

**Regional Forum for Africa on  
Women's Entrepreneurship Development  
In Response to the Financial Crisis**

**Opening Address**

**Mr. Charles Dan**

**ILO Regional Director**

**Cairo, 27-29 October 2009**

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Minister of Manpower and Migration of Egypt,

Your Excellencies,

The representative of the African Development Bank,

Dear Ronnie,

Dear Ghislaine,

Government representatives and,

Representatives of employers' and workers' organizations,

Women leaders and promoters of entrepreneurship in Africa,

Dear friends and colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me also to express our gratitude to the First Lady, Madame Suzanne Mubarak for her patronage. We are very grateful for her support and commitment to a great cause: bettering the economic progress and social justice for women in Africa.

I am also pleased to thank the Egyptian government for hosting this Forum. We feel really privileged to be here in Cairo.

Minister Aisha Abdel Hadi, thank you for the welcome and hospitality extended to all of us. Congratulations for your leadership in the ILO Governing Body. And thank you so much for Egypt's support to ILO's activities in Africa.

May I also acknowledge here the presence and commitment of the Minister of Labour and Productivity of Nigeria, the Minister of Women Entrepreneurship of Senegal as well as the two Deputy Ministers of Tanzania for Community Development, Gender and Children and Labour, Employment and Youth Development.

And my salutations to the representatives of the social partners - IOE and PEC for the employers and ITUC-AFRICA and OATUU for the workers - so committed to promote decent work and women empowerment in Africa.

Thank you also so much to the African Development Bank for co-organizing this Forum, and for the great partnership we have enjoyed for many years.

### **Empowering Women is Empowering Africa**

Like many in Africa, my two grand-mothers were entrepreneurs - African women entrepreneurs - Not big entrepreneurs -Small - Actually micro- entrepreneurs - Striving everyday to make a little profit - To feed the family - To get children to school - To provide for healthcare -.

But one day, my paternal grand-mother did not get enough to pay the school fees. So my father had to leave school. And he went to help her selling fire woods at the railways station. When he collected enough, he went back and gave the money to the teacher. This latter was so surprised that a little boy went to help his mother to get the money for schooling. He decided that as from that day my father should not pay any fee anymore. Then my father went on to become a Professor of medicine.

Like many in Africa, that's where I come from - African grandmothers - African mothers – African women entrepreneurs at all levels - Striving to make a daily profit - to better the future of their children - to better the future of Africa.

But too often they cannot make enough. And whenever this is the case, children are out school - food is not secured - basic protection is not provided.

And Africa can end up wasting so many ambitions, so many talents.

In the ILO, our commitment to women entrepreneurship and empowerment stems from this very fact: Women are overrepresented in micro-and small enterprises. They generally invest more in the well-being of their families and communities than men. Therefore, women entrepreneurship development can be a powerful means of poverty reduction and engine for growth. At the same time, more jobs can be created by focusing on women-owned enterprises with growth potential.

This is our conviction - And this is our commitment -.

And this is why we are gathered here today in Cairo - Because we believe that empowering women is empowering Africa.

### **Women: Economic engine of the future**

One of the merits of any crisis is that it obliges us to see things differently – to look for new opportunities - new frontiers.

As reported in a September issue of Newsweek magazine, in the last few months, economists have begun to track the rise of a new emerging market. And this market may end up being the largest and most powerful of all: Women.

According to a new study by the Boston Consulting Group, women are now poised to drive the post-recession world economy, thanks to an estimated 5 trillion US Dollars in new female-earned income that will be coming on line the next five years.

That means women will be the ones driving the shopping and the recovery. That potential growth represents the biggest emerging

market in the history of the planet - more than twice the size of the two hottest developing markets, India and China, combined.

The impact of the shift will be broad and deep. An August Report by Goldman Sachs entitled “The Power of the Purse” confirms that women are the economic engine of the future. And it also notes that future spending by women - which tends to focus more on health, education, and children’s well-being - “should support the development of human capital” to a greater extent than spending by men, thus “fueling economic growth in the years ahead”.

**... And in Africa also, women can.**

In Africa also, women are making great strides in the world of work.

But this progress cannot and must not obscure the inequities that still exist in workplaces.

We all know that African women are still confronted with too many obstacles in terms of access to labour markets.

We all know that African women entrepreneurs still face too many gender-based barriers to starting and growing their businesses, for instance:

- Discriminatory property, matrimonial and inheritance laws or practices;
- Lack of access to formal finance mechanisms;
- Limited mobility and access to information and networks;
- Or lack of maternity protection...

Yes indeed, gender discrimination still exists and denies women their rights. It is economically unproductive. But this is not an African specificity. Women constitute 40 per cent of the working population worldwide - yet represent 60 per cent of the world's working poor.

Discrimination is one of the major inhibiting factors to the goal of productive and decent work for all women and men; and thus, an important barrier to the recovery of the economy.

Indeed, women often experience the negative consequences of economic crises more rapidly and are slower to enjoy the benefits of recovery.

### **Looking for the way ahead: the Global Jobs Pact**

This is the reason why, as the ILO in Africa, our focus today is on unleashing the productive potential of Africa's women by leveraging the four development assets that drive decent work as well as balanced and sustainable growth:

- Rights,
- Employment,
- Social Protection and,
- Social Dialogue.

And for this purpose, we have today a powerful instrument: the Global Jobs Pact adopted by the ILO tripartite constituents last June in Geneva - a crisis response framework designed to guide national and international policies aimed at stimulating economic recovery.

In this connection, let me highlight here today, three major policy directions where we can intensify our action - Together - :

- First, supporting advocacy to ensure policy and regulatory reform.
- Second, developing knowledge base on African women entrepreneurs.
- Third, providing relevant support services for women entrepreneurs, including basic business skills training combined with improved access to financial services.

### **Partnering to unleash African Women Entrepreneurship Potential**

The ILO's Women's Entrepreneurship Development Program is a creative tool that delivers two key objectives: the creation of sustainable enterprises and women economic empowerment.

ILO's efforts are sustained by our Bureau of Gender Equality and our Bureaus for Employers' and Workers' Activities.

And we are proud to partner with the African Development Bank because they strongly believe in fostering women entrepreneurship as a tool for economic growth and recovery.

### **Conclusions**

More and more, government policies and programs are taking into account the specific needs of women entrepreneurs. But we need to go the extra mile together - despite the crisis – or precisely because of the crisis.

It is time for creative policy measures to support African women's efforts to access opportunities for productive and decent work.

It is time for innovative programs to upgrade African women entrepreneurs' skills and access to finance.

It is time for a Decent Work Movement in Africa which will support African women to progressively secure a better life for themselves, for their families, for their communities.

It is time - And it is possible - This is our common challenge -.

And this is why we are today in Cairo - Because we know that African women entrepreneurship is a powerful engine of growth and decent jobs for Africa's development.

Thank you so much for your attention.