



ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF
PRESIDENTIAL CENTER FOR
WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

2023 Amujae Leadership Forum Report

EJS Center
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1. Executive Summary

The Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development (EJS Center) is a transformative organization established in 2018 to promote women's representation in leadership positions and drive social change in Africa. Founded by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf – the first democratically elected woman head of state in Africa, the EJS Center aims to foster equity and inclusion on the continent by increasing women's participation in governance.

The Center's flagship program, the Amujae Initiative equips women for the highest echelons of public leadership and is uniquely designed to accelerate the journeys of ambitious women public leaders as they work to achieve their aspirations. In line with its mission, the Center aims to drive substantial progress by placing women at the forefront of shaping Africa's destiny. Since the program's launch in 2020, the EJS Center has successfully enhanced the capacity and effectiveness of 30 women from 16 African countries. The initiative has created a strong sisterhood among these Amujae Leaders, inspiring them to strive for higher positions of authority and influence.

In April 2023, the EJS Center – in partnership with Big Win Philanthropy – welcomed the third cohort of Amujae Leaders. This intergenerational cohort comprises 12 high-achieving women public leaders with great aspirations for their countries. Among this year's cohort are former and current cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, and advisors to executive and civil society leaders. This cohort was inducted into the Amujae network at the 2023 Amujae Leadership Forum held on the 26th and 27th of April 2023 at the Radisson Blu Hotel (Upper Hill) in Nairobi, Kenya. Beyond the induction forum, Amujae Leaders have access to an array of capacity-building and visibility-enhancing opportunities, as well as a committed network of peers and coaches through the EJS Center.

The forum enabled the 2023 Amujae Leaders to meet and establish relationships with peers and coaches that include H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, H.E. Joyce Banda, Former President of the Republic of Malawi and H.E. Catherine Samba-Panza, Former President of Central African Republic. The Amujae Leaders were also guided through steps to develop tailored plans for their leadership journeys. With the support of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the 2023 Amujae Leaders also got the opportunity to network with other leaders and experts at the Ibrahim Governance Weekend which was held on the 28th – 30th of April 2023.





2. Introduction

The Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development's (EJS Center) work is designed to unleash the tremendous potential of women, recognized as Africa's most abundant but often untapped source of power. By amplifying the voices of women and girls and increasing their representation in public leadership, the Center endeavours to shape a future where women's contributions are valued, and their leadership is recognized as instrumental in driving Africa's development.

The EJS Center was founded by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first democratically elected woman head of state in Africa, who served as Liberia's president from 2006 to 2018. Internationally renowned for her exceptional leadership and achievements, Madam Sirleaf brings unwavering passion and dedication to the Center's work of empowering the next generation of women in public life across Africa. This work is accomplished through the Center's flagship program, the Amujae Initiative.

The program, launched on International Women's Day in 2020, prepares women to confidently assume and excel in top positions of public leadership. The Amujae Initiative seeks to transform the landscape for women in public leadership in Africa by moving away from tokenism, towards a culture that genuinely values and promotes women leadership.

Each year, the Center carefully selects a cohort of up to 15 women who have already demonstrated exceptional leadership within their respective fields. The selection process involves a rigorous evaluation of the candidates' achievements and commitment to advancing women in public leadership. Since its inception on International Women's Day, March 8, 2020, the Amujae Initiative has successfully recruited three cohorts of Amujae Leaders. Through this initiative, the Center currently supports 42 women leaders from 19 countries.

The Amujae sisterhood represents a wide range of sectors and industries, including government, politics, civil society, business, education, and more. This diversity informs the Center's comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges faced by women in public leadership. By providing training and mentorship opportunities, as well as access to a network of peers, the initiative has been able to support Amujae Leaders to position themselves for greater influence.

Furthermore, the Amujae sisterhood serves as a source of inspiration for other women and girls across the continent. By showcasing the Amujae Leaders and their exploits, the Center has managed to encourage more women and girls to aim for the highest positions of leadership.



3. Amujae Leadership Forum

The 2023 Amujae Leadership Forum was held on April 26 and 27 at Radisson Blu Hotel -Upper Hill in Nairobi to welcome the third cohort of Amujae Leaders. Speaking at the forum on the first day, President Sirleaf said:

“For all of us who have been a part of the Amujae family for the past 3 years, this is an exceptional occasion and opportunity for us to re-interact, to listen, to learn and to enhance our own abilities to be able to continue to provide the support that [the Amujae Leaders] need.”

