

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Allow me to start by conveying to all our guests a proudly Tanzanian KARIBU from H.E. Dr. Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of the United Republic of Tanzania. She had wished to be here personally to address this august assembly but could not join you due to other exigencies. Let me confide that I am delighted and honoured to stand in for H.E. to make opening remarks at this WomenLift Health Global Conference because of its importance and additionally because I have vested interests. I am a proud father of four daughters i.e. two medical doctors, an economist and a lawyer and therefore, I can testify to the challenges holding back women from ascending to senior/top leadership positions.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

This Conference is taking place at a critical moment when the world continues to grapple with geopolitical tensions and conflicts, climate crisis, stubborn diseases and health pandemic risks, food insecurity and malnutrition, economic headwinds as well as rapid technological advancement and related threats and opportunities. Addressing all these global challenges require dynamic and inclusive leadership as well as strong partnerships and collaborations. In this context since its establishment, WomenLift Health Global has canvassed and united a wide range of multidisciplinary health leaders worldwide to champion women leadership in global health and promote gender equality, realizing that women leadership and priorities are critical to finding new ways and innovative solutions to current global challenges because women are the most affected. I therefore commend the organizers of this Conference on the choice of the theme which is: ***Re-imagining Leadership: New Approches To New Challenges.***

Ladies and Gentlemen;

While women constitute a higher percentage of the total workforce in the health sector, global reports estimates that, only **25%** of senior and **5%** of top leadership positions are held by women. The situation is more less the same in other sectors. Challenges holding women back from holding senior and top leadership positions in the health sector may vary from one region to another based on many factors. These challenges may range from distribution of responsibilities between women and men and the tensions of balancing work and home responsibilities; lack of or few successful women to inspire other women as role models; lack of networks and mentors for women; lack of self confidence amongsts some women; male dominated patrilineal customs which are biased against women; harrasment at work places; and poor school enrolment of girls to mention a few. On top of these challenges there are new challenges related to rapid technological advancement in the health sector, climate change, environmental polution, and economic constraints.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Humanity today is facing many global health challenges with greatest adverse impacts falling on low and middle income countries. It is estimated that communicable diseases including Malaria, Tuberculosis and virus related diseases are among the leading causes of death and disability in Low Income Countries. Similarly about 77% of death caused by non communicable diseases occur in Low and Middle Income Countries. Other major global health challenges relate to food insecurity and malnutrition and environmental health due to climate change, natural calamities, plant/animal diseases and invasive pests. Sadly, Women who are primary care providers for families, constitute a higher percentage of the work force but are often left out in making vital decisions regarding these challenges. As a result we are deprived of their invaluable insights, experience and leadership talents.

Ladies and Gentlement;

Tanzania under President Dr. Samia Suluhu Hassan, provides clear examples of women engineered priorities and innovative leadership in addressing global health challenges. Allow me to highlight a few examples:

The first, relates to appointment, mentorship and empowerment of young women leaders in various sectors. Taking an example of the Ministry of Health, the Minister, the Deputy Permanent Secretary, the Chief Medical Officer and other senior posts are held by women. Her Excellency the President, has also taken a deliberate decision to increase the number of female judges up to 36.5%. The number of women District and Regional Administrative Secretaries has also been increased significantly in the range of 30 – 35%.

Second, the Samia administration has improved access to education for girls and boys reaching the gender parity of 1:1. This was made possible by introduction of fee-free basic education and scaling up financing for education to 19 percent of the total budget over the period 2021/22 - 2023/24. The Government is also investing in women leaders by constructing special schools for girls who will choose to study science subjects. The President has also initiated the ***Samia Scholarship Program,*** which provides funding for undergraduate studies to Tanzanian students. The Scholarship Program is designed to benefit students especially girls who earn top grades in science subjects combinations in national form six examinations. The President's gender sensitive transformative leadership agenda, has also made it possible for re-entry of drop-outs in primary and secondary schools who had exited schools for various reasons including pregnancy and poverty.

