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LETTER TO THE FUTURE:
THE FUTURES AFRICA EVENT REPORT



AFRICAN
WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT
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Letter To The Future: The Futures Africa Event

19 April 2017
Accra, Ghana, West Africa

Dear Mariam,

The year is 2017 and we're looking ahead to your era, or more accurately, we're trying to predict what your life as an African woman will be on 30 August 2030.

Our Daring Experiment: Predicting The Future

We already know that the total population of Africans will likely increase 1.5 times between now and 2030, but what would the future of Africa look like if we looked at it through the eyes of an African woman? Through someone like you? That's the question Jessica Horn asked to get the ball rolling on this futuristic experiment of ours. She is the Director of Programmes at the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) and passionate about thinking with forward vision. The 19 April 2017 would turn out to be a day unlike any other for those of us gathered at the East Legon offices of the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) and the hundreds others following proceedings online via Twitter hashtags #AfriFemFutures and #FuturesAfrica. It would be a day to not just look back on the progress we've made so far in advancing African women's rights, but also, to look ahead and ask questions. More importantly, it was a day to envision what the future could possibly hold for our dear African continent and the role that women's rights activists, organisations, and allies in other sectors and movements would play in making it so – the role we would play in what would ultimately become your experience of life. It's no surprise we were trending by the end of the day!

You must be very curious to hear exactly what we deliberated earlier, so we'll jump right into the details. At approximately 9:30am we met IDEG Executive Director Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey who welcomed us to the

space and offered thoughts on AWDF's invitation to collaborate on this day to launch their futuristic experiment. You see, the Futures Africa event is revolutionary in many ways. In our present day, most policy events look to the past and rarely scratch the surface on what the future might hold. Besides being an innovative approach to a policy event, AWDF's initiative marked the first ever effort to pull together both data and ideas and take a stab at foresight trends analysis and scenario planning for women's rights across the African continent as a whole. To be honest, many of us had never even encountered the terms "foresight" and "futures thinking" until we received the beautifully decorated email invitations to this event. Many of us came out of curiosity – the thought of 'creating the future' was no doubt enticing.

"As women's rights advocates we say we're building the future, but in our methodology we're always looking backward. We're never actually defining what the future is going to look like, what are the trends, or what would we like to happen. So we thought let's do a future forward process."

Jessica Horn, AWDF

Report of the launch of Futures Africa: Trends for Women by 2030 and the AWDF Future scenarios 19 April 2017, Accra, Ghana

Mariam – a young tech activist in a wheelchair living in 2030 – is the lead character in the future scenario stories generated by AWDF for the Futures Africa project.

"Africa's future is something that should concern all of us – a future of great opportunities but also great challenges. How we steer ourselves will depend on all of us. Long term objectives cannot be fulfilled without civil society."

Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey, IDEG

But as they say, a big part of predicting the future is looking at the past – we could not do away with history entirely. In his welcome, Dr. Akwetey helped ensure a sound footing on which to take off. Stressing the importance of a holistic approach and civil society engagement in achieving objectives outlined in the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), he challenged us to rethink existing frameworks. In our era, neo-liberal models of development are touted globally as pathways to development, although there are folks like Dr. Akwetey who question its relevance to Africa's various countries. Countries like Rwanda and Ethiopia seem to be buttressing his point by offering interesting but controversial alternatives. Dr. Akwetey believes these examples are worth reviewing for the next 30 years. He also made a passionate call for stronger partnerships between women and men in advancing African women's rights.

Dr. Akwetey had a point and Jessica Horn voiced her agreement, noting that the futuristic experiment we were embarking on was as a result of wanting to share a "thinking space" with likeminded institutions committed to promoting democracy and development in Africa. As you can imagine, many of us were on the edge of our seats wondering what exactly was about to transpire. Would we be getting into a time travel machine that would zap us into your room to see things for ourselves? Or maybe we would be making use of a virtual reality tool of sorts? The answer, dear Mariam, was both simple and profound: we would be looking within ourselves to birth our ideas of how our current actions could potentially shape your existence. And so that's how we all got to meet Katindi Sivi-Njonjo; our guide on this daring mission.

