



THE IFC AND THE GLOBAL SME FINANCE AWARDS FETE EQUITY AS BEST FINANCIER FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

- ***The Group won platinum in the Best Financier for Women Entrepreneurs and silver in the SME Financier of the Year-Africa award categories***
- ***Women-led SMEs banking with Equity reported to have higher than average business growth & half the average risk metrics***

12th October 2022...Equity Group has been feted by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Global SME Finance Awards 2022 as the platinum winner for the Best Financier for Women Entrepreneurs.

The Group was also named the silver winner for SME Financier of the Year- Africa and received special honorary mention under the Product Innovation of the Year category.

Organized by IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, and the SME Finance Forum and endorsed by the G20's Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (GPFI), the Global SME Finance Awards which were held in Cambodia celebrated the outstanding achievements of financial institutions and fintech companies in delivering exceptional products and services to their SME clients. While highlighting Equity's entry for the Best Financier for Women Entrepreneurs award category, the judging panel recognized Equity Group's business growth noting that this was higher than average for women-led SMEs while risk metrics (NPL) were about half the average. The judging panel also described Equity Group as an excellent role model to smaller, newer banks.

The lender who has a strong regional presence in East and Central Africa has innovated its financial solutions to meet the needs of individual women, women in groups and women-led SMEs enabling them to enhance their growth and wealth creation. Through the *Fanikisha* range of tailor-made solutions, women have been included financially enabling them to access affordable loans from as low as Ksh 1,000. *Fanikisha* was launched in 2007 in partnership with UNDP and participation of ILO and UNIDO to promote and increase women in business and investment. Over the years, Equity has successfully employed a credit-scoring graduation model for both individuals and women in groups running sole proprietorships, micro-businesses and SMEs and has encouraged women to leverage on their social capital and group savings to access financing for their individual and group projects. To date, a total of Kes 339.2 billion has been disbursed to women impacting 8.3 million of them.

Additionally, other services extended free of charge to women entrepreneurs through Equity Group Foundation include financial education training, business advisory services and mentorship and coaching. To date a total of 2.4 million women and youth have so far benefitted from this 13-week financial literacy and entrepreneurship training.

To further support women and youth entrepreneurs, Equity Group Foundation in partnership with Mastercard Foundation and Equity Group is currently implementing the Young Africa Work Kenya (YAW-K) Program. The Program aims at generating 810,000 jobs through micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) across all sectors of the economy over a 5-year period which comes to an end in 2024. The Young Africa Works Program was established with the primary objectives of stimulating job creation and economic growth by providing youth and women MSME entrepreneurs with advice, mentorship, entrepreneurship training and access to financial and business development services. The Program further seeks to build financial capability and greater financial access to low-income youth by linking them to access appropriate financial services, products and expert financial literacy training.

To date, the Young Africa Works Program has supported over 500,000 MSMEs through capacity building and extending access to Kes 200 billion in loans which has seen the MSMEs create and preserve over 1.26 million jobs. The success of the Program in Kenya has led to the scale up of the same into the greater East and Central Africa region to support realization of 25 million jobs under the Africa Recovery and Resilience Plan.

The judging panel while issuing the SME Financier of the Year-Africa award further applauded the Group for its wide range of financial solutions including digital banking and trade finance products that are readily available and efficiently delivered for SMEs through a dedicated business banking unit.

Speaking at the award ceremony, Matthew Gamser, CEO of the SME Finance Forum said, "This year has seen the largest field of applicants ever, as we expand to a fifth award category in the important area of greening SME financing. We have more countries, with more financial products and approaches than ever before. It was a tall order for the almost 100 judges, whom we thank profusely for their expert, informed and unbiased judgment about who merited recognition."



Also commenting on the awards, Dr. James Mwangi, Equity Group Managing Director and CEO said, “The recognition by the IFC and the Global SME Finance Awards is timely and is truly humbling. Equity Group remains committed in its efforts to champion the building back better post the COVID-19 pandemic. We have rolled out a private sector focused stimulus package to accelerate the recovery and resilience of the region through a KES 700 billion funding dubbed ‘Africa Recovery and Resilience Plan’. We intend to reach 5 million MSMEs and 25 million individual borrowers over the next 5 years including women and youth owned businesses.”

Equity Group with 72% of its loan book in SME sector uniquely demonstrated its commitment to the MSME sector when COVID-19 struck by restructuring 45% of its loan book for periods of up to 3 years. The Group also continued with 27% loan book growth for two consecutive years to allow the sector to mitigate, adapt, repurpose, survive, thrive and keep the lights and the lifeline of the economy on.

The recognition by the IFC and the Global SME Finance Awards adds to the global accolades Equity has bagged this year including the 5th Strongest Banking Global Brand and position one in Sub-Saharan Africa in the world's top 500 most valuable banking brands as per the Brand Finance, Banking 500 2022 rankings.

About the SME Finance Forum

The SME Finance Forum works to expand access to finance for small and medium businesses. The Forum operates a global membership network that brings together financial institutions, technology companies, and development finance institutions to share knowledge, spur innovation, and promote the growth of SMEs. Established in 2012 by the G20 Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion, the SME Finance Forum is managed by IFC.

For more information, visit <http://www.smefinanceforum.org>

About Equity Group Holding Plc

Equity Group Holdings Plc is a financial service holding company listed at the Nairobi Securities Exchange, Uganda Securities Exchange, and Rwanda Stock Exchange. The Group has banking subsidiaries in, Rwanda, Uganda, South Sudan, Tanzania, DRC, and a Commercial Representative Office in Ethiopia; with additional non-banking subsidiaries engaged in the provision of investment banking, custodial, insurance, philanthropy, consulting, and infrastructure services.

Equity Group is the largest bank in the region in assets of Kshs 1.35 trillion (USD 13.5 billion). It is also the biggest bank in deposits, market capitalization of USD 2 billion and with a customer base of over 16.9 million customers. The Group has a footprint of 342 branches, 61,061 Agents, 36,133 Merchants, 695 ATMs and an extensive adoption of digital banking channel.

The Banker Top 1000 World Banks 2021 index ranked Equity Bank 22nd in Africa and 761 overall in its global ranking, 149th in soundness (Capital Assets to Assets ratio), 71st in terms of Profits on Capital and 39th on Return on Assets.

Brand Finance 2022 ranked Equity Group the 5th strongest banking brand in the world and 338 overall among the top 500 banking brands, with a Brand Strength Index (BSI) of 90.8 and a brand ranking score of AAA+, the highest rating that a brand can attain.

The Banker's Top 100 African Banks 2020 placed the Bank in position 7 overall among the top 10 Banks in Africa, 5th place on soundness, position 9 on growth performance, 8th on return on risk and position 6th in terms of profitability and on leverage category.

In the same year, Moody's gave the Bank a global rating of B2 with a negative outlook, the same as the sovereign rating of the Kenyan Government due to the Bank's strong brand recognition, solid liquidity buffers, resilient funding profile, established domestic franchise and extensive adoption of digital and alternative distribution channels.