

Women Aviators in Africa is born by Kajuju Laiboni

The idea to start Women Aviators in Africa came after attending the Aviation and Women Europe conference in Norway last September. Attending the conference gave me a sense of understanding of what awaited me in my future career as a pilot. I also learnt a lot about other careers within the aviation sector that I did not have prior knowledge about. The mentorship, support and encouragement I got from the women at the conference, gave me the confidence to aim higher in my goals. Looking back at my continent, where young people, and especially women look as their dreams go down the drain, I felt that such an organization was necessary to avail girls and women alike with information, mentorship and when possible sponsorship to pursue their passions.

According to Amnesty International, in the Kibera slums of Nairobi, the largest slums in Africa, women and girls are the ones who suffer most from poverty. Parents would rather take their boy child to school than educate the girl child. In these same slums, education is viewed as a luxury, whereas in other parts of the world, a necessity. The young girls lucky enough to go to school will end up not passing their exams because they do not get enough time to study at home due to the chores and responsibilities given to them after school. Plan International, because I am



a girl, mentions that in some parts of the world, the girl child is the lowest in the family hierarchy. By this they mean that, some families would rather feed and educate a boy child first before giving a chance to the girl child. Many young women and girls have been taken out of school and sent off as domestic workers or married off early. In their latest statistics, Plan International has estimated that over 62 million girls are not in school, 90% of child domestic workers are girls between 12 and 17 years old, and are at risk of both sexual and economic exploitation, violence and abuse and that 60% of girls aged 15-19 in sub Saharan Africa are married.

I believe that if given a chance, many of these girls would do a lot to change the world into making it a better place. I often wonder how many Beryl Markhams, Bessie Colemans or Amelia Earharts we have lost. How many great leaders, mentors, and aviators have we lost due to gender discrimination or mere lack of resources and mentorship?

Last year in December during our first introductory dinner, we sponsored a young girl, Clarice Odhiambo,



from the Kibera slums who dreams of being a flight engineer. Since she cleared high school to date, she works with her mother selling vegetables to feed and cater for her family. If given a chance, I am certain that this young girl would excel in her dreams. Another girl we met works as a toilet cleaner at a club in Nairobi to support her 7 siblings and her mother. She aspires to be a flight attendant. We are currently working with these two girls trying to get them sponsorship to attain their goals and hopefully they will soon 'Pass it Forward'.