



## International Women's Day 2014 - Concept Note

### Theme: Equality for Women is Progress for all

*“Investing in women is not only the right thing to do. It is the smart thing to do. I am deeply convinced that, in women, the world has at its disposal, the most significant and yet largely untapped potential for development and peace.”*

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General

## 1. Background

Women's rights have advanced in most of the world's regions. Some historians consider the 20th century the century of women. This is given the “unthinkable” steps towards equality which have been reached. The progress of women's rights have not been a gracious present offered to women, but rather the result of their determined action against gender hierarchy and inequality, and women's ability to advance proposals and make alliances to build a universal movement.

On March 8, 1857, garment workers in New York City marched and picketed to demand improved working conditions and equal rights for women. Their ranks were broken up by the police. Fifty-one years later (March 8, 1908) their sisters in the needle trades in New York marched again, honouring the 1857 march. They demanded the vote, as well as an end to sweatshops and child labour. The police were present on this occasion too. In 1910, Clara Zetkin<sup>1</sup> proposed that March 8th be proclaimed International Women's Day, to commemorate those demonstrations by women fighting back discrimination, denouncing unbearable working and living conditions, and in favour of gender equality. March 8th therefore became a day to honour working women and their mobilization for equality and rights, the world over<sup>2</sup>.

Since those early years, International Women's Day has gained a new global dimension, in developing and developed countries alike. March 8th has also gained important allies and a growing international movement toward equality. An increasing number of men are now committed to gender equality, and international institutions such as the United Nations, major civil society organizations, development banks and private companies, have also begun to voice their support for gender equality. Increasingly, International Women's Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change, and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women, men, and those who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities.

## 2. Gender Equality at the Bank

The African Development Bank has promoted gender equality in its operations for more than two decades, moving from a focus on women, to gender (both women and men) mainstreaming. This is in line with other multilateral development banks. In 2001 the Bank adopted a Gender Policy, confirming

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<sup>1</sup> Clara Zetkin was the Leader of the “Women's Office” for the Social Democratic Party in Germany. In 1910, she tabled the idea of an International Women's Day. She proposed that every year in every country there should be a celebration on the same day – a Women's Day – to press for their demands

<sup>2</sup> CWLU Herstory Website. <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/interwomen.html>. Reviewed February 9, 2014.

a gender approach that was then operationalized in two consecutive gender action plans. The Bank worked to optimize its efficiency and outreach in this area through various institutional changes, including the number and placement of gender specialists and units dedicated to promoting gender equality. Initiatives such as the Gender Working Group, established by the President of the Bank in 2009, advise on ways to strengthen gender mainstreaming in the Bank and in member countries. The President's Prize for Good Practice in Gender Mainstreaming (recommended by the Gender Working Group) has also affirmed the Bank's commitment to promoting gender equality in Africa<sup>3</sup>. In 2010, the Bank created a gender division that opened new opportunities to institutionalize gender mainstreaming and promote gender equality in the Bank and RMCs. These efforts have had notable results. For instance, from 2011 to 2012, the percentage of newly approved projects, rated as having mainstreamed gender in a satisfactory manner, increased from 38% to 67%<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore in 2012, the Bank won the U.S. Treasury Award for its commitment to gender equality, inclusion, and fragile states for a project in Côte d'Ivoire which holistically addresses the effects of gender-based violence.

The Bank's Ten Year Strategy 2013–2022 (TYS) reaffirms its commitment to gender equality as essential for economic progress and sustainable development. Under the TYS, the Bank will employ existing as well as innovative tools, processes and approaches to effectively mainstream gender in the priority areas of infrastructure, governance, skills and technology, regional integration and private sector development. Drawing on the lessons learnt, the Bank will double its efforts to promote women's economic empowerment, strengthen their legal status and property rights, and improve knowledge management and capacity building. The Bank also seeks to strengthen internal capacity, including increased cross-sector coordination to optimize synergies for scaling up gender-related results.

To implement this commitment to gender equality, the Bank has developed a gender strategy to guide the Bank's efforts to effectively integrate gender equality into its operations and promote gender equality in Africa. The recently adopted Gender Strategy: Investing in Gender Equality for Africa's Transformation (2014–2018), envisions an Africa where African women and girls, have easy access to knowledge; where women's skills and innovations are optimized, their capacities contribute to greater economic opportunities, and where they fully participate in decision-making processes.

The Gender Strategy identifies three mutually reinforcing pillars to tackle the underlying causes of gender inequality: i) women's legal status and property rights; ii) women's economic empowerment; and iii) capacity development and knowledge management. Advancing progress in each of these pillars will be interfused in the Bank's core operational areas and areas of special emphasis, identified in the TYS.

To further advance its work on gender equality, the Bank appointed a Special Envoy on Gender in September 2013. The Special Envoy on Gender will provide strategic leadership to the Bank on gender equality and undertake advocacy with regional member countries, and in national and international fora.

