

Women entrepreneurs across Rwanda on March 27, came together to celebrate International Women's Day, acknowledging their achievements while addressing the challenges they still face in the business world.

The event, held on Thursday, brought together women from various sectors who were recognized for their contributions to Rwanda's economic growth.

The celebration highlighted the role of women in advancing the country's development agenda, particularly in alignment with the National Strategy for Transformation (NST2) and Vision 2050.

Despite remarkable progress, challenges remain. Diane Kamanzi, the owner of a thriving clothing factory in Masoro Industrial Park, shared her perspective on the barriers women continue to encounter in business.

"Some people still underestimate a woman's ability to run a business," she said. "Many assume women can only manage small-scale enterprises, and that mindset holds African women back. It needs to change completely because it limits our progress."

Kamanzi was among the women honored at the event for their outstanding contributions. Her factory, which employs over 500 Rwandans, is a testament to the impact women can have in the business sector. She encouraged fellow women entrepreneurs to support each other by prioritizing locally made products.



Thérèse Sekamana, Executive Director of a division for women, youth, and disabled entrepreneurs, noted that women entrepreneurs make up 46% of Rwanda's business community. While this is a significant number, she acknowledged that barriers such as access to capital and market expansion continue to hinder their growth.

"One of the biggest challenges we face is financial access. Many women struggle to secure funding, and even when they want to expand their businesses into international markets, they often face additional constraints," Sekamana explained. "Sometimes, even their own husbands do not support them in taking those steps."

She emphasized the importance of collaboration between men and women in business, urging husbands to trust and support their wives in entrepreneurial

pursuits. She also called on government institutions to remove obstacles that hinder women's economic empowerment.

Government's Commitment to Women's Empowerment

Silas Ngayaboshya, Director of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment at the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), highlighted the significant strides Rwanda has made in promoting women's leadership and economic participation over the past 50 years.

"Rwanda has achieved incredible progress in empowering women, especially in the last 30 years since the country's liberation," he said. "Women have made strides in leadership, business, education, and the economy. However, we still have work to do to ensure full equality."

Ngayaboshya stressed that true economic empowerment is not just about financial independence but also about giving women decision-making power in their households. "It is not enough for women to earn money; they must also have a say in how that money is used," he noted.

He also called for a shift in societal attitudes that continue to limit women's growth. "Some women still hesitate to take on leadership roles or struggle to assert control over their finances. At the same time, men must become active partners in women's progress rather than obstacles."

The discussion also touched on gender roles in households. Ngayaboshya emphasized the need to break the stereotype that childcare and housework are solely a woman's responsibility.

"Women should have the freedom to pursue careers or run businesses without being burdened with all the domestic responsibilities," he said. "Men must step up and actively participate in raising children and household management."

To reinforce this, Rwanda has implemented a National Transformative Strategy engaging men and boys in gender equality. The initiative encourages men to take an active role in domestic responsibilities, recognizing that shared duties lead to a more balanced and thriving society.