



Annual Review 2022

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Accelerating Gender Equality, Social Entrepreneurship, and Mentorship Initiative.

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Introduction.

Citizen Advancement Initiative plays a catalytic role in accelerating efforts to address gender inequality and drive inclusive transformation for women across East Africa through mainstreaming gender in its operations and implementing targeted initiatives dedicated to female professionals and entrepreneurs through collective engagement.

All the activities envision a just and sustainable society where young women, professionals, and entrepreneurs harness their collective power and voice to access and influence government; and impact social change.

To further push forward the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment across the region, the organization has invested in targeted initiatives through specific projects specifically designed to impact women such as Gender, Technology and social Entrepreneurship workshops for Women in business.

A flagship initiative that specifically focuses on increasing inclusive responsive policies, strategies and practices that address the specific governance, accountability, development and social justice concerns faced by women entrepreneurs and professional women.

The Gender, Technology and Social Entrepreneurship initiative was unique as it offered a multi-dimensional approach to understand and remove the constraints women activists, professionals and entrepreneurs face in the region.

The programs aim was to discuss the governance barriers that Women Small and Medium Enterprises (WSMEs) face, and how they can leverage on technology as an innovative mechanism of de-risking women entrepreneurs from corrupt public sector service delivery.

Conversely closing the digital divide by 2030 has become the primary global on policy priorities. The program outlined the urgent action required on stimulating demand, regulatory reform and greater global coordination, and how a new digital coalition needs to be formed to transform opportunity and access for billions of women out there.

The program trained 100 WSMEs, and the outcome was that women entrepreneurs are disproportionately represented in the informal economy. They represent the majority of low income revenues, making them more vulnerable to crisis and shocks and less likely to have access to finance to expand their businesses and productivity.

Furthermore, data related to informality is severely lacking or incomplete, making it complicated to have tailor-made solutions for women entrepreneurs in the informal sector.

Given the fact that the informal economy is not a homogeneous group, several innovative approaches need to be undertaken in order to encourage more women entrepreneurs into the formal economy as well as respond to their specific needs such as digital access.



Technology as an innovative approach to build a supportive ecosystem for women Entrepreneurs.

Technology, Integrity and Accountability.

The use of innovative futures is one of CAI's central pillars towards the achievement of good governance and gender equality. The workshop provided quite insightful experiences that indeed tech can elevate women's power and influence within governance structures both in private and public sectors while raising their consciousness and agency to demand government and private sector accountability around topical issues that affect their lives.

More specifically, the program adopted collaborative efforts and support in and around government and private sector to create actions that increase WSMEs influence and inclusion in decision making as well as raise their voices and power through the use of technological platforms.

Technology provides the knowledge, capacity and confidence, for WSMEs women and professionals to meaningfully engage. It also facilitates them to mobilize, organize and advocate against malfeasance, impunity and corruption; as well advance just economic practices for women entrepreneurs.

In respect of private sector accountability, the program noted that the mechanisms and pathways to justice in the marketplace cannot be realized only by technology.

While not a panacea, these mechanisms provide concrete opportunities for WSMEs to support products that reflect their values, educate others, and provide a lifeline to businesswomen and professionals.

Consequently, it was observed that technology provides women professionals, business leaders and their formations with strategic information vital to challenge patriarch power and extractivism.

Additionally, technology proved that it can connect female professionals and entrepreneurs to the wider women's movement. The program noted the importance of women organizing with other women around shared interests builds their capabilities for voice and influence.

To that effect technology provides the ability. The program noted with affirmation, that experiences of group cohesion and solidarity can contribute to self-affirmation at the individual and collective level. Technology can give support and legitimacy to agendas and enable women to exert the collective power needed to influence, not only policy but also shift gender norms.

Through the program both the WSMEs and women professionals acknowledged the ability of technology to offer honesty, transparency and accountability in all their interactions at all levels of work. Indeed, tech strives for responsible use of resources, fairness, openness and accountability; and therefore, maintain necessary systems and processes in operations and interactions.

Technology provides the commitment for integrity owing to the fact that, it operates through systems and programs that are traceable hence pushing those in public service to hold themselves to higher ethical standards and behavior to the people they serve regularly hence a safeguard from women being abused.

Although the question as to whether technology provides the best tool for ensuring good governance is still being debated, what can be observed is that country's such as Rwanda's adoption into tech automation has seen the country improve on her governance system with very minimal cases of corruption and gender inequality.

Technology as a pathway for Women's Advancement and Protection

In respect of technology, the program observed that tech can empower WSMEs & professional women to creatively leverage digital and immersive media to tell their stories and curate narratives that shape and influence governance, social justice and development.

Tech has the ability of enabling them to build new and stronger networks with civic actors, policy makers and corporate sector for a more powerful voice and collective action towards private sector and government accountability.



Nairobi SME Think Tank ~ A workshop training on how women can leverage on technology to Increased awareness, involvement and influence on emerging governance challenges such as corruption, extremism through digital access and activism by women entrepreneurs and professionals.



In view of the above the program was able to connect the WSME to relevant technologies, legal knowledge and technical skills, as well as policy fora, networks, platforms and groups (formal and informal) to enhance their voice and credibility and, therefore, capacity for influence.

This was driven by the believe that technological tools and platforms, political skills, networks and experience are key to their leadership and influence beyond the business sector. Still on the same breath the program undertook interventions that was able to build the leadership capacity of young female entrepreneurs to improve their business skills, and increase their numbers in leadership positions in the business sector.

Technology as a dynamic part of globalization as presented by Safaricom PLC, both in the informal and formal sector. Has the ability to crosspollinate female professionals and entrepreneurs across generations to act in ways that advance democracy and social justice, both directly and indirectly.

Mentorship.

