

"To succeed you need not act like a man"

UNIV Kenya Women's Congress 2019 took place on Saturday 23rd February at Strathmore University, on the topic "The Transformative Power of Work." UNIV is an annual international university congress that takes place in Rome during Holy Week.

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“In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the Resurrection of Christ, we always find a *glimmer* of new life, of the *new good*, as if it were an announcement of ‘the new heavens and the new earth’” (Saint John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 148).

UNIV Kenya Women’s Congress 2019 took place on Saturday 23rd February at Strathmore University, Shaba Room, Oval Building. UNIV is an annual international university congress that takes place in Rome during Holy Week. Each year, a relevant subject is chosen as the theme of the Congress. Young people have the opportunity to study and reflect upon it in order to suggest forward-looking solutions (www.univcongress.info). The theme for this year’s UNIV is “Getting Down to Business: The Transformative Power of Work.” Each country can organize a local phase of the

congress since very few people actually make it for the International Congress.

The key-note guest speaker, Prof. Ann Muigai (professor of Genetics, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, advisor World Health Organization) gave interesting insights on preparing for the workplace. She explained that one of the biggest mistakes students make when joining the workforce is taking the professional step with the mentality of a student. She posed the questions, “Do you see yourself as a professional?” “What do people see when they look at you?” This touches on appearance, posture and grooming; in short, on “personal branding.” She said each person should aim at developing their personality, etiquette standards and have clear criteria on moral issues, and this transformation should begin right from university. She pointed

out some successful women who are clearly happy about their femininity, for example the Secretary for the Civil Service in Hong Kong, Denise Yue. She emphasized that “to succeed you need not act like a man; act like a lady, you’ll do it very well.”

The time then came for students’ presentations. Lucianne Odiero and Cynthia Kipng’etich (University of Nairobi, School of Medicine) focused on mental health. Their study aimed to establish the causes of stress among wpmen university students at the faculty of Medicine of the University of Nairobi and to suggest coping strategies towards stress related challenges that affect student productivity.

On leveraging technology, Merlyn Florah (Mechatronic Engineering, Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology) and Diana Kimari (Architecture, Jomo Kenyatta

University of Science and Technology) proposed an enhanced navigation device for the blind that can be accessible to individuals from low and high-income areas. The proposed device, a smart cane, integrates machine vision technology which entails the Image capturing unit, Processing Unit, and Communication module. The physical design will make use of locally available materials and integrate 3D printing technology, stereo cameras that use machine learning methods for motion detection, obstacle detection, image capture for recording, and algorithms for face recognition. The provision of a safe, efficient and cost-effective assistive navigation technology for people living with severe visual impairment/ blindness, in an area that lacks clear access points, would promote self-reliance within work environments and other daily activities.

Gloria Nabukwesi (Development Studies and Philosophy, Strathmore University) looked into a case study of women working in informal sectors in Nairobi. According to readily available statistics, women are the greatest human resource globally and are key to sustainable development. Gloria was advocating for women in the informal sector to be included in government policies, for women to voice their concerns and to be empowered through community-based programs such as entrepreneurship to help further economic development.

Mantui Turgo, Cherono Simam, Patricia Kinyua, and Brittany Mangara (Bachelor of Science in Commerce, Strathmore University) launched a character development project entitled “The Pepea Project” (a Kiswahili word that means “to soar”). The project strives to create awareness of the need to

challenge the materialistic view of work prevalent in Kenyan society, as well as promoting the integration of virtues in work as a means of transforming the human person. Through this social project, the group seeks to teach Kenyan teens of the importance of the virtue of hard work and good study habits as a foundation for their future roles as leaders of the country.

The Angaza Social project presented by Bettina Okinyi and Magdalene Njueini (Bachelor of Law, University of Nairobi) set out to begin the transformation of the lives of the people of Kenya beginning from a school based in the Kenyan Coastal County of Kilifi, known as Shariani Primary School. “Angaza” is a Swahili word that means to “give light.” Through various action points centered in the education sector, the group seeks to be the light that brings change in society.

After the students' presentations, the second guest speaker, Dr. Lucy Muturi (Clinical Psychologist, Strathmore University), spoke about stress in campus life and in the workplace. After an interactive session about the challenges faced by students, she stated that the best way to handle stress and be resilient is to have genuine relationships, friendships, where each can honestly communicate and acknowledge their state of mind and view failure as an opportunity to learn.

The final guest speaker, Anastacia Kariuki (Associate Director, Advisory, KPMG), dealt with the topic of "Work-Life Integration." She elaborated on why it is important to delineate aspects of life such as family, work, spirituality, health, etc. while still at the university, determining what our priorities are in these areas. This will enable us to create a mental picture of what we want for the future and

how these aspects can be integrated so as to achieve, not so much an equality (which can be elusive), but a harmony between them.

The 3 panelists: Dr. Virginia Gichuru (lecturer, Pwani University), Dr. Victoria Syombua (Lecturer, University of Austen) and Sandra Mututi (Lecturer, Strathmore University) congratulated the students for exploring topics that further change and the transformative power of work. They were impressed with the innovative and comprehensive research carried out by the students and encouraged them to continue spearheading for change on issues that affect society.

Four of the papers presented in the local phase were sent to Rome and all of them have been selected for presentation at the International Congress in April.

It was motivating to see ladies who had attended the local phase for the first time and their eagerness to learn, share ideas and network with like-minded individuals in this year's UNIV theme. Anita Wanjiru (Public health, Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology) found the Congress to be an eye-opening experience and a true pointer that women too can go to extraordinary places.

Grace B.

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