

Pan-African initiative to amplify women's voices

The Graça Machel Trust has announced that it will launch a pan-African initiative to 'Multiply the Faces and Amplify the Voices' of African women as a force for economic and social transformation. The Trust will convene the first-ever Women Advancing Africa (WAA) Forum in 2017 to highlight the critical role that women play in shaping Africa's development.



Image by 123RF

Over the past decade, Africa has experienced unprecedented economic growth but women and children have shared least in its prosperity. Today, African women constitute 70% of the informal economy, while one third of Africa's formal small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are owned by women but only 47% of these are financially served.

Africa's women are a powerful untapped force and creating more opportunities for women to participate in the economy will improve their earning potential, assist families to move out of poverty and drive inclusive and sustainable growth, stated the Women Advancing Africa press release.

Women Advancing Africa plans to build an inter-generational movement of women whose experience and wisdom will lead to collective action to address these economic imbalances. To identify priorities and help shape the agenda for the inaugural Women Advancing Africa Forum, the [Trust](#) convened a roundtable meeting of African women leaders across sectors in Magaliesburg, South Africa from August 11-13, 2016.

The intimate gathering was hosted by Machel, who shared her vision for Women Advancing Africa and invited participants

to share their stories and develop targeted goals for the initiative moving forward.

“Africa’s continued journey towards full economic and social prosperity will only be achieved when women take the lead in setting the continent’s development agenda and have equal opportunities to participate at all levels in society. Now is the time to shape a collective agenda for the economic advancement of African women.”

Priorities

At the meeting, more than 40 African women leaders worked together to identify priorities and outline key focus areas for the 2017 Forum. Under the overarching theme of driving social and economic transformation, WAA will focus on three core pillars in 2017: promoting financial inclusion, increasing market access and driving social change.

“It is rare to experience a completely safe space in which we can tell our truth, own our stories and challenge each other,” reflected Renée Ngamau, participant and member of the Graça Machel Trust Women in Media Network. “The WAA roundtable created that space and challenged me to powerfully take on next steps in my journey; not just for myself, but for other women younger, or less privileged than I am.”

The Trust has selected APCO Worldwide, the largest women-owned communications firm in the world, to be the convening partner for the Women Advancing Africa initiative. Working closely with the Graça Machel Trust, APCO will leverage its global network and communications expertise to bring the initiative to life at the inaugural meeting.

The Forum will take place next year in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania and will be attended by at least 250 of Africa’s most influential women leaders, the continent’s rising stars and committed global champions.

Initial support for the WAA initiative has also been provided by founding sponsor, The Intel Foundation. Through the “She Will Connect Program”, Intel will also establish a dedicated online platform to connect a pan-African community of women leaders.

Additional support has been provided by the UPS Foundation, Discovery, The United Nations Foundation, The Skoll Foundation and the Bridgeway Foundation. These partners share the Trust’s belief that advancing women economically is crucial to the health and prosperity of African families, communities and nations.

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