns in primary and secondary schools in Uganda to create awareness on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). On a personal level, I have been able to mentor and offer counselling services to 125 girls within my community and give them exposure and opportunities for personal development.

My biggest achievement is that I have successfully developed a web based app www.safhealthportal.com for reporting, getting help and sharing experiences on Gender Based Violence. I have a background in engineering and from the experiences working on GBV in the community, I was motivated to create this platform.

Looking back, It is interesting to note that all this happened just because I sent a simple twitter message to GIMAC and reached out to the chair and expressed my desire to be part of the network, Crazy! Right? If I were to give advice to other young women, I would tell them, “Don’t be hesitant to reach out, to connect, to mobilize, to learn, to educate and to advocate for the issues affecting youths until we find a solution”



Edouine Kirere

DRC

GIMAC Young Women Network gave me an opportunity to participate in a Gender Responsive Education Sector Planning workshop in Dakar, Senegal. Through the workshop I highlighted the need for young people to be involved in shaping what gender equality looks like in their education



I am Edouine KIRERE, a women's and girls' rights activist in the DRC. In 2020, I had the opportunity to participate for the first time in the GIMAC youth training with the theme "Silencing the Guns in Africa." This training was particularly meaningful to me as I come from the eastern region of the DRC, which has been ravaged by armed conflict for over two decades. During the training, we had the privilege to draft recommendations that were intended to be presented to African Heads of State. It made me feel like I was contributing to a bigger goal of Silencing the guns in Africa.

I participated in 4 training sessions for young people online and face-to-face and participated in the different spaces on twitter. Participating in these different training courses allowed me first of all to be in contact with several young women active across Africa and to have a network I can turn to in case there is need for advice or exchange of experience. GIMAC Young Women Network gave me an opportunity to participate in a Gender Responsive Education Sector Planning workshop in Dakar, Senegal. Through the workshop I highlighted the need for young people to be involved in shaping what gender equality looks like in their education.

Since I started participating in the GIMAC youth training, it has provided me with the opportunity to raise awareness about gender issues among the young people in my city. Additionally, I have become a member of several networks comprising young women who are actively involved in peacebuilding efforts. As part of these networks, I serve as a mentor to young girls and together we advocate for the issues affecting them in our society. Furthermore, we are dedicated to working towards the protection and promotion of the rights of survivors of sexual violence in our community. I would like to encourage young people to continue participating in capacity building and training workshops. Engaging in these spaces not only enhances knowledge and facilitates impactful actions in our respective communities but also provides an invaluable opportunity to exchange experiences with fellow young individuals from across the continent. The diverse perspectives and strategies shared during these trainings can broaden our horizons and inspire innovative approaches to address the challenges we face. By actively participating in youth training, we can strengthen our collective efforts towards positive change and contribute to a better future for all.



Salwa Apiece

South Sudan

Advocacy is an effective tool to engage and relate with decision-makers and can cause and impact change on a wider scale. Young people who are actively involved in advocacy need to work together to address African problems

My name is Salwa Juan Abdusalam, 28 years old from South Sudan. I have attended two advocacy training sessions conducted by GIMAC Young Women Network. I had a very good experience and enjoyed listening to young people sharing experiences from their countries especially from Ghana, Sierra Leone, and from the other parts of the continent. The platform helped me to network, interact and learn from other young people even from my own country S.Sudan.

After coming back from the training, I successfully joined a project called Determine, Resilient, Empowerment, Aids Free Mentored Safe "DREAMS". It is a project funded by the USAID and implemented by Jhpiego that is targeting adolescent girls and young women, providing them with livelihood skills training. They go through livelihood training and mentorship for a period of six to seven months. After that, they are given a starter kit to come up with business ideas of their choices and implantation plan. These practical skills help them support their families, especially the young women who are part of the program.

In addition, the adolescent girls who acquire these skills become entrepreneurship minded hence, support themselves with payment of school fees as others are students who might have dropped out of school due to lack of funds to pay their school fees. So far, I have seen and heard testimonies of how young people are really changing their lives and making a lot of positive impact in their communities and families. We are not considering only girls who have gone to schools, but we are also considering girls who are school dropouts who have the knowledge, but they are unable to get an opportunity to go back to school but with the businesses they can do the businesses and go back to school and do whatever they aim for the future.

As young people we need to understand that advocacy is an effective tool to engage and relate with decision-makers and can cause and impact change on a wider scale . Young people who are actively involved in advocacy need to work together to address African problems.

