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25 FOR 25 SERIES

## TANYA PUNCUH

*25 for 25 is an original content series by Gucci and CHIME FOR CHANGE to mark the historic milestone of Beijing +25 in March, as well as Women's History Month. The series will highlight activists, CHIME Advisory Board members, partners and supporters who represent the progress made on gender equality over the past 25 years, and the emerging next generation continuing this critical work.*



s the founder of Padding Africa, [Tanya Puncuh](#) aims to support local women in Southern Africa and protect girls' health and education by distributing free, reusable, ecologically sustainable sanitary pads and investing in menstrual health education. Explore her reflections on the challenges and hopes on the path to gender equality below in our latest feature of the series highlighting 25 gender equality activists and leaders around the world.

### **What are your hopes and expectations for gender equality in the next 25 years?**

Stigma, inequality and discrimination still prevent so many girls and women from fulfilling their dreams and reaching their full potential. My hope is that we can create a society of true empowerment where women and girls are enabled to reach their goals. I also hope that in the next 25 years we will see more women fully participating in politics and economic decisions. By balancing women's voices in these areas we can improve living standards and, I believe, create a lasting and positive impact on economic stability.

### **What does gender equality mean to you?**

There are so many areas to focus on. I believe strongly in investing in women's health, education, social protection and working to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

This will require a range of approaches across different cultures and religions, but it is vital that we find a way to have open discussion regarding the rights and aspirations of girls from a young age as the battle for gender equality starts with the young. I also believe gender equality entails both men and women should be held accountable for achieving this collective goal of female empowerment. Men need to be engaged as vocal and visible advocates for change along with women role models.

## **What keeps you energised and committed as a leader for gender equality?**

Women continue to face a staggering amount of discrimination and ostracism globally. We are facing so many global issues including climate change and political polarity that affect each and every person regardless of demographics, and this feeling of urgency keeps me motivated. I'm also inspired by women with influence who enable other women to tell their stories: it's up to each and every one of us to take responsibility and make our own difference, irrespective of size.

## **What advice would you give younger generations on how to advocate / work for gender equality as they get older?**

Stand up for whatever you believe in and speak up. Defend your beliefs but stay open to the possibility that someone will change your mind; changing your mind is never a sign of weakness. Persevere and vocalise the change you dream of, but remember that actions often speak louder than words. Be a voice for those who are less fortunate than you, respect the opinions of others and refrain from harsh judgements. All feelings are human. Listen to your inner voice—it's normally right and comes from your authentic self, live to be an example for others.

## **Who do you look to as an example / role model in the fight for gender equality?**

Women all over the world who speak up and in the face of daily hurdles, women on the ground are working hard and often at personal risk, who are 100% dedicated to supporting and empowering women and girls lifting them up and making a difference. They are my inspiration and example, and they need our continuous support. No matter whether actions are big or small you never know whose life you may change and what difference you will make. I am also often inspired by the men in my life who have committed themselves to gender equality, and use their privilege to collaborate with women and advance female empowerment.