3.1 Amujae Leaders, Class of 2023

The 2023 cohort of Amujae Leaders consists of a group of 12 remarkable women leaders hailing from 10 countries in East, West and Southern Africa. The 2023 Amujae Leaders hold a range of experiences and expertise as the group includes ministers, members of parliament, a medical doctor, a governor, a mayor and civil society leaders. With their diverse backgrounds and collective experiences, the 2023 Amujae Leaders cohort embodies the strength and resilience of women leaders in Africa. They include:

1. Peggy Onkutlwile Serame - Minister of Finance, Botswana
2. Fatou Jagne Senghore - Founder of the Center for Women’s Rights and Leadership, Human Rights Advocate, Mentor, Gambia
3. Dr. Grace Ayensu - Danquah - Gender Advocate, Humanitarian Surgeon, Educationist, Philanthropist, Ghana
4. Seregebe Keita - Former Chief of Staff, International Development and Humanitarian Expert, Public Policy Analyst, Computer Specialist, Lecturer, and Ph.D. Candidate, Guinea
5. Gladys Wanga - Governor of HomaBay County, Kenya
6. Moriah Kou Dwhede Yeakula- Lawyer, Feminist, Political Activist, Liberia
7. Sona Traore Sesay- Executive Director, LEAD Monrovia Football Academy, Liberia
8. Joyce Chitsulo - Member of Parliament, Mwanza West Constituency, Malawi
9. Emma Theofelus - Lawyer, Member of Parliament, Deputy Minister of Information and Communication Technology in the Republic of Namibia, Namibia.
10. Chilando Nakalima Chitangala - Mayor of Lusaka, Zambia; Vice-Chairperson of the Covenant of Mayors in sub-Saharan Africa (CoMSSA) RMF, Zambia
11. Chipokota Mwanawasa - Policy Advisor to the President of Zambia, Zambia
12. Joanah Mamombe - Molecular Biologist, Member of Parliament for Harare West Constituency, Gender and Human Rights Leader, Zimbabwe



3.2 Coaches, Mentors, and Experts

The Amujae Leaders enjoy access to a cadre of distinguished leaders and experts who they can rely on for advice and guidance. Led by H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, H.E. Dr. Joyce Banda, the former President of the Republic of Malawi; H.E. Catherine Samba-Panza, the former President of the Republic of Central African Republic and Madam Zainab Bangura, the Director-General of the United Nations Office in Nairobi; were among the coaches that participated in the 2023 Amujae Leadership Forum.

Madam Rosine Sori Coulibaly, seasoned public leader, economist and politician; and Dr. Christopher Fomunyoh, Senior Associate for Africa and Regional Director at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs served as forum mentors together with Jamie Cooper, Chair and President Big Win Philanthropy and Dr. Kesetebirhan (Kesete) CEO Big Win Philanthropy.

Highlighting the calibre of this year's cohort, Jamie Cooper said:

“It gets more and more inspiring by the year as we really develop this wave of women reaching for the highest reins of public service. It makes you believe in the future. They are a force to be reckoned with. It’s truly inspiring.”

Dr. Christopher Fomunyoh also spoke of his confidence in seeing more women at highest level of governance:

“Younger generation of Africans who believe in diversity, and equity, and inclusion recognise the role that 51% of the population should be playing. Before this decade is over, we will have not just one but two or three women who come forward and get elected presidents of their African countries.”

Present to welcome the new cohort of Amujae Leaders into the sisterhood were representatives of the first and second cohorts. Fadzayi Mahere (Zimbabwe), politician and lawyer, and Yawa Hansen-Quao (Ghana), founder of the Leading Ladies’ Network represented the inaugural cohort while Anne Waiguru (Kenya), Governor of Kirinyaga County and Umra Omar (Kenya) represented the 2021 cohort of Amujae Leaders. With the support of the EJS Center’s Director of Programs, Rumbidzai Chisenga, the forum was skilfully facilitated by renowned activist, lawyer and leadership coach Renee Ngamau.

The rest of the EJS Center team, led by Oley Dibba-Wadda, Executive Director, were at hand throughout the forum, to ensure that there was adequate support for the Amujae Leaders.



3.3 Forum Objectives

The 2023 Amujae Leadership Forum was designed to address the following objectives:

- To facilitate strong connections between the new cohort of Amujae Leaders with each other, Amujae Leaders from previous cohorts and the greater Amujae stakeholder community.
- To equip each Amujae Leader to develop an effective individual development plan to guide their journey to their aspirations.
- To position Amujae Leaders among other prominent figures, improving their visibility.

The forum commenced with a challenging address by H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on the topic "Dreams that scare you". Madam Sirleaf challenged Amujae Leaders to "dream big" and face the intimidation that comes with reaching beyond one's apparent capacity. These sentiments were further explored when Madam Sirleaf was joined for a panel discussion by H.E. Dr. Joyce Banda, H.E. Catherine Samba-Panza, and Madam Zainab Hawa Bangura. In a conversation moderated by Emma Theofelus, Amujae Leader '23, the panellists candidly discussed the challenges they overcame throughout their leadership journeys and the strategies they employed to overcome them.

