

As Chairperson of Rwanda's Private Sector Federation (PSF), Jeanne-Françoise Mubiligi is leading an economic transformation while empowering a new generation of women entrepreneurs.

Mubiligi, the Chairperson of PSF, stands at the forefront of Rwanda's business community—an influential position that underscores her exceptional leadership and commitment to inclusive economic growth. She also serves as CEO of E.M.P Ltd, a prominent construction firm based in Kigali. Her journey is one of resilience, strategic vision, and the quiet defiance of deeply rooted gender stereotypes that continue to limit women's full participation in business.

Rising Above Stereotypes in Male-Dominated Sectors

Rwandan women are increasingly making their mark across various industries, including traditionally male-dominated fields like business, construction, and manufacturing. This progress is the result of a broader shift driven by national reforms and supportive legal frameworks that promote gender equality and inclusive economic participation.

Among the leading figures in Kigali's top business circles, Mubiligi is also the former Chairperson of the Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs. She has consistently used her voice and leadership to challenge long-standing social norms that once cast women as less capable in high-stakes sectors.



In an interview with Rwanda Dispatch, Mubiligi shared her inspiring career path and her passion for advancing women's empowerment—especially for those pursuing entrepreneurship.

Her exposure to business and the construction industry in particular began at a young age, thanks to her father, a businessman who introduced her to the trade. School holidays were spent on construction sites, working as the the only girl alongside her four brothers hence gaining hands-on experience and mastering the nitty-gritty of the trade.

“The construction sector has always been an interesting and formative part of my life,” she recalls, “I used to work with my dad during holidays and undertook internships there. That's how I became familiar with the industry.”

Although her family was supportive—treating her equally alongside her brothers—societal expectations proved more resistant.

“I was fortunate to grow up in a family that never denied me opportunities,” she says. “But the larger community still upheld beliefs and norms that classified tasks as either feminine or masculine.”

Initially aspiring to become an engineer, Mubiligi pursued business management instead. Her early professional experience after graduation wasn’t at the family firm but in a private investment company dealing in methane gas, cement, and biomass which proved pivotal. It honed her managerial skills and solidified her ability to lead in competitive business environments.

As Rwanda championed gender equality through policy reform and awareness campaigns, she returned from abroad to join the family business—this time with a clear vision and renewed confidence.

“I came back knowing nothing could stop me,” she says. “The country was offering opportunities, and I was ready to build something impactful.”

Breaking Through in Construction

Upon rejoining E.M.P Ltd, Mubiligi quickly noticed that gender biases still lingered—especially in roles like engineers, foremen, and site supervisors.

“Initially, I faced resistance. But I knew what I wanted. When you lead with vision and competence, the team eventually aligns with you,” she explains.

Her leadership had taken firm root at E.M.P by 2012, she spearheaded key reforms, expanded operations, and grew the workforce. Temporary setbacks were only experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, E.M.P specializes in civil engineering projects such as road construction, dam and irrigation systems, as well as water supply infrastructure. Mubiligi and her siblings have upheld the business legacy started in 1984 by their father. In 2014, they restructured E.M.P into a fully corporate entity with a strong governance model—cementing its reputation in Rwanda’s infrastructure sector.

With more than four decades of experience, E.M.P is known for its collaborative, bottom-up approach to construction—working with skilled architects, engineers, and

managers to ensure efficient, timely project delivery.

The inspiration of Socio-economic Transformation

“What stood out for me were the site visits—when you see a bushy field turn into a hospital serving patients, it’s powerful. That impact kept me going,” Mubiligi shares about the inspiration into construction.



Building structures laid groundwork as Mubiligi builds the country’s business community. Now at the helm of PSF, she champions inclusive growth, advocating for greater participation of women, youth, and people with disabilities in the private sector. PSF has launched special clusters for underrepresented groups to promote peer learning, networking, and easier access to finance.

“We found that women often lacked vital business information. We are working with partners to change that,” she says. “PSF is advocating for the implementation of the 30% government contract preference for women-owned businesses.”

She also supports policies that encourage gender-inclusive partnerships, drawing on best practices from other countries.

Despite earlier barriers to accessing finance, women are now gaining more trust from financial institutions—thanks to higher loan repayment rates and legal reforms such as equal asset ownership.

“Today, the number of men and women accessing finance is nearly equal. The gap now lies in the loan sizes. Women were less confident about taking bigger loans—but even that is shifting.”

She adds that female-led businesses often bring a different dynamic to teams, blending innovation with purpose.

“Women don’t just focus on profits—they focus on impact and empowering others. That transforms families and communities.”

Advice to Aspiring Female Entrepreneurs

Mubiligi is candid about the realities of running a business:

“Running a private business is not about showing up late or just collecting profits. It’s hard work—but rewarding. Set your goals, embrace challenges, and don’t be afraid to enter less-explored sectors. The market is ready for you.”

The entrepreneurship journey can be both challenging and exhilarating, especially for women looking to carve their own path in the business world. By embracing hard work, setting clear goals, and being open to exploring new avenues, aspiring female entrepreneurs can break barriers and make significant impact in their industries. The opportunities are vast, and with determination and resilience, everyone can succeed.

Her story is a powerful reminder that with determination, vision, and support, women can thrive in any sector—including those once thought to be off-limits. Mubiligi’s triumphant rise is a testament, signaling of what’s possible when systems evolve and women are empowered to lead.