



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT'S ADVISOR
ON WOMEN RIGHTS

Keynote Speech for the 7th Women Engineers Summit

Theme: “Future of Work: Women’s Role in Industrialization and Green Growth”

Date: Tuesday, 29th October, 2024

Venue: Pride-Inn Paradise Beach Resort Convention Centre and Spa

- President, Institution of Engineers of Kenya, Eng. Shammah Kiteme;
- President, Eng. Papias Kazawadi, Federation of African Engineering Organisations;
- All other Presidents of Engineering Institutions in Africa
- Chairman, Engineers Board of Kenya, Eng. Erastus Mwongera;
- Registrar/CEO, Engineers Board of Kenya, Eng. Margaret N. Ogai;
- Chair, Women Committee, Institution of Engineers of Kenya, Eng. Jennifer Gache;
- Chair, Future Leaders, Institution of Engineers of Kenya, Eng. Annette Ingaiza; and
- Council Members of the Institution of Engineers of Kenya

Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. If you don’t like the way the world is, change it, one step at a time. The greatest threat to our society is believing that someone else will change it.
2. Kenya, like many other African nations, is poised for significant industrialization and green growth. The rise of automation and artificial intelligence is expected to transform various industries. While this presents potential job displacement, it also opens up new opportunities for skilled workers, especially in Science, Technology, Engineering and Technology (STEM) fields.

3. Despite the increasing demand for STEM skills, women remain underrepresented in these fields in Kenya. Addressing this gender gap is crucial for tapping into the full potential of the female workforce. Studies have shown that countries with greater gender equality tend to have higher economic growth rates.
4. The transition to a green economy will help create new job opportunities for women, particularly in sectors like renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism and construction. By empowering women to participate in these sectors, Kenya can harness their potential to drive sustainable development. You will agree with me, that women bring diverse perspectives and innovative solutions to the workplace, fostering a more dynamic and productive environment.
5. Women are often at the forefront of sustainability initiatives, making them valuable assets in the green economy. Unfortunately, women continue to face significant barriers in accessing education, leadership positions, and employment opportunities. They also experience discrimination, violence and harassment at the work place, hindering their professional advancement.
6. Africa faces significant infrastructure deficits, including transportation and digital connectivity. This hinders industrial development and competitiveness. A lack of skilled labor, particularly in technical and managerial roles, limits the ability of African countries to attract investment and drive innovation.
7. So how do we overcome these challenges? It is by fully realizing the potential to harness the power of women. Investing in women's education and skills training is crucial for their economic empowerment. It is also about recognition and re-distributing unpaid care care work. By providing affordable and accessible childcare, we will help women balance work and family responsibilities.
8. For those in formal employment, implementing friendly work arrangements, such as remote working and flexible hours, can accommodate women's

diverse needs. Mentorship and sponsorship programs also help women advance their careers and reach leadership positions.

9. At the same time, Government policies and legislation promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace are in place to create a more favorable environment for women engineers. I call on private companies to implement policies that support women's advancement, such as flexible work arrangements, equal pay, diversity and inclusion training.
10. Enacting and enforcing laws that protect women's rights and promote gender equality, is essential. Encouraging **Public-Private Partnerships** is also key. My office is collaborating with the World Economic Forum to establish the 1st Gender Parity Accelerator in Sub-Saharan Africa. By focusing on women-owned Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) we can create tailored support mechanisms that empower women entrepreneurs.
11. The Accelerator will not only enhance access to resources and funding for women-owned businesses but also foster innovation and sustainability within these enterprises. In close collaboration with the Private Sector, we can create more job opportunities for women and promote gender-inclusive practices, driving economic growth and social equity.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

12. Kenya is a patriarchal society so we must challenge any cultural norms and practices that disadvantage women's participation in the economic development of the country. Traditional gender roles need to be interrogated, and gender equality in societal norms mainstreamed to leave no one behind.
13. Collecting and analyzing data on women's participation in the workforce will enable the enactment of informed policy decisions, and subsequent tracking of progress. Benchmarking by collaborating with international organizations and other countries should be encouraged, to facilitate knowledge sharing and best practices.

14. Embracing technology will enable us to improve productivity and competitiveness. Here we must ensure timely enactment of legislation and policies that promote technology transfer and innovation, to address the slow adoption of technology in African industries.
15. While Kenya has made strides in promoting gender equality in various fields, engineering remains a male-dominated profession. However, a growing number of women are breaking down barriers and making significant contributions to the field. I am happy to note that the **Institution of Engineers of Kenya, Women Engineers Chapter** provides a platform for women engineers to network, share experiences, and advocate for their rights. And today's Summit is one such avenue, well done!
16. To encourage more women to pursue engineering careers, it is essential to promote STEM education for girls. Experience has shown that early exposure to STEM subjects sparks interest and inspires young girls to pursue engineering. However, traditional gender roles often discourage girls and young women from pursuing STEM fields, leading to a lack of female role models in engineering.
17. Providing mentorship and sponsorship opportunities also helps women advance their careers and overcome challenges. The Government through its relevant Ministries has undertaken initiatives aimed at inspiring young girls to pursue STEM careers, such as STEM camps, workshops, and competitions, to encourage more women to enter the field.
18. Empowering women has many advantages. It leads to increased labor force participation, expanding the pool of skilled workers and boosting productivity. Specifically, women's economic empowerment leads to increased household income, improving the overall standard of living and reducing poverty rates.
19. When women have access to resources, education, and opportunities, they can start businesses, create jobs, and drive economic growth. Universally, women's empowerment is linked to better health and education outcomes for their children, leading to a healthier and more educated workforce.

20. Young people, on the other hand, are often at the forefront of innovation and entrepreneurship, driving economic growth and job creation. Investing in youth education and skills development creates a skilled workforce that meets the demands of a modern economy.
21. Empowering youth reduces poverty and inequality by providing them with opportunities to secure decent jobs and improve their livelihoods. Empowered youth are less likely to engage in crime and violence, contributing to a more stable and peaceful society.

In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen;

22. To harness the potential of women in industrialization and green growth, policymakers should prioritize STEM education and vocational training to build a skilled workforce.
23. Let us continue encouraging Public-Private Partnerships in our countries to create job opportunities for women and promote gender-inclusive practices. Similarly, creation of a supportive ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship, must be prioritized.
24. Africa will unlock its industrial potential and achieve sustainable economic growth. By empowering women and the youth, and embracing their potential, Kenya can position itself as a leader in sustainable development and economic growth.
25. The true value of smart city's lies in the ability to foster innovation, sustainability and inclusivity, while enhancing the wellbeing of it's citizens. Smart cities are not built on brick and motar, but with data and innovation.

Thank you!

Hon. Harriette Chiggai

President's Advisor on Women Rights