

**First Lady Jeannette Kagame's Remarks at  
the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of FAWE RWANDA and  
National Conference on Investing in Education:  
'The role of parents, community and the learner'.**

**Kigali, 6 July 2018**

**Honourable Ministers,  
Headmistress of FAWE RWANDA, Sister Eugénie Kairaba,  
Distinguished Friends and Partners of FAWE RWANDA,  
Esteemed Benebikira Sisters, Members of the Administration,  
Faculty and Staff,  
Valued Parents, Students, and Alumni of FAWE RWANDA,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good Morning.**

What a lovely day it is, to be gathered here, still exulting in the momentum of our 24<sup>th</sup> Liberation Day, and celebrating 20 years of girls' empowerment through education, thanks to the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) Rwanda Chapter!

Indeed, FAWE has, over the years, strengthened its position as an institution providing quality education for our young women, and supporting many brilliant girls from vulnerable backgrounds to obtain a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to alter the course of their lives.

The theme of this present national conference, which lays emphasis on the role of Parents, the Community and the Learner in education, is of critical importance and could not have come at a better time, when the world is grappling with new and emerging challenges, which require a different approach to education.

Even more so, as education is the bedrock of development, and social stability.

Globally, early educators, focused primarily on facilitating learning within the confines of rigid, universally-established, dogmatic teaching protocol, in which students were expected to memorize to pass exams, rather than being encouraged to develop their capacity for independent intellectual enquiry, and innovation. - **No offense to the people of my generation!**

The role of parents, the community and the learner, in that kind of education, was minimal.

### **Distinguished audience,**

Today, let us take a moment to congratulate FAWE Rwanda Chapter, for its contribution to expanding the frontiers of innovation, in the education sector, in Rwanda.

Let us take stock of the past 20 years; the challenges met, and the victories reached.

Let us acknowledge the leadership of Benebikira Sisters, whose clear vision and effective coordination efforts, helped reinforce the national guiding values, for the sustainability of this establishment.

Today, we recognize FAWE Rwanda as an institution that helped further bridge the gender gap in education enrolment, retention, and completion by providing scholarships at the secondary school level; and now at the tertiary level, through their new partnership.

FAWE has also helped mentor and foster girls into confident and competent young ladies, able to hold their own, anywhere in the world.

It is my hope that through this conference, all of us, as individuals and organizations, will continue to advocate for, and support, initiatives that believe in the education, emancipation and empowerment of our daughters and sisters.

I take this opportunity to thank, most sincerely, all partners of FAWE Rwanda, and of the education system in Rwanda, for your purposeful dedication to this great cause.

**Honourable guests,**

As education is a journey with a series of obstacles, we must stay alert, and see ourselves as agents of change. Indeed, all of us in our diverse capacities, can provide support to educators and students, for us to contribute to a well-educated society, ready to take on the challenges of our times.

For instance, as a collective, we must address the root causes of the high dropout and repetition rates in schools, standing at 18.4% and 5.7% respectively at the primary school level, and at 11.6% and 6.5%, at the lower secondary level.

Allow me to take a moment here, to share a few examples, of activities, we, at Imbuto Foundation, were able to implement, thanks to sound partnerships between public and private entities, to further promote inclusive and quality education, through diverse schools around the country, including FAWE.

Indeed, from projects focusing on:

- the improvement of the performance of struggling learners at the primary school level, as we paired **2,000 students** with teachers and mentors, through learning clubs;
- the promotion of girls' education, as nationwide community campaigns were conducted to reward over **4,800 girls** who completed, and excelled, at different school cycles;
- the completion of secondary school, as we provided over **8,000 scholarships** to well-performing, but vulnerable students;

we were driven by our duty to contribute to the pillars of our national education sector.

So today, I invite us all to collectively invest more of our time, our ideas, and resources to create an environment that dispels gender myths, and encourages coordination at different levels, to ensure our children, the leaders of tomorrow, are truly given a fair chance at a bright future.

### **Distinguished guests,**

In line with the theme of today's conference, I wish to share my thoughts on the three questions posed: the role of parents, community and the learner in education.

#### **1. What is the role of Parents?**

The parent is the child's first contact with the outside world, hence the manner in which the parent introduces the child to this world through education, is paramount.

The physical and emotional conditions, in which parents bring up their children, will also greatly affect their future cognitive ability to learn, and develop.

Bringing up a child in a loving, healthy and peaceful environment, with role models of good social values is a prerequisite for stability at home, in school, professionally, and in the community, keeping

in mind that while we cannot exhaustively teach our children, a great deal of what they learn, is in fact communicated through what they see, in our actions and behaviors.

While the role of the parents or guardians in the formative stages of a child's life is to provide a conducive environment, guidance and financial means for the student to learn effectively; the role of the learner is to apply himself or herself, in order to succeed.

In fact, education is not confined to the four walls of a classroom; it is rather cemented at home. I therefore urge us all, as parents, to remain engaged and invested in our sons' and daughters' academic pursuits.

Let us also instill in them the continued quest for knowledge, the need to excel, innovate and set ambitious goals and standards, regardless of their gender, as their subsequent contribution to, and value in society, is equally appreciated.

## **2. What is the role of the Community?**

Children, like their parents, live in communities that are known to shape collective thinking, social norms, and practice.

When the messages the child is hearing from the community differs from that of the school, internal conflict is borne within the child on what values to espouse. If the child constantly hears in the community such things as, “a boy child is more precious than a girl”; that “girls cannot do science”; that “boys must not show emotion”; that “too much education will compromise a girl’s ability to be a good wife or mother”, then such a child will set a low ceiling of achievement; settling for second fiddle.

Believe you me, you do not want to go through life, not living to your fullest potential, and risking to live a life of regrets, by missing out on becoming an integral part of this beautiful nation, we call home.

### **3. What is the role of the Learner?**

A relatively new way of teaching nowadays is one in which the Learner is responsible for part of the learning process, and becomes a partner in their own education. The idea is to stimulate continuous, inquisitive learning and independent, innovative problem-solving. We encourage our youth – especially the young girls – to speak up, embrace new ideas, explore science and technology and bring solutions to challenges that we face on a daily basis, in our communities and in the country.

**To our young girls, *Bakobwa bacu*,**

You are the leaders of tomorrow.

I urge you to take full advantage of this nurturing environment, built with you in mind.

Strive to acquire academic, creative and leadership skills while at FAWE.

Seek positive advice and direction from your parents, teachers and elders.

Soak in like a sponge, the education you are so privileged to have; be ambitious, confident, and good role models for your younger sisters, and brothers, and the communities in which you live. You can and will achieve whatever it is, you set your mind to do – if you are focused, disciplined, relentless, tenacious and consistent.

Whenever in doubt, look at Rwanda for inspiration. Who would have known, 24 years ago today, that Rwanda would stand tall among the Nations and be cited in the Book of Firsts? Are you not Rwandan? Then, you bear that ***imbuto*** that has brought us to where we are today. Watch and learn, and be the very best that you can be, standing on that great platform, from which you were meant to soar to greater heights.

Most importantly, remember that there is no end to learning.  
Education is for life!

I wish you all once more a great day ahead, and a Happy 20<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary to FAWE RWANDA!

I thank you all for your kind attention.