There are so many causes to speak up for in Africa, the art of direct or indirect advocacy can be used by young people to get positive change in different sectors. It is, therefore, our solid role and responsibility as young people who are actively engaged in advocacy in the region to ensure we speak on issues that are affecting us currently so that we build a better future for the generations to come in the African Continent.



Ruvarashe Winnet

Miti

Zimbabwe

My engagement with GIMAC has yielded tremendous results including the special appointment of the first African Union Youth Envoy. This happened soon after the 29th AU Summit that was held under the theme harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth. Having advocated for this important youth space meant opening more doors for young people to engage with the African Union and Regional Processes.



I am the Founder Of Youth Vibes Afrika, Pan- African and a global social justice expert in SRHR ,Youth development and empowerment, Education and Gender Equality. I am so proud to be one of the founding member of the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign Young Women Network from Zimbabwe.

I have served the network for 6 years from the year 2017 to 2022. My encounter and engagement with GIMAC has yielded tremendous results that include the special appointment of the first African Union Youth Envoy Ms Aya Chebii. This happened soon after the 29th AU Summit that was held under the theme harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth. Having advocated for this important youth space meant opening more doors for young people to engage with the African Union and Regional Processes.

I have gained so much knowledge during the period I served in the network from the trainings, diplomacy engagements, coaching and mentorship. My personal favourites were conducting Pre-GIMAC Youth Trainings and doing the administration work during the GIMAC Sessions and African Union Summit. The Zeal was driven by much positivity, an open mind, flexibility and as my own father puts, Respect, Responsibility and Discipline!

I am and will forever be grateful to the mentors especially the women that cleared the path for us the young girls and women. Now I run a successful consultancy that focus on youth trainings, mentorship, coaching, teachings to empower the next generation of youths. The consultancy also run Community - Based clubs (She's Activated and He's Activated) that aims at exposing youths to information that stimulates their knowledge base.

My advice to everyone reading this, matter of fact if a youth especially, remember to "keep your roots alive and keep your vibes lit!" Lastly, but not least embrace being you and the net worth of networking with peer youths from across the mother continent Africa.

Farirai Gumbonzvanda

Zimbabwe

To be effective in advocacy and activism, it is crucial to conduct thorough research and have solid knowledge and evidence. Merely relying on protest or demonstration may not be enough in many cases. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Maputo Protocol, a significant women's rights treaty. Understanding the history and context of the women's movement is important for informed decision-making and setting future goals.

My name is Farirai Gumbonzvanda, a 29-year-old from Zimbabwe. I am the founder of a movement called Girls & Goals where we use sports, arts and culture for social Justice. We are particularly focused on young women and girls from rural and resource-poor areas being able to fully enjoy their rights. Currently, I work as a researcher focusing on sexual and reproductive health rights. I have been thrice published in academic journals and done consultancy work for several organizations including Caritas Australia, UNWOMEN, CAFOD and other women's rights-focused organizations. I am a member of the Africa Women Leaders Network (AWLN) Zimbabwe chapter where I currently serve as a co-chair of the Women's Political Participation and Young Women Leadership Committee. I have an avid interest in women's participation in political processes beyond candidacy including campaign management, campaign marketing and analysis of electoral processes.

I have been attending the GIMAC youth advocacy training since their beginning and I have attended all but one since. This has meant that I have also been privy to watching the evolution of the GIMAC Young Women Network (GYWN) itself, a network of young people formed in 2018 from the GIMAC Network, has been recognizing and amplifying young women's voices and their advocacy efforts in their local communities, nations and regions, and their achievements over 5 years. The young women's network has been an integral part of my growth as both a professional and in shaping my identity as a proud pan-African woman.

My participation has evolved from being a passive participant to being a resource person during the training to now a mentorship role wherein I have been recruiting more members and guiding them through the space. During the 33rd GIMAC session, the individual actively participated in the preparatory processes. This included organizing a focused group discussion in Zimbabwe and engaging in planning activities with the GIMAC Secretariat and other partners, including FAWE, FEMNET, and the YWCA.

During the training, I took on a more active role behind the scenes as a member of the communications team. Additionally, after the training, I engaged in advocacy efforts, including visiting the African Union to connect with the youth division and establish a relationship with the first-ever appointed youth envoy, Ms. Aya Chebi. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the individual focused on mentoring and further developed their skills. They were part of a team that facilitated virtual participation of young women from rural areas in Mashonaland East (Murewa) and Mashonaland Central (Shamva) due to travel restrictions.

