We Have a Dream...
Interview with Ana Langer
Ana Langer, Director of Women Health Initiative at Harvard School of Public Health, discusses key issues in women’s health, focusing on progress since the inaugural Women Deliver meeting in 2007, and the role of women’s health in the post 2015 agenda.
We have a dream...

The idea for this invitation to dream came from my daughter Isobel, now 12 years old (with generous and enthusiastic support from the inspiration for Women Deliver, Jill Sheffield). Isobel’s homework, coinciding with Martin Luther King Day in the USA, was to write her response to the notion of “I have a dream”, the great speech King gave exactly 50 years ago (on August 28, 1963). King delivered his words on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, in front of 250,000 supporters. His subject was the gap between the dream of equality and the reality of racism for African-Americans. 50 years later, our world confronts another intolerable gap—between the dream of equality and freedom for women, and the too frequent reality of discrimination, oppression, and violence. The power of a dream is that it allows us to set to one side the excuses and prevarications so often held up as reasons for failure. A dream enables us to begin again, to renew our hope, to revivify our vision. Words can change the world. The words that follow can too.

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Special thank you to Janna Oberdorf from Women Deliver and Shane O’Halloran from DSW (Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung) for spearheading this effort.
Introduction

Half the world’s population, nearly 3 billion people, is under the age of 25. The majority of these young people live in the low-income and middle-income countries, and too often their perspectives and needs are overlooked when leaders develop policies and programmes that affect their lives—especially policies and programmes related to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. But we see the possibility of a different future, and we dream of a world where these young people can realise these basic rights and thrive.

When we see 3 billion young people, we see 3 billion opportunities to make the world a better place for the present, and for the future. But this can only happen if we allow them to chase and realise their dreams.

Dreams let us think big and help us imagine what our lives could and should be. Dreams aren’t confined by issues relating to gender, education, or religion, because everyone has the ability to dream. But these dreams can only become a reality if we give young people the resources, services, and education that they need to achieve their goals.

Across the world, young people aspire to have a better life, especially those living in the poorest countries. Millions of adolescent girls and boys around the world do not have access to information, education or services related to sexuality, or education about how to prevent pregnancies or protect themselves from HIV. Many face serious discrimination and stigma. Many others experience violence and coercion. How can young people pursue their dreams if they cannot control their lives? For too many, their dreams will remain unattainable visions. Those dreams and hopes will be lost.

Rather than lose those dreams, we can seize opportunities and create new platforms to help young people achieve their goals. This book is an insight into their world—a look at what they really need and want for their futures. We must listen to them, and take action. If we do it right, we can ensure that these young people live in a world where individuals and couples have the ability to plan their families and their futures. This is a human right AND an economic necessity for families, communities and nations to fight poverty. And it is our dream. It’s time to deliver for girls and women.

Jill W Sheffield, President, Women Deliver; Renate Baehr, Executive Director, DSW (Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevoelkerung)
Western Asia and Middle East

I am a feminist and I have a dream. I have a dream that one day there will be no discrimination based on gender in this world. Instead, the world will believe that all genders are created equal. I have a dream that one day all people will be able to sit down together and get involved in all the decision-making processes of their communities. I have a dream that one day Pakistan; a country that has oppressed women, where there are forced marriages, child marriages, honour killings, token participation of women in the politics, restrictions on women’s mobility, acceptance of domestic violence, sexual taboos, religious extremism, and violations of minority rights; will be transformed into a place where freedom and diversity are celebrated. I have a dream that one day the young women of Pakistan will not be oppressed but will be as equal as men in this society. The young women will be the leaders. This is my faith. By working together, struggling together, and standing up for gender equality, we will be able to achieve all this.

Saba Ismail, 25, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan
Organisation: Aware Girls

I am an Indian born in the United Arab Emirates and I have always aspired to become a doctor, an aim that I’m slowly but surely fulfilling. I have always dreamed of doing more and used my time as a medical student to contribute as much as I could to the service of other people. I dream of a day when people learn to live and respect each other irrespective of race, religion, background, sex, financial status, and even health problems. We live in a world where power and money rules all; a world where a woman is seen as an object for pleasure and a person with HIV is seen as an untouchable. My dream is to try to change that attitude. Coming from a background of various cultures and beliefs, it’s extremely important that the youth take over the responsibility of bringing about change. In India it pains me when I hear about the number of instances of molestation and the insane lack of laws to curb such incidents. As a male, I believe that women need to be empowered, not just by thoughts or words, but by actions and I dream of a day when this will be more possible.

