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**MODALITIES FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

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By Mrs. SAYA Marie Antoinette

**Dear friends, participants,**

It is a privilege and a pleasure for me to address and exchange views with you on the modalities for economic empowerment of women.

My presentation, or my views, here, does not aim to list ready-made recipes for empowering women or to indicate miraculous solutions which if applied will eliminate all the constraints already identified. However, I will try to make some suggestions based on an analysis of some of my experiences which I will throw open for your criticisms, because much concerning culture and the personality of women have yet to be fully grasped.

Through continuous and sustained combination of several approaches over time we will no doubt be able to put together a number of preconditions for the economic empowerment of women.

Let me begin by saying that for my part, I mean not only businesswomen but all women whatever their social status, type of economic activity or marital status. This is because every woman needs a certain degree of economic power in order to have an impact in whatever environment she finds herself.

We have heard the various constraints listed by Mrs. MPUTELA in her presentation which I will summarize as follows:

- Constraints linked to education and training of women;
- Constraints caused by lack of financial and material resources worsened by inadequate technology;
- Problems of adapting to the evolving social environment which requires a change of mentality;
- Legal problems of human rights which concern women's freedom and capacity to act;
- Problems of identity which concern the intrinsic personality of women;
- Problems of joint responsibility of men and women; and
- Cultural and political problems as well as gender-based distinctions.

In view of the foregoing, the issue of women cannot be addressed without identifying the various roles played by them in society. These roles will be discussed later in this presentation.

But why this issue of economic empowerment of women? Is it that women have no economic power or have little and so need more for their full development and participation? Do their amazing acumen for business and trading and their

struggling spirit, evident in their day-to-day activities, and their demonstrated ability to create enterprises, suggest a lack of economic power? Are the many women here in this hall most of whom are in business or employed deprived of power. It is difficult to say!

This is why it is important to first grasp the meaning of the theme of this presentation so that we can have the same understanding of it.

**Modality:**

This is a word with different connotations, including methods, strategies, ways, procedures and terms of putting something into effect.

**Empowerment:**

When something is empowered it is given more power, more vigour. It is consolidated to make it achieve an objective.

**Economic power:**

Let us begin with the term power.

Power is always the perfect word in politics. Is it the same for economics without involving Politics? Using another word will change the sense intended.

Often, we are afraid of the word power or any thing power-related, because the way to power is not always clean and often sows conflicts with real impact.

Power which means mental, physical and moral capacity to do something is often misunderstood by human authorities. It is a word that suggests sinister, dirty and machiavellian tendencies. It often creates the image of cruelty, dishonesty, egoism, arrogance, dictatorship and domination.

As people of the Third World, we view power as something often synonymous with corruption and immorality. It reminds us of Lord Action's saying that power tends to corrupt and that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Corruption per se is not inherent in power but in us. What is this power that constitutes the essence of life for people and which to a large extent is often their life ambition.

Power, in my view, should be understood as the very essence and dynamic force of life. It is the power of the heart which pumps blood to sustain life in the body. It is the power of citizens who are actively involved in their own advancement, the supplier of the energy which is pooled to execute a project. It is an essential force for life which is working ceaselessly either to change the world or to counter change.

Power is organized force. It could be the explosive which kills or the medicine which saves: the power of the gun can be used to impose slavery or to achieve freedom.

The power of the human brain can create the most glorious achievements of man. It can develop perceptions and reflexes on the nature of our unimaginable possibilities in life.

According to St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesus campaign, it takes human power and competence to do something well.

It is impossible to imagine a world without power and we only have a choice between organized and unorganized power. The human race has advanced tremendously in learning to develop and organize the instruments of power in order to replace the struggle for survival with order, security, morality and culture.

The goal of all organizations known to man, from the government down to the grass roots, have always been to organize themselves in order to obtain power to execute a common project.

Power should be understood for what it is and for the role it plays in life. Understanding power and not understanding it is essential for using it instructively and for controlling it. In short, life without power is death.

A women's world without power is a ghost wilderness, a dead planet.

