



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR
ON WOMEN RIGHTS

OPENING REMARKS FOR WOMEN IN ASALS STAKEHOLDER/PARTNERS' BREAKFAST MEETING

DATE: Thursday, 31ST October, 2024
VENUE: Fairview Hotel, Nairobi
TIME: 7.30am – 10.00am

Salutations

- President's Advisor on the Minority and Marginalized, Josephat Lowol;
- Principal Secretary, State Department for Arid and Semi-Arid Lands, Harsama Kello (in absentia);
- CEO, National Gender and Equality Commission Dr Purity Ngina;
- Country Director for Pathfinder, Pamela Onduso;
- Senior Economist, World Bank Shubha Chakravarty;
- Medecins Sans Frontières, Ambassador Lucy Chelimo;
- CEO, Ushanga Initiative, Dorothy Mwashipei;

Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning!

1. I start by appreciating each one of you for accepting our invitation, and joining us here this morning. It is gratifying to see your readiness to partner with the Government in efforts to address the challenges faced by women and girls in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs). In our discussions we shall focus on the opportunities available, and how best we can leverage those.
2. Economic empowerment of women in Kenya's ASAL regions is a complex issue. Various factors influence women's participation in nation building and their success in economic ventures. The positive gains reaped from this effort are many, with far-reaching effects across diverse sectors.
3. ASALs are not a Kenyan concept. Globally, they cover about 40% of the world's land area and are home to more than 2 billion people. These regions are characterized by low and unpredictable rainfall, extreme temperatures, and scarce vegetation.
4. In many parts of the world, ASALs experience increasing pressures from climate change, population growth and economic marginalization, which exacerbate poverty and food insecurity.
5. Here in Kenya, ASALs cover over 80% of our land mass. They are home to approximately 39% of the Kenyan population with 50% being women, and about 90% of our wildlife. Over 75% of the country's livestock and pastoral wealth are also found here.

6. Available data, we have already heard from the World Bank earlier, indicates that women in these areas face barriers in accessing land, affordable credit, technology, and information, which are essential for economic activities. The poor transportation and communication networks in most of these areas, further limit their ability to access markets and sell their products.
7. The 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey shows a shocking high infant mortality rate in some of the ASAL Counties, with Migori having 53%, Baringo 50%, Laikipia 44%, Wajir 43% amongst others. You will agree with me these are one too many children to lose in our society. Teen pregnancies and Gender-Based Violence cases in these areas are also above the National average.
8. Given the above, how can we assist these women overcome these hurdles and set them on their empowerment journey? Let us first understand what the contributing factors are that have brought them to this point.
9. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often limit women's participation in economic activities and decision-making processes. Climate change and environmental degradation as witnessed in ASAL areas, are among major factors that exacerbate poverty and food insecurity. This disproportionately affects women who are often responsible for household food security.
10. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. We are in agreement that women play a significant role in agriculture and livestock production in ASAL areas. Therefore, we can start by equipping them with knowledge and skills in climate-smart agricultural practices like drought-resistant crop selection; and water conservation techniques.
11. We can also train and build their capacity on how to access agricultural inputs like improved seeds and livestock breeds; fertilizers; tools; and sustainable livestock management. The training should include how and where to access affordable credit and financial services. We should then connect women farmers to markets to ensure fair prices for their produce and reduced post-harvest losses.
12. Similarly, women can benefit from the sustainable harvesting and processing of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as honey, gum, and medicinal plants. It is important, therefore, to teach them sustainable harvesting practices to ensure the long-term availability of NTFPs. They will also need connections to markets for NTFPs, both domestic and international.
13. When it comes to conventional small-scale enterprises, I urge that we purposely support women-owned businesses. We can facilitate their access to credit and financial services, and provide financial literacy training in business management to promote economic growth and job creation. In addition, let us encourage them early enough to form savings groups to promote financial inclusion and collective savings.

14. Given that most ASAL areas already suffer high temperatures, involving women in the development and management of renewable energy technologies, such as solar power and biogas production, makes financial 'cents'. We need to encourage the local communities to undertake and support community-based initiatives for renewable energy projects to benefit women collectively. Supporting women's groups and cooperatives will greatly strengthen their collective voice and bargaining power.
15. And given the high percentage of wild animals in these regions, let us encourage the involvement of women in tourism-related activities, such as guiding, accommodation, and handicrafts production. This will enable them to generate additional income.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

16. You have heard the World Bank affirm that the Government has already put in place policy and legal frameworks that promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Gender-responsive policies that address the specific needs of women in ASAL regions, are in effect.
17. Enormous efforts have also been put in place to improve road networks, water, and electricity connectivity, all of which are crucial to economic activities in ASAL areas. Institutions responsible for women's empowerment and economic development in those areas, have also been strengthened.
18. Capacity building through training and education programmes for women in agriculture, business, and technology continue to be undertaken, through various Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs), to enhance women's skills and knowledge.
19. This brings us to the purpose of this breakfast today. Government can only do so much. The positioning of my Office in the Executive Office of the President is strategic in that it allows me to execute my mandate smoothly. I am, therefore, well placed to advise the President of Kenya on matters pertaining to Women Rights and Empowerment and to support the adoption of the Government's Women Agenda across all sectors.
20. It makes sense therefore that to succeed, I need you on board. We must adopt an all hands-on deck approach. The Private Sector, Development Partners, Philanthropists and Civil Society Organizations through Public-Private Partnerships are crucial in augmenting Government efforts of mobilizing much-needed resources and the necessary expertise to support women rights and economic empowerment in ASAL areas.
21. Collaborating with international organizations and donors will further improve knowledge sharing of best practices and lessons learned from other countries to inform the design and implementation of effective interventions.

In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities for women's economic empowerment in Kenya's ASAL areas requires a multi-faceted approach.

I believe the presentations and subsequent discussions we shall go into this morning will be focused and give us the outcomes necessary to reduce poverty, create safe spaces for women and girls and improve the livelihoods of all residents in these vulnerable regions.

Thank you.

Hon. Harriette Chiggai,
President's Advisor on Women Rights