Dr Shibilu Shamsudeen, 28, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
Organisation: EMSS/IFMSA

Saba Ismail, Dr Shibilu Shamsudeen, Amany Mohammed El Gharib, Mustafa Mohammed Al-Sufi, Nosheen Furmoli

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For most families, the birth of a child is a happy and joyful event. But in Palestine, the situation is different. From the first days of pregnancy, Palestinian women face complications getting access to routine health care that most people in developed countries take for granted. Most notably, many Palestinian women have difficulties reaching their doctors because of Israeli checkpoints that separate Palestinian cities and villages. The stress of not being able to reach the hospital increases for pregnant women and their families and the situation is even worse at the time of birth. Often, women in labour are stopped at checkpoints and are not allowed to pass through to the hospital. My dream is that these women can have safe pregnancies and deliveries, without having to worry about passing through checkpoints.

*Amany Mohammed El Gharib, 29, Gaza, Palestine*

My personal dream is to study abroad... I want to study hard to be able to help my people and my country—especially girls! I want Afghan girls to become educated, run their own businesses, and have a bright future after three decades of war.

*Nosheen Furmoli, 19, Kabul, Afghanistan Organisation: Afghan Women’s Networking*

I have been reporting on stories that affect women’s lives in different parts of the world. Most of the time such stories are confined to women’s media or the women’s section of newspapers and magazines. It makes me wonder, how come what affects half the population does not concern all of us? My dream is that women’s rights become human rights issues. News media should cover stories about women as a general beat, and not call all who speak for women as feminists. I would prefer them to be called human rights activists.

*Nur Hidayati Hidayati Handayani, 24, DKI Jakarta, Indonesia Organisation: Aliansi Remaja Independen*
My dream is that respect for the rights of some should be the universal norm.

Bijoyeta Das, 28, Guwahati, India
Organisation: ThinkBrigade and Women’s eNews

My personal dream is to become a professional in my chosen career—development communication. I want to see a progressive community where services, in all aspects, are adequately provided for, where human rights are recognised and respected, and where gender-based violence is not an issue. I dream of a nation where there is good governance, where reproductive health topics are being prioritised and embraced as a major subject in all school curriculums, and where all people living with sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) and HIV/AIDS are free from stigma and discrimination. I also dream of carrying a wanted baby and being able to tell him or her about life and happiness. I want to see youth actively exercise their rights and I want to be able to hear them shout and scream for what they think is theirs. I am an ambitious person. This attitude drives me to seek better ideas, make positive influences, mould concrete connections, and be a person that can happily say, “I served my purpose.”

Mark Anthony J Labriaga, 20,
Cagayan de Oro, Philippines
Organisation: Family Planning Organisation of the Philippines

Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that all was in vain. The dreamers of the day are dangerous, for they act on their dream with open eyes, and make it possible. I want to see a fairer society where every single individual can access their sexual and reproductive health rights.

Qaisar Roonjha, 21, Balochistan, Pakistan
Organisation: Welfare Association for New Generation (WANG)

I have a dream that all the upcoming generations will accept young girls and women as equal partners in development, and that there will be a time where every young girl and woman will live her life with equal rights, dignity, and health. I have a dream that all young girls will have equal access to their social, cultural, economic, civic and political rights, including education, information, entertainment, employment, health care, and contraceptives. I have a dream that each girl will have the choice to select her life partner, that no young girl child will have to suffer from child...
marriage and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, and that all girls will have full freedom to know about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. I believe that one day every young girl will have the right to become part of all kinds of decision-making processes related to their lives, and will be in a position to enjoy their lives with health and dignity.

Sana Sohail, 26, Lahore, Pakistan
Organisation: Chanan Development Association (CDA)

Since 2006, I have been a young leader working with other young change agents, peer educators, and leaders. I believe that whatever the mind conceives or believes it can achieve. My mission is to become an inspiration for other young and energetic people of my area, my community, my nation, and all over the world. I take my life as a challenge and I plan to never give up. I have devoted myself to the empowerment of the young people of Pakistan. I am full of energy and spark and I believe in enjoying every simple moment of life.

Shaukat Channan, 26, Multan, Pakistan
Organisation: New Horizon Foundation Pakistan/Youth Peer Education Network Pakistan

I have a dream to create a world where every girl is educated and informed with knowledge on safety issues that affect the world they live in, and are equipped with basic self-defence techniques that will give them an upper hand over their aggressors. With this dream, girls will be informed and equipped, which will lead to a reduction in crime—especially human trafficking. The maltreatment of girls has to end.

Louis Hadassah, 18, Bangkok, Thailand
Organisation: Safety First For Girls

It has always been my dream to be a doctor. In my opinion, every person deserves access to health care, health education, and has equal right to be taken care of. Becoming a medical doctor will not only benefit me and my family, but it will also help the community. I believe that doctors are the ones who heal the wounded both physically and psychologically, giving them the best information, education and compassion. Therefore, my goals ahead are to work hard to achieve my medical degree to help people in need—with both advice and treatment—from the knowledge and experience I have gained.

