

Africa must prioritise women, girls' empowerment —Veep

BY EUGENE AMPIAW & SARAH KWAKYE

THE Vice President, Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, has called on African governments to prioritise the empowerment of women and girls as a critical step towards building a just, inclusive, and prosperous future for the continent.

She made the call yesterday at the official opening of the 27th Zonta International District 18 Conference, held in Accra, which brought together over 300 delegates from 12 countries across West, East, and Central Africa.

Zonta International District 18 countries include Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, La Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Togo, Senegal, Kenya, Uganda, Madagascar and Congo.

The event also marked Zonta's 55 years of dedicated service to women and youth development in Africa.

Speaking on the theme, "Realising equality: Building for an even



• Professor Opoku-Agyemang (fourth from right) with some delegates after the event

brighter future for women and girls in Africa," the Vice President reaffirmed Ghana's commitment to gender equality and outlined progress made in promoting girls' education, tackling gender-based violence, and enhancing women's leadership.

"We must continue to create inclusive environments where girls can thrive, lead, and contribute meaningfully to national and continental development," she said.

Prof. Opoku-Agyemang commended Zonta International for its partnership in supporting national development goals, particularly in the areas of advocacy, mentoring,

and education.

She added: "organisations like Zonta helped us go further, reach deeper, and impact more lives. Your commitment is deeply appreciated."

The Vice President urged stakeholders to remain committed to investing in policies and programmes that ensure every girl in Africa had the opportunity to succeed.

Zonta International District 18 Governor, Ms Opeibea Omaboe, reflected on the organisation's 55-year journey in Africa, describing it as one driven by purpose and passion.

"As we reflect on 55 years of

impactful service, we are also reminded of the work ahead. This conference is a platform to deepen our resolve to build a fairer future for women and girls across Africa," she said.

Mrs Opeibea announced the launch of a new STEM initiative, in partnership with Koforidua Technical University, aimed at supporting 50 girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics fields.

The UNICEF Ghana Representative, Mr Osama Makkavi, commended Ghana and Zonta for their efforts in reducing child marriage, noting that the rate had declined from nearly 40 per cent in

the 1980s to 20 per cent by 2020.

He said over eight million people had been reached through awareness campaigns, while more than 158,000 adolescents including 98,000 girls had received support to stay in school.

Mr Makkavi, however, cautioned that more than one in six girls in Ghana were still at risk of child marriage, adding, "We must not relent. We must build a future where every girl can thrive free from child marriage and full of opportunity."

Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mrs Shirley Ayorkor Botchway, called for urgent, bold action to close gender gaps across Africa.

She underscored the importance of education, STEM inclusion, and economic empowerment in achieving long-term equality.

"Equality is not just a goal; it is a matter of justice. When we invest in women and girls, we invest in the future of Africa," Mrs Ayorkor Botchway underscored.

She reiterated the commitment of the Commonwealth and member countries, including the Republic of Congo, to champion initiatives that uplift women and girls across the continent.