Are we then ready to use and control it in such a way as to take hold of what is important in organizations, particularly in a pluralist society? Why and how should women be economically empowered in a world where their contribution is increasingly noticed.

By economic power we mean not only the ability to produce but also and especially that to:

- really have the means of production;
- control, have free access to and enjoy the revenues yielded by activities;
- have access to markets and all resources needed for the development of women and the advancement of their activities; and
- in short, participate in production through communication channels for generating income, savings, credit and investments, and for achieving security.

To illustrate this I will narrate two sample cases.

**The case of Vita and Tabulukayi**

Since childhood, Vita abhorred the miserable and hard life led by her mother, and never stopped saying "will is might". Thus she built herself a personality that matched her ambition and became a doctor in a hospital in the capital.

One day, the Ministry of Public Health, Social Affairs and the Family announced the offer of scholarships to women doctors who would like to do specialist training in Israel. This was a godsend and her husband encouraged her to apply.

Then what happened? Unknown to anyone, Kalenga had underestimated his wife. On the announcement of the results of the competition, Vita, contrary to her expectations, was reprimanded instead of congratulated for succeeding. Offended, her husband withdrew and would not give in. He refused his wife's travel to Tel Aviv.

The more efforts were made to persuade Kalenga the more he protested and stood against the idea. Heart-broken and humiliated, Vita found herself in a dilemma. Should she accept with equanimity and possibly without being much broken?

Submit to and swallow the misfortunes of her marital life?

should she resign to a blow or sink into a breathtaking despair? I leave that to your judgement.

At least one thing is sure: each moment of our lives we are faced with a choice which could be decisive for our existence. A choice which reflects what we are, what we think of ourselves and which depends on our power.

**The second example is that of Tabulukayi**

Tabulukayi, a student at IPN fell in love with a classmate of hers who put her in the family way. As expected, she broke up with her family, followed by all the misfortunes that befall pregnant girls who are compelled to stop schooling.

However, all was not lost. The young man accepted responsibility for the child and married her. When she expressed the desire to return to school she received a categorical NO.

Wearied, she was finally allowed to enrol in a computer course. But her husband took back with the left hand what he gave her with the right, using all cunning tricks to prevent her from pursuing her education.

For example, her husband ruled that he would no longer eat food prepared by the housemaid, started to show jealousy, suspected his wife of infidelity and

cooked up a chicken pox to accuse her of negligence of the baby. In short he created such an impossible atmosphere that Tabulukayi had to give up every thing.

She was forced to renounce her dream in order to save her home. However, a few months later, she found a job as manager of a perfume shop where having to travel to Paris to procure stock became a source of harassment.

André could no longer stand the absences of his wife and things came to a point where showing her flight ticket in order to secure his approval was no longer acceptable. One day, in the plane, seat belt fastened, she decided to travel in spite of her husband's disagreement. That was the third time and things fell apart.

She left her husband to earn her own income. But here again, Tabulukayi has problems with her employer who made his concubine's younger sister her co-manager, in charge of marketing. The business started heading for catastrophe owing to the huge commissions taken by the co-manager. When Tabulukayi told her employer of it he would not listen.

The attitude of her boss, which again demonstrated the power of power, forced her to resign.

But how many Vitas and Tabulukayis are there, how many mothers are there who have been offended and humiliated but who have nowhere to vent their anger as they have no power over themselves or over the responsibilities entrusted to them.

Nevertheless, the world acknowledges the fact that women with their innate sense of duty, their talent to run to secure their role of providers of livelihood, are truly responsible for every body except themselves.

And in order to safeguard every thing, she alone plays the role of fireman every where. These women have the will but not the might.

These two examples show how the power of men and matrimonial role can encroach upon professional role and obstruct individual role, thus preventing women's access to economic power (income) to which they aspire.

Women may not have access to economic power if there are no true provisions at every level of their roles for their attaining that power which allows for economic possession and empowerment.

The two cases cited raise the issue of the social roles of women where it is vital for them to have economic power.

But what are these roles?

We cannot talk of economic empowerment of women in the strict economic sense, without talking of women's roles in society, of their personality and of man-woman relations.