Tran Chau Nguyen, 21, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Organisation: VN MED, Southern Purple Scarf

My two best friends and I have been working as members of the Bhaktapur Youth Information Forum Library (BYIFL) since we graduated from school. This local non-governmental organisation is dedicated to increasing awareness of sexual and reproductive health for young people in our community. Our dream is to reconstruct a library, and we have started to collect old books from other members of BYIFL including daily newspapers, magazines, and other resources related to health. As BYIFL is working to promote young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, our dream is to make the library youth-friendly and to organise weekly classes on reproductive health. Then, the girls in our workshops can speak out about topics like safe abortion, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and more. I hope our dream comes true soon.

Shreejana Bajracharya, 25, Bhaktapur, Nepal
Organisation: Bhaktapur Youth Information Forum Library (BYIFL)
I dream of a world where rape culture does not exist and women are trusted to decide what is best for them when it comes to their bodies and reproduction. I hope that within my lifetime I will see a day when women everywhere may seek abortions as a legitimate and safe legal medical procedure, without having to face stigma or the threat of violence. I dream of a world where if I have a daughter, she will never be told that women are not full human beings, and she’ll never be told that women are objects to be consumed. I dream that one day the word “slut” will lose its power as an insult, and that the sexuality of women will no longer be seen as something which is necessary to fear and control. I hope for a world where all sexual orientations and formations of family are taken seriously, treated as equal, and given the same legal protections that culturally dominant orientations and forms of family have today. In short, I hope for a world where women are treated as full citizens of the world no matter where they live, who they sleep with, or how they choose to express themselves.

Gaayathri Nair, 25, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Organisation: ARROW

We live in a world that fears what it does not understand. What we fear, we hate. And in hating, our world becomes a little darker, and a lot more limited. I dream of living in a world that comes together regardless of differences and misunderstandings. A world where a woman does not get raped or sexually harassed—not in the streets, not in the parking lot, not in a bus, not in school, not at work, not anywhere. A world where a person of different sexual orientation or gender identity does not have to be afraid to openly be who they are. A world where women are not denied the rights to be educated, to choose whom they want to marry, if they want to marry, to choose when they want to have children, if they want to have children. I dream of a world where access to contraceptives, safe and legal abortion services, as well as sexual and reproductive health services are available to all, regardless of their age, gender identity, socio-economic status and geographic location and are free from discrimination. I dream of a world where a woman doesn’t have to compromise on her health and her rights.

Suloshini Jahanath, 29, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Organisation: ARROW
Caribbean

Last night, I dreamt about the ‘world we want’;
Heard the pitter-patter of playing little feet,
Saw children smiling with missing front teeth,
Little girls with ponytails, in frilly dresses and bobby socks –
Looked so sweet and neat.
Then suddenly, I awoke
to the frightening cries of abandoned babies;
The longing stares of hungry and malnourished children;
Bruised bodies and battered hands of girls who had been raped –
And given work too hard for their age,
I saw tears running down their pain distorted faces;
Feelings of hurt and betrayal seeped from their broken hearts.
Oh I wish we could have the world we want!
I wish children could be free to play their childhood games,
Enjoy the beauty of growing up.
I wish girls could still be pretty and innocent
without having their virtue snatched away!
I know we can have the world I want –
So I’ll go back to dreaming about a better world;
A safe world for all our children.
The world we want.

Victoria Melhado, 27, Kingston, Jamaica
Organisation: Be Inspired International
Personally, I believe that the collective efforts of individuals can make differences within society. I believe that with my knowledge and continued experiences, I can accomplish my hopes and dreams of filling the world with love and peace. I dream of someday working with the United Nations to conquer the 2015 Millennium Development Goals globally. Firstly, governments, international or regional Organisations, and policymakers must play an integral role in creating an environment that the youth, their children, and their grandchildren can comfortably survive in for the rest of their lives. This must be an environment free of discrimination regardless of class, race, gender, and sexual preferences. Secondly, global leaders must address the health and wellbeing of girls and women as a vital component of sustainable development programmes. The issue of the access to sexual and reproductive health care, particularly for teenage mothers, has been a contentious issue and is very important to me. It has become an increasing problem worldwide. In Barbados and the wider Caribbean, there is an anomaly in the current legislation where teens can consent to sex at age 16 but cannot access sexual and reproductive health without their parents’ permission. We need to be forward thinking as it relates to sexual and reproductive health for our teenagers.