"We have to interrogate and ask ourselves: what it is that democratically helps us fight for our rights and also aids our economic development? Agendas are plenty but the common thread is can we strengthen our democracy, reach a multitude of people and therefore overcome our democratic challenges and strengthen prosperity?"

Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey

"The question is who shapes the future – and the answer is, we do."

Jessica Horn, AWDF

As lead consultant for Longview Consult, Katindi Sivi-Njonjo is one of five women futures and foresight practitioners on the entire African continent. She not only did an analysis of the current realities of African women, but also assisted the AWDF team in crafting their organisational strategy, and consequently, coming up with four future scenarios for Africa in 2030 seen through women's eyes. That definitely took a load off how much work we would be doing during the course of the day, but nevertheless, it was a paradigm shifting experience. What's that they say about thinking outside the box? Or indeed, as Sivi-Njonjo herself would say, thinking as if there is no box?



Our Hopes & Fears For Africa's Future

To get us started, Jessica Horn asked us to introduce ourselves by sharing our hopes and fears for the future of women in Africa by 2030.

We wrote our thoughts on sheets of paper which must be archived somewhere by the time you're reading this (for your convenience, we've captured some of them below). While there was a diversity of thought in both hopes and fears, there were also many similarities. For instance, a good number of us hoped for more women's representation in Africa's cohort of leaders and presidents.

A sister from Kenyan was quite precise: "I hope that half of Africa's presidents will be women by 2030". Another hope that resonated deeply was for women's inclusion, equal treatment, opportunity and voice, or as another participant put it: "To be accepted as a human being".

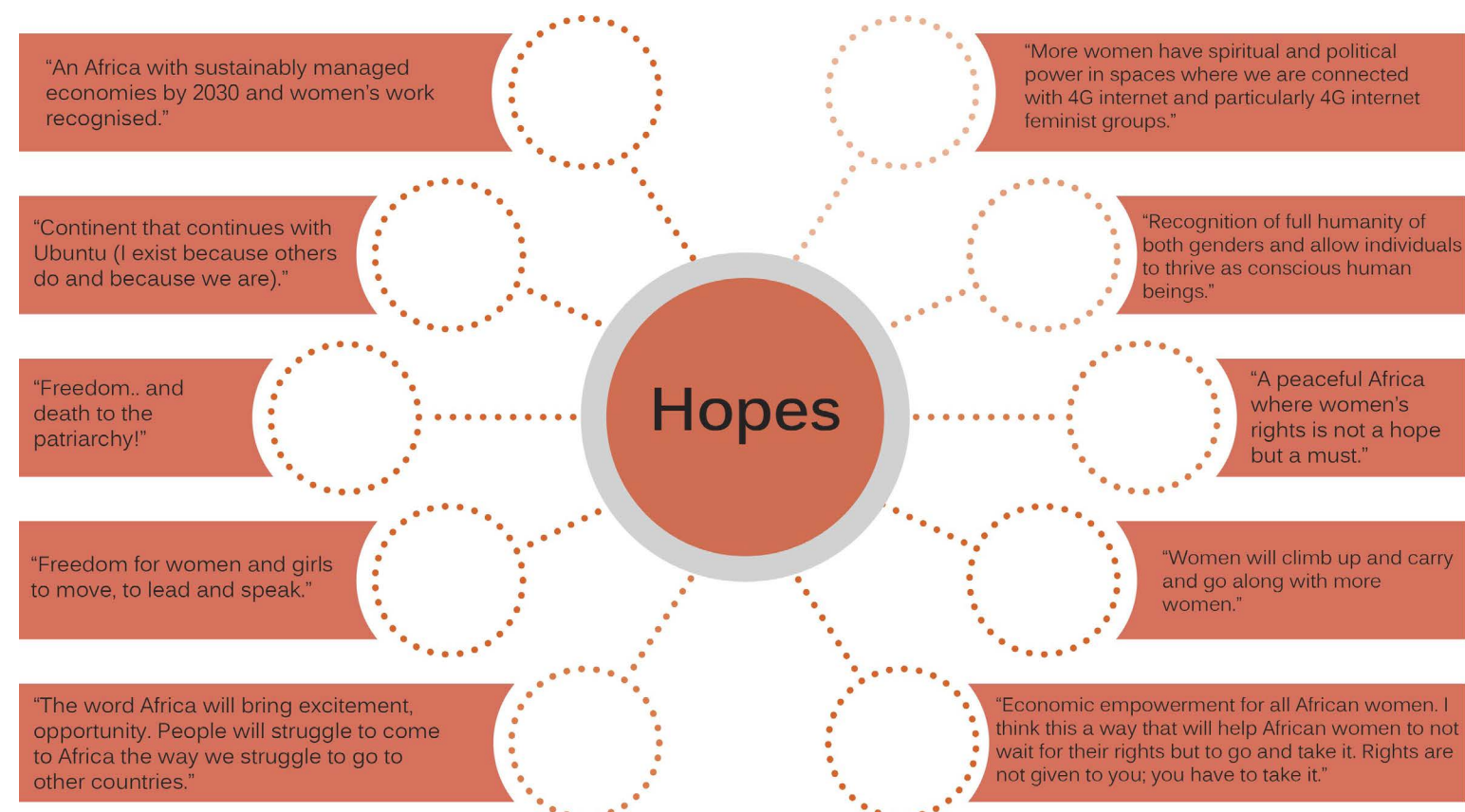
There was also a lot of overlap on the fear front; many were worried that the "human" element of development might be lost in favour of an exclusive focus on financial profit, while others expressed apprehension that the progress thus far would be eroded as fundamentalism, misogyny and the patriarchy became more entrenched.

