

Stories from the field: Namibian girls ready to code

In April 2019, a group of six Namibian high school girls joined 39 other girls from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to participate in the “African Girls Can Code” (AGCC) camp held in Pretoria, South Africa.

AGCC, a 4-year (2018-2021) programme jointly implemented by the African Union (AU), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and UN Women, aims to reach 2000 girls from across the African continent with digital literacy skills, including coding, programming, and leadership skills.

This January, the group of girls visited the UN House in Namibia to start their journey of putting their coding skills into action. UN Namibia, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, graced the event to demonstrate its unequivocal support of the group of ‘coding girls’ by giving each girl a laptop as part of a short ceremony.

Ms. Rachel Odede, UN Resident Coordinator a.i., congratulated the girls for completing the programme and for representing Namibia. During her address, Ms. Odede said “if young girls and women do not have the training and access to ICTs, they will be left behind.” She added, “teaching girls to code is needed to close the gender gap in the technology world, and the overall gender digital divide.” Quoting Lupita Nyong'o's 2014 Oscar acceptance speech, Ms. Odede encouraged the girls to continue believing in their dreams and told them, “no matter where you're from, your dreams are valid.”



Ngurimuje Tjivikua, a Rocky Crest 2019 high school matriculant, delivered a testimony about the impact of the programme's life changing experience, “I'd like to take this moment to thank UN Women, the African Union (AU), ITU, and everyone that made it possible for us to learn and be empowered as young girls today, to be strong leaders of tomorrow, and empower the girls that come after us.” Ms. Tjivikua added that, “the AGCC taught us that we can do anything we want... I will live to not only be a

consumer, but to be a creator.”

Ms. Edda Bohn, Deputy Executive Director for the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, appealed to the girls to reach out to their community, especially the youth, to utilise and share their new skills before returning to mainstream learning. Ms. Bohn emphasized the importance of UN Namibia's partnership role, how the organisation enabled fundamental and active learning opportunities, beyond books, for the girls from not only Namibia, but also the entirety of Africa.

Globally, only 28.4% of people who engage in science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) careers are women, and in Sub Saharan Africa, 30% are women. In the future, 90% of jobs will require ICT skills and an estimated 2 million jobs will be created in STEM fields. The AGCC organisation and its programme represent another positive step towards achieving more equality, representation in the field, and opportunities for women.

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<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2020/01/namibian-girls-ready-to-code/>