

INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE (ITC)

SPEECH / TALKING POINTS

EMPOWER Programme Launch Ceremony | Nairobi,
Kenya

SPEAKER

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COUNTRY PROGRAMMES

AFRICA

14 January 2026

Occasion	EMPOWER Programme Official Launch Ceremony
Date & Time	14 January 2026, 10:00–13:00 EAT
Venue	Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), Nairobi, Hall 4
Expected Audience	~250 (Government, EU, private sector, media, beneficiaries)
Speaking Slot	3rd speaker; follows EU Ambassador and Cabinet Secretary
Allotted Time	12 minutes (strict - MC will signal at 10 min)
Tone	Inspirational, partnership-oriented, results-focused
Language	English (Swahili greeting expected)
Key Message	EMPOWER is a transformative investment in Kenya's most underutilised economic asset: the talent of its women entrepreneurs
Dress Code	Business formal (ITC badge visible)

DOCUMENT GUIDE: ■ BLUE BANNER = Section divider with timing ■ ORANGE BOX = Speaker stage cue ■ BLUE QUOTE = Key pull quote ■ BODY TEXT = Full speech text

1 OPENING AND GREETINGS

 ~1 min

[SPEAKER CUE] Approach podium. Pause. Make eye contact with the Cabinet Secretary, EU Ambassador, and the women entrepreneurs seated in the front rows. Begin with a Swahili greeting.

Habari za asubuhi, good morning.

Your Excellency, the EU Ambassador to Kenya, Henrietta van der Berg. Honourable Cabinet Secretary for Industrialisation, Grace Wanjiku. Distinguished representatives of the Government of Kenya, the European Union, Ecologists Without Borders, our private sector partners, civil society, and most importantly, the women entrepreneurs who are the reason we are all here today.

On behalf of the International Trade Centre, I am deeply honoured to stand before you at this historic moment, the official launch of the Enterprise and Market Pathways for Women's Economic Resilience Programme: EMPOWER.

2 THE PROBLEM — WHY EMPOWER

 ~2 min

[SPEAKER CUE] *Shift tone to serious and grounded. Speak slowly. The statistics should land with weight.*

Let me begin with a truth that is both uncomfortable and, I believe, deeply motivating.

Kenya is a country of extraordinary entrepreneurial energy. Walk through any market, in Gikomba, in Kongowea, in Kibuye and you will see it: women working before sunrise and after sunset, building businesses with ingenuity and determination that would impress any business school professor.

And yet. Women own less than one percent of registered land in this country. They access less than ten percent of formal credit. The productivity gap between male-led and female-led enterprises stands at thirty-four percent, not because women work less hard, not because they are less talented, but because the system has not given them the same tools, the same connections, the same opportunities.

"This is not a women's problem. This is Kenya's problem. And it is a problem that EMPOWER is designed to solve."

ITC's research shows that closing the gender gap in enterprise productivity in Kenya alone could add up to 1.2 billion US dollars to the national economy annually. That is not a small number. That is hospitals. That is schools. That is the future.

3 WHAT EMPOWER WILL DO — THE PROGRAMME

 ~3 min

[SPEAKER CUE] *Increase energy and pace slightly. Be concrete and specific. Avoid jargon.*

So what exactly is EMPOWER? Let me be specific, because this programme deserves specificity.

Over the next four years, EMPOWER will work directly with two thousand women-led enterprises across five counties — Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru, and Meru. We chose these counties because they

have the highest concentrations of women-led enterprises and the strongest value chain infrastructure. But we also chose them because they represent Kenya's diversity — coastal, highland, lakeside, urban, and peri-urban.

First, we will train. Through a network of twenty-five Business Development Advisors and five Women's Business Acceleration Hubs, we will deliver structured, practical business training to every one of those two thousand enterprises.

Second, we will connect. EMPOWER will organise twenty buyer-seller matchmaking events and support five hundred enterprises to sign formal off-take agreements with verified buyers — supermarket chains, export agents, government procurement offices.

Third, we will finance. In partnership with three commercial banks, we will launch a Women's Credit Guarantee Scheme that will de-risk lending to women-led enterprises and help twelve hundred women access formal credit — many for the first time in their lives.

"Train. Connect. Finance. Three words. Two thousand women. One Kenya."

4 THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

 ~2 min

[SPEAKER CUE] Warm, genuine tone. Look towards the EU Ambassador and EWB representative when mentioning their organisations.

EMPOWER is, at its heart, a programme about partnership. And I want to take a moment to acknowledge the partners who have made it possible.

To the European Union and to Ambassador van der Berg personally, thank you. Your investment of EUR 4.4 million is not just a financial contribution. It is a statement of values. ITC is proud to be your implementing partner.

To Ecologists Without Borders and the Green Enterprise Network team, your expertise in sustainable market linkages and your global network of women entrepreneurs is invaluable. Together, we will not just help these women grow their businesses in Kenya; we will help them reach markets across East Africa and beyond.

And to the Government of Kenya, your partnership is what will make EMPOWER sustainable. When EMPOWER ends in four years, we want to leave behind stronger institutions, better policies, and a private sector that has learned, permanently, that investing in women is the smartest investment it can make.

5 A PERSONAL NOTE — THE HUMAN DIMENSION

 ~2 min

[SPEAKER CUE] *Step slightly away from the podium. Lower your voice slightly. This is the emotional heart of the speech.*

Before I close, I want to share something that happened during EMPOWER's pilot phase in Kisumu last year.

We visited a woman named Akinyi, a single mother of three who runs a small fish processing business near Lake Victoria. She had been processing and selling smoked fish for eleven years. After six months in the EMPOWER pilot programme, Akinyi had signed her first formal supply agreement with a supermarket chain in Nairobi. Her revenue had increased by thirty-one percent. She had hired two additional workers, both women from her community. And she told our team: 'For the first time, I feel like a businesswoman, not just a woman trying to survive.'

"That is what EMPOWER is for. Not for statistics. Not for reports. For Akinyi. For the two thousand women like her across this country."

6 CLOSING AND CALL TO ACTION

 ~2 min

[SPEAKER CUE] *Return to full energy. Speak directly to the women entrepreneurs in the room. End on a strong, uplifting note.*

Ladies and gentlemen, the EMPOWER Programme is officially open for business today. And I want to close with a direct message to the women entrepreneurs in this room and across the five counties we will serve.

We see you. We know how hard you work. We know the obstacles you face. And we are here — ITC, Ecologists Without Borders, the European Union, the Government of Kenya, and all our partners — to stand beside you, not above you, as you build the businesses and the future that you and your families deserve.

To our partners and stakeholders: I ask for your continued commitment, your creativity, and your willingness to challenge the systems and structures that have held women back for too long. The time for incremental change is over. EMPOWER is a programme of transformation, and transformation requires courage.

"Kenya's economic future is female. EMPOWER is how we build it together."

Asante sana. Thank you very much.

[SPEAKER CUE] *Step back from podium. Acknowledge applause. Return to seat.*