They emphasized the significance of friendship and sisterhood among women leaders, highlighting how their mutual support had helped them navigate through difficult and, at times, perilous situations. The panel discussion provided the 2023 Amujae Leaders with valuable insights and inspiration, empowering them to confront their own fears and pursue their dreams with renewed determination.

The exchange among the Amujae coaches set the tone for engagements at the forum. As the Amujae Leaders worked on understanding and articulating their leadership journeys, they did so with openness and vulnerability.

During the remainder of the first day, Amujae Leaders were guided on articulating their leadership journeys using the **Story of Me, Story of Us, and Story of Now** storytelling framework.

Using the framework, Amujae Leaders sharpened their storytelling skills by learning to understand and compellingly express the following parts of their leadership journey:

- The call to leadership. This session encouraged Amujae Leaders to reflect on what compels them to serve.
- Shared values. Leaders were encouraged to continually make the effort to understand the needs and priorities of others to establish common aspirations.
- The urgency to act. The session explored the strategies for effectively communicating the timeliness of collective action.

On the second day of the forum, the discussions centred on transforming dreams into action. Amujae Leaders got the opportunity to articulate their dreams for their communities and/or countries and envision the roles that would enable them to turn those dreams into reality. With the support of the coaches and mentors, the Amujae Leaders developed and refined their individual development plans.

This exercise allowed for collective exploration of individual goals, challenges, and actionable steps. By leveraging diverse perspectives and experiences, the Amujae Leaders were able to turn their strategic plans into tactical ones.



3.4 Conclusion

When asked to reflect on the forum, Amujae Leaders highlighted their gratitude for a network of like-minded peers; unfettered access to coaches, mentors and experts; open and vulnerable conversations and the gift of a clear personal roadmap. The Center will continue to support the 2023 Amujae Leaders together with the previous cohorts as they position themselves for higher levels of public leadership.

Yawa Hansen-Quao – “If I were to summarise what happened these past two days in one sentence, it’s a sisterhood of African women that came together to reignite the fire that burns within us.”

Grace Ayensu Danquah – “I truly believe that I will benefit tremendously in terms of direction, in terms of advice and just even in terms of the sisterhood.”

Fatou Jagne Senghor – ‘It’s a unique opportunity. I’m happy that for two days we are learning intensively with participatory methodology but also group work, and intimate discussions with our coaches, the former president and former minister. [...] Those are very enriching moments.’





3.5 Ibrahim Governance Weekend - EJS Center Side Event

Participants of the 2023 Amujae Leadership Forum got the opportunity to network with other leaders and experts at the Ibrahim Governance Weekend which was held between 28 - 30 April 2023.

The Ibrahim Governance Weekend (IGW), hosted by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, brings together key stakeholders, leaders, and experts to discuss and promote good governance in Africa. By convening leaders, recognizing excellence, fostering dialogue, empowering youth, and advocating for sustainable development, the Ibrahim Governance Weekend plays a crucial role in promoting good governance and driving positive change in Africa.

The EJS Center leveraged this occasion to host a side event at the first IGW held in-person since 2019. The event showcased the Amujae Leaders and highlighted the EJS Center's work. By hosting this side event, the EJS Center aimed at increasing visibility and generating awareness about the Amujae Initiative, which focuses on empowering and supporting women leaders in Africa to be able to achieve the highest echelons of public leadership. The event aimed to engage the public, stakeholders, and the wider community in understanding the significance of advancing gender equality and women's leadership in promoting effective governance and sustainable development.

A panel discussion, moderated by Yawa Hansen-Quao, herself an Amujae Leader from the inaugural cohort, provided a platform for deep reflection and meaningful dialogue. The panel brought together Amujae Leaders from all three cohorts, including Governor Anne Waiguru, Fadzayi Mahere, Moriah Kou, and Hon. Peggy Serame. In their discussion, the Amujae Leaders delved into their personal experiences, challenges, and growth as they embarked on their leadership journeys. Through an open and honest conversation, the panellists shared their insights, lessons learned, and the transformative impact of the Amujae Initiative on their leadership journeys.

In addition, to the presence of H.E Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, H.E. Dr. Joyce Banda and H.E Catherine Samba - Panza; the program was graced by the presence of H.E Graca Machel who spoke on the importance of sisterhood and determination for women seeking leadership positions. She emphasised the need for women leaders to support and uplift each other in their different leadership journeys.

Furthermore, Madam Sirleaf introduced the 2023 Amujae Leaders and highlighted the importance of a network of support and mentorship that the Amujae Initiative offers them. The EJS Center created synergies and collaborative opportunities with other organizations, leaders, and stakeholders who were present and were interested in promoting good governance, gender equality, and inclusive leadership in Africa.

Overall, the side event during the Ibrahim Governance Weekend served as an important opportunity for the EJS Center to showcase the Amujae Initiative, introduce the 2023 Amujae Leaders, amplify the voices of the 2023 cohort, and to create broader awareness of the Center's work in empowering women leaders and advancing effective governance in Africa.

