

SPEECH BY THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER, HIS EXCELLENCY JOHN LINDFIELD AT THE HANDOVER CEREMONY OF THE ESWATINI WATER SCHEMES REHABILITATION PROJECTS AT NKILONGO INKHUNDLA

- Programme Director
- Chiefs present here today
- Regional Administrator, Mr Themba Msibi
- Your Excellency, High Commissioner Ms Radha Venkataraman
- Honourable Nklongo Member of Parliament, Mr Timothy Myeni
- Honourable Members of Parliament
- Chairperson of the National Resource Mobilisation Committee, Dr Phil Mnisi
- CEO of the National Disaster Management Agency, Mr Russell Dlamini
- Representative of the Trade and Development Bank
- Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning! I am very pleased indeed to have been able to attend this important event today.

The coronavirus outbreak is the biggest public health emergency in a generation. All over the world, we are seeing the devastating impact of this invisible killer. It calls for decisive and coordinated action. As a force for good in the world, the UK has a longstanding record of supporting countries across the globe to prepare for large disease outbreaks.

We are not doing this alone; we are working with all our international partners, including the G7, G20, the EU, Commonwealth, NATO, the UN and other multilateral institutions, to deliver a strong global response. This includes direct funding to vulnerable countries to help them prepare their health systems and to global organisations like the WHO to help slow the spread of the virus.

The UK has led the international response to support vulnerable countries, including an ambitious G20 action plan, drafted by British and Indian officials, providing a

package of \$200 billion of global support from the World Bank Group and Regional Development Banks.

There has never been a more critical and challenging time for the international community to work together to respond to the deep global health and economic crisis. There is an urgent need for a globally coordinated response to the virus, which minimises economic disruption.

The most fragile and poorest countries in particular have limited economic tools to respond to the global economic downturn and offset the economic cost of containment measures. We are working through the International Financial Institutions and our bilateral programmes to ensure Governments and business in developing countries can access affordable financing and advisory support; and to urgently establish safety nets to protect the most vulnerable.

Even though we are a micro-mission with limited resources, the British High Commission in Eswatini is supporting hundreds of emaSwati who have been adversely impacted by the pandemic. Through our partner organisations – WFP Eswatini and All Out Africa - we have contributed funding to assist vulnerable households with food parcels. The **Nkilongo Garden Project** is an extension of our direct support in assisting those affected by the pandemic to develop sustainable food security projects and establish sustainable income-generating opportunities.

On the back of the pandemic, gender gaps have been widening as the crisis takes hold. There is a risk we will see a significant reversal in gender equality gains, with some countries using the pandemic as an excuse to roll back on women's rights during lockdown. The economic fallout will hit women hard. They tend to earn less, save less, and hold less secure jobs so are less able to weather economic shocks. Female-headed households are particularly vulnerable.

Despite all of these adversities, women are often the invisible first responders and will be the backbone of recovery efforts in their societies and communities. The **Nkilongo Garden Project** is one such example – community gardens collectively run by women to feed vulnerable child-headed households, people with disabilities

and their own families, as well as to generate income. We can only build back better and create a more equal, more inclusive economic recovery, if women are empowered to act and lead.

A recent UN report shows that COVID-19 is increasing the poverty gap between women and men. By 2030, the gender poverty gap for ages 25 to 34 will worsen from 118 women for every 100 men in 2021 to 121 women. By 2021, around 435 million women and girls will be living on less than \$1.90 (which is equivalent to approx. E30) a day, including 47 million pushed into poverty due to the pandemic.

The UK is working with our international partners to ensure that gender equality is a central element of the COVID-19 recovery. Our global recovery must be inclusive and support the most vulnerable who are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and climate change.

The FCDO is working with International Financial Institutions, including the World Bank and IMF, as well as the wider UN system to ensure that gender is factored into multilateral investment and financing. We are working with businesses to protect livelihoods and build resilience of the most vulnerable workers in their supply chains, in particular garments where the majority of workers are women - and agriculture.

We are supporting women's entrepreneurship and women-owned businesses and are adapting our programmes – including at a country level - to deliver gender-responsive and inclusive social protection, support digital financial flows such as remittances and cash transfers, and support women's economic empowerment.

If women participated in labour markets on an equal footing with men, this could add \$28 trillion or 26% to global GDP in 2025. Women are only half as likely as men to have a full-time paid job in the formal economy. On average, women did three times as much unpaid care work as men at home even before COVID-19. Now, female employees with children are balancing one or more of the following: work (if they still have it), childcare home schooling, elder care, and housework. The response must address these longstanding inequalities experienced by women to strengthen resilience and women's economic participation.

Women and girls are at the heart of the UK's approach to economic development. Enabling women to play an equal role in the economy is essential to sustained economic growth and will help lift millions out of poverty. Trade is a key driver of growth, prosperity and development, and a crucial enabler for achieving women's economic empowerment. Supporting women-owned businesses to participate in global trade and play an equal role in the economy is essential for advancing gender equality.

I am happy to announce that on Wednesday, the UK government launched the Trade Forward Southern Africa programme, which will benefit SACU member States and Mozambique. The £8.9 million programme will connect the business community with the right tools to drive trade across and beyond the region as well as provide access to trade information, support for businesses to link up to regional and global value chains and provide training on meeting export requirements.

As companies and women-centred firms get support to expand their trade horizons in the region and internationally, there is an opportunity to get on track with economic recovery and, at the same time, generate wider growth. It is my hope that women entrepreneurs in Eswatini will take advantage of this opportunity to expand their businesses beyond the country and region to the global market.

The TFSA programme will also assist Eswatini business to understand the new terms of trade under the new UK-SACU+ Mozambique Economic Partnership Agreement. I am pleased that the Eswatini Parliament has ratified the UK-SACU+M EPA. New free trade agreements are an important part of the long-term economic recovery, providing new opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs in every industry.

The UK remains committed to ensuring that trade supports economic development and poverty reduction in developing countries. Eswatini is a Commonwealth country and former British Protectorate. We have a shared interest in supporting progress towards a stable, secure and prosperous democracy that respects good governance and the rule of law, and that is open to bilateral trade.

To the women driving this garden project, we know that there is still a lot of work to do to achieve your objectives. We very much look forward to hearing more about your progress going forward and wish you all the best.

Thank you.