**Rasheda Melissa Shemeek Walker, 24, Bridgetown, Barbados**  
Organisation: Barbados Youth Development Council

I dream of a world without injustice that will make this world a better place to live. I don’t feel that we can continue living with all the violence that currently exists, and most of all, with the non-recognition of individuals and their rights. My dream is to wake up every morning and smile knowing that each and every person lives by these simple rules: live and let live; be happy and try to make others happy; be better and the entire world will be better.

In my mind, the real problem is that no one cares for the “others.” We are so inside in ourselves that we are less human every day. These days we can’t trust anyone—TRUST is something we miss and we definitely need. Many changes need to take place in order to accomplish my dream, and country leaders must work together. The nations, the governments, the organisations, and the people, must embrace this duty: make this, our home, our community, our country, our region, our world, a better place.

Maybe this sounds like a utopia, but I gave myself the opportunity to dream, and we know that nowadays dreams can still come true—but only if you believe they can.

**Vladimir Encarnación Jáquez, 29, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic**  
Organisation: Dominican NetWork for Youth Rights (RD-JÓVENES)

I have a dream that young Jamaican women, and by extension women worldwide, are empowered to overcome their social and economic vulnerabilities and finally break the cycle of poverty ravaging the societies of the world.

**Nekeisha Lewis, 24, St Andrew, Jamaica**  
Organisation: Nekeisha Lewis Foundation
South-Central America

I’ve always wanted to work for non-governmental organisations or the United Nations because I think I can make a difference. There is no such thing as “small change”. Every change makes a difference regardless if it’s big or small. I want to raise awareness and make people realise, especially young people, that they are capable of making a change and creating a better world.

Alejandra Salas, 22, San Jose, Costa Rica
Organisation: World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

My dream would be to live in a more humane, more aware, and more loving world.

Jeniffer Castillo Irazabal, 24, Caracas, Venezuela
Organisation: Mujeres en Positivo por Venezuela (NGO)

I dream of a world where all women can access sexual and reproductive health information and services. A world where everyone has equal access to safe and legal abortion services and affordable and reliable forms of contraception. I dream of a world with equity in gender relationships. I dream of a place where women have the opportunity to determine their future, care for their families, and manage their fertility. I dream of a world where equality, social justice, and democracy reign.

Raquel Revuelta, 29, Córdoba, Argentina
Organisation: Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir

I dream of a country and a society where men and women are equal, where they can exercise their rights and participate in social, economic, and cultural development. I dream that girls, adolescents and women won’t be afraid to go out into the streets or return home for fear of being raped. I dream that they will be able to make decisions about their bodies, their lives, and their destinies. I dream that the rights of girls, adolescents, and women go from paper to reality.

Majo Rivas, 25, Fernando de la Mora, Paraguay
Organisation: CEPEP/IPPF-WHR

One of my biggest dreams is that humanity becomes aware of maternal and infant death; these days it’s so sad to see girls giving birth to
children and innocent young people playing the role of mothers. I dream that all young people in the world are capable of SCREAMING and saying ENOUGH to so much violence, ENOUGH to all the injustice, and where society doesn’t call us out for being who we are. What gives me hope are all the people who fight for a better life and to be better each day, and who care about their neighbours. My body, my decision!!!

Cinthia Sagrario Interian Varguez, 24, Quintana Roo, Mexico Organisation: GOJOVEN (Programa de liderazgo Joven en Salud Sexual y Reproductiva)

I wish to live in a country where there are no privileged groups, but a country where all people’s rights are acknowledged and respected. I want political commitments to become personal pledges, and I want governments to work for the wellbeing of their citizens. I dream of a world where no woman or child has to die of preventable diseases; where no teenager has to undergo an unsafe abortion; where no person is denied access to health services. I envision a world where comprehensive sexuality education is taught in every school and every home. I dream of being part of a global community that condemns and prevents all forms of gender-based violence. Finally, I would like to witness the emergence of new human rights advocates that contribute to the construction of fairer and more equitable societies. At the end of the day, my dream is to live in a world where everybody’s dreams can come true.

Cecilia Garcia Ruiz, 27, Mexico City, Mexico Organisation: Espolea

Central East Europe

I dream of a world where gender is not an obstacle to the fulfilment of dreams. Where “gender equality and equal opportunities” are not just buzzwords. I dream of a world where women have control over their bodies and can exercise freedom of choice without prejudice, condemnation, and moralisation.

Aiste Dackauskaite, 28, Vilnius, Lithuania Organisation: Family Planning and Sexual Health Association

I believe that most of the problems suffered by women in my country have a lot to do with their lack of economic independence, often resulting in their education being interrupted at an early age and a life-long dependence on their husbands. My dream is that all the women in Turkey, regardless of where they live, will have access to the necessary tools that will enable them to receive education and make sure that their work is recognised. This way, they can assist their own children and communities in development and ensure that certain education and health-care standards are achieved in their region. This is the key to further development of both themselves, and their communities.

