

Remarks by the Chairperson of the Council of the Republic of the  
National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus Natalya Kochanova  
at the panel discussion “Stepping up women's economic empowerment and  
financial inclusion”  
of the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament  
(17 August 2020, online format)

Dear colleagues!

Today there is no doubt that women are drivers of sustainable development.

Making up 53.8 % of the population of Belarus, women form a highly accomplished part of our society and are a powerful source of the country's development. The Republic of Belarus sees gender equality as one of the accelerators of the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

Should women engage in politics and economy?

Research by different international centres and institutions demonstrates that women's participation in administration at all levels is a stabilizing factor. In countries where women's representation in public administration structures makes up 30-40 % societies develop in a more sustainable way and pursue socially oriented goals.

The Republic of Belarus is among 27 states that reached the target of women's participation in decision making processes.

In Belarus, women are working towards financial independence and focus on successful careers.

Development of women's entrepreneurship and self-employment is one of the current points of growth.

Compared to companies headed by men, female-led businesses are still falling behind in size and growth rates, but women are more socially oriented and tend to choose spheres of social, education and medical services.

Belarusian legislators are working on measures to distinguish women's entrepreneurship as a separate category to ensure differentiation in provision of state support or other benefits and preferences. Still, no unified solution has been reached yet as many see these measures as gender-based discrimination and violation of conditions of fair competition. And this peculiarity is typical of any area of gender policy.

Development of women's entrepreneurial initiative requires joint effort from the Parliament, the Government, the business community, the civil society and international structures.

Belarus has a positive experience of such cooperation, including collaboration in the sector of accessibility of financial products for women. This year, within the framework of the state programme “Small and Medium-Sized Entrepreneurship” the Bank of Development introduced a separate product “Support of Female-Led Businesses” which was used to provide funds to 48 projects. The European Bank of Reconstruction and Development implemented the programme “Women in Business” within which it maintained close cooperation with the partnering banks in Belarus to provide funds to female leaders on favourable terms.

At the same time, aligning career and family life is still a problem for women. The household survey on time management showed that women spend twice as much time as men on household chores and childcare.

There is still need for further evolution of norms and values contributing to elimination of stereotypes, personal fulfilment of women and empowerment for reconciliation of different roles.

To that end, in Belarus women are entitled to take maternity leave without loss of employment to care for children up to the age of 3. Upon return from the leave they are entitled to a working contract until the child’s attainment of the age of 5 years.

According to the 2019 Human Development Report, Belarus ranks the 27<sup>th</sup> among 162 countries on Gender-Related Development Index.

The country adopted the Concept of the National Strategy of Sustainable Development of the Republic of Belarus for the period until 2035 which includes a separate section on gender equality.

Over the next decade the main efforts in this area will be focused on promotion of gender-sensitive culture including introduction of principles of gender equality in educational programmes, enhancement of legal mechanisms to counter gender stereotypes, and raising awareness of social and economic benefits of gender equality.

Growth in the life expectancy up to 84.5 years for women and 76.4 years – for men and improvement in female-to-male median salary ratio from 74.6 to 80 per cent are expected to be among the major performance criteria in implementation of the tasks ahead of us. These tasks are quite ambitious, but we will do our best to accomplish them.

Our country is proud of its women. Pursuit for success and perfection in everything is a national trait of character of Belarusian women.

Women are ready to make a significant contribution to revival and preservation of national traditions, constructive development agenda, international dialogue, resolution of problems of poverty and economic inequality, because half of the world’s population are mothers, sisters and wives.

As parliamentarians, our task is to create a favourable environment and stimuli for all of this.

I am confident that today's discussion will allow us to get closer to global solutions for parliamentarians in economic, ecological and social spheres that would be absolutely gender-responsive.

Let me wish you inspiration, energy and flexible mindset for fruitful work during the Summit and to the benefit of your countries!