My advice to young people is , Invest in yourself! You are a resource for Africa and therefore you must be willing to invest in yourself. Invest in building your knowledge base and building your networks as these will expand your sphere of influence. The GIMAC Young Women's Network is a great place to start!





Articles and Blogs

A journey to Gender Sensitive Development

In a fast-changing world, women, girls, children and youths continue to bear the brunt of violence and conflicts in society which in turn makes them susceptible and particularly vulnerable in times of war, conflict, uncertainty and political instability. Therefore, understanding the undeniable link between gender, peace, and security remains cardinal. It is important to note that gender equality is intimately tangled to peace and security

Stable and secure environments contribute to women's empowerment and to the realization of gender equality whilst societies riddled with conflict and violence perpetuate the infringement of women's rights.

As we continue to strive for sustainable peace and security, it becomes crucial to recognize the impact that gender dynamics exert on these vital aspects of human existence. Gender uniquely shapes and affects the experiences of individuals, communities and societies at any given time be it in times of peace or during times of conflict. By actively addressing gender inequalities and promoting gender equality, we can pave the path towards a more peaceful and secure future especially for those in marginalized groups of society.

Peace and security remain a necessary pillar for progress and the development of any individual or society. Women and men are affected by conflict uniquely depending on their varying strengths and vulnerabilities.

Acknowledging these varying differences whilst simultaneously ensuring active engagement and participation of all genders in efforts of peace and society is of great importance and must be prioritized.

Looking back, women and girls have had the unfortunate burden of disproportionately enduring more conflict, loss and violence which makes it crucial to recognize that women and girls embody the essence of strength and resilience and should be seen as potential and active agents of change.

It is therefore a strategic necessity for women and girls to be included in prevention and resolution of violence and conflict so as to beef up peace building processes. Adopting a gender sensitive approach in areas of peace and security will allow for a more diverse pool of knowledge that brings in more perspectives, skills and experiences that enrich the effectiveness and sustainability of peace initiatives that are inclusive. Furthermore, active involvement of women and girls will lead to extensive means of dealing with leading causes of violence and conflict in our society. It will further reflect-the spirit of solidarity in decision making processes, and brings further understanding on to the actual differences of response to conflict with regards to gender and how they can be addressed.

Moving forward, conflicts fuel the violence towards women and gender-based violence serves as an effective barrier to peace. By giving attention to and addressing the central inequalities and imbalances that promote violence, an environment that is intolerant of conflict and violence can be created and societies can become a little more peaceful



**By Taonga Zulu
Zambia**

and just. Similarly, promoting gender equality and women's rights and generation of thorough and inclusive initiatives that challenge implicit social and gender norms and power imbalances that promote violence and also respond to immediate needs is fundamental in the creation of this environment.

In addition, acknowledging the underlying fact that traditional social and gender norms and stereotypes reinforce and promote violence is also key in creating an inclusive approach that recognizes the need for joint efforts of all genders in promoting peace and security. This means there should be active engagement of boys and men in dialogues about gender and ensuring that they too can be champions, allies and advocates for gender equality. With collective effort, negative norms are challenged and this allows for transformative change that fosters a culture of respect, peace and security in our society.

Finally, it remains undeniable the connection between gender, peace and security and this interception remains important for promotion of sustainable development. This further speaks to the importance of acknowledging the need to both advocate for gender equality and ensure the active participation of women in peace- and decision-making processes.

A Letter To The African Leaders

Dear African Leaders,

I express gratitude for your dedication and commitment towards shaping Africa's destiny. I embrace with pride the African continent's strategic framework towards 'The Africa We Want' expressed in AGENDA 2063, the master plan and blueprint to transform Africa into a power house.

In order to fully realise sustainable development, you have committed to prioritise inclusivity as a drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity. Agenda 2063 is a deliberate realisation by you that there is a need to refocus Africa's trajectory and reprioritise social and economic development, continental and regional integration, democratic governance and peace and security amongst other issues aimed at repositioning the continent as a dominant player in the global arena. More significantly, the Maputo Protocol was a seal in recognizing the immense contribution that the women of Africa bring to the table in repositioning the continent as a force to reckon with. I welcome such robust commitment and I am confident that even the young people are keen on engaging and contributing to meaningful development across the continent.

Africa is brimming with talented and resourceful young minds, and your support is essential in fostering an enabling environment to harness this potential. By providing access to mentorship, funding, and technology, we can unlock the potential of African youth, creating job opportunities and driving economic transformation. I also believe that the young people's unique perspectives, fresh ideas, and boundless energy can contribute immensely to the development of our nations. The young people of Africa are filled with untapped potential, ready to unleash creativity and innovation.