İrem Tümer, 21, Ankara, Turkey Organisation: European Youth Parliament Turkey
I believe in a world that respects our diversity. Youth of the twenty-first century can’t be treated as a group with only one dimension. We have various backgrounds and needs. Youth represent diversity in sexuality, culture, religion, gender and populations most affected by HIV. Nevertheless, it doesn’t mean we are unique. As generations before and after us, we believe in a better future and we have dreams. But, to make all our dreams come true we need to be healthy. In turn, we need to be informed and involved in the HIV response.

We are not too young for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education programmes; we are too vibrant to die without access to life-saving antiretroviral treatment before we achieve all our goals in life. As of 2012, we are 10 million young people under the age of 30 living with HIV. We are not a homogenous group and our voices must be heard!

Mariia Ishkova, 28, St Petersburg, Russia
Organisation: Y+ Programme by GNP+

Africa

Today I woke up again. I don’t have a job, a university degree or a tangible way to the future I earnestly hope for. I wake up, not because I must, but because of the desire that burns within me to make the lives of young people like myself better. It’s for this cause that I sacrifice, that I volunteer my time, energy, skills, and other resources. I work so that the dreams of young people like me will find a way to materialise. I sacrifice to hope and to the aspirations of African youth who wish to wake up to the reality of a world in which they want to thrive and secure a future for their children. I want a world that creates systems of financial support for us to pursue higher levels of education, and doesn’t abandon us to the uncertainty of self-enterprise. A world that creates meaningful economic spaces in which our skills and experiences are valued and exceptionally rewarded. This is my dream—it is our dream—a dream worth waking up to, and a dream worth fighting for.

Yemurai Nyoni, 22, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
Organisation: Zimbabwe Young People’s Network on SRH, HIV & AIDS

My dream is to see every child in school regardless of their background. Every day I see children playing in the streets or begging for food and money while their peers attend school. My dream is a system of free primary
education for all so that every child gains a basic education independent of whether they can afford it or not. I believe that youths are our present not the future. We cannot change the world if we neglect those who are vital by leaving them in the streets or domesticated at home. If these children can be educated, they will help change the world for the better.

*Chitopo Hazel, 21, Harare, Zimbabwe*  
*Organisation: SistaAct Zimbabwe*

I dream of a future where the opinion of females would matter within a family and where men would value our input and respect our ideas. A future where we as women could believe in ourselves and be confident in our abilities to make an impact. I dream of a future where we would not be coerced into using our bodies as a means of livelihood or be the brunt of domestic violence. I dream of a future where statistics would not show that a majority of people suffering from HIV are young females. I dream of a better future for females. One that is free from discrimination, violence, and abuse.

*Aderonke Salako, 25, Ile-ife Osun State, Nigeria*  
*Organisation: Campus Health Rights Initiative*

I dream of a world where men stop looking at girls with prejudice. I dream of a world where our cultural leaders understand human rights and their benefit for mankind. I dream that someday I will be a law practitioner helping to make this happen. I wish the elders in my home village would understand that educating the girl child is not a waste of resources, and that girls don’t actually need to marry and have children by the time they turn 18. I hope that someday our beloved mothers will have access to good reproductive health care, allowing them to take control of their own lives. I hope our governments will make health policies that will have low maternal mortality as a priority. You see, I dream of a country where unsafe abortion is a thing of the past. I feel our policy-makers can stop being partisan about it and eventually look at the bigger picture. I dream of a world where by being a girl in a village, you don’t stand a 40% chance of dying before 30 years of age due to reproductive health-related causes. And I dream of a world where many of my fellow men will feel the way I feel!

*Kondwani Susuwele-Banda, 21, Zomba, Malawi*

I hail from one of the most socially challenged villages in Cameroon and live in a community where: having three meals a day is a luxury; accessing health facilities is a nightmare; going to school is rather a privilege than a right; and living in a decent house and safe environment is a far-fetched dream. I have so have often tried to imagine a better world. Each time I do, I see not an egalitarian, but an equitable world—a just world where resources, though scarce, are justly distributed to its citizens, each according to his/her merits and needs. Though possessing different abilities, talents, and skills and of different gender and social classes, every single soul within a just world will have the right, not only to life, but above all, to a life worth living.

*Kwa Gaston, 22, Douala, Cameroon*  
*Organisation: Oxfam International Youth Partnerships (OIYP)/Advocates for Youth/ Education 4 Development*
My dream for the world was born back in time. I was four years old when I learned the old rhyme
“There was an old woman who lived in a shoe.
   She had so many children, she didn’t know what to do;
   She gave them some broth without any bread;
   Then whipped them all soundly and put them to bed”.

