

REPUBLIC OF KENYA



**THE PRESIDENCY
MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, YOUTH AND GENDER**

SPEECH BY PROF. MARGARET KOBIA, Ph.D, MGH, CABINET SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, YOUTH AND GENDER DURING THE FORUM ON NORTH MEETS EAST BUSINESS FORUM HELD AT THE TRADEMARK HOTEL NAIROBI ON 6TH SEPTEMBER 2019

“TOPIC - SOCIAL - ECONOMIC POLICIES AND GAINS FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN KENYA”

Your Excellency, Amb. Mahmoud Ali Talaat , Egyptian Ambassador to Kenya

Rita Kavashe- Vice Chairperson KEPSA

Carol Kariuki – CEO, KEPSA and her team

Dr Yomna El Sheridy – Chair, Business women of Egypt

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to participate in the Regional Business Forum that brings together eminent business women of Egypt and Kenya under the title ***“North meets East”***.

I wish to extend a warm welcome to the strong delegation of our Sisters from Egypt to Kenya. I am happy to see that your programme of visits include an opportunity for you to enjoy the warm hospitality and safari experience that Kenya is widely known for.

This forum is timely as it provides an important platform for women in business to share experiences and best practices in the promotion of women's role in trade.

It is significant that this forum targets women specifically, given the opportunities and challenges that women face in business ecosystem. I commend business women present who despite the challenges have the courage to start and grow their businesses to notable recognized business entities. Am happy to inform you that His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Kenya has been a champion in supporting women in business and I would wish to pass his good will message and thank you for choosing Kenya as the host to this auspicious forum.

AFRICA ECONOMIC FORTUNE (POSITIVE OUTLOOK)

Distinguished delegates

Africa is a rising giant!, The continent is globally recognized as the next emerging big market of 1.2 billion people with an estimated value of **\$4trillion** in trade and investment and an estimated **GDP of \$2.5 Trillion**.

The population of Africa is projected to reach 2.5 Billion by 2050 and will make 26% of the world's population. All these will establish the Continent as the biggest market and partner for global trade.

The rise is largely attributed to improvements in the continent's infrastructure, regulatory framework, governance, ICT and increased peace and stability among other factors.

Today the Continent has established all key strategic alliances as evidenced in the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (*TICAD*) by Japan, China-Africa Forum, India-Africa Forum, EU-Africa Summit, and soon to be Russia Africa Forum. This is recognition of the Africa's increasing importance on the global political and economic stage.

According to United Nation's World Investment Report, Foreign Investment in Sub-Saharan Africa rose 13% to \$32 Billion during 2018.

The recent adoption of **the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** as a key flagship program will significantly accelerate growth of Intra-Africa trade and use trade more effectively as an engine of growth and sustainable development by doubling intra-Africa trade, strengthening Africa's common voice and policy space in global trade negotiations.

World Trade Organization, United Nations, African Union and other such global and regional institutions recognise trade as an important driver for greater women economic empowerment.

Governments and partners must work towards more **inclusive trading system** that allows women to fully reap economic benefits of trading. Therefore women in business need to be knowledgeable to recognize these opportunities in Africa.

GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSE TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN TRADE

The full potential contribution of women to trade is hampered by several barriers including; existing regulatory regime, lack of access to finance, lack of markets, information and relevant networks to name a few.

To respond to these challenges, Kenya like other countries has continually developed policies and programs to ensure equal opportunity and successful participation of women. Allow me to name a few.

i. ENABLING POLICY AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

The Constitution 2010 advocates for gender inclusivity in all spheres of our national life. In this regard we have created a conducive environment in support of **economic empowerment of women** through promotion of the participation of women in all sectors of the economy.

The Government through interministerial approach recently finalized the development of the Women Economic Empowerment policy.

The policy encourages **partnership amongst all stakeholders** with a goal of accelerating women engagement in trade.

