



AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP

Statement on International Women's Day

Dr. Donald Kaberuka
President

Event: International Women's Day 2014

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Venue: Amen Bank Auditorium

Good morning all.

Thank you for finding the time to be here. I know that many of you have worked so hard to ensure a successful celebration of this important event.

In particular I want to thank the Special Envoy on Gender, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, for her leadership.

There is little doubt, Africa has been making a lot of progress on many fronts. I want to salute the steady achievements in steadily closing gender gaps across the Continent. From access to education, decision making, discriminative laws, we have a lot to be proud about.

Esther Mbabazi, my compatriot, lost her father in a plane crash. She grew up determined to be a pilot. Esther is now a pilot. There are so many Esther Mbabazis of all professions across the continent, including here in the Bank.

But we are a continent in a hurry.

Last year in Dar es Salaam, when President Obama was visiting and meeting a cross section of leaders, I was sitting next to Susan Mashibe, another pilot - a Tanzanian – who runs an aviation business. I listened to her story. It was fascinating.

Two weeks ago, at our Board retreat, we invited some of Africa's Captains of Industry: Aliko Dangote, Verone Mankou, a young entrepreneur from Congo, Ziad Oueslati, the Head of Tuninvest, Ismail Douiri, CEO of Attijarriwaffa, and Daphne Mashile-Nkosi, a woman who has ventured into the all-male mining business.

There are many more such stories. African women are coming along, on the back of their talents, as long as those doors open. Increasingly, the doors are opening. Nonetheless progress is patchy, within and between countries. Much remains to be done.

Today, I would like to concentrate on the area where progress is slowest and where the Bank itself must lead and think out of the box.

I am referring to the whole area of financial inclusion, business opportunities, and access to assets. In short, this is the opportunity to enable half of all Africans - the women of Africa - to deploy their talents to create wealth.

Late last year, I accompanied the SG of the UN, and the leaders of the World Bank, the AU and the EU - to the Sahel. No other region of Africa demonstrates in such a way the powerful link between security, development and the environment. You are familiar with this. But the region also demonstrates another important issue and link for this region, if any was needed. It is the direct link between gender inclusion and economic development.

The Sahel Region has one of the highest fertility rates in the World. In one of the countries, the birth rate is 3.9%, one of the highest. The President told us, his Government were grappling with this multidimensional problem, at the core of which was the premature marriage of young girl children. By the time they are 30, they are already the mother of 7 or 8 children. We encouraged the President to take on this matter with all necessary vigour, and we promised support. With such high fertility rates, fast growing population, you can make the link with every other social economic and human development indicator. It's a huge lost opportunity for a society, and a high cost to its development. Even at 7% GDP growth, the country will be struggling.

We hear Africa "rising", with all the nuances needed when we use that phrase. It can only rise so far until both halves of our Continent of one billion people have the same opportunities, and are provided with the chance to develop their talents and put them towards creating prosperity for Africa.

Last year, the Bank adopted a new Ten Year Strategy, focused on growth – growth that is transformative, inclusive, and sustainable, and which supports the transition to green growth. It is a strategy for growth that leaves no one behind.

Now, “Development speak” apart, why is this so important, so critical at this time? Quite simply because the economic growth over the last decade, however strong it is, is not sustainable until it is broadly shared, and until it offers opportunities for all.

Today, building on that Ten Year plan, the Bank launches its new Gender Strategy for the period 2014-2018. The aim is to ensure the two arms of our one body – men and women; girls and boys – enjoy their inalienable rights and together build a prosperous Africa. Gender equality and opportunity will not feature in the Bank's projects as a token, just to pass by the Board. They will be a key filter, to get results where it matters – on the ground.

I know that the Bank has done a lot. Indeed only last month, we celebrated the winners of the US Treasury Award for our project in the Ivory Coast.

But prize worthy or not, every single one of our operations must always ask the question: is this for the two parts of Africa, or only for half of Africa? If not, go back to the drawing board. I know people say it is not easy – but why do you want it to be easy?

Last year in September, I appointed Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, the former South African Minister and a person with a very good pedigree on all these issues, as the Bank's Special Envoy on Gender. We needed a Special Envoy, because the issue is urgent for Africa, and a sense of urgency had to be created. Not only inside the Bank, but also within our member countries.

Her task is to advocate, to ensure gender equality in the Bank's operations and its operating systems, and to support our countries, our regional economic communities and the AU to implement those things on which all of us agree, and I know we all passionately believe in.

The new Gender Strategy which she will oversee sets out clear objectives, directions and measurable targets in many areas but with special emphasis on three areas. First, promoting women's access to economic opportunities, and access to financial resources in order to maximise their participation in all parts of the economy. Second, closing the gender gap in property and legal rights, land, and property. Third, making gender equality a practical reality by access to skills.

I know everyone in this room agrees with this.

So today we are here not just to reaffirm our attachment to principles on which we all agree.

We are here to determine how each of us will implement this new strategy, in our Complexes, our Departments.

We are here to engage on how Senior Management will make the Gender Strategy their business.

We are here to see how we incorporate that in our performance metrics.

We are here not to reaffirm general principles, but to agree on accountability mechanisms.

The future prospects of Africa are very much a function of our ability to leave no one behind, to make full use of our talents of our people irrespective of their ethnicity or gender. In short, I am talking about human rights and smart economics.

Remember Madiba: 'It always looks difficult until it is done'.

This time, actually, we have no choice. But it can be done. And it is exciting to do. I trust that each of you will play his or her part.

Thank you all. I know we all agree: now is the time for action.