

# ACP High-level Women and Youth Forum leads to calls for a platform to support ACP States in their efforts to engage women and youth

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*Brussels, 19 December 2019/ACP:* Held in the margins of the 9th ACP Summit in Nairobi (Kenya), The first-ever Women and Youth Forum led to the call for the establishment of an ACP Women and Youth Forum that will act as a platform to support ACP States in their efforts to engage women and youth.

The Forum, on 8 December, provided the opportunity for high-level representatives, including Prime Minister of Barbados H.E. Mia Amor Mottley, H.E. Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, and H.E. Senator Kamina Johnson Smith of Jamaica to share their experiences on women's empowerment during two sessions entitled "Addressing Gender Parity and Challenges to Women Empowerment in ACP States and "Decent Jobs and Opportunities for Youth in ACP Countries and the role of Youth in a Transformed ACP"

Senator Johnson-Smith in her intervention, reminded the audience that 2019 was an important year for women's issues and gender equality on the global agenda, as it marked the 25th anniversary of the creation of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences and the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Urging leaders and policy makers to fully and tangibly recognize the valuable contribution made by women to our societies, the Jamaican minister also noted the changing role of women and the thrust towards building capacities for women in entrepreneurship and trade, which she predicted to be a 'game changer' that would redound to more sustainable economies, especially for developing countries, "...notwithstanding your views on a woman's place, if women make up 50% of your populations and you have not optimized their economic empowerment to enable their increased contribution to your economy – there is clearly more you can do to secure your country's sustainable economic development and progress."

Dame Meg Taylor highlighted the Pacific Islands Forum's 2010 Gender Equality Declaration, saying it was, "a collective commitment to lift the status of women and empower them to be active participants in economic, political and social life."

Following the session devoted to women's empowerment, Arancha Gonzalez of the International Trade Centre and H.E. Ms Rosmary Mbabazi, Minister of Youth and Culture of the Republic of Rwanda participated in an energetic panel to discuss "Decent Jobs and Opportunities for Youth in ACP Countries" and the role of "Youth in a Transformed ACP".

According to Ifeyinwa Ugochukwu, CEO of the Tony Elemelu Foundation, a philanthropic organization dedicated to the empowerment of entrepreneurs which has created a digital networking centre for the African entrepreneurial ecosystem, the ACP regions are populated by thousands of ingenious, ambitious, well-educated digital natives under the age of 35, many of whom often feel forced to emigrate – sometimes clandestinely and perilously – to Northern Economies which they deem to be more apt to materialize their dreams.

In her presentation, besides highlighting the work of the TEF to shape the next generation of African Entrepreneurs, Ms Ugochukwu outlined actions by various organisations such as banks and governments which could assist to spur youth initiatives in terms of self-employment and entrepreneurship, reduce the complexity of procedures and eradicate administrative delays.

Rwanda's Minister of Youth, Rose Mary Mbabazi noted that developing skills in management, communication, marketing and fundraising are key to making young entrepreneurs independent; giving the example of the Youth Connect Africa Regional Initiative launched in 2012 in Rwanda with the United Nations, which is being implemented in several countries on the

continent. In addition to mentoring, the programme builds the capacity of young people to solve the difficulties and obstacles they face in implementing and managing their own business. Moreover, at a time when rich and poor are living together in the digital age and the interdisciplinary nature of science around the world, ACP countries have the necessary tools to seize opportunities and catch the train of the fourth industrial revolution.

*Photo: H.E. Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum*

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