Private sector goes beyond call of duty during the COVID-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

The Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) is a limited liability membership organization registered in 2003 as the apex body of private sector in Kenya. KEPSA brings together the entire business community from all sectors of the economy under one umbrella, to engage and influence public policy in a single voice to ensure year on year improvement in the overall business environment. With current membership of over 500,000 direct and indirect members organised under the umbrella of KEPSA, the organization is a key player in championing the interests of the Kenyan business community in trade, investment and industrial relations.

2. Public Private Partnership (PPD) during the COVID-19 pandemic

Before the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Kenya in March 2020, businesses had begun suffering supply chain disruptions due to linkages with major global markets in Europe, China, and other Asian countries that had imposed travel restrictions to contain spread of the virus.

KEPSA swung into action, and initiated a survey to determine the impact of the pandemic. The survey inspired the constitution of a COVID-19 Business Response Team, comprising key sector leaders, to craft an economic management framework. The framework’s overriding focus was: protecting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), to safeguard livelihoods, prioritising health and safety of employees, communities, and healthcare workers, while ensuring supply chain continuity. Framework also sought to mobilise private sector resources, maintain high ethical standards and avoid moral hazards such as price spikes, and production or distribution of low quality products. It also involved frequent dissemination of clear and accurate information, and promoting social stability.

Following robust engagement with Government, we presented to President Uhuru Kenyatta, the COVID-19 strategic recommendations matrix 20th March 2020 during the 11th Presidential Roundtable. In his address to the nation on 25th March 2020, the President announced economic stimulus measures that included tax cuts (reduction of PAYE and 100% relief for incomes below KSh24,000; as well as reduction of VAT, corporate tax and turnover tax for SMEs), expedited settlement of pending bills and VAT refunds, lowered Central Bank Rate and Cash Reserve Ratio to inject more liquidity into the economy, and temporarily suspended listing of loan defaulters with Credit Reference Bureaus. An additional KShsh6.6 billion Economic Stimulus Package was announced to support most affected sectors including establishing an SME Credit Guarantee Scheme.

3. KEPSA projects to mitigate COVID-19 Response

a) Flowers of Hope initiative: in collaboration with Kenya Healthcare Federation, Kenya Flower Council (KFC), Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), Elgon Kenya, Kenya Airways and Jambo Jet, Rotary Kenya and Women of Kenya Initiative. KEPSA launched the “Flowers of Hope” project aimed at distributing fresh flowers to local hospitals and existing markets in Europe with a message of hope and compassion, and to sustain jobs in the floriculture industry. Flowers and face masks worth over KSh3 million were distributed to 10 hospitals in Kenya, and another 200 bouquets of flowers to the UK National Health Service frontline health workers. The aviation industry converted passenger planes to transport fresh produce and flowers to Europe.

b) Wheels of Life initiative: an innovation by Dr Jemimah Kariuki supported by University of Nairobi, Ministry of Health, KEPSA, Bolt, KHF, AMREF, Telesky and Rescue.co. The initiative uses the KEPSA 1196 hotline to enable mothers’ access hospital during curfew hours. The initiative continues to serve a growing number of women (with 2,413 cases handled so far) and have been working with counties to expand it with now 5 counties on board i.e. Uasin Gishu, Kiambu, Machakos, Nyeri, and Nakuru.

c) KEPSA women in partnership with Chandaria Foundation distributed food, clothing and sanitizers to the urban poor families in Nairobi. They also distributed a tricycle to a disabled person in Narok County, and are undertaking an initiative towards establishing income generating activities for women in prisons.

d) Financing: KEPSA partnered with Mastercard Foundation, setting up a fund to support 400 MSMEs with up to KSh1 million in interest-free loans, repayable within six months.

e) Digital Commerce program: KEPSA partnered with TradeMark East Africa (TMEA) for the e-Commerce Booster Programme. About 2,000 SMEs were trained on e-commerce and digital marketing, and on-boarded onto digital marketplaces. In partnership with Jumia, KEPSA partnered with Mastercard Foundation, setting up a fund to support 400 MSMEs with up to KSh1 million in interest-free loans, repayable within six months.

f) Capacity Development: In partnership with Educate Global Rapid Technical Assistance Response Team, KEPSA is supporting businesses in food, health and education sectors through financial restructuring, strategy review and addressing critical operational issues. In partnership with Passion Profit Limited, KEPSA is also training and mentoring women and youth in business. This complements a similar programme targeting women in business, in partnership with the Embassy of Ireland.
j) "Men in Silence" launched by KEPSA in partnership with SanShieShe Foundation, TelEsky and Kenya Healthcare Foundation for male mental & gender based violence issues through KEPSA hotline 1196. A total of 1,509 consultations have been received thus far;

h) Reporting of Non-compliance to Government directives through the 1196 Call Centre in partnership with National Police Service, Citizen TV and TelEsky. 3,172 reports have been received so far and directed to NPS.

i) Tele-medical services: 40 telehealth providers were registered enabling continuous access to healthcare services with reduced movement. Mobile platforms have also been developed to enable patients access medical services while limiting person-to-person contact. The private sector is involved in development of Digital Healthcare Regulations.

j) Training and mentoring youth in emerging digital opportunities: KEPSA began implementing the second phase of Ajira Digital in January 2020. This is in partnership with KEBS, KPC, M-KOPA, KPLC, BOC, etc.

k) Information support: KEPSA established an online portal http://COVID-19.ke and a 24-hour call centre, #1196. The call centre was linked to the Ministry of Health hotline #719.