

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL**

-----

**REMARKS TO THE SIXTH AFRICAN  
DEVELOPMENT FORUM**

**Addis Ababa, 21 November 2008**

**Excellencies**

**Honorable Ministers,**

**Distinguished members of the diplomatic corps,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

**I am honoured to participate in this sixth African Development Forum.**

**Achieving gender equality and ending violence against women is one of the most crucial challenges of our time.**

**I therefore thank the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank for their role in making this Forum possible. This tripartite partnership helps to shape the policy landscape on the continent and advance Africa's development agenda.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**The issues paper on “Empowering African Women” under consideration at this conference noted that “gender equality and women’s empowerment are development goals in themselves; they are key to promoting sustainable development, particularly in Africa”.**

**Therefore gender equality cannot be a women’s business alone, but should concern everyone. It is not a matter solely for Ministers of Gender and Women’s Affairs, but for Ministers of Defense, Finance, Justice, Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs, too.**

**In this regard permit me to applaud the civil society organizations across the continent who have worked so hard and so creatively to get this message across. As we commend them we must also remain acutely conscious of the numerous challenges that remain ahead. We must all work together purposely and vigorously.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Many African countries have experienced positive economic growth over the past few years. The fact that there remain glaring disparities between women and men, and between girls and boys imply that the sustainable development we seek to attain may not be realized. This is evidenced by disturbing gender gaps in health, higher education, employment and empowerment and is likely to undermine any gains that have been achieved.**

**Such inequalities have widespread ramifications and clear economic and social costs. They undermine efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) can succeed only if women and men are accorded equal opportunities to economic, social and political participation.**



**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**I am aware that you have already discussed in detail over the past two days the issues of violence against women and the empowerment of women. I will focus the remainder of my remarks on another urgent topic under your purview this morning: the commingled crises of climate change, global financial turmoil and high prices of food and fuel.**

**These crises are a threat to all people, and all countries. But they affect women in ways that are different from the impact on men. They have the potential to deepen and widen existing gender inequalities.**

**The global financial crisis jeopardizes the well-being of women. It could thwart the ability of many African countries to promote gender equality and empower women, particularly because of its negative impact on public finances and employment. It could also result in reduced official development assistance.**

**The combination of weaker government receipts and reduced aid could force many African countries to cut back on public spending. Such cutbacks are more likely to affect those government activities that have consistently not received enough attention. These include gender inequality and women's empowerment programmes.**

**We must not allow this to happen. But while development assistance makes a significant contribution, it is critical that gender issues be funded through the mobilization of domestic resources. This promotes ownership and sustainability. We must find new ways to finance gender equality efforts from domestic resources, and explore other non-traditional sources of external resources.**

**To achieve equality, it is essential to also assess the gender impacts of climate change. This is particularly so when considering the adverse implications that climate change has on factors critical for sustainable development and poverty reduction. Higher prices for food and fuel exacerbate these problems and deepen gender inequalities.**

**Therefore, it is crucial to develop and implement policies and initiatives that will address the gender dimensions of problems resulting from climate change. We must also improve the participation of women in decision-making process related to this area if responses to environmental change and disaster are to have an equally positive effect on women and men.**



**Women in Africa, and throughout the developing world, are largely responsible for household water supply and energy for cooking and heating. They are also largely responsible for food security. At the same time, women tend to have little income. They suffer unequal access to resources, land, technologies and other assets.**

**Food protests in some African countries and elsewhere in the world show the potential of this crisis to generate instability. Indeed, food protests have been precursors to civil conflict and unrest.**

**It is imperative to bear in mind that the food shortages in Africa have been mainly structural and long-term in nature. Part of the problem has been that the crucial contribution of women to agriculture has not been given full recognition and support. We must go beyond short-term solutions such as emergency food aid, and address the underlying causes. Women and girls must have better access to secure land rights, irrigation water, clean energy sources and agricultural technology.**



**Equitable and sustainable rural development cannot be pursued without an explicit recognition of these realities. Women's empowerment is central to raising levels of nutrition, improving production and distribution of food and agricultural products and enhancing the living conditions of rural populations in countries where income and livelihood are derived from these resources.**

**We need to raise awareness and support efforts to entrench equality of access in national laws. Governments and other stakeholders should recognize the urgent need to develop policies and legislation that promote women's land and property rights at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.**

**As part of this effort, we are called to improve the participation of women in decision-making processes. If women are involved, the solutions will be more responsive to their concerns and needs.**

**The participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives in all levels of decision-making is a prerequisite for sustainable development and vital if we are to reach the goals of equality, development and peace.**

**We also need to strengthen the capacity of countries to develop gender-sensitive indicators, and to compile sex-disaggregated data. This will ensure informed policy making and encourage mainstreaming of gender perspectives into governments' national policies, actions plans and other sustainable development initiatives.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Let me conclude by appealing for increased action at all levels. We cannot afford to exclude women and girls from mainstream development. We can no longer tolerate violence against women. I call on government leaders to act decisively and urgently. When it comes to women's empowerment, there can be no more business as usual.**

**This Forum offers all a chance to forge partnerships and consider new and stronger collective action. We can make a difference. Together, we can bring to life, here in Africa, the great promise and potential of gender equality, for the benefit of the entire continent's people.**

**Thank you very much.**

**\* \* \* \* \***