Overly, the government continues to strengthen the **policy framework** to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

ii. **SUPPORTING MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES (MSMES)**

MSMEs make significant contribution to the national economy with a share contribution to GDP as much as 20-25 % in 2018. Employment in the sector, account for 83.6% of total employment. MSMEs are therefore critical to job and wealth creation in Kenya especially in the creation of new jobs for women and youth.

Focusing on the challenges faced by SMEs in Kenya the Government has adopted several policies and programmes to support the sector including net reduction of the cost of electricity by 20 per cent to support cottage manufacturers.

It has also released Funds owed to SMEs trading with government under the access to government procurement opportunity. The challenge of addressing markets through affirmative action by government to procure goods locally by buying locally assembled cars and other goods manufactured such as apparel, shoes, furniture as well as protection from cheaper low quality goods.

The Country has also taken measures that has led Kenya to being ranked No. **61 out of 130 countries in the ease of doing business index.**

iii. **INCLUSIVE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT**

Government procurement has been identified as a powerful tool to achieve socioeconomic objectives even as Governments fulfill their functions. Globally, public procurement spending averages 13% to 20% of GDP. In Kenya the Government spends approximately **28%** of the Country's GDP procuring goods and services.

The Government has established a 30% preferential policy - **Access to Government Procurement (AGPO) Policy** to unlock **USD 2.5 Billion** annually to women, youth and People Living with Disabilities (PWD) owned businesses.

AGPO is one of the programs that holds great potential to actualize the commitment of the Government in putting money in the pockets of women and build their capacity to grow their small and medium enterprises.

iv. **ACCESS TO CREDIT AND FINANCIAL SERVICES**

The Government of Kenya has established several affirmative funds aimed at empowering women through entrepreneurship and through Women Enterprise Fund disbursed over **160 Million USD** since inception to benefit over **1.6 million women** and **59 million USD** and benefited **over 1 million women** from a decentralised Fund called UWEZO.

v. **OWNERSHIP RIGHTS**

In Kenya greater legislative and administrative reforms have been undertaken to guarantee women's rights to full and equal access to ownership and control over resources, including the right to inheritance and land titling, credit, financial services, and the right to enter into contracts. However land ownership by women still remains at single digit percentage.

vi. **SUPPORTING WOMEN THROUGH NETWORKS**

The Government has enhanced networking of women in the East Africa community through the implementation of the **50 Million women speaks**- a 3-year project that recognizes the role of women in the wellbeing and development of society; and, gender equality and gender equity as non-negotiable prerequisites to attaining sustainable and inclusive development respectively.

The project that cuts across 3 Regional Economic Communities (RECs) namely the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

CALL TO ACTION

It is clear that women must **seize the opportunities** and be at the centre of the Continents transformation.

I wish to urge us all to:

- i. Commit to **strengthened networks** and other partnerships for greater investments and growth directed at women.
- ii. **Extend networks and growth of women in key decision making areas** of critical importance to empowerment of women. These include; banking sector, Government policy making, trading bodies, negotiations spaces etc.
- iii. Build the capacity of women to engage in **Win-Win Private Partnerships** from the rising number of investment partners coming into the continent.
- iv. Be **BOLD and THINK BIG-** big business, big money, big dreams.
- v. Ensuring women led businesses practice highest standards of professional ethics.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I conclude my remarks, I wish to take the opportunity to acknowledge the leadership of both our Heads of State who have remained champions of women empowerment and strengthened the relationships between Kenya and Egypt setting the ground for enhanced trading, investment and economic opportunities.

Finally, my special thanks go to KEPSA and the Business Women of Egypt organization for making this forum possible where we have the opportunity to analyse business through a gender lens.

I encourage you to arrange more of similar forums which will facilitate the realization of our goals of women equality and leaving no one behind in development activities.

It is my hope that this forum will come up with actionable solutions that will enable women entrepreneurs attending this forum break new grounds and succeed in growing their business. It is now my pleasure to officially open the North meets East business forum.

I THANK YOU.