

# Raising women in decision making: A WOSWA challenge



WOSWA members during the launch of the university social media challenge

**W**OSWA had the privilege of being invited to the launch of the EAC Inter-University social media challenge. This is an initiative by The Trademark East Africa and The Ministry of East Africa Community, in partnership with The East African Community Students Union. The campaign dubbed 'Connect, Vuka Border' is the first of its kind in Kenya and the East Africa region as it is based purely on social and digital media, specifically Facebook and Twitter and, involves 13 major universities in Kenya.

"The university challenge comes at a time when the Ministry of East Africa Community has embarked on a campaign to educate Kenyans on the benefits of integration and the progress made so far in making integration a reality," said the Minister for East Africa Community, Honourable Musa Sirma during the launch held at The Multimedia University College East Africa.

"This is an exciting campaign whereby we are engaging the students on social media to constructively discuss what

can build them. We are fortunate that this is coming when Kenya has just been appointed to head the East Africa Community Students' Union in the recent election held in Arusha," said the EACSU President, George Yogo.

Women in East Africa continue to be marginalized in the decision-making processes and have limited access to education, information and communication technologies in comparison to their male counterparts. Failure to involve the

women in the development process constitutes a major hindrance to regional integration.

The East African landscape has vastly changed over the past decade in regard to the situation of women. Despite the apparent slow take-off and modest gains, the countries of the region are steadfastly pursuing policies for the promotion of women's access to development roles, opportunities and resources.

Rwanda, for instance, has become the first country in the world where women





**WOSWA members during an open forum with stakeholders at the Great Court**

already outnumber men in parliament; and Kenya has promulgated one of the world's most progressive Bill Of Rights, with liberal provisions for women's rights. These are no mean achievements. A highly progressive trend is discernible in the empowerment of women, and the contribution and full participation in the socio-economic transformation of their countries and of the East African region as a whole.

It is pleasant to note that this is the essence of the recommendations of the historic first EAC

Conference on the Role of Women in Socio-economic Development and in Business, which was held in Kigali in August last year. Dovetailing into the overarching EAC Strategic and Action Plan on Gender, Youth, Children, Social Protection and Community Development, the Kigali recommendations have reinforced the recognition of the place and role of women at the cutting edge of the EAC's development challenge. A solid foundation has been prepared and the stage is set for the full participation of women in the EAC regional integration and

development process in the period ahead.

Our greatest challenge is to steady the course and maintain the momentum. We need to embrace a great shared responsibility to heighten the visibility and virility of the women in the development enterprise.

This is why WOSWA is involved in the social media drive which aims to educate the youth on the integration process, raise awareness on the benefits they stand to gain from it and report on the progress made so far in making it a reality.

By putting emphasis on

the women's participation, it could instantly reduce poverty levels by half and thereafter rapidly advance towards the realization of our region's higher development goals.

It is in this context that the 'East Africa Women in Business Platform and Strategic Plan', which is well structured will yield focused, practical and action oriented applications in empowering women and put gender mainstreaming firmly at the centre of the development agenda with regard to the goals of women's liberation and emancipation for the rapid development of our region.