

00:10

I came back to my home of Rwanda two years after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. The country was devastated. The children I was caring for in the hospitals were dying from treatable conditions, because we didn't have equipment or medicine to save them. I was tempted to pack my bag and run away. But I debated with myself. And because I'm really dedicated to social justice and equity, and there were only five pediatricians in total for millions of children in Rwanda, I decided to stay.

01:02

But among the people who have motivated my decision to stay, there were some fantastic women of Rwanda, some women who had faced the genocide and survived it. They had to overcome unbelievable pain and suffering. Some of them were raising children conceived through rape. Others were dying slowly with HIV and forgave the perpetrators, who voluntarily infected them using HIV and rape as a weapon. So, they inspired me. If they can do that, I can stay and try to do my best.

01:57

Those ladies were really activists of peace and reconciliation. They show us a way to rebuild a country for our children and grandchildren to have, one day, a place they can call home, with pride.

02:17

And you can ask yourself where this shift of mindset has brought our country. Today in Rwanda, we have the highest percentage of women in parliament.

02:37

(applause)

02:39

Wait till I tell you the percentage -- sixty-one percent.

02:44

(applause)

02:47

Today, we have the best campaign for the vaccination of children with, among our success, 93 percent of our girls vaccinated against hpv --

03:00

(applause)

03:02

To protect them against cervical cancer. In this country, it's 54.

03:08

(laughter)

03:10

We have reduced child mortality by 75 percent, maternal mortality by 80 percent. In early 2000s, there were nine women who were dying every day around delivery and pregnancy. Today, it's around two. It's an unfinished agenda. We still have a long way to go. Two is still too much.

03:40

But, do i believe that those results are because we had a big number of women in power positions? I do.

03:55

(laughter)

03:57

There is -- yes --

03:58

(applause)

04:00

There is a study in the developing world that shows that if you improve the status of women, you improve the status of the community where they live. Up to 47 percent of decrease in child mortality. And even in this country where we are now, it's true. There is a study by a lady called Patricia Homan, who projected that if women and men were at parity in state legislatures, there would be a drop of 14.5 percent in child mortality -- in America!

04:44

So we know that women, when they use their skills in leadership positions, they enhance the entire population they are in charge of. And imagine what would happen if women were at parity with men all over the world. What a huge benefit we could expect. Hmm? Oh, yeah.

05:11

(applause)

05:13

Because in general, we have a different style of leadership: more inclusive, more empathetic, more caring for little children. And this makes the difference.

05:29

Unfortunately, this ideal doesn't exist in the world, and the difference between men and women in leadership positions is too big. Gender inequity is the norm in the majority of professions, even in global health.

05:52

I have learned that if we focus on women's education, we improve their life positively as well as the well-being of their community. This is why now I dedicate my life to education. And this is totally aligned with my sense of equity and my pursuit of social justice, because if you want to increase access to health services, you need first to increase access to health education.

06:32

So with friends and partners, we are building a beautiful university in the rural north of Rwanda. We educate our students to provide quality, equitable, holistic care to everyone, leaving no one

out, focusing on the vulnerable, especially women and children, who are historically the last to be served. We transform them into leaders and give them managerial skills and advocacy skills for them to be smooth changemakers in the society where they will be, so that they can build health systems that allow them to care about the vulnerable where they are.

07:22

And it's really transformative. Because currently, medical education, for example, is given in institutions based in cities, focused on quality health services and skills, clinical skills, to be given in institutions. We also focus on quality clinical skills but with biosocial approach to the condition of patient, for care to be given in communities where the people live, with hospitalization only when necessary. And also, after four to seven years of clinical education in cities, young graduates don't want to go back to rural area. So this is why we have built the university of global health equity, an initiative of partners in health, called uge, in the rural north of rwanda.

08:34

(applause)

08:40

Our students are meant to go and change the world. They will come from all over -- it's a global university -- and will get the medical education for free at one condition: they have to serve the vulnerable across the world during six to nine years. They will keep the salary for themselves and their families but turn the education we give in quality clinical services, especially for the vulnerable. And doing so, they sign an agreement at the start that they will do that, a binding agreement. We don't want money. We have to go and mobilize the money. But they will turn this in quality service delivery for all.

09:36

For this, of course, we need a strong gender equity agenda. And in all our classes, master's course, minimum of 50 percent of women.

09:49

(applause)

09:53

And i'm proud to say that for the medical school that started five months ago, we have enrolled 70 percent girls.

10:03

(applause)

10:06

This is a statement against the current inequity for women to access medical education in our continent.

10:17

I believe in women's education. This is why i applaud african ladies who go all over the world to increase their education, their skills and their knowledge. But i hope they will bring that back to africa to build the continent and make the continent a strong continent, because i'm sure a stronger africa will make the world stronger.

10:48

(applause)

10:54

Twenty-three years ago, i went back to rwanda, to a broken rwanda, that now is still a poor country but shining with a bright future. And i am full of joy to have come back, even if some days were very difficult, and even if some days i was depressed, because i didn't find a solution and people were dying, or things were not moving enough. But i'm so proud to have contributed to improve my community. And this makes me full of joy.

11:31

So, african women from the diaspora, if you hear me, never forget your homeland. And when you are ready, come back home. I did so. It has fulfilled my life. So, come back home.

11:55

Thank you.

11:56

(applause)