

# Meeting of Ministers on Committee on Women and Development

## Opening Remarks

by **K. Y. Amoako,**  
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Honourable Ministers,  
Senior Officials,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome all of you to this meeting of Ministers of the Committee on Women and Development (CWD). I am pleased to welcome all ministers, some of whom have not visited ECA before. During your stay I hope you will feel free to visit ECA and familiarize yourselves with its work.

This year's meeting has particularly registered a high level of attendance. Over 29 countries are attending, with 19 of these being CWD member countries. The meeting is also a rich mix of experts from the Ministries of Women Affairs, Finance and Economic Development, UN partner Agencies, IGOs and NGOs. This is evidence of the seriousness with which member states are taking the concerns of gender inequalities in Africa.

This meeting takes place seven and eight years after the Dakar and Beijing Platforms of Action respectively. Since the last CWD Meeting held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in April 1999, some progress has been made in Africa, in the area of gender and development. The Sixth Regional Conference on Women was held in November 1999 here in Addis Ababa to assess progress since Dakar and Beijing Platforms were committed to by your governments. From the National reports presented at this conference, it is clear that the majority of the African countries have the political will and commitment to creating an environment conducive to addressing gender issues and enhancing the status of women. NGOs are very active partners in supporting government initiatives.

However, inspite of progress that has been registered, there are still fundamental challenges that remain to be addressed. The first challenge is how to bring about change in the process of eradicating poverty in Africa where it is estimated that over 70 percent of the poor are women. Although women and men share the burdens of poverty, in most societies in Africa, women are also subject to socially imposed constraints that further limit their opportunities to improve economic conditions or to equal access to public services and consumption goods. Women are also subject to heavy time burdens due to the need to balance demands on their productive, social reproductive, and community management roles. Studies have shown that when both household and market work are taken into account, women work much longer hours than their male counterparts. This is ironical given that both men and women play significant roles in economic development of the region. Women contribute 70 percent of the labour force in agricultural production and produce over 90 percent of the food in Africa especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The second challenge which is linked to the first is how to address the gender inequality that persists in access to and control of productive, human, and social capital assets. Recent UNDP studies show that women in Africa receive less than 10 percent of the credit going to small farmers and 1 percent of the total credit given to the agricultural sector. Studies have also shown that there is differential access to essential public services including education and health in nearly all African countries. Despite the belief that education is the single most important investment a country can make to eradicate poverty, education has registered the lowest average annual growth in total years of schooling between 1969 and 1990 of all regions. Gender disparity in enrollment persists at all levels of the education system. This is indeed saddening given that knowledge, innovation, and application of skills is considered by the new endogenous growth concept as the only source of long term economic growth. It is therefore a missed opportunity in terms of growth to deny education to girls who in many countries not only outnumber boys but also mature to be the backbone of livelihoods.

The third challenge is whether the International Development Target (IDT) to reduce poverty by half by the year 2015 can be achieved and sustained over the next two decades if macroeconomic policies do not adequately

incorporate gender dimensions. Our studies show that to achieve the IDT demands a 4 percent reduction per year in the ratio of people living in poverty. In these terms, GDP growth of about 7 percent per annum would be required for Africa as a whole. Many of you, Honourable Ministers, may be aware that despite good economic performance reported in several African countries in the recent past, the impact of this growth does not seem to reduce poverty. For ECA, poverty reduction is a key concern and central to the initiatives and advocacy work we are undertaking. Moreover, we have now moved a step forward to add value to this work by systematically mainstreaming gender perspectives as a development objective in all our sectoral activities.

In this regard, ECA is becoming actively involved in the development of Poverty Reduction Strategies Papers (PRSPs). The PRSP as all of you may be aware, is a framework for developing poverty reduction strategies at country level as nationally-owned participatory poverty reduction strategies that should provide the basis of all their concessional lending and for the debt relief under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. I believe the introduction of the PRSPs offers a significant opportunity to deepen the focus on broad-based participatory growth strategies that fully integrate gender concerns. Governments now need to take steps to ensure that women's concerns are integrated into policies and translation into action. The PRSPs provides an opportune vehicle to ensure that in eradicating poverty all poor groups benefit. It is for this reason that ECA has identified one of its activities being to assist governments to look at gender and PRSPs.

The PRSP should therefore be considered as an important entry point for mainstreaming gender into sustainable development process and to enhance African ownership of these strategies.

ECA as the main UN organ for development in Africa has also been involved in the recent initiative of the African Leaders: the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). We are working on priority sectors as identified in NEPAD and as requested by OAU Member States at their Lusaka Summit in July 2001. The NEPAD will in future be a vehicle for making significant transformation of the African economy, and through it, opportunities exist for integrating gender perspectives.

Let me now link these initiatives to the role of the CWD. As a statutory organ and a subsidiary of ECA, CWD offers an important avenue for Ministries of Women Affairs in Africa to influence the various initiatives that I have already highlighted.

The CWD should also be used as a vehicle to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of the Dakar and Beijing Platform for Actions. Consideration and adoption of the monitoring and evaluation framework which has been developed by ECA and validated by your committee of experts is an item on your agenda. The results of this monitoring and evaluation framework will provide a vital input to the African Women's Report, which is a periodic flagship publication providing all stakeholders with information on changes being realised in the situation of women.

Honourable Ministers,

This is your meeting and I therefore trust that you will be committed to the implementation of the results of this meeting at your national level.

Let me conclude by re-affirming the Commission's commitment to supporting Member States in breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and to bridge the gender-gap. These are two pre-requisites for sustainable social and economic development. I am confident that your meeting will yield practical recommendations for improving the development of gender-sensitive poverty reduction strategies in Africa and which are consistent with the requirements of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action, that is gender equality and equity.

With these brief remarks, I would like to call upon the Chair to set the stage for our discussions.

Thank you.

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