Our hopes and fears also centred on specific themes – often the ones we already work on. Some reflected on economic empowerment, education, technology, bodily autonomy, gender-based violence, food security, politics and governance and environmental sustainability. Others focused on how we work, and what

we work for overall- the quality of leadership, sisterhood and the broad agenda of freedom and an end to the deep gendered inequalities that compromise our lives. One thought in particular encapsulated our collective hopes and fears: "I hope that hope itself does not become an endless journey".

"I hope that hope itself does not become an endless journey."

Participant



Data & Trends: A Reality Check



Our soul-searching exercise left us with a lot to think about. Many of us took the opportunity to discuss our hopes and fears further with one another during the morning tea break. By the time we returned, we were rejuvenated and ready to go deeper. This time, we had the benefit of data; both Jessica Horn and Katindi Sivi-Njonjo encouraged us to examine the data and consider what we can collectively do to change a future we don't like and ensure one that we do.

As Sivi-Njonjo took us through highlights from Futures Africa: Trends for Women by 2030, we had to keep its limitations mind. As Horn noted, data in our era can be very political; people collect what they would like to see. Sivi-Njonjo buttressed her point by explaining that much of the data on Africa and its countries tends to be weak, inconsistent, and not always disaggregated by gender. So, our task was to not only ask what's going on or to (re)imagine the future, but also to

question how we are generating and interpreting the data.

All in all, our immersion into some of the data from the new report was a reality check. The expected 43% increase in Africa's 15 to 34 year old population by 2030 put the urgency of addressing youth bulge in stark perspective, as did the fact that many of Africa's policies are not yet focused on youth and the elderly. Sivi-Njonjo highlighted that while Africa might have the highest urbanisation rate between now and 2030, much of that urbanisation would be concentrated in cities like Nairobi, Dar Es Salaam and Addis Ababa, leaving most of the East Africa region under-urbanised.