### 3. Rationale and Objectives of the International Women's Day 2014 at AfDB

Each year the Bank celebrates International Women's Day by carrying out activities to raise awareness of gender issues in the Bank. This year, the Bank will seek to advance awareness on gender equality as

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<sup>3</sup> African Development Bank (2013). "Accelerating Progress on Gender during ADF-13. Background Paper" ADF-13 Replenishment Meeting, February 2013, Tunis, Tunisia.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid (2013). The Readiness Retrospective Report 2012.

the central consideration in advancing economic development and social progress in Africa. This is on the back of the recently adopted Gender Strategy.

The 2014 theme of International Women’s Day is **“Equality for women is progress for all”, with a particular focus of women’s equality with regard to financial inclusion**. It is widely recognized that equitable access to education and financial services can play a pivotal role in poverty alleviation and in decreasing the vulnerability of poor people. In many African countries, however, more than two-thirds of the adult population have no access to formal financial services. In Sub-Saharan Africa, financial exclusion is as high as 76 per cent. Furthermore, exclusion is highest among women, youth and the very poorest segments of society.

Financial inclusion can advance equality for women in a number of ways. Firstly, having access to resources on their own account and to the tools that help them to earn a living, can increase women’s bargaining power within households and their influence over how money and other resources are used. Secondly, financial inclusion can help increase women’s opportunities to earn or control assets outside the household. Thirdly, it can reduce women’s vulnerability by allowing them to insure against risk or borrow to meet unexpected expenses, such as medical treatments. These are all key factors for economic empowerment. Further to this, financial literacy allows individuals and families to understand how the accumulation of assets can aid in achieving their financial goals. A positive spillover from that process is greater economic stability in communities. It can be argued that financial literacy is a necessary skill just like reading and writing. The Bank IWD celebration in 2014 is therefore aimed at the following objectives:

- To stimulate debate and build knowledge of Bank staff on gender and financial inclusion.
- To identify entry points for advancing the role of women in financial markets in Africa.
- To expand the network of champions and advocates of gender equality in the Bank and beyond.

#### 4. International Women’s Day Activities in 2014

The IWD celebration will take place over a one-week period from March 3-7, 2014. This will culminate in a main event, held on March 7, the eve of the IWD. Several Bank staff have been engaged to make this celebration happen. The table below indicates the sequence of IWD events. Field offices will be linked to events in Tunis via video-conferencing but are also encouraged to undertake country level events to commemorate the day.

## Events International Women's Day 2014, African Development Bank

- **3-6 March – Exhibition by the Family Association:** The Bank's Staff Council and Family Association will organize exhibitions in the Bank buildings to showcase and market women's products and services.
  - **3-7 March – Airing of interviews on gender equality on Bank screen savers:** The Bank's Communications and External Relations Department (CERD) will carry out interviews with men and women in the Bank on their efforts and perceptions on gender equality, either in their professional or personal lives. These interviews will stimulate interest among staff, not only on the event but on the gender discourse.
  - **6 March –Art for Equality:** A film will be aired for the Bank Women's Network and other interested Bank Staff, followed by a panel discussion on themes of inequality raised in the documentary.
  - **7 March – Appreciation of women, and appreciation of gender equality in the Bank by the Staff Council:** The Staff Council will present tokens of appreciation to all women in the Bank, and will highlight its engagement with the wave of gender equality in the institution.
  - **7 March – Main IWD event:** The main IWD event will be held on **7<sup>th</sup> March from 10h00-14h30 at Amen Bank**. This event will be an opportunity to increase visibility of the Bank's work on gender equality. The Special Envoy on Gender will make a "State of Gender Address", which will be followed by Davos-style panel discussions on advancing financial inclusion for women as follows:
    - **Panel I.**
      - **The cost of exclusion**  
**Fatou Sarr Sow**, Director of the Gender Institute at IFAN, University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal (TBC)
      - **Inclusive growth and gender equality: Unpacking the relationship**  
**Donald Kaberuka**, President, AfDB
      - **Challenges and opportunities to advance women's financial literacy and capabilities: Lessons from New Faces New Voices**  
**Nomsa Daniels**, Executive Director of New Faces New Voices.
      - **Young Professional to be confirmed**
    - **Panel II**
      - **Venture capital: What are the opportunities for African female entrepreneurs?** **Sharron McPherson**, Chair of Women's Enterprise Development Initiative (WEDI)
      - **Financial Markets: Does gender equality matter?**  
**Stella Kilonzo**, Division Manager, AfDB Financial Markets Division
      - **YP to be confirmed**
- The panels will be moderated by **Joe Kibazo, Director, CERD, and Amani Abou Zeid, Lead Advisor in the African Natural Resource Centre (TBC).**

### I. Expected Results

The discussions in the panel are expected to build the momentum for the implementation of the second pillar of the Gender Strategy.

### II. Participants:

All Bank staff will be invited to the events.