

**First Lady Jeannette Kagame's remarks**

**at the**

**Gender Equality Forum - YouLead Summit**

**Wednesday, 10 November 2021**

**Honorable Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa,  
Distinguished East African Leaders,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Our dear Youth,**

**Good afternoon!**

“It is impossible to create a better world, without bettering the lot of women. The world cannot be a better place, if women’s conditions are not better in it.” wrote Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem. May his soul rest in peace.

While these words were penned in 2006, they still resonate now, despite our countries’ advances of the past 15 years, in granting women equal status, equal opportunities, and equal protection under the law.

Perhaps the greatest indicator, of how much further our fight must take us, is the fact that discussions on female equality, are still being held, and justifiably so.

To this day, the biological differences between the sexes, are frequently mischaracterized, as a justification for gender inequality. They are not. Instead, they are an indicator of how complementary our respective offerings can be.

To build a post-94 Rwanda, the contributions of all available human capital, had to be put to use. The nurturing nature of women, the sensitivity that nourishes their unconditional love for their children, needed to be capitalised upon, to engage an entire nation, in the testing task of communal healing.

The gift that womanhood offers the community, is the antithesis of enmity and death: love and life.

For a continent that has been scarred by centuries of oppression, but bears the resilience and drive to overcome, these are the energies that must be tapped into.

Gender equality isn't about uplifting one gender. It is about uplifting the community, by empowering every individual, that can contribute to our society's progress, well-being, and stability.

Gender equality, is the common appreciation of the unseen, yet essential, efforts of invisible women, to craft the first notion of "home", most of us have ever known.

Achieving gender equality at last, is our means of giving back to those countless women, who have dedicated their lives, to ensuring we could all sit here, positioned to bear an impact on the future of our communities.

We owe these women we have loved, and whose trials we were not blind to, the promise that we will strive, for a world where, our daughters will know protection, support and regard.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen, Honorable guests,**

Our modern world's history is no secret.

We all know the long-term damage, the injustice, and the cruelty, of being defined as second-class global citizens.

We understand how challenging, it is to achieve emancipation, when negotiating with parties in power, that remain insensitive to our plights.

Therefore, I am proud that this discussion, and these strides for advancement in gender equality, are happening here, in a country led by a woman, amongst female leaders, and men that have attested to their allyship.

These valued allies, should join us in making the decisions, that will drive the change women deserve. The actions we choose to engage in now, will shape history's remarks on our integrity.

Let our vision for 2063, be an Africa where the African woman thrives, in the sectors upon which our developed economy rests; sectors like STEM and finance, which should no longer bear a male face.

This empowered woman, has attained her position out of merit, and this merit results from her parents, and their parents before that, actively nurturing her potential.

**Dear Young Leaders,**

In many developing countries, education is a bridge to advancement.

We must remain conscious of education's ability, to grant power, to the disempowered.

The extent at which extremists, ill-bent on halting progression, withhold knowledge from girls in their societies, is very telling.

On our continent, too many young girls have been withdrawn from school, and forced into premature adulthood, through child marriage, full-time employment, and the responsibility of financial support to their families.

While these practices are becoming less and less common, we cannot hope for our morality, to match our development in 2063, if they still occur at all.

The East African Community, features some of the first countries in Africa, to make primary education free, so that parents would no longer have to decide, on whether to pay for their son's, or their daughter's school enrollment.

Scholarship programmes have multiplied across the region; in Rwanda, my foundation, the Imbuto Foundation, has disbursed thousands of scholarships to students from disadvantaged communities, as part of our Edified Generation Programme.

And still, in view of the cultivation, and employment of female potential, that must be achieved to reach our 2063 development goals, greater efforts must be invested.

Change has to occur at the core; the female student must be certain of her ability to, at the very least, match her male peers' performance. Only then, will she thrive, in the areas in which, her male counterparts, have already enjoyed a headstart.

At Imbuto, one of the programmes I will forever cherish, and always advocate, to expand and export, is the Best Performing Girls initiative.

We believe in rewarding the girls, that have shown their determination to succeed academically.

We believe that a young girl, who has been shown the merit, and the value of her efforts, will be more willing to take on academic challenges.

This young girl will seek excellence, overcoming the adversity of evolving in a man's world.

But, it is one thing to reward academically-promising girls, it is another to create an ecosystem, where these girls can channel their work ethic, into stimulating, and intricate fields.

I firmly believe that distinction, moulds distinction. Therefore, I invite some of the professionals, leaders and entrepreneurs here today, to join us in providing young people, including our young girls, with guidance, on attaining career fulfillment and success.

Your expertise may be invaluable, but I believe it could lead, to quantifiably promising results.

**Dear distinguished guests,**

Yes, our women and girls are valued. But the future I envision for our nations, is one where this fact, makes for their protection, support, and access to every opportunity they deserve.

For all the love women and girls receive, they re-invest tenfold in their communities.

**Mpe mwanamke amani, utapata utulivu.**

Give a woman safety, and she will give you serenity.

**Mpe mwanamke elimu, atawalea watoto wako wawe na busara.**

Allow a woman knowledge, and she will raise your children to be wise.

**Mpe mwanamke mbegu, utaona shamba la matunda likisitawi.**

Give the woman a seed, and you will watch a fruit garden flourish.

Honorable Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Youth,

I look forward, to the fair, just and kind future, we can  
commit to strive towards today.  
All that is left for us to do, is act.

Thank you!