Because I pitied her children, I knew what I would do:
When I grow up, I’ll have many children too!
100 in total, yes, many children indeed (I was too young to fathom a larger sum of kids!)
I would indulge them with fresh, tasty bread and warm vegetable soup.
I would teach them and read them stories at night
and come morning, let them play with all their might.
Instead of living in a shoe, we would live in a hospital,
where they could be tended to and healed—cuts, bruises and all.
It would be the biggest homestead for little ones in all the land.
So, of course, I knew I would need a hand.
As my years have cumulated to twenty six,
So have the manifestations of cuts and bruises, whips and sticks.
In Kenya old women are rearing nearly a million tots,
Whom their own young could not nurture as death cut them short.
Young mothers who could not protect themselves...
But how can they if they can’t even afford to educate or clothe themselves?
Health is a fundamental right and I dream of a time,
when the young can control their sexual health without spending a dime.
In my country free Voluntary Counselling and Testing focuses on HIV,
But all sexual and reproductive health services should be free.

Muthoni Mugo, 26, Nairobi, Kenya
Organisation: Daystar University
Succeeding in life. There is nothing more heartbreaking than seeing children starve to death. I have a dream of seeing a world free of hunger in my lifetime. Although I studied accounting in college, I am looking forward to furthering my education at an advanced level. Most of my former classmates in high school thought that accounting would be too tough for a girl like me to handle, or they thought it was the typical territory of study for male students. But I have a dream to do things that are considered impossible to do. I finished my studies in accounting and proved myself to those who thought otherwise. My dream is the direct reflection of the real world in which I live. Since I believe in succeeding, I can go that extra mile to face the challenges. One of my most important dreams focuses on materials that contribute to the welfare of children.

_Tesfaneh Endale, 20, Ethiopia  
Organisation: DSW Ethiopia_  

I dream of a disease-free Africa with a strong health-care system that can effectively combat infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases. I want to see a continent where there is zero maternal and child mortality. I want to see Mother Africa smile at her strong, competent children at the helm of affairs in the health-care sector while working tirelessly to ensure faster access to health care, improved quality of care, safe delivery, and adequate care for children under five. These dreams are beyond the scope of one man. They require sacrifice, adequate knowledge, high level of capacity, and social capital. Today, I have a medical degree from one of Africa’s finest universities in Nigeria. I was so deeply touched by Nigeria’s challenges that soon we will send short mobile phone messages to pregnant women and nursing mothers to remind them of antenatal clinic and immunisation days. This is just the beginning of what we can do to achieve this
dream. It is possible. We can achieve a disease-free continent.

Dr Awosusi Abiodun Emmanuel, 27, Lagos, Nigeria.
Organisation: Youth for Sustainable Development in Africa

My dream has always been to make a difference in the lives of people. I recently decided to start a project for people with disabilities living in the rural parts of my country. I chose to work in this area because I grew up with an eye condition which exposed me to some of the difficulties and challenges that a disabled person faces in society. I write this short piece three days prior to my departure to the rural area where I intend to start the project. Disabled people suffer greatly from poor conditions in my country. They have little or no access to health care, education, and employment. To make it worse, most disabled people have very low self-esteem because society has stigmatised them. My goal is to start a nation-wide non-governmental organisation that empowers disabled children and their families. I hope to one day be a spokesperson for this vulnerable group of people. I hope to be able to provide that strong voice in my country that reminds government and fellow citizens that people with disabilities can’t be left in the dark any longer. It is time to consider their needs, give them a voice, and be more respectful of their human rights. This is my dream for my community, nation, and myself.

Rosine N Makanaky, 27, Douala, Cameroon
Organisation: Crystal Foundation

My dream for the future is to see everyone as a trusted and equal partner in development, irrespective of culture, race, religion, creed and gender. I want to see a world fit for all; where youth can be seen, not as beneficiaries or objects of research, but as co-creative partners that are ready to take leadership of the world they want.

Musa Ansumana Soko, 26, Freetown, Sierra Leone
Organisation: Youth Partnership for Peace and Development

My dream is to gain a good education—an education that will benefit my family and community. I dream that one day I will smile and enjoy the fruits of my education. I will look at my achievements and remember my past and how I achieved success. I dream that my children will also have good access to education, never go to bed hungry, or walk to school almost naked in tattered clothes. I dream to live in a community that does not discriminate

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against my tribe, religion, or gender. I dream to live in a country that is free from corruption and bad politicians. I want to see young people accepted by the community and given a chance to show their creativity. I dream that no child will ever again have to shed a tear because of hunger, and that no child will die of AIDS, malaria, or any other deadly disease. I dream that there will be no more street children or homeless families.

