

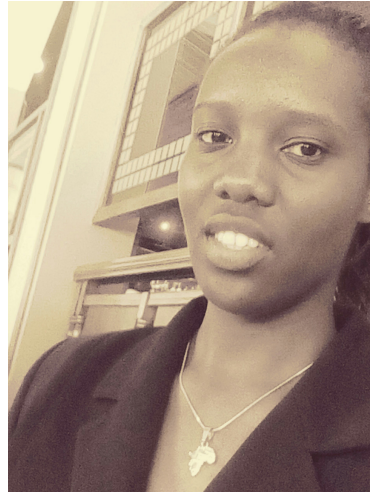
GENDER BASED VIOLENCE SEMINAR AT SILVER SPRINGS HOTEL.

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In the twenty first century, putting one's hands together and making them hit each other in continuous succession is considered to be clapping or applauding another in acknowledgement for something outstanding that he or she has accomplished. At the Silver Springs Hotel, this is not what I witnessed. There was picking of imaginary flowers from the air and offering them as though they were real, using fingers instead of hands and stamping of feet like it was done in the era of the second president of Kenya; His Excellency, Daniel Arap Moi. As I looked across the table to my fellow mentees at AKAD Group, in particular Ted Apamo, they looked dubious. At this, I had to laugh. This was a true reflection of the diversity in age as well as professions of those present in the Ostrich Conference Room that morning.

Due to this diversity, the conversation that took place sped in all directions. The theme was Gender Based Violence and the session was led by Stephanie Mutindi of the National Gender Equality Commission. A vibrant young lady who seemed to have taken multiple cups of coffee for her energy was great. She was immensely hospitable and made the room feel like home.

The girl child in the society has been talked about so much in our society such that whenever I hear the word gender, I only think about females. However, one has to remember that there are males in the society hence should also be incorporated in discussions pertaining gender. This was voiced by Honorable Florence Mutua, a Member of Parliament of Busia County. An extraordinary woman who did not sit in parliament during her term doing nothing but has gotten down to work. Having drafted a bill advocating for gender equality, she faced criticism from the media and even her fellow colleagues in the government. Determined to succeed, she spoke of not giving back but returning in the 12th Parliament to push for the bill to be passed once more.



Stephanie Mutindi, the Master of Ceremony, gives a remark.

Break time was a time for tea and snacks. I chose to spend it differently. With a couple of business cards in my hand, I approached the member of parliament. On the outside, I seemed to be confident but was actually shaking from intimidation. She was surrounded by so many people, all of them older and in admirable professions. As I edged closer to her, I saw hope of getting an opportunity to speak to her. Just as I extended my hand to greet her, another man shook it and I was left with mine outstretched. Then, she was whisked away! This was getting annoying. However, I was not giving up that easily! I persisted and after a while, got her attention.

It was time to return to our seats for the second and last period of the seminar. During this session, the representatives from different partner organizations were given an opportunity to give their views on the roles outlined in the handbook in order to achieve gender equality nationally. Learning about the amount of work that is put into this astounded me. Clearly, no man can survive in isolation.

A story was told of a young girl in lower primary school who was defiled continuously by a man with the consent of her aunt. This was in order to earn petty cash of around two hundred shillings. A similar story was also shared but this one was about a boy who was sodomized. What disgusting pedophile acts! Anger surged in me when I heard that majority of the offenders are released due to the victims' shyness to speak about the incidents in court. The Beacon Teachers are a true beacon of hope to such children, rescuing them from their oppressive homes and leading them to safety. Ensuring that they get the necessary treatment from hospitals and the opportunity to continue with their studies. This is just one scenario of how discrimination based on gender occurs. In leadership, there are cases where women are oppressed by the men, as it was with Honorable Florence Mutua and Honorable Njoki Ndung'u.

I felt moved and I wanted to help. Later, I approached Zipporah Musengi, the principal administrative officer at the Teachers' Service Commission. I wanted to know more about the Beacon Teachers, the challenges they face and to offer my help. This led to an invitation the following Monday to Zipporah's office to continue the discussion and find out how I can be of service. I look forward to this meeting, to learn how I can help those who are less fortunate than me. Surrounded by adult mentors such as Dr. Weche and Rosemary Wambui and fellow mentees such as Mike Farad, I venture out with nothing but success in mind.



Zipporah Musengi invites us to her office.

Lunch was thereafter served. A meal so satisfying that I couldn't help but thank every member of staff that I saw, even the guard I passed as I headed to the washroom! What a morning! However, it was not time to leave. I joined Rosemary Wambui, an adult mentor at AKAD and a second mother to me and Edwin Oyamo, a peer mentor at AKAD at their table. Soon, we were six at the table. The stories shared were wild but educative. The main point being to motivate us to appreciate the freedom we enjoy as citizens in our own country. After all, there's no place like home.