As over 650 million Africans throng to these urban centres, the number of slums will likely increase and with it the lack of crucial services like water and sewerage. Already, more Africans have access to a mobile network than they do to electricity. How will they charge up their phones? Many of us were visibly disheartened when we learned that our current trajectory in addressing child marriage would only lead to a 3% drop in the practice, while population growth overall would mean we will have 50% more child brides by 2030 – we would have to work eight times as fast to address this. We can assure you, dear Mariam, that we are by no means superhuman beings. Not in the year 2017 at least.

Besides the bleakness we felt at learning we are unlikely to close the gender parity gap by 2030, the

evidence on the health front also left a sour taste in our mouths. Our current lifestyle of high sugar, high fat diets, minimal exercise and living in increasingly polluted environments is edging Africans toward a future of non-communicable diseases. In addition to a huge increase in the prevalence of obesity, the incidence of cancer on the continent is projected to double. And yet, we barely have policy, programming or funding needed to adequately address these looming health challenges.

The world of work also opens up significant shifts which education and training in Africa overall has yet to adapt to. As Sivi-Njonjo put it, "what we're training for now is already irrelevant for the next five years".

Our hopes regarding economic empowerment were also tempered when Sivi-Njonjo pointed out that "middle-income" status for Africa as defined by international financial institutions translates to incomes of USD 2-20 a day- hardly enough to lead a middle class life in Africa's current economies or indeed in the global North.

Many of us challenged the data, perhaps in the hopes of retaining some of the optimism we had, until our futures experiment captain asked a simple question: "If you are kicked out of your job today, how many months can you sustain your current lifestyle?". One participant admitted that his sustenance would be for a few weeks at most; it wouldn't be farfetched to assume similar for the projected one-fifth of Africans who will form part of the continent's 'middle class' by 2030.

"We have to work eight times faster than we currently are to address [child marriage]."

Katindi Sivi-Njonjo



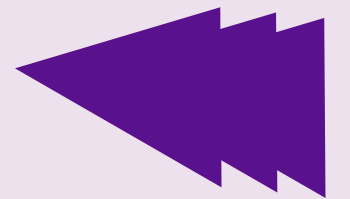
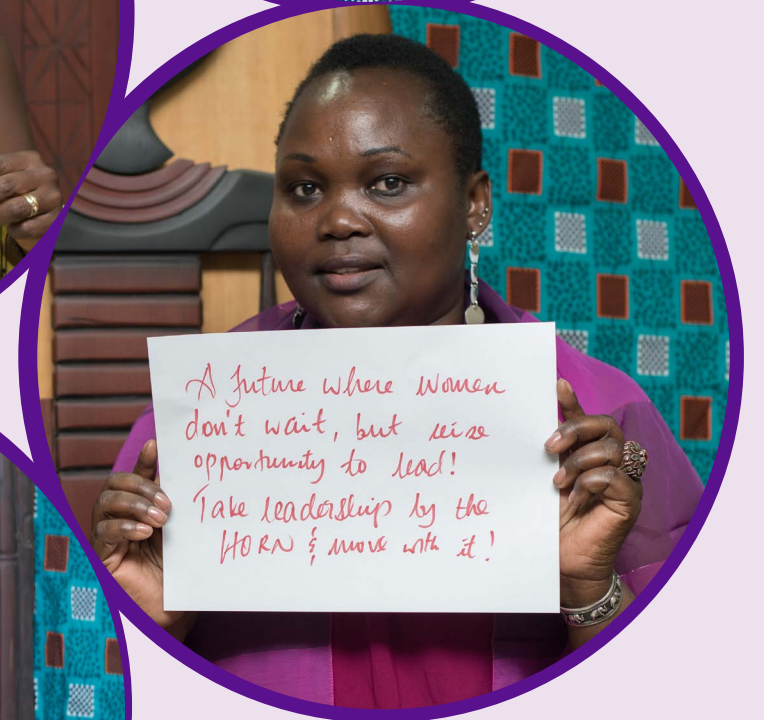
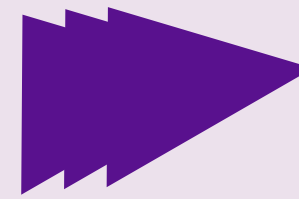
"African women are not really at the table when data agendas are set. The questions framing the data are therefore not always our questions... GDP is not the only thing that's important to us."