They seek opportunities to actively participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives and the future of Africa. By involving the young people in policymaking, you will be sure to harness enthusiasm and passion, and together, we can create sustainable solutions to the challenges we face.

I remind you of Goal 18, Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063, in which you committed to create a positive environment for Youth Activism more particularly for the girl child and young women in Africa. The Maputo Protocol turns 20 years and its gains remain invaluable to the young woman and girl child within the continent. It is the few shortcomings that are key reference in which an urgent call to action is expressed by in this letter. A notable increase in political will and a deliberate creation of spaces for the young women and girls by key AU bodies and African Leaders at National and Regional Level to include girls and young women in key decisions will definitely ensure that Agenda 2063 becomes a reality. I appeal for increased inclusivity and gender equality in all spheres.

Empowering women and girls is not only a moral imperative but also an essential driver of development. I urge you to continue to create opportunities that enable women to participate fully in politics, education, entrepreneurship, and leadership roles. By doing so, we can break down barriers, empower our communities, and drive holistic progress.

Dear African leaders, I believe in Africa's potential, and with your guidance and our collective efforts, as a united front, we can overcome any challenges that lie ahead and transform Africa into a beacon of hope and progress.



SHAMISO MASOKOVERE-MAGOKO
Women and Child Rights Advocate

Reflection on Africa Continental Free Trade Area I (ACFTA) through the eyes of a young women living in a border town

My name is Doreen Okweno Simiyu, Born and raised in Busia, a border town between Kenya and Uganda Border. From a young age, I have always interacted with women trading at the border, casually walking to the border, and buying bananas from them. In fact, as a family we have always preferred getting fruits from the Uganda Side.

For me this was a normal thing and so it is interesting to live in a time where cross-Border trading is being institutionalized and deliberate effort put in place to guide, protect, and promote trade across borders. I am therefore very keen on seeing how this will promote economic empowerment among women. In my opinion AFCFTA looks like an empowering opportunity for these traders. However, I'm wondering which measures will be put in place to ensure big companies with big financial muscles do not take over the markets and render them jobless? Will their trade be swallowed? How will they be supported to scale up? Why do they all just focus on one thing: fruits and vegetables? Is it because they do not have information about other goods they can sell? How can we change this?

On another note, I am aware of the abuse women go through in border towns. Where women are raped and abused, and perpetrators escape to the

next country. How will ACFTA policies ensure that open borders do not promote this abuse? I think governments, CSOs, Partners, Youth Movements that work on ending GBV need to investigate this seriously. Otherwise, we will be solving one problem of improving economies and creating another of increasing cases of women abuse. I also look at AFCFTA as a channel to improve our health sector here since it can allow us to get doctors and medical resources from other countries to support the often-strained healthcare systems in different African Countries. For me this is a big plus since a healthy population is Key for Africa's development.

As a young person I'm yearning to know more about ACFTA. I believe we should continue create awareness among young people so that we can understand more about ACFTA and involve them directly in this process. In the leadership, in the negotiations, in the development of policies etc. It is especially important to engage young people from border towns as they have lived experiences. Young people need to understand how exactly they fit into ACFTA, should they be involved in farming to produce goods for export?

If they already have these goods, who do they go to? Do they just walk to a border town and trade? What other services can young people trade in? Can they sell services such as digital and technology expertise? If they are not directly trading, how else can they support this process?

I encourage my fellow youths to continue seeking knowledge and gain an understanding of ACFTA so that they can participate in the process and improve their economic status.



DOREEN OKWENO SIMIYU
Ajira Digital Programme



New Leadership

The GIMAC Young Women Network Has elected its new leaders who will be supporting the network's activities across the 5 African Regions. They will be responsible to ensure the network grows and carry out its mandate for the next two years. Congratulations to the newly elected leaders.



Chairperson and Southern Africa Representative

Melissa Ruvimbo Kubvoruno is a Zimbabwean holder of a High Honours Degree in International Trade and Business. She is currently studying for a Master's degree in Disaster Risk and Livelihoods Management with Women's University in Africa. Melissa has been doing advocacy in the GIMAC space since 2014 and speaks for the rights of women and girls as well as equal representation of young people in different advocacy for a such as the UNCSW and the SADC People's Summit. She is the current Community Engagement Coordinator with Rozaria Memorial Trust in Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe and Murewa Districts. In this position she works with girls and young women with the aim of building their agency. In addition, she works with traditional leaders and other duty bearers to ensure that they protect the rights of children especially girls.



