

SETTING THE AGENDA FOR WEE CONFERENCE:BY PROF MARIA NZOMO-24TH – 25TH NOV. 2021

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to give my remarks during this Fourth Annual International Conference on the Status of African Women.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Global Status of Women

Globally, women have fewer opportunities for economic participation than men, less access to basic and higher education, greater health and safety risks, and less political representation. Guaranteeing the rights of women and giving them opportunities to reach their full potential is thus critical not only for attaining gender equality, but also for meeting a wide range of international development goals. Empowered women and girls contribute to the health and productivity of their families, communities, and countries, creating a ripple effect that benefits everyone. (Ricardo Hausmann et al., 2010).

According to the Global Gender Gap report 2010, Ricardo et al., argue that though women comprise more than 50% of the world's population, they only own 1% of the world's wealth. They record that throughout the world, women and girls perform long hours of unpaid domestic work. In some places, women still lack rights to own land or to inherit property, obtain access to credit, earn income, or to move up in their workplace, free from job discrimination. Further, at all levels, including at home and in the public arena, women are widely underrepresented as decision-makers. In legislatures around the world, women are outnumbered 4 to 1, yet women's political participation is crucial for achieving gender equality and genuine democracy. (Ricardo et al., 2010)

Nilufer's (2001) report reveals the high ranking of the U.S. in terms of Women's Economic Empowerment although women's earning power still remains approximately 20% lower than men's. Nilufer argues that women in the United States have a very high ranking educational attainment, with high levels of literacy. At present, she says, there are more U.S. women attending college than men. Despite this, Nilufer notes that in the global space, no country has fully attained gender equality. Her report highlights Scandinavian countries like Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden that lead the world in their progress toward closing the gender

gap. In these countries, she records a relatively equitable distribution of available income, resources, and opportunities for men and women. Contrastingly, the greatest gender gaps, she says, are identified primarily in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia.

1.2 Status of WEE in Kenya

Women account for 48.7% of the Kenya labor force¹. However, according the United Nations Development Program (2019²) the female labor participation rate was only 63.6% compared to 69.1% males behind Tanzania's 79.4% and 87.2% female and male respectively. According the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) (2018)³, about 64% of female workers work on a fulltime basis and 26% of them work for 40 – 48 hours in a week. Female workers accounted for about 62% of all part time workers. In addition, earned income differentials continue to exist in Kenya with women earnings being about 70% of male earnings⁴ and women salary about 70% that of men for similar work.

A recent study using the Kenya Women's Empowerment Index (WEI), shows that only 29 percent of Kenyan women can participate equally and effectively in political, economic, and cultural life — and that their involvement is largely dependent on household circumstances. (UN, 2020). Developed by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) in partnership with the State Department for Gender, UN Women and UNICEF, the Index provides the first comprehensive and systematic measure for women and girl's empowerment in Kenya.

According to the study, on average, 40 percent of women living in Kenya's urban areas are empowered, nearly double the rate for women in rural areas. Where household heads have attained secondary education, women are more than four times more empowered than in households where the head – whether male or female – has no education. This rate climbs quite drastically in households where the head has attained post-secondary education; women here are more than six times more empowered than those in households where the head has no education.

¹ World Bank, World Development indicators database.

²<http://hdr.undp.org/en/2019-report>

³ KNBS (2018). Labour Force Basic Report. https://africacheck.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/KIHBS-2015_16-Labour-Force-Basic-Report.pdf

⁴World Economic forum (2020). Global Gender gap Report 2020.

Based on data collected from 14,000 women aged between 15 and 49 years during the 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, the Kenya Women's Empowerment Index is strongly rooted in existing legislation and policies. The first study using the Index provides a valuable starting point for future assessments of women's empowerment in Kenya based on access to education, paid employment, contraception, and household decision-making power, among other economic and socio-cultural factors.

Kenya has made commendable steps to increase women's equality through policies and legislative frameworks including the Sexual Offences Act 2006, the Prevention Against Domestic Violence Act 2015, Policy on Eradication of FGM 2019, and the National Policy on Gender and Development 2019. However, assessments such as The Global Gender Gap Report 2020 show that the country is still lagging in progress towards achieving gender parity. (UN, 2020)

2.0 Women's Economic Empowerment Hub

2.1 Highlights of WEE Hub priority areas

In response to the above, the African Women's Studies Research Centre, a multidisciplinary Centre, established Women's Economic Empowerment Hub (WEE Hub), whose aim is to provide cutting edge research that will inform policy makers and strengthen scholarship in the various disciplines. The Hub aims to collaborate with its partners in being a **thought leader** in each of the four work cluster areas, which are *Affirmative Action Funds and entrepreneurship; Women in formal and informal employment; Child care and women's work; and Women's movement and policy advocacy for WEE*. The hub will produce foundation research to understand what matters for women's economic empowerment and understand pathways that enable women's work. It will provide expertise to policy makers, researchers and other stakeholders in these four program areas. The WEE Hub works collaboratively with civil society, the women's movement and relevant government departments to generate cutting edge data to strengthen generation and use of evidence to advance WEE and gender equality in Kenya, which will be used to provide innovative policy and research ideas. This can be emulated regionally and globally. As a thought leader, the WEE Hub will contribute towards shaping the agenda for

WEE in Kenya, and influencing policy development and implementation. This will be done through evaluation of policies and programs with high impact which the Hub has identified.

I am glad to note that the conference's thematic areas which include: *Economic Stimulus Packages and Social Protection safety nets during the COVID-19 pandemic and their Implications for WEE; National Budgetary policies, child care and women, work; Women's Economic Empowerment Indicators; Policy Advocacy Strategies to influence policies and programs and promote WEE: challenges and opportunities; and Legal-legislative environment, and Women's Economic Empowerment;* mirror the Hub's four areas of focus including women's economic empowerment in Kenya. We believe the conference will be important in generating information that will shape the wee Hub's work.

Reference

Nilufer, Cagatay. *Trade, Gender and Poverty*. UN Development Programs. 2001

Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson and SaadiZahidi. *Global Gender Gap Report*. World Economic Forum, Geneva, 2010.

UN Women Africa. *New Women's Empowerment Index for Kenyan Women and Girls*. 2020. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/08/womens-empowerment-index-for--kenyan-women-and-girls>