Jessica Horn



"We should not accept data that grossly misrepresents our economic reality, because that analysis feeds into maintaining the present corrupt systems of power."

Participant



Rising to the Occasion: Challenging What We Know

"A lot of the things that happen are imagined in people's lives and actualised. How are we going to use these processes and this data to start imagining the things we have in Africa and then realise for ourselves?"

Katindi Sivi-Njonjo

But all is not lost, dear Mariam. You come from a long line of passionate and resilient African women who have risen to the occasion more times than can be recalled. And so we did what we always do: we questioned, We examined, we suggested alternative ways at looking at the numbers, we dared to dream. You see, for many of us it neither represented the Africa we know or love, nor the future we envision. Horn barely ended her call for impressions and questions on the data before Sivi-Njonjo was barraged with an endless stream of feedback – it was actually quite amusing to see.

There was a unanimous consensus that the data was both revealing and thought provoking; however as Sivi-Njonjo had cautioned in the beginning, it was not wholly representative of our experiences and realities as Africans. We queried who exactly was defining the methodology for the data, particularly on the "middle income status" front and highlighted the importance of variables like peace and security. Some of us jumped right into problem-solving mode with questions about how best to prepare

for the emerging job market. And so it went for a good half-hour, an exchange of questions, ideas, and insights on everything from land reform to spirituality, rights, disability, voice and the role of democracy and civil society.

With all these questions swimming in our minds and around the room, the excitement was palpable. Horn asked us to write down one burning thought or thing we would like to explore further in the context of women in Africa, which we all did without hesitation. Here we were, hitherto sceptical about this whole futures experiment, yet already examining our narratives and pushing boundaries on our thinking. We were already wading into the territory of scenario building. While Katindi had served as both our guide and sounding board, the truth is many of the questions we asked her were questions we were asking ourselves.

Futures Africa Scenarios: Envisioning your future

A young woman is seated in a wheelchair and staring out of her window. The date is August 30, 2030 and she has just graduated from university with a degree in Software Engineering. How has her life in the past decade and a half unravelled? What does the future hold for her? Did her predecessors leave a legacy worth taking up? This, dear Mariam, is how we first encountered you.

We were right there with you as you relished the eco-sustainability of your tech apps in the Flourishing City Gardens; as you leaned on the Desolate Concrete and waited on God's grace to heal your mother's lung cancer; as you smiled triumphantly while harvesting beans in The Sky Garden, and yes, even as you gazed upon the Concrete Rose and contemplated the challenges ahead for the triumphant President Cheidza Bah.

Thanks to Zimbabwe's animator Mationese Wade, Ghana's ground-breaking woman DJ Keyzuz, and AWDF's pan-African team of futuristic women thinkers we were able to take a glimpse at the many possibilities for your future- or rather- our collective future. We rode the waves of your emotions, thoughts, frustrations and dreams.

Even as we felt surges of hope for what might come, we struggled to wrap our minds around the idea that our wildest dreams could come true. They seemed too abstract to be



realised; that it until we considered the fact that focusing solely on development indicators could actually be limiting, that it all starts in the mind. Some of the scenes were uncomfortably familiar. Here too, we chanced upon more questions:

- How can Africa see itself more as a creator or a producer, rather than a consumer?
- Is our future so dependant all about technology? Are there other forms of education?
- What do relations between African women and men look like in the future? Do they evolve at all?