Western Africa Representative

Nafissate Hounkpatin is a Beninese midwife, specialist in maternal, newborn, adolescent, and youth health. She is also a passionate and talented activist who has been campaigning since 2015 for the well-being of women and the development of adolescents and young people. She has coordinated several social initiatives both at regional and national level, including movement building, advocacy, and high-impact project management. Nafissate is a member of the Advisory Board of ODAS and the Movement Committee of the Global Fund for Women in Francophone Africa. She will be working to ensure inclusion of Francophone youth movements within the network.



Eastern Africa Representative

Doris Munyingi is a Kenyan young lady whose expertise is in movement building, stakeholder engagement and advocacy. She has a strong interest in the recognition and inclusion of young people in all decision-making platforms and has vast experience with working for grassroots women and girls. Over the years, through her work, she has led many grassroots women and girls in advocating for gender-responsive public governance, taken lead in the collective organizing of grassroots women and girls into advocacy groups to engage effectively in numerous livelihood initiatives in the social-economic spectrum. She has also played active roles in working on reforms in the climate change and energy sector as well as the unpaid care economy. She currently serves as a Programs Officer at GROOTS Kenya, a national movement of grassroots women and girls in Kenya and strongly believes in the power of collective strength and action.



Northern Africa Representative

Raghda ElShaloudy is an Egyptian Fulbright scholar. She is specialized in Strategic Communication, Partnership, and international development. Raghda is the Africa Regional Representative for the International Federation of Business and Professional Women. Previously, she worked in at the Africa Business Council, and the African Union Commission Office of the Youth Envoy, where she worked on the implementation of several Gender and Capacity building projects, including the African Youth Charter hustlers, Young African Professional Online Series. During her work, she established a huge network of young people across the continent. ElShaloudy served as the Egypt Liaison Officer at the Comesa Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB). Elshaloudy is an AU-YVC alumnus; selected among 100 African leaders for the Nasser leadership fellowship. Raghda is experienced in Gender, diplomacy and international affairs.



Central Africa Representative

Ruth Abunaw Besong is a conflict sensitive HDP nexus professional, a civic engagement leader, a Mandela Washington Fellow, a holder of an MBA in International Business from Anglia Ruskin University United Kingdom. Ruth is PhD candidate in Gender and Development, she is a gender and feminist researcher passionate about highlighting women's issues under the ; Trade, Peace & security and humanitarian assistance thematics. Working in the domains of conflict management and humanitarian intervention for over seven years now, Ruth passionately unearth's women and girls concerns in conflict affected countries around sub-saharan, west and central Africa and provides humanitarian support, training and capacity development of humanitarian professionals at KAIPTC-WPSI. Through her substantive contribution to crisis management in Cameroon, Ruth was awarded the title, Global Goodwill Ambassador. She is winner of the Anglia Ruskin University Vice Chancellor Outstanding Alumni Award under the category, Service to the Society. Ruth is also recipient of a US congressional recognition from Congressman Hanks Johnson for her outstanding contribution to the community within Cameroon, Central

Areas of Key focus for the new leadership



Way Forward

The last five years have been a remarkable journey for the GIMAC Young Women Network, filled with impactful accomplishments and transformative experiences. As we reflect on our progress, we are inspired to chart an even brighter future, paving the way forward for our network.

With our unwavering commitment to empowering young women across the region, we have witnessed the positive ripple effects of our collective efforts. We have provided a platform for young women to amplify their voices, fostering a supportive community that encourages their active participation in decision-making processes.

Through capacity-building initiatives, mentorship programs, and skill development workshops, we have equipped young women with the tools they need to thrive in various sectors. Our network has nurtured countless leaders who are driving change and breaking barriers in their communities.

As we embark on the next phase of our journey, we will build upon our past achievements to reach new heights. We will continue to advocate for gender equality, working tirelessly to eliminate the systemic barriers that hinder the progress of young women. Empowering them economically, socially, and politically will remain at the core of our endeavors.

In the spirit of inclusivity, we will expand our network, ensuring that every young woman has the opportunity to be part of this transformative movement. We will foster partnerships with like-minded organizations, forging collaborations that amplify our impact and promote meaningful change on a regional scale.

The next steps for the GIMAC Young Women Network is paved with determination, resilience, and unwavering dedication. Together, we will create a future where young women can flourish, where their potential knows no bounds. We invite everyone to join us on this journey as we continue to shape a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

With our shared vision, collective action, and the indomitable spirit of the GIMAC Young Women Network, we will create a world where gender equality is not just a dream, but a lived reality.





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