### **Women's roles**

According to many studies and scientific observations, women play seven roles, namely:

- Parental and maternal role;
- Professional role;
- Matrimonial role;
- Domestic role;
- Family role;
- Community role; and
- Individual role.

Fully understanding the forms of each of these roles will enable us to understand how they are linked to economic development and to the problems encountered by women in assuming these roles.

This approach reveals that there are necessary preconditions for preparing and executing projects or programmes so as to improve women's participation in development as well as to promote equality between men and women, increase their ability to analyze their strength or to see to the welfare of families.

### **Women's parental or matrimonial role**

With regard to their reproductive and nursing activity as well as the social upbringing of the child, this is a role that requires maternal skills in child education planning and management.

Women's requirements and their access to money and material goods will enable them to provide for their needs and those of their children. This role determines the extent to which women can control children's birth and education, including taking decisions regarding birth and the environment in which children are to be raised and the type of education to give them.

### **Professional role**

The definition of professional role will depend on the context. It is any productive and remunerative activities carried out by women.

Activities: that is the wide range of work done by women to live, earn a living and as duty. Women's ability to play a professional role while playing the role of mother and bringing up the child will depend on the particular context, the flexibility and the formal nature of the activity involved.

An important factor for women is their right to have/use and control not only the means of production but also the fruits therefrom (that is, agricultural products, consumer goods and income).

### **Matrimonial role**

This is the role which results from a woman's situation as man's partner for many ends, including procreation, sexual satisfaction, domestic work, material and financial support, economic cooperation and company.

These roles have the following three characteristics:

1. The extent to which couples prove their solidarity, that is, share their rights, duties and tasks.
2. The extent to which women participate in decision-making. Are decisions taken independently, dominated by the views of one of the partners or adopted after discussions and an agreement.
3. The delegation or sharing of rights, duties and tasks, the level of openness or isolation of the matrimonial relationship (that is, the extent to which they function as a single unit).

### **Domestic role**

This refers to all behaviours in a household or in one's home.

These activities may combine some of the roles of mother, wife, family member and individual.

They may overlap with professional activities if the income-generating goods and services are produced at home. Many women, sometimes unmarried, may find themselves as head of a household as single parents.

This domestic role seems difficult at times when it comes to resource acquisition and allocation.

### **Family role**

These are the roles played by women as sisters, girls, grandmothers, nieces, etc. and which are considered fundamental in their lives.

These roles involve providing resources and unrestricted support. They arise from the expectations and constraints which govern their lives and affect their many different activities such as exchange of goods and participation in marriages and engagement ceremonies.

Determining shares of rights, duties, resources and activities is very important for ascertaining whether or not women have sufficient time, money and resources to play their role of mothers, heads of families and members of the community and for understanding their feelings of insecurity, frustration and dissatisfaction.

### Community role

The participation of women in community organizations such as political parties, religious congregations and women's organizations is notable.

Also notable is their sharing in information and in such political acts as voting, making choices, paying tax and community work.

### Individual role

This concerns individual activities carried out by a person for his/her own development, self-expression, being what he/she is and use of his/her private moments.

This role varies greatly from culture to culture. Poor communities offer little opportunities for the development of the individual role.

Each of these roles involves and requires:

- Knowledge;
- Ability or sufficient freedom to make choices and take decisions;
- Rights;
- Obligations; and
- Resources.

In fact, in the sixth which include stereo-type roles based on gender division of responsibilities many roles enter into conflict with one another and obstruct the growth and increase of women's power.

It is the one who has all the power that matters. The constraints mentioned above reveal that these obstacles exist at each level of women's role.

The first obstacle is the problematic relationship between men and women and between young men and young women.

Two examples cited earlier are illustrative of these obstacles and prevent these roles from acquiring power. Another example, among others, is the case of rural women farmers who are deprived of the income from their crops by marital power.

### **Empowerment modalities and strategies**

On the whole, the question of economic empowerment cannot be exclusively solved by institutional set-ups.

It is faced strictly with cultural problems (men's hegemony, men as suppliers of money and resources, men as providers), tradition, religion, women's status in the society with all its ramifications at all levels where they constitute social or traditional authoritarianism.

