

Evolving cultures and breaking barriers

***Statement by Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi
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On the occasion of International Women's Day 2014***

Happy Women's Day.

Two years ago, President Donald Kaberuka asked the question, "Are we doing everything we can and should do to leverage the efforts of women?" It is a question that the Bank should ask itself today as we move along this road of mainstreaming gender across the work of the Bank, operations of the Bank and well beyond.

The Bank Group Strategy (2013-2022) places a renewed emphasis on gender equality and mainstreaming as a cornerstone for Africa's economic transformation. We are not here to change any strategy of the Bank in terms of the Ten-Year Strategy, we are here to accomplish it. It is about making inclusive growth a reality for all. So it is to this end that the Bank Strategy has designated gender as an area of special emphasis, across all the core areas of operational priority, including infrastructure development, governance and accountability, skills and technology, regional integration, and skills development. In your daily work, there are key questions to which we should answer: What do we do that is mutually reinforcing to the reduction of poverty and attainment of sustainable development? Questions such as financial inclusion and increasing access to finance and credit, control over productive assets and market access, women in business and participation on corporate boards, women and mining, the

interface of gender and state fragility, gender and agriculture, to name but a few.

So, as we celebrate this International Women's Day that was first globally observed over a century ago in 1911, it is important as a continent to take stock of the gains that have been made in terms of women's economic, political and social empowerment; to take judicious note of the challenges and prospects for a way forward. And, there have been some notable achievements. In the political arena, we all are quite aware, that the first African woman Head of State, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, of Liberia, came on board at the end of 2005, joined by the Heads of State of Malawi and, more recently, the Congo, and bringing the composition of the African Union to 6% women. Now this may seem paltry, but in actual fact, it is a testament to a changing political landscape and I hope to the mindset of leadership on the continent. The African Union in its Inaugural Assembly in 2002 took a decision on gender parity ensuring that at least half the AU Commissioners are women. It thus comes as no surprise therefore that for the first time a woman, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, heads up the African Union Commission. The example set by the AU has been followed regionally through various instruments including the Protocol to the Africa Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa adopted in 2003, the solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa in 2004, and numerous Regional Protocols such as the SADC Protocol and National Constitutions and Legislations as well as gender specific indicators within NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism. The Bank's own recently adopted Gender Strategy commits the Bank to better

integration of gender equality in all its programs and support to Regional Member Countries to do the same.

These initiatives have had some results. Rwanda, for example, leads the world in terms women's representation in Parliament, with 64% women representatives in the Chamber of the Deputies.

Continuing with gains made, despite existing disparities, it is true that schools are registering more enrolment by girls, and female students entering fields that were traditionally occupied by males such as science, mathematics, engineering, and so on. Other notable positive developments in the promotion of gender equality at national levels include engendering poverty surveys in the Poverty Reduction Strategic Papers (PRSPs); more intensive analysis of macro-economic and social policies; gender-responsive budgeting to enhance transparency and accountability of gender-sensitive public expenditure (at least 15 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are implementing this); and affirmative and gender-aware policies in sectors such as education, provision of security services and policing, etc.

Without more, it would seem that it is a good time to be an African woman. Unfortunately the reality is rather different. Sadly, these normative gains have not resulted in substantial changes in the lives of ordinary women. Economic, cultural and social barriers continue to hamper the full participation of women to economic development and transformation. African women still have less access to productive resources (water, land, energy, credit, education and training, etc.), which are key to economic empowerment and alleviation of poverty. The cumulative effects of HIV and AIDS, TB, and malaria have left women further impoverished and

stigmatized, and this has implications for food security. Women are more affected by war and conflict as well as gender-specific violence and violations of human, sexual and reproductive rights. Women and girls risk death from maternal mortality. An average of one in 16 pregnancies in Sub-Saharan Africa results in death.

According to *New Faces New Voices: Women in Finance*, in most countries the majority of women lack access to financial services and remain unbanked, un-invested and ultimately uninsured. Statistics from Zambia for example show in 2009 that only 11% of women have a bank account or used a bank product. There are also several legal restrictions to the economic empowerment of women. At least 10 African countries restrict the ability of married women to get passports, and a similar number of countries require married women to get their husband's consent to get a job or pursue a trade or profession. In some countries, women cannot register a business without her husband's permission. And other issues include the ability to pass on citizenship to children, administer joint marital property or even choose where to live.

Another area of concern is the participation of women on corporate boards. According to the 2012 Global Summit on Corporate Women and Directors International, women make up only 15.6% of the Boards of Directors of the largest banks and financial services globally. Equally, there are fewer women in top and middle management positions. Many have heard of the term 'glass ceiling' but what does this mean? In 1991 the US Department of Labor defined a glass ceiling as "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization." Elsewhere, I have seen it defined as "an

invisible limit in corporations and other organizations above which it is difficult for women to rise in ranks.” Take note, one person’s ceiling is another’s floor.

Since 2007, McKinsey has been publishing annually the Women Matter Series, which explores the role women play in the global workplace, their experiences and impact in senior executive roles, and the performance benefits that companies gain from gender diversity. The first publication in the series focused on making the case for change by demonstrating a strong correlation between performance for companies and a higher proportion of women on executive committees. The recent report of 2013 confirms that corporate culture plays a critical role in gender diversity at the top of the corporation. The report noted that the problem may not be the glass ceiling but the leaky pipelines. Women are outnumbered at all levels and increasingly outnumbered as they rise through the ranks. These are some of the issues that we are looking to tackle both internally and externally.

The foregoing presents a broad menu of issues to be tackled, which is by no means comprehensive, making ours a very ambitious and challenging endeavour. As the African Development Bank, we believe it is morally wrong that women cannot fully contribute and benefit from the growth on this continent. And it is economically damaging. Africa has grown on an average of 5% a year for a decade, enough to affect transition but not transformation. We estimate that the physical infrastructure gap on the continent costs US \$40 billion, or 2% GDP growth a year. And the gender gap may cost it as much or more. So we want an Africa, where women’s skills and innovations are optimized and their capacities tapped to

contribute to greater economic opportunities and where they fully participate in decision-making processes.

The Gender Strategy envisions an Africa where African women, and girls, have easy access to knowledge. The Strategy places a special emphasis on country programming and country dialogue, as presenting the most strategic entry point for the implementation of the actions outlined. This is because progress on key gender indicators – such as school enrollment and completion rates, maternal mortality, labour force participation, and asset ownership – also depends on investments in water, sanitation, transport, productive assets, and access to financial services. In terms of programming and country dialogue, the Gender and Social Development Departments have developed a helpful and practical guide on gender mainstreaming in the project cycle. I encourage you to ensure that gender needs and gaps are recognized and taken into account in all aspects of development interventions in all sectors. We have also identified from each Complex special projects which we hope will serve as an example and a good practice of gender mainstreaming through the project cycle. So, in response to the question of the President, and as he stated, we are adopting clear performance indicators incorporating gender for senior staff. In addition, the independent Evaluation Department will hold us to account.

I wish you an empowered International Women's Day 2014.