Third, the current administration is also implementing a program to ensure accessibility to safe and clean water by the population. The aim is to relieve women, especially in the villages, from travelling long distances to fetch water. In this regard, the Government increased the budget of the Ministry of Water from Tshs. 709.4 Bilioni in 2022/2023 to Tshs. 756.2 Bilioni in the year 2023/2024. Also President Samia agreed to take on the role of Champion for clean energy in Africa, and is

pushing implementation of clean energy projects in the country including rural electrification and use of clean energy for cooking in Tanzania to reach 80% by 2030.

Fourth, was the launching of M-Mama Program in April 2022, which is an Electronic System to facilitate women and newborn emergency referrals. Currently the System is up and running in both Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar. Reports show that since the System started working in April 2022, a total of 71,075 emergencies were served, among them 82% were mothers with pregnancy related complications and 18% were newborns. The estimated number of lives saved from implementation of M-Mama System (based on the severity of the condition) amount to 2,989.

Fifth, is United Republic of Tanzania implementation of SDG number 3 which requires countries to reduce maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births and to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services by 2030. According to Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey of 2022, Tanzania has managed to reduce Maternal Mortality Ratio to 104 per 100,000 live births from the previous 556 per 100,000 live births in 2015. Likewise, the under 5 mortality rate has gone down from 67 per 1,000 live births to 43 per 1,000 live births at the same period. These results come from concerted efforts to increase contraceptive use among married women (32% - 2016 to 38% - 2022), health facility delivery (63% - 2016 to 81% - 2022), and sustaining high immunization coverage of more than 95% for PENTA vaccine.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I would like to assert with confidence that, the milestones highlighted above have been reached largely on account of the staunch leadership and eyesight of a woman leader at the very top. However, despite the outlined positive progress, there are other remaining challenges, both conventional and emerging, that need to be addressed to enable women to rise up to leadership positions across sectors. These are:

First; Climate change and environmental pollution. Globally climate change has had serious adverse impact on women and girls. Women and girls shoulder disproportionate responsibilities in securing essentials such as food, fuel and water. It is estimated that, about 160 Million women and girls would be pushed into poverty by 2050 due to climate change. It is my firm view that, women at the helm of leadership are best positioned to address such challenges.

Second, budget constraints continue to be a major restriction for well-trained women leaders including parliamentarians, policy analysts and researchers; I think it is now time to direct more financial resources to train women leaders and create awareness about their potential in our societies. Often times, these areas are still perceived as low budget priorities items.

Third, is persistence of cultural gender norms in some tribes which embrace violence and early marriages; Tanzania is comprised of about 123 ethnic tribes which are mostly patrilineal and mainly biased against women, compromising work-life balance and forcing females to choose families over career and leadership roles.

Fourth, is rapid advancement of technology in the health sector which entails use of artificial intelligence in diagnosing and treating diseases, gene editing, smart bandage, digitization of health records, among other things. With rapid technological advancement some women and men may be left behind.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

While this Conference provides an important Forum for leaders and experts from the global north and the global south to network and collaborate in addressing some of these challenges, I perceive that, there are disparities with regard to health and leadership needs between the two sides. In this regard, I call upon women leaders from the global south to use this platform to articulate their challenges and exchange ideas on how best WomenLift Health Global may be of help. I also call upon Tanzanian women, to consider establishing a forum that will inspire and mentor young women to develop their leadership skills and take up top leadership posts in country and beyond.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

To conclude, I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate the commitment of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania to work with WomenLift Health Global and other stakeholders to continue to advance and promote women in Health leadership positions. With these remarks, it is now my singular honour and pleasure to declare that the Women-Lift Health Global Conference 2024 is now officially opened. I wish you fruitful deliberations and safe travel back to your place of work but only after spending at least a few extra days to enjoy Tanzania's unique tourist attractions and warm hospitality of our people.

I thank you for your kind attention!