



Gibt Kindern eine Chance

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YOUNG VOICES IN CONVERSATION – UNLEASHING YOUTH POWER FOR GENDER EQUALITY

A Side Event hosted by Plan International Germany at
the 5th African Youth SDGs Summit

Henri, Thokozile, Victoria, Yona

5th African Youth SDGs Summit - Lusaka, Zambia - 14-18th August 2023

The 5th African Youth SDG Summit in Zambia was a significant event that brought together a diverse coalition of youth leaders, development experts, government officials, NGOs, private sector representatives, activists, and stakeholders from across Africa and beyond to discuss and collaborate on issues related to sustainable development and co-create ways of attaining the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) before 2030. The summit was held at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre in Lusaka from 14th-18th August 2023 with the theme 'Attaining the SDGs through Youth Innovation and Financing for Inclusive Development in Africa'.

The summit's overarching mission was to collectively shape a future for Africa that embraces sustainable progress and equity, harnessing the power of youth-driven innovation and strategic financing for inclusive development. Throughout the event, delegates engaged in vibrant discussions, shared impactful insights, and forged collaborative pathways aimed at turning challenges into opportunities and aspirations into action. The summit touched on different thematic areas highlighting different challenges through panel conversations and side events hosted by different organizations. Various side events featuring different interesting and engaging conversations and panels to address various challenges faced in Africa was one of the most important highlights of the summit, as these avenues allowed for a close interaction. This year's summit was organized by the summit Secretariat, chaired by Youth Advocates Ghana (YAG), with Alliance for Accountability Advocates Zambia (AAAZ) and 2nd Floor as local organizing partners.

We - Henri, Thokozile, Victoria, and Yona - participated in the summit to talk openly and honestly about making Africa better by achieving the goals set by the United Nations. We know that Africa is a big mix of different demographics and cultures. Our main goal is to involve everyone by having important conversations and allowing young people to come up with innovative solutions. By doing this, we want to make plans that fit each demography and deal with each problem individually. Our talks are like making a

roadmap for success, where we tackle challenges and make the most of opportunities, all to help Africa grow and succeed in the long run.

Young Voices in Conversation – Unleashing Youth Power for Gender Equality

Plan International Germany hosted the side event "Young Voices in Conversation - Unleashing Youth Power for Gender Equality", providing a space for young people to share their experiences in advocating for gender equality and youth participation and to develop collective political demands. This youth-led event was facilitated by Henri (Germany), Thokozile (Zambia), Victoria (Nigeria), and Yona (South Africa) – four young activists who are experts in gender equality and meaningful youth participation.

Our event aimed to promote meaningful youth participation, particularly for girls and young women, in advocating for gender equality and achieving SDG 5. The event featured discussions, group work, and the formulation of political demands. By sharing experiences and best practices, young activists sought to draw attention to barriers and advocate for inclusive participation. The event aimed to challenge hierarchies, empower participants, and develop demands for national and international stakeholders. It highlighted the crucial role of young women in achieving gender equality and the SDGs.

The event structure included a keynote address, interactive discussions, and the creation of a shared document for future political processes. Participants worked together to envision a future of gender equality and youth participation.

In four working groups, participants shared barriers they are facing in their activism as young people as well as best practices to overcome those barriers. In a final step, we developed collective political demands to achieve gender equality and meaningful youth participation as well as to emphasize young people's crucial role in achieving gender equality.

The following **barriers** young activists are currently facing were collected:

- Cultural beliefs and constructs (such as those listed below but mainly regarding patriarchal constructs and social hierarchies)
- Religious/societal orientation
- Gender-blindness
- Lack of implementation of enacted government policies
- Patriarchal constructs
 - Prejudice towards women (as undeserving)
 - Gender-based exclusion from decision-making processes
 - Male dominance
 - More opportunities given to men

- Negative ideologies about gender equality
- Harassment
- Discrimination (for example in access to education, funding, and inclusion)
- Economic exclusion of many marginalised groups
- Misconceptions about gender equality-related political work
 - Men as disincentivised to engage in gender-related political and activism-oriented work due to predominant discursive misconceptions around gender (equality), its performance, and who is seen to derive more value from advocating for gender equality (i.e., women)
- Unequal access to resources

In the second step, **best practices** were shared amongst the participants that counteract or overcome these barriers. The sharing of best practices also served to identify important aspects of the political demands to make them as focused and practical as possible.

Within the groups, we agreed on the following best practices as the most meaningful:

- Incorporation of organisations and collaboration between different groups within civil society
- Partnerships with grassroots organisations and NGOs
- Affirmative action's such as quotas or policies
- Intersectional gender practices
- Raising awareness at grassroots levels
- Efforts towards inclusion of young people and girls in political spaces

In response to the barriers and best practices they shared, the participants were then able to develop these **collective political demands**. The demands can be grouped in 6 categories:

Representation	Gender-balanced representation in rural areas, political parties, politics and government, education
Norms and Values	Feminism to be understood as positive and for everyone → male involvement Awareness campaigns on gender-related policies in communities, especially in rural areas (for example in villages) against the backdrop of patriarchal cultures and norms
Policymaking	Policies to be accessible, brief, and digestible for community members Gender-transformative engagement: gender-sensitivity for programs, projects, and financing Gender equality as a priority in policymaking Menstrual hygiene and health policies
Participation	Meaningful participation of young people, especially young women in all processes and spaces – from policymaking to implementation
Opportunities	Decent work for young people Equal opportunities (e.g., equal employment) for women Compulsory education

<p>Resources</p>	<p>Equal distribution of resources to people with disabilities Equal access to digital technologies and innovation Provision of resources to orphans Easily accessible and distributed spaces, platforms, and resources for youth (advocates) of all genders Provision of services for women (e.g., sanitary facilities)</p>
<p>Finance</p>	<p>Allocating financial resources and land to women Allocate finances and resources to support gender equality initiatives Investing resources in the implementation of policies.</p>

Outlook

The event showed us that an essential criticism was the lack of implementation of policies. This is partially rooted in the lack of meaningful representation as we as young people are often only involved in the late stages of decision-making processes. This also includes summits where we are able to make connections amongst each other but rarely have the processes to get involved with stakeholders directly or give our demands to them. Therefore, an important goal is sharing this document and the outcomes of the side event across all possible levels. We can further utilise them to rethink current initiatives and inform future ones.

The event also showcased the necessity for a coordinated, intersectional approach to gender and youth work. The general understanding of work such as this is that it is meant to be undertaken in individual themes, neglecting the intersectional identities we all have and how that impacts our daily lives. As such, it is essential to reconcile and highlight how our diverse lived experiences impact our activism and politics. Going forward, one critical point we need to emphasise in both the planning and execution of events such as these is the harmonious co-existence of our various identities and experiences and their influence on lived realities in order to ensure a truly unique and coordinated political agenda.

Feedback

Getting to meet other youth from the African continent and beyond and having the opportunity to facilitate the sharing of expertise and insight from across disciplines is probably one of the highlights of our time at the side event. Also, being responsible for helping create a safe space for youth participants to speak freely, engage each other, and articulate themselves was just awesome. Events like these are so important if we are to continue pushing the needle and amplifying voices often left out and behind.

In a world striving for inclusivity, let us continue to uplift the voices of emerging change-makers. By nurturing meaningful dialogues, converting them into actionable plans, and collaborating across generations, we can pave the path towards a future where gender equality is not a dream, but an unwavering reality. This summit birthed something beautiful in us! Overall, the experience was great!