

**Speech of Dr. Donald Kaberuka
International Women's Day 2011**

Tunis, March 8, 2011

Madam Chair,

**Honorable Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I want to extend a warm welcome to all of you who have come together to celebrate the Centenary of International Women's Day.

Today, we take the opportunity to honor African women who as farmers, traders, teachers, mothers, lawyers and politicians contribute to shaping the continent's future.

In 1911, when International Women's Day was first observed it was mainly to offer a platform to press for women's demands, including the right to vote, to work and to hold public office. In 2011 this day is observed both in celebrating women's advancement and as a reminder that much more needs to change to achieve women's empowerment and equality.

Much has been achieved, also in Africa:

Girls enrolment compared to boys now stands at 90 girls per 100 boys in Africa and a number of African countries are expected to reach parity by 2015, meeting one target of the Millennium Development Goal for gender equality;

For the first time in history an African country heads the list of countries with the largest representation of women in parliament, Rwanda, where 56 percent of members of parliament are women, closely followed by South Africa in third place.

And in 2005, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Liberia was inaugurated as the first woman head of state on the continent, an event that would have been considered unthinkable only 10 years earlier.

In other areas African women still carry a large burden of inequality.

Gender gaps in secondary and tertiary education are still large: In 2008 the gender parity index in secondary education in Sub-Saharan Africa stood at 79, the lowest in the world. By comparison, the North African region, with a gender parity index of 98, is close to parity.

At the tertiary level the gender parity index in Sub-Saharan Africa dropped from 71 to 67, that is the gender gaps in tertiary education increased, while in North Africa it stood at 98.

These figures cover large differences within Africa: a few African countries have now reached a gender parity index above 100, suggesting that more women are enrolled at universities while others still struggle, with overall very small numbers and large gender gaps at secondary and tertiary levels.

In employment too, gender equality is a long way off and hiding large differences: In Sub-Saharan Africa one in three women held paid employment outside agriculture and only 29% were in management positions. In North Africa, even though gender parity in higher education is almost a reality, only 20% of women are in paid employment (outside agriculture) and only 9% are in management positions.

Our institution has been at the forefront in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality, both in our Regional Member Countries and in the Bank itself. Equality in access to education, training and science and technology, the theme of this year's celebration of International Women's Day, is a cornerstone of economic growth and development and is likely to have positive impacts on poverty reduction and economic growth on the continent. As such the theme is very much in line with the Bank's vision.

Over the years Bank investments contributed to improve access to and quality of primary, secondary and tertiary education for girls and boys through construction of thousands of classrooms, hundreds of laboratories, provision of scholarships and training of teachers.

To address the specific education challenges girls' face, Bank investments helped supply girls and young women with scholarships for continuing studies at secondary and tertiary levels, supported the development of gender sensitive curricula, provided dormitories for girls, staff housing to encourage retention of female teachers particularly in remote areas and separate sanitary facilities to ensure the safety of girls.

But girls' and women's access to science and technology training is still phenomenally skewed in favor of boys and men. Girls' access to S&T training is hampered by false perceptions about male and female abilities and roles, male dominated environments, negative attitudes of teachers and parents, and a lack of role models.

These gaps need to be closed, not just as a matter of the human rights of girls and women to choose free of prejudice, but also a matter of dire need: African countries need the brains of both men and women to chart the way forward and contribute to economic growth.

AfDB projects have encouraged greater participation of women in science and technology at universities and technical training institutions:

An example in this respect is the support to the African Virtual University, a Pan-African Intergovernmental organization based in Kenya, which seeks to significantly increase access to higher education through information communication technology.

The project awarded 297 female students with scholarships to undertake math, science and ICT programs; developed marketing materials to encourage female students into S&T subjects, authored gender responsive teaching materials, trained teachers in gender responsive teaching methods, and it encouraged participation of women as staff, teachers and students.

But the training of girls and women in science and technology is not enough. We also need to make sure that women will work in their respective fields and in positions where they are able to earn the same salary as men and where they are able to influence scientific and technological advancement in their countries.

This is not always a given: in Tunisia, for example, while surprisingly female students outnumber male students in science subjects (56 percent), only 8 percent of research team leaders were reported to be women in 2008.

Yet, women's involvement in science and technology development is particularly important on this continent:

African women shoulder the larger share of work burdens, and have limited access to labor and time saving technology, but the design and development of technology remains largely male biased and does not sufficiently focus on the needs of women to support them in their multiple roles, both in production and reproduction, and in reducing the drudgery of many of the work processes traditionally assigned to them.

This reduces the benefits that research and development can bring to society. Women therefore need to be part of the technological advancement both as scientists and as end users of technology.

We must make sure that African women are able to contribute to development with their ideas and their wealth of knowledge in all fields including science and technology.

In the Bank deployment of female staff in managerial positions has seen great changes:

In 2010 the proportion of women in management stood at 27 percent, up from 8 percent in 2006! While this trend shows improvement in the right direction, we acknowledge that progress has not gone far enough to close the gender gap in leadership positions in the Bank. Therefore, much more efforts are need on our part including improving the work environment to meet the needs of women employees, many of whom have to juggle professional and family lives.

More efforts also are needed in our support to RMCs: As the leader in the field of climate change mitigation and adaptation on the continent, the Bank needs to urgently ask itself:

Are we really doing enough to integrate women's voices in decision making on the technological and scientific advancements for climate change? Are we supporting female students to specialize in climate change adaption and mitigation, and are we supporting female scientists to find African solutions to the effects of climate change side by side with male scientists? I promise you that I personally will drive this agenda.

Let me last but not least laud the initiative of the Women's Network Scholarship Fund, which has been launched today. It will remind us of the importance of women's participation in the development of their countries and on the importance of providing access to quality training.

I pledge that I personally will financially contribute to this fund and encourage my fellow men at the Bank to do the same to send a signal to all that gender equality in education and in science education in particular is a goal everybody in the Bank, at home and in our operations, needs to pursue with passion!

Thank you very much.