



Great Lakes Regional Consultative Round-Table Virtual Dialogue on Economic Empowerment of Women and their Effective Participation in Peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region

Tuesday, 28th July, 2020
2pm – 4:30 pm

Objective: *Briefly a message in relation to the role of women entrepreneurs in sustainable development and peace building*

1. Amb. Huang Xia, UN Special Envoy for The Great Lakes region, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good afternoon!
2. I am honoured to have received an invitation to say a few words about the role of women entrepreneurs in sustainable development and peace building. As a Rwandan, I am very proud how we have championed women empowerment in nearly all facets of our society. I would like to think that we all know the importance of recognizing the value of women in sustainable development and peace building.
3. Today, I am delighted at the opportunity to address this cohort which is composed of remarkable women entrepreneurs from the Great Lakes region. I am also delighted to note that the majority of these amazing women will be taking part in the upcoming Great Lakes Investment & Trade Conference (GLITC), tentatively scheduled from 2 - 4 Dec 2020 in Kigali.
4. Just to give you a short background on why women empowerment matters – in Rwanda we subscribed to the idea that the benefits of empowering women are not exclusive for women. Empowering women is a pathway for achieving all of the sustainable development goals.
5. Globally, evidence proves that the income spending patterns and habits differ greatly between men and women. It is estimated that Men tend to spend only 40-45 percent of their incomes on their family; women on the other hand, dedicate double that amount towards the welfare of their families and ecosystems. That explains why

women cannot be left behind in all disciplines and also explains why bolstering economic development of women is at the heart of Rwanda's National Transformation Strategy.

6. The engagement by Government of Rwanda to promote women and gender equality has gained international acknowledgment. With a population that is 52% female, Rwanda has made unprecedented progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment through various laws, policies and mechanisms. Specialized institutions and forums such as National Women's Council, Gender Monitoring Office, Rwanda Women's Parliamentary Forum (FFRP), Private Sector Chamber of Women among others were created to support women along this journey.
7. Similarly, the legal system guarantees equal rights in terms of land ownership and inheritance, hence 26% of land is owned by women while 54% is owned by both spouses. In Rwanda, we believe that women's access to land tremendously contributed to their control over productive resources and access to loans.
8. Politically, our constitution enshrines gender equality - with a required 30% quota for women in leadership positions. Because of this approach, 61% of our parliamentarians are women. In Cabinet, over 50% of Cabinet Members are also women.
9. In business, equipping women with entrepreneurship and innovative skills to absorb underutilized labour force is a priority for the institution I lead, the Rwanda Development Board (RDB):
 - ✓ Women with sound and innovative business projects are supported to acquire startup capital in financial institutions through Guarantee and Grant facilities. In fact, today, women entrepreneurs head more than 42% of enterprises. They contribute 78% in cross border trade, and Cross border trade contributes 30% to GDP.
 - ✓ The government introduced agricultural programs and developed community cooperatives to help the poorest farmers, most of whom are women, to improve agricultural practices.
 - ✓ There is support for SMEs clusters in Made in Rwanda value chain to acquire modern equipment through affordable leasing to upgrade the technology and quality of products.

- ✓ Support is also given in the form of training, market linkages, and in the area of technology where young women are provided with grants to implement and market their ICT projects according to the innovation aspects in each project.

10. Ladies and gentlemen, none of the above efforts happen by chance. We have women political leaders at all levels, from local, district and national levels. It is this structure that has been the foundation for considerable success in Rwanda, not to mention the visionary leadership of His Excellency, President Paul Kagame.

11. RDB is playing a central role in inclusive trade, given that RDB's achievements are giving opportunities to women to be integrated in economic activities as Producers, Suppliers, Investors, Exporters, Employees (getting decent jobs) etc...

12. We have re-aligned our focus and priorities and re-positioned the institution to capably formulate and deliver the required interventions to ensure inclusive growth with a special focus on women. As an example, we have a target of connecting 5,000 women to the market in the next twelve months.

13. A Case in Point is our Meetings Incentives Conferences & Exhibitions (MICE) strategy where the space has created a good number of gender-sensitive employment opportunities in hotels, travel agencies, airlines, and other visitor-oriented economic activities – both at management and ordinary staff levels.

14. Ladies and gentlemen, as I conclude, it is my sincere hope that during this dialogue, you will be able to learn and interact with each other at a deeper level, sharing experiences that will change the future outlook of women entrepreneurs in Africa and beyond.

15. For now, please allow me to invite you all to take part in the upcoming Great Lakes Investment & Trade Conference (GLITC), tentatively scheduled from 2 - 4 Dec 2020 in Kigali. I am confident you will be able to explore investment opportunities that Rwanda has to offer in light manufacturing, agribusiness, to name but a few.

Thank you!