

Communiqué

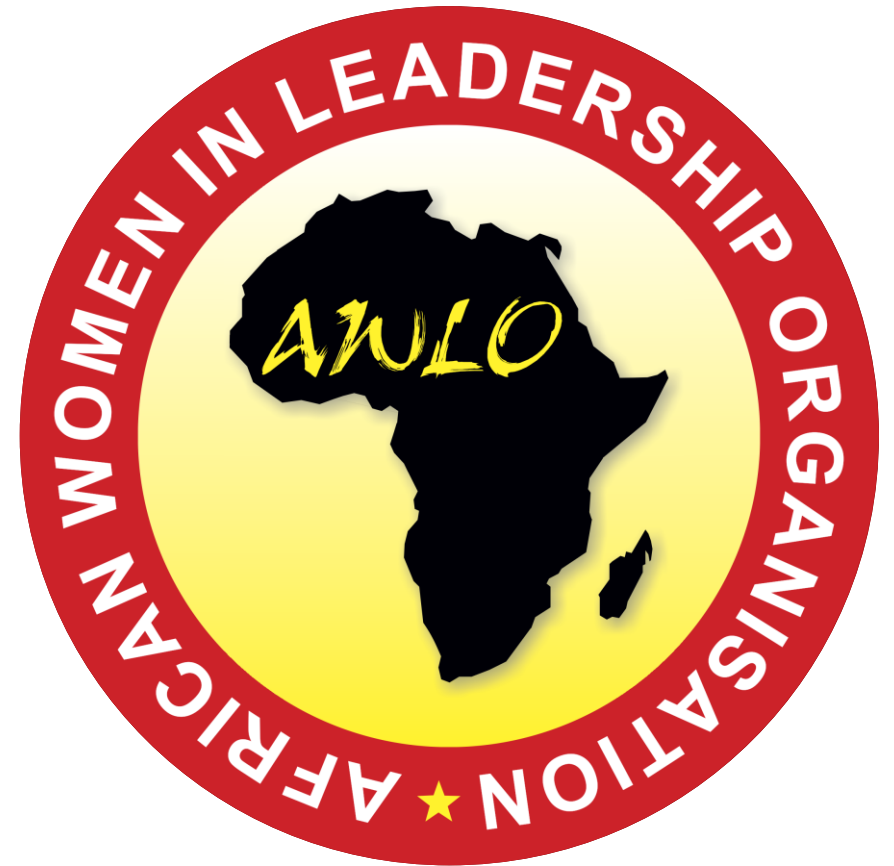
Using the Power of Your Voice to
Change the Society

with H. E. Fatima Maada Bio
First Lady of Sierra Leone

Date: Wednesday May 27, 2020



On Wednesday 27th May, 2020, the African Women in Leadership Organisation (AWLO) convened a webinar on the theme 'Using the Power of Your Voice to Change the Society' It was Moderated from the United Kingdom by Ms. Nonye Omotola, the webinar had in attendance more than eighty (80) participants from different parts of the globe.



Highlights

- Women must first determine and understand whom they really want to change in society. When they know whom they want to change, then the work become easier.
- Women must know what kind of change they are aiming for: good change or bad change?
- Whoever you are, when you speak, stand on the platform of the truth. Always speak on the platform of truth as that is what you believe and it is the foundation for your advocacy.
- Believe in the change too. Be persuasive and determined to use your voice positively. Always use your voice to bring about solution for the good of everyone.
- Women are the most difficult gender to convince. Women tend to be critical of one another. Women can be difficult to be convinced by a fellow woman but it's easier for a man to convince a woman and vice versa. Always go with a modest attitude and a beneficial plan that they can leverage on. With that, you should be able to win them over.



Highlights

- Be a counselor that is not judgmental; rather be a friend that welcomes victims of any circumstances. Do not be afraid to speak up on sensitive issues no matter how difficult they may seem.
- Be observant to the issues of concern in your community so that informs your intervention.
- Open up your heart to help them cheerfully. “I try to study women’s expectation before going further to address those expectations”.
- One must be able to learn from criticism. Sometimes, people may twist one’s words to achieve mischief. Women must be persuasive and very determined.
- Many women do not want to deal with the problems; they want to be spectators from afar. “But I try to use my voice to fight for the voiceless”.



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS FROM GENERAL DISCUSSION AND QUESTION-AND-ANSWER

- **Question from Dr. Kadidjatu: Do we have any structure in place-like mentorship-which women can go to, to address their challenges?**

H. E. Fatima Maada Bio

- What we are doing in Sierra Leone is bringing solution to the menace of girls who cannot perform their daily activities when they are menstruating because of lack of sanitary pads. Hence, advocacy to the government is to provide sanitary towels for all girls in Sierra Leone especially since menstruation is not a choice as sex is. Hence, men are given condoms and girls also deserve pads. Along the line, certain people volunteered to support the advocacy through their platforms.

• **H. E. Ambassador Arikana Chihombori-Quao**

- Girl and woman are abused everywhere. It becomes difficult when the abuser is in the home. This is not a problem for Sierra Leone alone, but for women around the world.
- We must continue to speak to the problem all over the world.

H. E. Fatima Maada Bio

- In two years, we have done a lot in respect of abuse of women. In the past, society was silent about issues of abuse of women.
- Gender-based violence should be classified separately from rape. It is not just about criminalizing early marriage, but also about addressing rape and associated issues.
- One way to go is to advocate with the people, not just through the government.
- Religion and traditions are being used to cajole women and, unfortunately, African people do not want to talk about sex.

- As Africans, sex education is the way to go to empower women. Women must, therefore, re-prioritize issues.
- With respect to the question of prostitution, we must call a spade what it is as prostitution is a choice that girls in Africa take to and most of them see it as a way of supporting their families. But the question is not getting them out but also getting them to choose to come out and providing sustainable source of livelihoods to support them.



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS FROM GENERAL DISCUSSION AND QUESTION-AND-ANSWER

- Question from Nonye Omotola: How has the 'Hands Off A Girl Campaign' Fared?

H. E. Fatima Maada Bio Response

- I work with paramount chiefs to report cases of rape. Since the launched of the 'Hands Off A Girl,' the parents do not condole rapists anymore. Cases of rape have reduced drastically. People trust the system more now.
- Before now, girls missed out of school up to eighty-four (84) days because of sanitary pads. Once they see their menstruation, they do not want to go to school.

- Question of upbringing of children and how to use their voices positively inspire of negative situations.

H. E. Fatima Maada Bio Response

- Parents have the soul responsibility of instilling values and discipline in their children that help children determine the course of their lives. Hence, it is important parents shun certain allowances and create measures to curb their children.

- Finally, the question of local production of sanitary pads arose.

H. E. Fatima Maada Bio

- Importing from China is more economical but quality control is equally important. Hence the need to observe the local factories until a convention can be reached.
- H. E. Ambassador Arikana Chihombori-Quao also added her voice to this and spoke on Female Genital Mutilation.



COMMUNIQUÉ

Following the major highlights of the session, the following position was reached:

1. Women must determine the direction of their advocacy and impact. They must determine the nature and demographic of advocacy and impact.
2. Truth must form the foundation of any advocacy.
3. Women must believe in the capability of their voice in bringing the deserved change.
4. Women must develop the persuasive skills needed to convince members of their gender group.
5. Women must learn to network for change, rather than depend fully on governments.



Signed

Elisha Attai

**Dr. Elisha Attai,
Founder/President African Women in
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