



REMARKS BY JANE KIRAGU,

**BOARD MEMBER,
KENYA ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN
BUSINESS OWNERS,**

**DURING THE 59th SESSION
ON THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF
WOMEN KENYA SIDE EVENT HOSTED BY THE
MINISTRY OF DEVOLUTION AND PLANNING
UN HQS NEW YORK**

TUESDAY MARCH 17th 2015

Excellency's, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty years after Beijing, it is a pleasure to be here speaking about Kenya's progress in implementing the Platform for Action in the Critical Area of women and the economy. This afternoon, I will speak on how our women's association has worked towards increasing women's participation in public procurement.

The Kenya Association of Women Business Owners (KAWBO) is the leading women business association for small-medium size businesses in Kenya.

Registered in March 2008 the association was set up in response to a yearning among local business women for a forum in which they could network, professionally engage on issues affecting their businesses and acquire requisite skills that would enable them to upscale their businesses and ultimately create stature and significant levels of resources to benefit their community and contribute to national economic performance.

Globally the case for supplier diversity has gradually gained traction. Whilst the cause was initiated by private sector to harness value for money, increase efficiency and competition as well as accessing goods and services of the highest value, the concept is slowly being adopted by the public sector in a bid to ensure that the supplier base is reflective of the population demographics and that social justice, equity and inclusion is achieved.

The Kenyan government has been a notable trailblazer in the pursuit of supplier diversity, not by rhetoric but clear concrete action anchored in policy and legislation.

Towards institutionalising this public good, the Government of Kenya through the Public Procurement and Disposal (Preference and Reservations Regulations) 2013, reserves at least 30% of all procurement spend to women, youth and persons with disabilities. It spells out how supplier diversity is to be implemented in the public sector.

This provision together with other supplementary legislation that are inspired by the Constitution of Kenya have drastically changed the narrative of public procurement in Kenya.

In addition, Government initiatives such as Uwezo Fund and the Youth Enterprise Development Fund have been created to facilitate women, youth and persons with disability to become suppliers to government. The uptake of the 30% reservation is increasingly taking root.

Our Association has been focusing on the technical, structural, systemic and information challenges that have been hindering women from accessing government contracts.

KAWBO's research has revealed two main challenges women face in public procurement:

- 1) Lack of information on the transformative provisions for women
- 2) the weak capacity in delivering a competitive bid.

As a result, KAWBO developed its Imarisha Biashara Campaign (a Swahili slogan directly translated to mean 'Improving your businesses') in October 2013. The objective of the campaign is to increase women's participation in public procurement in four ways:

- 1) By influencing public procurement policy through engagement with relevant stakeholders particularly Ministry of Devolution and Planning, National Treasury and the Public Procurement Oversight Authority
- 2) Through awareness creation and mobilisation of target groups to take full advantage of the Preference and Reservations Scheme
- 3) Building the capacity of target groups to competitively bid for government contracts through training
- 4) Working with target groups to formalise their businesses and acquire Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) certificate

So far, we have been able to:

- a) Develop a training curriculum for women to structure their bidding processes;
- b) Support training for over 1000 women entrepreneurs to create a pipeline of credible and skilled women suppliers
- c) Undertake advocacy with women members of the national assembly in support of the legislation process, in particular the women representatives towards generating demand at county levels.

Key lessons learnt

Our work has revealed that:

- A policy framework that guides the change process is critical to success– it is evidence of transition from commitment to action and facilitates advocacy
- Systematic and deliberate measures to link beneficiaries of the dividends brought about by the law is also important
- Broad based stakeholder ownership is necessary towards securing effective implementation of the law.

As KAWBO we pride ourselves as the first country in the world to make such progressive and transformative measures law that will propel women's economic empowerment for Kenya's prosperity!

Thank you.