

Women as Agents of Change for Social and Economic Transformation

Women as Agents of Change for Social and Economic Transformation of the Great Lakes Regional Consultative Round-Table Virtual Dialogue on Economic Empowerment of Women and their Effective Participation in Peace building in the Great Lakes region within the evolving context of COVID-19

Key Messages of Dr Amany Asfour

World President of International Federation of Business and Professional Women

In this terrible time of the world as it is facing this Pandemic of COVID 19 and its effect on the health and lives of people. While this pandemic has a major effect on health, it has other huge impacts on the economic, social, and political arenas.

On another level this COVID 19 has a direct effect on women and girls globally that needs to have a special response from all the stakeholders.

The COVID 19 pandemic affects the health, the economic and social status of women and girls. So our response to COVID 19 need to emphasize on the major challenges that women and girls are facing as Professionals in every field ,as Traders, as Business women and entrepreneurs.as women in agriculture and responsible about food security , as women in the informal sector and women owners of MSMEs, but also as house hold responsible and as mothers and family care takers and as community leaders. Women are suffering the burden of the COVID 19 on multiple dimensions with more social impact more likely than men, including the domestic violence that increased during the lockdown. So the response of BPW International to the impacts of the COVID 19 affecting women have to take in consideration the solutions to embrace the concerns and the requirements and needs of women and girls in their fight against this COVID 19 and the mitigation of risks of the complications of the COVID 19.

As BPW International, our main objective is women empowerment and to advocate for a gender sensitive response towards facing the challenges of COVID-19. This will be through addressing the multiple effects of COVID 19 on the economies, on the social status and the health care systems.

In addressing the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the Great Lake regions, Economic empowerment of women is crucial to create jobs and economic growth that leads to peace and security in the region

My strategy for Economic Empowerment of Women is the “Triad of empowerment” based on 3Ps pillars

1st Pillar: Personal Empowerment

- Empowerment of women through capacity building and training programs to advance their professions and develop their careers.

2nd Pillar: Policy advocacy

- Focus on **10 key advocacy pillars for economic empowerment of women:**

1) **Government procurement policies** for women-owned SME.

This was implemented in Kenya.

30 Percent of all Public Procurement goes for SMEs women, youth and People with disabilities

H.E President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa announced in his acceptance speech as Chair of the African Union that Member States should adopt the policy of Public Procurement of at least 30 percent goes to SMEs women owned Businesses

2) **Financial Inclusion for Women:** to have specialized tailored financial products and to have special regulatory framework for the digital payment solution.

3) **Women in Trade and access to markets**

4) **Women in Digital Economy, ICT, and Innovation: promotion of women products digitally and using ecommerce** for online promotion of women owners of SMES and women products and in line with the Recently launched Africa Electronic Commerce Platform Sokukku Africa, launched on the Africa Integration Day by H.E President Mahamadou Issoufou President of Niger and Champion of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area

5) **Corporate procurement:** promote big corporates to have to source from women vendors

6) **Women on Boards:** to promote women on the Boards

7) **Women Entrepreneurship Development:** through establishing Business Development Centres and Business Incubators

8) **Women in Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) Education:** and using scientific expertise for value addition to raw materials

9) **Equal Pay:** advocate for having equal pay

10) **Women Empowerment Principles (WEPs):** advocate for private sector companies to be signatory for the WEPs which is an initiative of UN Women and UN Global Compact

3rd Pillar: Product Development

- Promote branding, Designing, Packaging and Value addition to raw materials to have a strong African product that meet the standards.

BPW International proposals, activities, and projects

BPW International response plan aims to address the Impact of the COVID 19 pandemic in several channels through its affiliates suggestions, activities and projects that are focusing on:

1. **BPW International COVID 19 Fund “:**
2. **Advocacy Efforts:** BPW Affiliates have done lot of advocacy to ensure government responses to have laws and legislation and incentives for the women in different fields for Business and for social protection and Violence against women.
3. **Educational Online Webinars:** for Health Awareness and Business development promotion.
4. **Media Campaigns:** for reaching out to women and all stakeholders for messages of solidarity and support to women suffering the brunt of COVID 19 pandemic.
5. **Business Catalogues:** for online promotion of women owners of SMES and women products and in line with the Recently launched Africa Electronic Commerce Platform Sokukku Africa ,lunched on the Africa Integration Day by H.E President Mahamadou Issoufou President of Niger and Champion of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area ..
6. **Community services:** Supporting communities and women household and women in need.
7. **Food Security:** Donation of food packages and securing food for women and communities
8. **Health Care Preparedness:** Health awareness campaigns and donation of personal protection equipment including masks, sanitizers, gloves etc.
9. **Social Protection:** providing support and shelters for women suffering from violence during the lockdown period.
10. **Training and Capacity Building of women :** or to address different challenges and train them on different aspects.

BPW International Advocacy Pillars

BPW International through its Affiliates across the world and its global partnerships with different stakeholders will contribute to the realization of the SDGs through the following Advocacy Pillars and Initiatives.

In many of the activities and projects of BPW Affiliates during COVID they addressed the advocacy pillars for Economic Empowerment of women plus

Sectorial Advocacy Pillars

- 1- Women in Agriculture and Agribusiness
- 2- Women and Environment and Climate Change

- 3- Women in Water and Sanitation
- 4- Women in Energy and Green Economy
- 5- Women and Health and Wellbeing

Special Advocacy Pillars

- 1- Preventing Violence against women
- 2- Prevention of Child marriage
- 3- Empowering Women in Rural Areas
- 4- Empowering Women with special needs