

OPENING ADDRESS BY SICILY K. KARIUKI (MRS.), EGH, CABINET SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, YOUTH AND GENDER AFFAIRS, DURING THE HIGH LEVEL POLICY FORUM: WOMEN AND YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP ON 14TH JUNE 2017 AT SANKARA NAIROBI

My Cabinet Colleague, Hon. Amb. Dr. Amina Mohammed, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Prof. Jane Mariara, Executive Director, Partnership for Economic Policy

Diplomats

Researchers

Entrepreneurs

Distinguished Guests Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to welcome all of you to Kenya, for those of you travelling from abroad, it is my hope that you will spare some time to enjoy the beauty and hospitality of this nation, fondly known as The Cradle of mankind. I am delighted to be part of this High Level Forum which I will be officially opening in a short while.

I wish to appreciate the Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP), and the conveners of this forum for choosing Kenya. We are a country that is strongly promoting entrepreneurship especially among the youth and women as a way of facilitating industrial take-off. You are in the right place. Feel at home.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Evidently, entrepreneurship is the backbone of economic growth and development due to its link to poverty reduction. Rapid economic take-off in Africa depends on countries' entrepreneurs being able to absorb and creatively adapt technological knowledge and innovation, as entrepreneurship, serves as a catalyst of industrialization and economic growth. It is worthy of note that Majority of entrepreneurs in Africa, especially in the SME sector are women and youth, and they have dire need for vital data and research to be able to scale up their enterprises. In Kenya for example, women owned businesses make about 4.8% of all SMEs and contribute to about 20% of GDP.

Women represent about 70 percent of the world's poor, comprise two-thirds of the global illiterate population, are more likely to hold vulnerable jobs, and almost systematically earn lower wages than men. Much as women around the world are increasingly participating in economic activities, they continue to face significant challenges in pursuing better paid, productive jobs, and accumulating assets. Many of these challenges are associated with marginalization stemming from failure to access vital data and information.

Similarly, over two-thirds of Africa's population across the continent is under the age of 35 years – making it the most "youthful" continent in the world. For example, the youth (18-35 years of age) make up more than a third of Kenya's population. Of the estimated 2.3 million unemployed people in Kenya, 80% are aged between 15 and 34 with a greater number among the female than male youth.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In developing countries, both youth and women face unique hostilities when it comes to participating in labour markets and this has been a concern in many countries. The Kenyan labour market as in the rest of the continent, is one that is characterized by inadequate employment opportunities against a large and growing population of unemployed people especially the youth and women.

Government's biggest mandate therefore, is to create an enabling environment for business to thrive, and addressing the distributional inefficiencies brought about by market failure, in addressing the vulnerable segments of our population, particularly the young men and women.

In Kenya, we have adopted enterprise development as a major policy agenda towards job creation. The creation of productive, decent and sustainable livelihoods for young people and our women is a major objective both in the public and private sector. To achieve this goal, the Government is taking various key measures to boost enterprise especially amongst the youth.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Ministry I head, The Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs is charged with the task of spearheading youth and women empowerment in all aspects of national development and to promote gender equity and equality.

The Ministry is mandated to create an enabling environment for realizing the full potential of the youth towards building a globally competitive and prosperous Kenya. Gender concerns are anchored in Article 27 (3) of the Constitution of Kenya which states that “**women and men have the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres**”.

In this regard, the ministry has put in place affirmative action programmes and funds to support youth and women enterprises. **This is in realization that gender equality is not just a social issue, it is a development imperative. Indeed no County can attain full economic growth when the greater part of the population is ignored and unengaged.**

These affirmative action programmes focus on deepening financial access, provision of access to markets, opportunities for trade, and a facilitative bureaucracy which are all vital elements of national enterprise development and support agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today’s forum is therefore, important to Kenya and many developing countries represented here because it addresses key development issues that many countries are grappling with. Inclusive growth strategies need to include policies that support and facilitate the entrepreneurial activities of the marginalized groups mainly women and youth.

To formulate and implement appropriate policies for addressing the challenges that youth and women are facing, Governments must be able to

rely on well-informed advisory, based on scientific evidence produced through rigorous analysis.

The uniqueness of this initiative to prioritize research and evidence to inform policies therefore holds great promise for this continent.

I further note that, this forum will discuss and explore ways of integrating stronger gender analysis in development initiatives. This is welcome and it resonates very well with the visitation of the Kenya Government in matters of gender equality and empowerment.

The work and contributions of organizations such as Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP) – not only in producing such evidence, but also and more importantly in building and promoting the expertise of local researchers in the scientific and policy analysis of development issues cannot be over emphasized. With availability of research that fully addresses the challenges, opportunities and the prospects of entrepreneurial development in support of youth and women entrepreneurs, the dream of Africa's industrial growth will come to pass.

Moreover, by organizing events like today's policy forum, PEP also contributes to fostering essential dialogue, and bridges between the various parties involved in identifying appropriate policy responses.

The participation of the Government of Kenya in this forum, is testament of the high premium it places on research and evidence-based policy options in national development. So I encourage you to be candid in your deliberations

and welcome viable proposals on how we can partner going forward. I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I now declare this High Level Policy Forum officially opened.

GOD BLESS.