_Salim Juma, 22, Nairobi, Kenya
Organisation: Youths For Development (Y.F.D)_

I want to be an IT technician in the community. I would like to set up a computer training centre for young people so that they can access services for free as they train on how to use computers. Within the training, I want to give health talks and to encourage them to use the internet to find information on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

_Iga Yosam, 22, Kampala, Uganda
Organisation: DSW Uganda_

Before I came to Addis Ababa and started living with my uncle, I grew up as a country girl in a remote, rural place. Achieving an education remains a distant dream for many country girls out there where I once lived as a child. Like most of my fellow childhood rural girls, I hoped that one day I would achieve my dreams for the future. My dream is to master my own life and become independent in terms of making my own decisions about my life. The possibility of turning my dream into a reality will hinge on how far I can go through educating myself and educating those country girls who yearn for knowledge and desire to grow free from gender-based stereotyped pressure. I have a dream of weaving other girls’ dreams into the fabric of their self-worth. I have dreams of becoming a lawyer and a writer, for then I can be certain of making a difference in advocating for girls’ education.

_Abeba Assefaw, 19, Ethiopia
Organisation: DSW Ethiopia_

I have a dream of freeing girls from gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices. I happened to grow up in a place near to rural villages that were notorious for their customs of forced early marriage and female genital mutilation. My dream is to liberate girls from undignified social norms. The older I become and the further I progress with my education, the more determined I am to see that my dream remains coherent with the whole purpose of my life. My dream springs from my strong conviction of gender equality. Mainstreaming girls’ education, participation, and decision-making at all levels would make my dream a complete accomplishment. I see nothing better in life than advocating on behalf of girls in order to help them live with dignity, to offer them the ability to educate themselves, and to help them keep their bodies as safe as they want.

_Berhane Lemma, 19, Ethiopia
Organisation: DSW Ethiopia_

My dream for the future is to become a great counsellor so that I can counsel and guide people in my community, in schools, and at health centres. By being a counsellor, I would promote unity among different organisations in Uganda to help the youth understand the facts of life and to achieve their desired goals for a bright future. I will promote good
relationships by encouraging some organisations to involve themselves in certain activities that are income generating. I hope that with the work I do I can advise young people on sexual and reproductive health and rights, how to prevent pregnancies, and how to abstain from sex and lead responsible lives. I would like to give them knowledge so that they can achieve their desired goals.

Ajambo Moureen, 16, Uganda
Organisation: DSW Uganda

I hope to see a society where people are given equal opportunities, and where people are incorporated so that they too can participate in decision-making and benefit from other developmental activities. Furthermore, I aspire to see a society that upholds equal access to basic social services, including education and health, equal reward for equal work, equal protection under the law, equal distribution of public seats, equal rights for women as well as men, and the elimination of discrimination at all levels. In order to see these and many others come to reality, we as individuals must stand up, voice our concern, and search for lasting change.

Kula Aatoz Zodua, 25, Monrovia, Liberia
Organisation: Women Alert

My dream involves young women being empowered at the national level. This includes equipping young women with leadership skills and other life skills in order to become better placed within their respective communities. While growing up I realised that women in my community did not have the same opportunities as men. When the men are making speeches and drafting policies, the women are in the background, cooking and singing. But is that what we need as Africans? If not, how do we ensure we have more women involved? We need to raise awareness of involvement from the grassroots level, so that young women grow with the mentality that they too can do it for themselves. I have a dream that will see the empowerment of young women in my community so that we create a generation where women can say “no” to risky sexual advances and other gender-based violence. If a woman is empowered, the whole community will in turn be. She is the one that will teach her children to know the difference between right and wrong, and enable them to make decisions that not only benefit themselves, but Africa as a whole.

Lorato Palesa Modongo, 23, Gaborone, Botswana
Organisation: UB Young Women’s Leaders Club

My dream is to form a big multisectoral organisation that will focus on issues related to gender equality. I have grown up seeing my mother endure violence that women encounter in our community. I have seen her being mistreated by my father and I have seen her rise against him to claim her own rights. I have seen girls drop out of school. I have seen prostitutes and teenage mums. My dream is to create equality where it will not matter whether you are a man or a woman. Where weakness will not be defined by masculinity or femininity but with what you do and what you deliver.

Joseph Pumzile, 30, Nairobi, Kenya
Organisation: G-Rise Youth Group

My dream is to be an engineer when I grow up. I really like physics and mathematics and I desire to add economics to this so that I can have
better chances of becoming an engineer. Having grown up in a slum, I really want to help improve the lives of my community in Kisenyi Slums. I want to be part of the engineers who change the world.

Bisaso Isma, 14, Kampala, Uganda
Organisation: DSW Uganda, Young Adolescents Project

When I grow up I want to be a footballer, and play for the Uganda Cranes National Team. When I become a footballer I want to be able to help young boys and girls who love the game by inspiring them and helping them to develop their talents. Above all, I want to play with the Uganda Cranes team at the World Cup!

