

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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Young women inducted into Governance, entrepreneurship and peace and security: Lead(H)er Fellowship

The 3rd Cohort of the Lead(H)er Fellowship has commenced their induction process into a series of empowerment programmes focused broadly on politics and governance, business-trade-entrepreneurship, and Peace and Security. The 2024 cohort brings together 39 young women from 12 African countries selected from a highly competitive pool of 1000 applications. The fellows will benefit from training, coaching and mentorship delivered by industry practitioners, development partners and interactions with experts from the African Union Commission and Organs.

The Lead(H)er Fellowship is an initiative established in 2022 with the aim of empowering young African women and girls with leadership skills and knowledge to transform African societies aligned to the [African Youth Charter](#) that purposes to provide an avenue for effective youth participation in the continental development process. The collaboration is led by the African Union through the Office of the Youth Envoy, Plan International MEESA and YouLead Africa. The 3rd cohort has dynamic young women ranging from students to young grassroots advocates, politicians, entrepreneurs and community leaders, and refugees. The fellowship provides an opportunity to refine their leadership journeys and enable them explore or scale their various areas of interests.

Over the next 6 months, the fellows will be exposed capacity building and crafting entrepreneurship solutions, building on the impact already realized by the first two cohorts. To date, the Lead(H)er Fellowship has trained 78 young women whose leadership pursuits have proven diverse yet pivotal in transforming Africa. As part of supporting young people's entrepreneurship pursuits and potential, the Lead(H)er Fellowship provides grants to develop the fellows' community projects, with projects

so far piloted in Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda and Malawi. One of Grant recipients, **Dr Glory Florentin**, alumni of the 1st cohort, has scaled up her Mental Health Initiative, MiNova Mental Health, from Tanzania to other Southern African countries, where she has managed to train young people to become mental health champions across Africa.

Another alumni from Zambia, **Yande Changala**, recounts the benefits of the fellowship observing that, “One of the most impactful aspects of the fellowship was the opportunity to network with other young women from across Africa and share best practices. This experience inspired me to create the “*Ladies in Leadership Assembly*,” a space for young women to share experiences and make impact. She adds that, “the knowledge I gained continues to inspire me to advocate for good governance, and the rights for women and girls around the world.”

New fellow and student from Sudan, **Adut Andrew**, is an advocate who conducts campaigns against GBV and training for refugees and IDPs through an initiative called Girls ON THE MOVE. Selected in the Peace and Security pillar, Adut hopes to develop a “Professional network and build a relationship with different leaders who can share insights, advance my career and personal growth in my field of advocacy and leadership. I will use my experience to solve problems at the policy level, do more research or study to find solutions.”

The African Union Chairperson’s Youth Envoy, **Ms. Chido Cleopatra Mpemba** while welcoming the 3rd Cohort whose induction week took place in Arusha, Tanzania from the 11th to the 14th of June 2024, underscored the importance of girls and young women’s leadership in shaping the trajectory of the continent. She further charged the fellows to champion change and redefine the narrative, emphasizing that, “Africa, with its rich tapestry of cultures and traditions, is a continent bursting with limitless potential in its young people. Youths are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they are the leaders of today, and so together, we must work tirelessly to build a future where young women are leading and where gender equality is not just an aspiration but, a lived reality. The time is now and only, action, to build capacity and invest in young people will get us there.”

Thus far, the impact of the Lead(H)er fellowship has been a result of pooling together resources and expertise to support young women’s leadership while propelling collective African development. Plan International MEESA has been instrumental in championing this agenda, emphasizing the vitality of spaces, collaboration, access and participation of young women. “Our alumni have participated, contributed and shared information in crucial policy platforms including the Continental IGAD Youth Policy Consultations. Creating opportunities and spaces for young people to be present and influence decision making is one of the major reasons we need to collectively put our efforts to empower the generations of young leaders,” remarked **Charles Nyukuri**, the Plan International MEESA Regional Policy Advisor during the induction week.

Since 2022, the fellowship’s reach and potential has resulted in a mentorship class with over 300 young women convened by the African Union Youth Envoy, Ms. Chido Mpemba on the margins of the Women Deliver Conference held in Rwanda last year. This year, the Youth Envoy will inculcate a mentorship program within the fellowship where young women will be mentored by prominent African Women Leaders. By empowering youth and young women from marginalized communities and grass roots

to build their leadership capacity, the Youth Envoy continues to contribute to the African Union's One Million Next Level Campaign, which seeks to provide opportunities for 300 million young people.

The Lead(H)er Fellowship promises to propel collective development across the African continent. As this cohort launches, Africa's future is assured that the next generation of powerful changemakers and young African women is in the making, to achieve the Africa We Want.

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