

Africa: 'Africa Cannot Overcome Its Problems Unless Women Take the Lead'

BANJUL, Gambia, March 03, 2014 (The Point) -- The Charge d'Affaires Ambassador Michael Arietti, at the US Embassy in Banjul had said that Africa cannot overcome its problems unless women take the lead.

Arietti was speaking Thursday during the closing ceremony of the three-day Young Women's Empowerment Programme (YWEP) organised by the International Visitors Leadership Programme (IVLP), in partnership with Think Young Women (TYW), at TANGO office in Kanifing.

He added that there are many many problems in Africa amongst which are poverty, education, environment, violence, economic among others, all of which are challenges that needed to be addressed.

"I have worked with different African countries and have lived in Africa for over 10 years," he stated, adding that one of the countries he had worked in was Liberia and that country had the election of the first female President, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

"This time we have a woman President in Malawi and recently the selection of a woman President in a very troubled country Central Africa Republic," he went on.

So it was clear that the young women of this continent and the country are going to become more and more to take positions, responsibilities and leadership to help change this society, he said.

Arietti remarked that if 'you educate a man you educate an individual' but if 'you educate a woman you educate a nation.'

The US Embassy in Banjul Charge d'Affaires who only arrived in Banjul exactly one week ago to the closing ceremony, added that it was a honour for him that the first crowd he addressed in the Gambia was the IVLP Alumni Association's Young Women's Empowerment Program.

It was fantastic to look out into the crowd to see a room of young women who are preparing to become the next leaders of their communities, country and the world, he stated, adding that leaders are found everywhere, in classrooms and in the home, in government offices and in the rice fields.

"Leadership is shaped by our experiences, from how we face day to day situations, to aiding those around us in times of crisis," he said, noting that leadership was dedicating oneself to the service of others.

The Gambia, he continued, like the world at large, faces a series of challenges such as health, education, and economic and these issues affects every person and community and require a cooperative effort to meet these challenges.

"Your task, our collective calling, is to work together to face these issues. I call on you to treat this Young Women's Empowerment Program as only the beginning of a life of education and collaboration. Continue to challenge yourselves and teach others how to work together in order to build a better future," he told participants.

Over 60% of the population in The Gambia is under the age of 25, he said, adding that the youths in The Gambia are not only the future, but are also the present.

"By keeping your minds open, having an eagerness for education, and by working together you can better serve your community," he stated, noting that he was certain that the participants would take the lessons they have learned during the workshop home to their families, schools and communities and teach others.

What they have learned from was not only for their facilitators, but also from each other, will better prepare them and their communities to meet the challenges of tomorrow, he said.

The three-day workshop, which brought together participants from different parts of the country, was to have the opportunity to broaden their knowledge in the field of women studies, and to empower young Gambian women on leadership.

The year-long programme aims to empower young Gambian women in leadership skills, mentorship, and to help initiate community-based projects called "I change" and mentorship programmes.

The core focus of the project is to ensure that young women are empowered, confident enough to articulate their key concerns, and galvanised actions to end violence against girls and women. **(This story was originally published by The Point)**