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WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN IN POWER, ESSENTIAL BENEFIT FROM THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN AFRICA



H.E. Dr Amani Abou-Zeid, African Union Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy, highlighted the need to advocate for more women in power to participate in the fourth industrial revolution. The remark was made during the celebration of Girls in ICT at the Transform Africa Summit held from 26th -28th April 2023, in Victoria Falls, the Republic of Zimbabwe.

This year, the theme for the Girls in ICT Day is 'Digital Skills for Life'. The round table which brought together women digital ministers of which Commissioner Amani Abou-Zeid was among the panelists, addressed topics related to enhancing digital skills of women and girls through education, mentorship, and need to increase youth participation.

Noting that only 16 percent of ICT Ministers in Africa are women yet they constitute more than half of the population, they called for investment in pro-women and girls policies to empower them to take up decision making positions.



Commissioner Abou-Zeid seized the opportunity to highlight that digital literacy for girls is of high importance and it is in line with AU policy on gender mainstreaming in tech sectors. *“Improving the*

lives and opportunities of women and girls is an explicit objective of the African Union and this is well reflected in Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa and the AU Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE),” said Commissioner Abou-Zeid.

The opening ceremony of the Transform Africa Summit was graced by five Heads of State including H.E. President Emmerson Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe, H.E. President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Chairman of the Smart Africa Alliance, H.E. King Mswati III of Eswatini, H.E. President Lazarus Chakwera of Malawi, and H.E. President Hakainde Hichilema of Zambia.

The Heads of State called for the embracing of technology to spur Africa's economic growth. *“Technology is a development priority and must be embraced if our continent is to transform, modernise and industrialize in a fast-changing global environment. African Governments and stakeholders must usher Africa into a knowledge-based economy anchored on the benefits of technology,”* said President Mnangagwa during the official opening ceremony.

President Paul Kagame discussed the role of digitalising African economies to transform Africa. *“To step up digital transformation on the continent, everyone has to be connected to affordable broadband and also be able to have a smart device. We need to make digital identities of individuals and businesses portable across borders while using technology to reduce barriers of trade”,* emphasized President Kagame, adding *“Artificial Intelligence has made headlines in the recent weeks for the right reasons at most. We should move quickly to embrace Artificial Intelligence and make it work.”*

King Mswati III of Eswatini underscored Africa must not be left behind and must tap into the opportunities that the digital era presented. *“ We now live in an exciting time where the world is transforming at an unprecedented pace, the rate of technology development is fast and Africa should not be left behind. As we move forward, we must embrace digital transformation if we hope to get a better future for ourselves and generations to come in our beloved continent. Africa has to be united for us to promote the Africa we want as espoused in the 2063 Agenda”*

The leaders accentuated the need to intensify investments in digital transformation, innovation and youth and women empowerment for Africa to attain its long and short-term development objectives. *“In order to catch up with the first world trajectory of*

digital uptake, Africa must deploy multiple multiple strategic investments to integrate all key sectors of the economy on a single digital platform. Our citizens should have affordable access to digital products and services, digital literacy and improved digital infrastructure,” added Malawian President Lazarus Chakwera.

Digitalisation as a tool to accelerate African integration by fostering trade and free movement of people, goods and services was also emphasized by Zambian President Hichilema who said *“We need to also use digitalisation in our movement of goods across our borders. We should have non-border posts, unlike one-stop border posts. There is no point to stop trucks destined for Zimbabwe or Malawi at border posts and that can be achieved through technology. ”*



On the Sidelines of the Summit, the AU Commission attended the Smart Africa Board meeting and co-organised a session with the World Bank themed *“Connecting Unconnected Africa for an Inclusive Digital Transformation”*, where Dr Amani Abou-Zeid noted *“With the current global crises having serious impacts on Africa, digitalisation can enable economic transformation towards a path of green, resilient and inclusive growth”*

She further highlighted that 45 per cent of Africa’s internet users are male while females account for 34 per cent underlining the need to bridge the gender digital divide as these disparities limit women’s access to the full range of opportunities offered by digitalisation.

During the session panelists further observed that broadband penetration in Africa has been on the rise but usage is still low. This needs to be addressed by bundling different services including digital literacy, affordable devices, relevant content, access to energy and delivery of digital services through the wide postal network. The panel speakers included H.E. Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy, Hon. Minister of ICT of Tunisia, Hon. Minister of ICT of Rwanda, Presidential ICT Advisor of Senegal, Director General of Smart Africa and Head of GSMA Africa.

Notes to the Editor:

About Transform Africa Summit

The Transform Africa Summit is Africa’s leading annual forum organized by Smart Africa to bring together global and regional leaders from governments, businesses and international organizations to collaborate on new ways of shaping, accelerating and sustaining Africa’s ongoing digital evolution.

For media inquiries, please contact:

Bezayit Eyoel| Department of Infrastructure and Energy| African Union Commission| Mobile: +251913223288 | E-mail: BezayitE@africa-union.org

Molalet Tsedeke| Directorate of Information and Communication| African Union Commission |mobile+251 (0) 911630631| E-mail: MolalettT@africa-union.org

Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | **E-mail:** DIC@africa-union.org
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