We took much away from your simply imagining what your life in 2030, and although arduous, we succeeded in narrowing our thoughts down to a few common thoughts around how to navigate what the future could hold:

- All oppression is connected- so we must maintain an analysis of how different forms of power and inequality intersect.
- Our overall agenda is, at a most basic level, for women to be free.
- We also have a shared concern for Africa to be free, for self-determination in the production of materials for our lives and so on.
- Gender relations and gender power relations are important. Gender is not only men and women, it's a much larger spectrum of gender identity and expression.
- "Imagining futures beyond development speak" can be very difficult and may sometimes feel like heresy – but it is necessary.
- Technology is a critical variable in our current experience but it may or may not be the central driver or change.



- What are some new forms of socialisation and education based on rights for both genders?
- What questions can we ask to lay bare the values behind data?
- What happens in years to come when the word 'gender' will no longer be relevant?

Mindset, Activism, Religion, & Technology

- How do we create tech and artificial intelligence that are in line with values of our continent and represent our people?
- How can we build and develop technologies around African concepts like Ubuntu?
- How can we as women fight back using technology, digital media and other modes of tech-enabled resistance?
- How do we transform educational systems so that they create opportunities for all and don't reinforce violence? How can technology support this?

Health & Bodily Autonomy

- What is the future approach to pregnancy and childbirth?
- How do we spur the advancement of health technologies that are based on enabling women's autonomy and responding to women's own health prioritise?
- What possibilities exist for holistic health for body, spirit and mind?
- What kind of spiritual/emotional and physical wellbeing support will be available for women?
- What kind of extended family care system is needed for elderly women?
- How can feminist spaces centre women's bodily and emotional/spiritual health?

- How can women be dreamers of their own health care system that revolves around their own life cycle?

Education & Culture

- How do we break down current education mindsets to move towards a more play and talented based framework?
- How do we inspire innovative thinking in education? The kind of thinking that allows children to find their own interests and move towards more creative and design based thinking?
- How can we fund these changes? Apprenticeships?
- How can these new educational systems be used to break down (gender-based) discrimination?
- What do we need to do today to bring about these kinds of changes within two generations?

Food Security & Environment

- In 2030 what will be the future of women in relation to land tenure systems and ownership?
- What's the implication of GMOs on healthy living?
- What are some innovations in managing waste, in particular e-waste?
- How do we deal with land grab issues by multi-national companies and industries in relation to food and general security?
- How can we harness indigenous knowledge of women in mitigating climate change and environmental degradation impacts?
- How can we tap into knowledge of youth to develop feminist friendly apps to mitigate climate change impacts?
- How do we improve women's production systems into movements to ensure food security?
- How do we enforce policies to protect our bio-diversity?

Livelihoods, the Economy & Labor

- Is GMO sustainable for food security?
- How do we define or identify employable skills for the future?
- How can we balance growth in technology against labour markets to ensure women aren't excluded entirely
- How can the exploitation of women's labour be avoided?
- How do we improve indigenous agricultural methods?
- How do we advocate for policy change?



Governance & Politics

- How do we diffuse the powers of African presidents?
- How do we make the political representation of women stronger?
- How do we empower local people to govern themselves?
- How do we get more women in party politics or political structures?
- How do we influence the African to vote on the basis of competence?
- What kind of transformational education do we need to give the African on leadership in order to bring about change?
- How do we strengthen CSOs as organisations?
- How do we strengthen citizen-to-citizen engagement on policies?
- How do we influence constitutional amendments to diffuse power?
- How do we empower women to take up leadership positions?



We need to really make sure that when we talk about rights we're talking about it in a relevant way and that we are pushing our narratives and not simply accepting the existing narrative."

Theo Sowa, CEO, AWDF

But that's not all we achieved that day; we also captured essential questions on the final page of this letter for moving forward and are inviting everyone who reads this letter to contribute their own thoughts on how best to change our narratives and address the issues.

Why, you ask? Because, dear Mariam, as Theo Sowa, the CEO of AWDF eloquently, put it: "As African women we are innovative, we are visionary, and we are breaking boundaries." We are you and you are us. It's not just your future we've been talking about, it's ours.

Sincerely yours,
Africa Futurists

Just in case your era allows for time-travel back to 2017, here are our details should you want to get in touch.



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