In the circumstances, the challenge to take up is to introduce women into the existing economic space and structures by providing them with the necessary means and tools for a game dominated by social and cultural values which are strongly marked by an ideology of partiality.

In fact, economic rights, familiarization with State institutions responsible for managing the economy, market structures, savings, negotiation techniques, power structures and decision-making processes which constitute the bedrock of economic activities are factors women are often generally ignorant of.

In order to combat this ignorance, economic empowerment requires training and educational policies as well combined strategies.

**First strategy:** Strengthening the personality of women through various techniques in order to restore:

- Their dignity;
- Their freedom; and
- Their owning themselves, their body, soul and identity (decision-making).

**Second strategy:** Training and educational policies or intensive education/training awareness creation. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women by giving them knowledge, empowering them socially and giving them self-confidence.

Knowledge of the market, product suppliers, cycles and systems, marketing circuits, micro-economics, quality control, pricing, market study, market thrust and other relevant factors, including:

- Responding to needs, creating demand for a product and knowledge of competition;
- Ability to lead;
- Access to simple technical and management training; and
- On-the-job training and re-training.

**Third strategy: Independence of women**

Making women independent in their actions and choices, and fighting against resistance from patriarchal bureaucratic and traditional establishments (legal barriers by lobbying against unjust laws). Giving them direct responsibility and decision-making power in community management.

**Fourth strategy: Increasing women's capacity or power.**

The power relations which prevent women from attaining a safe and satisfactory life are active at all levels of society. This opposition creates discrimination and a system whereby men dominate and control access to resources.

Example: Budget

Ministry of public health: 55 per cent

Social Affairs: 35 per cent

The Family: 15 per cent

Access to power

Women's fertility

Women's production.

**Fourth strategy: Empowering women:**

Women's empowerment can be done at the following five levels, each of which should aim at eliminating disparities:

- Improving their living conditions;
- Giving them access to various resources;
- Awareness creation (elimination of the women-men disparity);
- Mobilization; and
- Control.

Improvement of living conditions

Control Men. Women Access

Increasing capacity Mobilization for access

Awareness creation

the key stage of empowering women (encouraging solidarity, collective awareness, full participation).

Increasing women's capacity or empowering them somehow means questing men's rights and fortunes vis-à-vis women with whom resources and power have to be shared.

**Fifth strategy: Women's independence**

1. Access to resources and sources;
2. Access to power and control;
3. Fertility control: a source of powerlessness and weakness;
4. Knowledge and control of production and marketing circuits;
5. Knowledge and control of the (friendly) market
6. Knowledge and control of income from production; and
7. Knowledge and control of negotiation and leadership skills.

**Sixth strategy: partnership between organizations**

- Establishment of alliances between groups for example NGO-NGO, NGO-STATE and NGO-ILD;
- Cooperation among business women
- Networking, Lobby, Platform, Cooperative.

**Seventh strategy: economic support services**

- \* Law: legislation in favour of women;
- \* Social and cultural activity structures;
- \* Flexible and appropriate financial structures;
- \* Socially friendly markets;
- \* Provision of technical advice;
- \* Social protection (for example women working in bakeries, women participating in the capitalization of bakery funds);
- \* Provision of information on supplier-client relations;'
- \* Relations between men and women;
- \* Promotion funds;
- \* Provision of services;
- \* Reinforcing support services;
- \* Water, road and electricity infrastructure,;
- \* Reinforcing networking; and
- \* Access to all resources

**Eight strategy: a vision**

AFECOZA - TOGO free ticket

Owing to lack of vision, this opportunity could only be seemingly (and not really) transformed into economic power.

**Ninth strategy: Services/promotion of financial organizations**

- Savings cooperatives, Assistance funds etc...

**Conclusion**

Unless women's capacity for action is consolidated, the family will for long remain poor and women will continue to wade in material insecurity and will continue to be considered dependants, thus belonging to the vulnerable groups.

It is time that not only women but also men, communal organizations and governments established mechanisms, techniques and infrastructure for making women independent and triumph over poverty.