The principal aim of our mentorship program had been to create a pool of articulate, confident, self-aware, visible, and responsive young women with increased visibility and voice to engage and influence emerging social justice, and governance challenges.

Directly in the sense that a few of the participants had already assumed leadership roles in their societies. Angel Mbuthia for instance a Key participant during the program has an initiative with problem-solving ability, tied to new perspectives, she has thus become a leading constituency for government and private sector accountability and reform through the COMESA Youth Advisory Council.



The program noted that, Women particularly young women's collective voice, when strategically oriented and perceived to be broad-based, is instrumental to their ability to negotiate transformative change. Nonetheless, the viability and sustainability of collective feminist voice, in all spheres including in business and other professions depends on women's knowledge, technical capabilities, confidence and resources for strategic action and coalition building.

The greatest achievement of our mentorship program was by having one of our mentees win the MS. President Season Two contest, in 2022. The aim of the show was to enhance the leadership capacity of young women by encouraging them to take active roles in elective spaces. Our mentorship program has therefore demonstrated that it is possible to nurture young girls into leadership.

However all these depends on there being institutional structures and political opportunities, including the political space for associational life, to enable their voices to influence. Further, while women who have traditionally faced barriers to entrepreneurial success are discovering how they can use powerful, new technologies e.g. handheld devices and an internet connection to gain access to the business skills, technology, markets, networks or capital they need in order to participate in the global economy and improve their lives; they are seldom effectively harnessing the same technology to organize, shape public opinion outside their vocations.



Achievements for the Initiative.

The program was able to connect, catalyze, and cross pollinate the movement of women professionals and entrepreneurs with the wider women's rights movement for increased solidarity, voice and influence through social media platforms. The Nairobi Women SME Think Tank was able to get digital soft skills training from Safaricom PLC and also got connected with African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD).

The discussions around was on how to develop and influence global platforms that shape the narrative around gender-responsive development through the use of technology.



The created platform was meant to amplify the voices of the African experts, foster experience sharing and learning, forge partnerships and collaborations and catalyze intergenerational learning that which AWARD stands for.

The program was able to enhance the leadership capacity of young women by increasing their inclusion in decision making spaces that drive good governance, sustainable development and social justice in their communities, and at all levels government and in the corporate sector. A young participant into the program was able to win the Ms. President Season 2, finale. She was further appointed as the youngest board member and chair of the COMESA Youth Advisory Council, all driven by the inspirations that she got from the program.



Ms. Angel Mbuthia, a mentee of our young female mentorship program. She the current Ms. President Season Two. Also serving at the National Youth Council as a Board Member, conversely, she has been appointed as the youngest board member and chair of the COMESA Youth Advisory Council, all driven by the inspirations that she got from our organization's mentorship program

The Nexus between Politics, Activism, Women in the Public Realm and Women's Rights Challenges Within Women Rights Movements.

Imagine being unable to decide how your country is run, or speak up about issues affecting your local community. This is the reality for many women around the world, who don't have a say in the decisions that impact their lives ~ Womankind Worldwide.

Highlighting challenges hindering the enhancement of women's rights movement, leadership, and inclusion in decision making spaces that drive good governance, sustainable development and social justice in communities and at all levels of government.

It was thus imperative to scrutinize any potential threats that could undermine these influences. Against a backdrop of patriarchy and gender inequalities, it is very important to understand societal complexities especially within the context of gender within the public and private sectors as well as within the professional fields.

The greatest challenge has been the psychological perceptual thought that civil rights movements is often perceived as a patriarchal undertaking, primarily a preserve for men, and unsuitable for women more so the young ones.

Male dominance in the civic, governance and private space presents a stereotype that women are fewer effective champions and leaders than men, (Brown, 1996). This stereotyping can highly be traced from the socialisation that girls undergo during their early years.

Girls are socialised to believe that they should not speak out to claim their rights they are further socialized not to be part of public decision-making positions a preserve to be occupied by men. While boys are socialised into believing that girls ought to be excluded from civic, public and private spheres. The fallacy of such gender norms is a big contributor to the silencing of women, in civil rights movement. (Longwe, 2000: 26)

Catalyzing, connecting and cross pollinating the movement of women with the wider national rights movement for increased solidarity, voice and influence. Continues to encounter social cultural stereotyping that a woman's place is in the kitchen and not out their championing for women's right. As noted, these thoughts are highly embedded on patriarchal structures, gender roles and socialization barriers to women's participation in civic life of championing for social justice.

The program notes that even when a woman manages to attain a professional position, she can often be marginalised by calls that she is a Protégé' rather than that she made it by her own personal development efforts. Therefore women who reach leadership positions face daily prejudice, harassment and violence.

The tendency to concentrate on the private life of professional women possess a great challenge to these women's leadership to the wider society as well as improve their contribution to the gender agenda and other aspects of life to promote equitable access of resources and opportunities. Often it does not matter whether the professional woman possesses three post graduate degrees and runs the most successful enterprise.

If she is not married, still to make it worse married but barren she is then construed to be unfit in a big way. Little is written about these women despite their achievements yet these women contribute significantly to their country's governance systems conversely advancing many women's forays into political leadership roles both indirectly and directly.

However, while women who have traditionally faced barriers to activism, entrepreneurial success are discovering how they can use powerful, new technologies e.g., handheld devices and an internet connection to gain access to express their views, enhance their professional skills, build networks in order to participate in the quest for change and improve their lives. The young women are effectively harnessing the same technology to organize, shape public opinion outside their vocations.

To conclude with, this scrutiny was important owing to the fact that it would enable the women to develop interventions and design solutions that contribute to stopping such threats from causing barriers to women in realizing gender equality and accessing their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights as well as in engaging in governance, sustainable development and influencing social justice.





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