

ECA/ADB Symposium on Gender Issues

**Statement by K.Y. Amoako,
Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa
Kampala, Uganda 24 May 2004**

Your Excellency, Yoweri Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda,
Your Excellency, Luisa Diogo Dias, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mozambique,
Honourable Ministers and Central Bank Governors,
The Honourable President of the African Development Bank,
Distinguished members of the diplomatic corps,
Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to join President Kabbaj in welcoming you to the second Joint ADB/ECA Symposium. We are most honoured that you have accepted our invitation to take part in our deliberations today.

Our discussion on today's theme: the Missing Link in Growth and Sustainable Development: Closing the Gender Gap is of critical importance not only to women but to the sustainable development of the entire African continent.

Investing in women is, first of all, a moral imperative. It is the fair thing to do. Investing in women is also essential for reducing poverty and promoting growth. Today, two out of five people in Africa live in poverty; the majority are women. These women also find it harder to escape the poverty trap than men do.

The empirical evidence on the positive economic returns that result from gender balance is overwhelming. Supporting a stronger role for African women will boost the economy, reduce fertility, improve child survival and slow the population explosion. These are all proven ways to help achieve and maintain family stability and national development.

We also know for certain that returns on investment in women's education and health are significantly greater than those for similar investments in these services for men. This is largely because of the strong interaction among factors such as women's schooling, health, nutritional status and fertility, on the one hand, and the synergistic effects of this combination of factors on Africa's future education, health and productivity, on the other.

In short, we in Africa will not make significant progress in bringing down poverty levels, if we do not take gender issues into consideration when we design and implement our development strategies.

Excellencies,

A recent study on the links between gender and growth in Africa, for example, portrays a remarkably consistent picture of gender-based asset inequality acting as a constraint to growth and poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa.

Gender inequalities in education and employment combined are estimated to have reduced sub-Saharan Africa's per capita growth in the 1960-1992 period by 0.8 percentage points per year.

These disadvantages account for about 15-20 percent of the difference in growth performance between sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia, which has less gender inequality than Africa in these areas. In this context, failure to incorporate a gender perspective is clearly the missing link in achieving sustained growth.

At the Economic Commission for Africa, our review of the decade since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted, reveals that some progress has been made in closing the gender gap in Africa, as policies and institutional mechanisms which promote gender equality overall have been introduced in most countries.

In many countries in the region, girls' school enrolment has gone up following the adoption of special policies to give priority to girls' education.

Similarly, we see a steady increase in women's participation in the decision making arena particularly in parliament in Sub-Saharan Africa

The appointment, earlier this year, of the Honourable Luisa Diogo Dias as the Prime Minister of Mozambique and the election of Madam Gertrude Mongella, as Speaker of our continental parliament are two high profile symbols of this progress.

Another is the achievement of gender parity at the highest levels at the African Union where half the Commissioners are women.

However despite these changes, there is little evidence, that African governments are systematically allocating resources to meet the economic needs and priorities of women. Excellencies,

Sadly, women's inequality is the un-noticed elephant in the room when we discuss poverty reduction strategies. Policy makers dealing with growth and development issues continue to pay little attention to the contribution of women to the national economy. To remedy this problem we need to implement pro-poor growth strategies in Africa targeted at spurring economic growth, as well as equality in income and asset distribution. As a first priority, we need to change our thinking about what constitutes "work" and what encompasses "economic activity".

In the current circumstances, what remains as the ultimate challenge is how to link micro gender issues to the macro level - that is the non-market work and market economy - in order to prepare decision makers more adequately for their task.

A significant amount of the work that women perform (especially in subsistence production, informal employment, domestic and reproductive work) tends to be "invisible". Although progress has been made in some countries to include subsistence production in the System of National Accounts (SNA), much of women's unpaid domestic work is still not counted. The result of this invisibility is that their work does not get considered in a regular and systematic manner in public policy and budgetary allocation.

Indeed, even when women are recognized as producers and entrepreneurs, they have access to fewer productive resources. For example, relative to men, they tend to have lower access to land, to credit, and to education and training facilities. Even in agriculture, where women tend to predominate, credit and land ownership has historically been directed to the male head of the household, to the detriment of women, and indeed, to the detriment of agricultural development in Africa.

Excellencies,

In tackling these challenges, we are constrained by an enormous deficit in necessary data for public policy.

We urgently need to improve our data collection and analysis in order to better understand the linkages between gender, growth and development.

Additionally, there is also need for gender-disaggregated data that reveal the distinct circumstances of men and women and allow for the design of targeted poverty reduction strategies.

In this regard, time-use surveys, which would cover unpaid work in subsistence agriculture, in childcare, in household duties, and in education could also be undertaken.

Excellencies,

In order to assess the impact gender inequality is having on our countries, we need to develop analytic tools.

In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that we in ECA have been working hard over the past few years to develop some highly relevant tools to address the gender dimensions of poverty.

We have developed a guidebook for integrating household production into national poverty reduction policies in Africa. This guidebook is envisaged to assist statisticians and policy analysts to integrate household production into national accounts.

We have further developed the "African Gender and Development Index" to help African countries monitor their progress in reducing gender gaps in all areas. First, the index measures relative gender inequalities based on readily available quantitative indicators on education and health; income time use, employment, and access to resources; and formal and informal political representation. Second, it captures the qualitative elements of women's empowerment and advancement.

To inform today's discussions ECA has prepared an Issues Paper on the theme which expands on many of the points I have mentioned.

Excellencies,

I am sure that in our deliberations today we will be touching on many other issues of vital importance to our quest to reduce gender inequalities and promote economic growth and poverty reduction.

I want to end by highlighting one of the most critical: the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS.

We are in a state of emergency. The AIDS epidemic is erasing, in a few short years, gains in development that took us decades to achieve.

The most direct impact is being felt at the family level, where the death of a breadwinner means the disruption of the family as an economic unit, and even its disintegration.

The capacity of communities to pool resources in times of hardship dwindles with the collapse of families, worsening poverty and leaving those alive ill-prepared to sustain our communities.

To this, must be added, the reality that HIV/AIDS is disproportionately killing our women.

Current information suggests that between 12 and 13 African women are infected for every 10 African men. Of newly infected 15-19 year olds, more than two thirds are female.

What are the implications of this for our social norms and values?

What are the implications of this for our labour force so dependent on female labour?

The resulting social decay and community breakdown may well threaten the socio-economic fabric of our continent.

This is our greatest challenge.

I thank you for your attention.
