

**Keynote Statement by Ms. Anika Jenne Dorothy, Executive
Director of the Green Congress of Kenya
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Distinguished Guests and Fellow Youth.

Greetings from Nairobi! I hope you are well and healthy amidst the pandemic.

Ladies and Gentlemen, If you were in Nairobi, I would ask you... Form Ni Gani? The response I would expect is Form ni Kustand. It means we must stand for something. All of us, in our day to day living, in parenting and in career, we must stand for something and decide exactly where to stand.

When a girl or a woman at a young age is raped or beaten or denied an opportunity because she is a girl or a woman (even if it's the proverbial stick that Chimamanda wanted to hold as a prefect) she picks herself up fights through to get the will to live again and swears to herself, THIS WILL NOT HAPPEN AGAIN, not to another girl or woman, NOT IF I CAN HELP IT. That is the story of how many community driven organizations are created. Usually, its one girl, one woman, with nothing but a passion and a dream to change her community and to change the stories of women and girls around her. Because Chimamanda Adichie told us about the power of a story. Stories have been used to dispose and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people but stories can also be used to repair that dignity.

Soon after the numerous sacrifices to get registered or not, she quickly becomes aware of the headache of bureaucracies that hinder her from doing what she thought would be a seamless journey to change the world, one girl at a time.

It then becomes a pit fall of hinderances with local law enforcement in some cases, massive fight backs from families where the bread winners are perpetrators of gross injustices and the mother of it all, the lack of resources to move this agenda forward.

It is evident by now that we cannot talk about girls interventions without talking about girls education. We have governments in Africa that have a no-return to school policy for pregnant girls like Tanzania and those like Kenya and Rwanda that are pushing for a total return of ALL girls back to school with a goal of 100% transition rate for ALL girls.

What we have not taken into account is that beyond the positive flowery language of getting girls back to school are real issues facing girls in the context of COVID -19. The abuse, the teenage pregnancy, the erosion of confidence, the inculcation of the tenets of patriarchy, the rampant FGM practices, the fear, the lack of resources to get back to school, the relegation to a house help as a young girl and most heart-wrenching, the early marriages. The third wave of early marriage and teenage pregnancies are yet to be documented. I , for one are gripped with fear. I do not want to see the utterly devastating numbers.

So I am here today. I am here to tell governments today that It is not enough for to declare that girls must go back to school, we must also invest in systems and structures that enable girls` holistic re-entry like protection from FGM & GBV, provision of school uniforms and sanitary towels and scholarships to fund their education. We must invest in systems like community driven organizations which fill the gap between school, parents and governments. Community Driven Organizations ran by young people like us who go to war for us against normative oppressive societal cultures of patriarchy. It is community driven organizations that bridge the gap between positive government re-entry policies and actual consistent school attendance by the girl child. We need to break down

the barriers and that we have put up for them first RECOGNIZING the pertinent ROLE they play in girls education and creating a mechanism to work together with governments to ensure that truly, NO GIRL IS LEFT BEHIND.

The larger global community has a role to play too. We must URGENTLY RE-EVALUATE our funding matrixes towards girls` education and prioritize direct and unrestricted funding towards girl-serving community driven organizations to ensure that ALL girls get back to school & stay in school. BUT Please note, creating a national chapter of your INGO is NOT LOCALIZATION! LESS than 1% of the \$150 billion in official development assistance in 2018 reached local development actors. This means that EVEN BEFORE COVID, we were not getting it right. The devastating effects of COVID have made the situation extremely dire.

And so I plead with you ALL today, that we cannot underestimate the VALUE of education. We cannot assume that we are doing enough. We need to institute a RADICAL shift in the implementation of the global goals to get girls back to school with the support system they need. The day cares for the teenage mothers, the psychological help for survivors of abuse, the legal systems for justice and lastly the SIMPLE, PRECISE and UNDERSTABLE PROPOSAL TEMPLATES for Community Driven Organizations to apply for funds to support girls education.

We KNOW this situation to be true. We KNOW we must do something about it. I start by bringing your attention to it. I am bringing back communities to the global stage. How many girls do we have to lose before each of you stands up and stands for girls? So where do you choose to stand? Because I choose to stand with all the girls in all the communities who stopped living and are now merely existing and ONLY live with nothing but a glimmer of hope. Their only lifeline is the audacity of hope for a better future. THAT IS WHERE I CHOOSE STAND!

Because Nelson Mandela said 'Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation.' It is through education that I stand before you as Anika Jane Dorothy daughter to Engineer Anika and now Dr. Anika, given to the world through education.

I thank you for this opportunity and wish you great deliberations.