

## 2010 ECOSOC Ministerial Roundtable Breakfast

“Economic Opportunities for the Empowerment of Women in Africa and LDCs: Access to Credit, Land and Markets”

Hosted by OSAA, OHRLLS and UNIFEM

Friday, 2 July, 2010, 8:15 - 9:45  
United Nations Headquarters, New York

A high-level Segment Ministerial Breakfast Roundtable on “Economic Opportunities for the Empowerment of Women in Africa and LDCs: Access to Credit, Land and Markets” was held on 2 July 2010 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The roundtable was co-chaired by Mr. Patrick Hayford, Director of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, and Ms. Inés Alberdi, Executive Director of UNIFEM. H.E. Mr. Samura Kamara, Minister of Finance and Development, Sierra Leone served as moderator and Ms. Helen Clark, Administrator for the United Nations Development Programme, served as lead discussant. Participants included Ministers and high-level government officials, representatives of UN system entities, including Bretton Woods Institutions, and civil society. The discussion focused on developing practical and manageable solutions to the issues surrounding women’s entrepreneurial pursuits, especially as it relates to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 in Africa and LDCs.

### **Political empowerment interlinked with economic empowerment for women**

One of the key points stressed by participants was the importance of engaging women, who make up 50 percent of the world’s population, in the political processes and institutional and social structures of their countries to ensure economic empowerment of women. Educating women on legal practices and their legal rights was highlighted as an essential strategy for accomplishing this goal.

Success stories on political empowerment of women were shared with the group. For example, following the setting up of quotas in Rwanda, more than 50 percent of Parliament members are female which represents one of the highest ratios in the world. It was agreed that higher female representation was needed at all levels of government’s institutional set-up to advocate for the protection of women’s rights to land, and equal access to credit and markets.

### **Leadership at the highest level brings results**

Participants pointed to the need for governments to acknowledge that women are key contributors to national economic growth and poverty reduction. Moreover, the need to involve men in gender mainstreaming efforts was highlighted. Women in countries such as Mozambique and Rwanda have benefited from leadership at the highest level that is committed to gender equality and women’s empowerment. Prioritizing the gender agenda in every ministry of government, putting in place a supportive legal framework and improving collection of gender-disaggregated data were highlighted as measures that have brought results.

Mahatma Gandhi's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) was provided as an example of how political support can contribute substantially to women's economic empowerment. Under MNREGA, 30 percent of the beneficiaries of guaranteed 100-day wage employment are women. This case study supported the suggestion for collaboration in the international community to brainstorm best practices of encouraging gender equality.

**Women's involvement in agribusiness – need to address the effects of climate change and exploitation of natural resources**

Emphasis was placed on supporting women's efforts in agribusiness and protecting women from the negative impact of climate change. Some participants pointed to the need to increase the share of ODA going towards agricultural development which had decreased from 17 to 4 percent over the past two decades. Ministers and NGO representatives called for guarantee funds that provide supplies (ex. access to fertilizer) that female entrepreneurs need to sustain viable enterprises. The link between environmental issues and economic development was also stressed, with a request for greater efforts by government officials to collect data on the effects of erosion and climate change on the agriculture sector. UNDP demonstrated its commitment to this agenda, highlighting its recent support to forestry preservation.

**Integrated approach – provide access to credit, markets, land rights, combined with infrastructure and training**

Many speakers concurred that granting land titles to women was complicated by cultural customs and regulations enacted by the governments of LDCs. For instance, recent FAO study found that less than 20 percent of land owners in LDCs are women. It was also found that less than 10 percent of credit is awarded to female farmers in LDCs. Land was seen as the most vital asset for women, since it can be used as collateral against loans granted to female businesses.

Practices leading to increased support to female farmers included Mozambique's recruitment of successful female entrepreneurs, who provide consultations to women aspiring to enter the agribusiness sector and serve as examples of opportunities for female ventures to achieve significant success.

Some participants called for enhanced support by the UN system for human resource development. Recommendations ranged from facilitating training in business and finance, to providing support services in health and well-being, especially for families coping with HIV/AIDS. Examples of the UN system's support was highlighted, such as the UNDP partnership with MASHAV in Israel to promote women's entrepreneurship, and the help of UNESCO with training teachers employed in Africa.

IFC, which is the private sector arm of the World Bank Group, introduced its approach to ensuring women's access to formal banking services. Through its Women in Business

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initiative, IFC has worked with institutions such as Access Bank in Nigeria to ensure at least 30 percent of credit provided by the formal banking sector is accessible to women. IFC is launching projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique and the Central African Republic.

Through a partnership with Ecobank, the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund was able to lower interest rates on lines of credit to women in Liberia. Sirleaf has also encouraged the development of savings programs, and is working on rebuilding and renovating markets to generate greater engagement from women in rural and urban areas.

Rotary International brought up the need for wellness support systems in addition to increased access to land, credit and markets. Suggestions included AIDS education, water purification systems, and the development of schools and day-care centers for parents. Men were also encouraged to be a part of the debate of gender equity, including discussions between husbands and wives on financial decisions within the household.

### Co-Chairs

- Ms. Inés ALBERDI, *Executive Director*, UNIFEM
- Mr. Patrick HAYFORD, *Director*, OSAA

### Moderator

- H.E. Mr. Samura KAMARA, *Minister of Finance and Development*, Sierra Leone

### Lead Discussant

- Ms. Helen CLARK, *Administrator*, UNDP

### List of Participants

- H.E. Ms. Bernadette SAYO, *Minister of Family, Social Affairs, and National Solidarity*, Central African Republic
- Ms. Tanja KRAUS, *First Secretary*, Permanent Mission to the UN, Germany
- Ms. Mazal RENFORD, *Director*, MASHAV - Israel Agency for International Development Cooperation, Israel
- H.E. Mr. Vadim PISTRINCIUC, *Deputy Minister of Labour, Social Protection & Family*, Moldova
- H.E. Dr. Alcinda de ABREU, *Minister of the Environment*, Mozambique
- Ms. Kampeta SAYINZOGA, *Permanent Secretary*, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Rwanda
- Colonel Abdoulaye BADIANE, *Military Advisor*, Senegal
- H.E. Mr. Kemal MADENOGLU, *Under-Secretary*, State Planning Organization, Turkey
  
- Mr. Jeffery HUFFINES, *United Nations Representative*, CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation

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- Ms. Dorothy DAVIS, *Founding Member*, Board of Directors, Sirleaf Market Women's Fund, Liberia
- Ms. Valentina BODRUG-LUNGU, *Chairperson* of Gender-Centru (Moldova NGO)
- Ms. Helen REISLER, *Representative to the United Nations* Rotary International
- Ms. Marieme Esther DASSANOU, International Finance Corporation (IFC)
  
- Ms. Lila Hanitra RATSIFANDRIHAMANANA, *Director*, FAO Liaison Office in New York
- Ms. Letty CHIWARA, *Chief*, Africa Division, UNIFEM