Kiyaga Reagan, 14, Wakiso, Uganda
Organisation: DSW Uganda, Young Adolescents Project

My dream is to become a great cardiologist so that I can help out with the increasing number of cases in my country, especially in the area of prevention. I hope that my community will get a fully functioning Cardiology Unit. I would also like to see a well organised health system in my community and the nation at large, where everyone is able to access health services, and where the government is able to meet the demands of the people in a more holistic way without discrimination and segregation.

Nassanga Maimouna, 27, Wakiso District, Uganda
Organisation: DSW Uganda

Organisation: DSW Uganda, Young Adolescents Project
What is your dream for the future?

Girls and women must not be victims of rape, abuse, domestic violence or dowry death.

Kiran Johnson, 19, Kannur, India
Organisation: Tata Institute of Social Science

I want a healthy, wealthy and educated society.

Wiqas Ahmad, 23, Swabi, Pakistan
Organisation: Human Resources Organisation

Both men and women take the lead to solve SRHR matters.

Nur Hidayati Hidayati Handayani, 24, DKI Jakarta, Indonesia*
Organisation: Aliansi Remaja Independen

I dream of a place of respect, acceptance and love.

Mark Anthony J Labriaga, 20, Cagayan de Oro, Philippines*
Organisation: Family Planning Organisation of the Philippines

Keep dreaming, keep being dangerous—keep making it possible! Let’s grow together.

Qaisar Roonjha, 21, Balochistan, Pakistan*
Organisation: Welfare Association for New Generation (WANG)

What concerns women, concerns all.

Bijoyeta Das, 28, Guwahati, India*
Organisation: ThinkBrigade and Women’s eNews

To give the youth a stronger voice; we are the future.

Rasheda Melissa Shemeek Walker, 24, Bridgetown, Barbados*
Organisation: Barbados Youth Development Council

I wish to work with people to make them realize they are capable of changing the world.

Alejandra Salas, 22, San Jose, Costa Rica*
Organisation: World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

Sexual and reproductive health information to decide, contraception to avoid abortion, and legal abortion to prevent death.

Raquel Revuelta, 29, Córdoba, Argentina*
Organisation: Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir Argentina

I dream of a world where gender is not an obstacle to the fulfilment of dreams.

Aiste Dackauskaite, 28, Vilnius, Lithuania*
Organisation: Family Planning and Sexual Health Association

I strongly believe that young people living with HIV (YPLHIV) need to be involved in HIV response at all levels.

Mariia Ishkova, 28, St. Petersburg, Russia*
Organisation: Y+ Programme by GNP+
The past is a ghost, the future a dream, and all we ever have is now.

Paschal Gerald Kalinga, 23, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania
University: International Medical and Technological University
Organisation: TAMSA

My dream is to set up a youth-led organisation, uniquely designed to bring together young people with different abilities to make a difference in the world.

Misoz Siwela, 22, The Hague, The Netherlands (Originally from Zambia)
Organisation: Dance4Life International

My dream is of a young generation that is empowered and has knowledge and access to youth-friendly SRHR.

Diana Nakaweesa, 22, Kampala, Uganda
Organisation: Young Mothers Support Group

I hope to see a world where individuals don’t suffer the effects of poverty, ignorance, lack of self-esteem, and drug abuse—all of which hinder dreams and goals.

Okurut Tamar, 22, Kampala, Uganda
Organisation: DSW Uganda

My dream is to have every child in school despite their background.

Chitopo Hazel, 21, Harare, Zimbabwe*
Organisation: SistaAct Zimbabwe

I dream of a better future for females all over the world. A world free from discrimination, violence, and abuse.

Aderonke Salako, 25, Ile-Ife Osun State, Nigeria*
Organisation: Campus Health Rights Initiative

I dream of free STI screening and treatment, and family planning for all.

Muthoni Mugo, 26, Nairobi, Kenya*
Organisation: Daystar University

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I see a disease-free Africa with zero maternal and child deaths and a strong healthcare system.

Dr Awosusi Abiodun Emmanuel, 27, Lagos, Nigeria*. Organisation: Youth for Sustainable Development in Africa

A world in which every human being has the right not only to life, but above all, to a life worth living.

Kwa Gaston, 21, Douala, Cameroon*. Organisation: Oxfam International Youth Partnerships (OIYP)/Advocates for Youth/ Education 4 Development

My dream is to see the men and women of this world come together as one.

Joseph Pumzile, 30, Nairobi, Kenya*. Organisation: G-Rise Youth Group

*The author is listed in the full-length dreams section as well.
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