

Presentation by Afua Bubaa Ansre (Mrs.) at the 2014 Global Ethics Forum Under the Theme "Equal in an Unequal World: The Value of Values in Responsible Business" at Bangalore, India, 3 January 2014

Salutations

It is a great pleasure to join you today at this forum on Gender Equality from the perspective of Tackling the Economic Dimension of Inequality – Challenges, Opportunities, and Way Forward. Amidst all the challenges and opportunities in Africa today, one fact is unassailable: countries and businesses with higher gender equality enjoy higher levels of growth and performance. And the growth is more inclusive, which benefits all of us – women, men and children. This is because we know that when women are empowered and earn an income, they invest back into their families and communities. This drives hunger, poverty and malnutrition down and improves standards of health, education and well-being. This is good for all of us. Business can bring so much to this effort and like all involved, stands to lose dramatically if we fail.

I would like to express my sincere admiration and appreciation to the organizers of this august conference. The theme Equal in an Unequal World: The Value of Values in Responsible Business is truly appropriate and timely especially where countries are putting in their utmost efforts in achieving the MDG by next year 2015. There was also the Rio+ 20 Sustainable Development Goals and the the discussions on the Post-2015 Development Agenda on the future we want after the MDGs. Interestingly "Inequalities" is one of the key areas for consideration within the Post 2015 discussions and this is chaired by Ghana with support from UN Women and UNICEF and with sponsorship from the Danish Government. The Africa Union is well on its way preparing its 2063 development plan, and we know the AU already has its gender policy, and its decade of the African Women declared from 2010-2020. It also has the Solemn Declaration on peoples rights and the rights of women.

Clearly, in finding a place for discussions on gender equality at this forum the organisers reflect the aspirations of the world's people for true sustainable development, in a world where although diversities exist we humans truly are all equal and should be treated as such. These equalities are well captured in the various international human rights instruments, commitments and protocols that most of our governments have signed up to including the `Commission on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other international Children's rights protocols. Achieving these ideal aspirations require continous and critical enrgagements with governments, businesses and other stakeholders by citizens themselves and this could well be the pancea to gender equity in Africa.

I have been asked to respond to the following questions and hopefully the answers they generate can help situate our conversation in the world's current development efforts:

- ✓ What are the key forms of gender inequality in Africa?
- ✓ What role do business, government and other stakeholders play in addressing gender inequality in its various dimensions – social (access to health care, education, etc.), economic (access to jobs, wealth distribution, etc.) and other?
- ✓ What changes in the current political, social and economic agenda are necessary and what ethical principles are needed as a platform for such changes to be implemented successfully?
- ✓ What good practices and actions are needed to achieve gender equality in Africa?

Let me begin by highlighting that gender inequality exists in most parts of the world, and Africa is not an exception. Yes inequality between women and men and children is not everywhere the same. It can take many different forms. Gender Inequality is not a homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and inter-linked problems on the various continents.

I will discuss just a few of the varieties of the disparities between the genders in Africa – **that is the key forms of gender inequalities in Africa:**

The themes of the UN Commission of the Status of Women over the last years give us an idea of key issues affecting women all over the world. In much the same way the annual themes of the Africa Women's Decade also point us in the direction of areas of inequalities affecting women on the continent. At the recent Stakeholder Consultation meeting held in Yaounde Cameroon, African women reconfirmed some of these issues as those that the continent need to focus on urgently. These include Financing for Gender Equality, violence against women and girls. The lack of recognition of rural women's contribution to our economies amongst many other noted below:

- ✓ **Mortality Inequality:** This is inequality between the sexes with regards to death. Most countries have life expectancy rates that vary between the sexes. Within these figures, maternal and child mortality rates play important roles. This in some societies come with

natality inequality, given the preference for boys over girls (sex-selective abortion). This has accompanying consequences such as unsafe abortion and female-genital circumcision which still persists in rural African societies.

- ✓ **Basic Facility Inequality:** In many parts of Africa, societies still experience unequal distribution of basic facilities in schools, gender -friendly specific machinery and access to health care and justice amongst others.
- ✓ **Special Opportunity Inequality:** Even when there is relatively little difference in basic facilities including schooling, the opportunities for higher education and skills development may be fewer for young women than for young men. With regards to leadership and decision-making, where numbers play an essential role, there are fewer women representation in national parliaments as well as at the local government levels.
- ✓ **Professional Inequality:** In employment as well as in promotions in formal work situations, income and occupation, women often face greater handicaps than men. There are still increasing inequalities in relation to decent work and the required skills for women as compared to men.
- ✓ **Inequalities relating to ownership and control of resources:** In many societies on the African continent, the ownership of property can also be very unequal. Even basic assets such as homes and land may be very asymmetrically shared. For instance, in the Northern part of Ghana and other parts of North Africa, a woman cannot own land, and even in situations where she is allowed to inherit or own a piece of land or a home, it is registered in the name of her husband or brother and it is kept under such person's control. Very often, these women rather work on the same land as employees with no remuneration.
- ✓ **Socio-cultural and Religious Inequality:** Africa has a history of cultural practices that significantly discriminate against women, in spite of recent legislations to criminalize some of these practices. And religious doctrines that prevent women from active participation in decision-making and places women in a silent position to accept gender-based violence as a way of life. In most countries HIV/AIDS is perpetuated by some of these socio-cultural inequalities.

The role business, government and other stakeholders play in addressing gender inequality in its various dimensions – social (access to health care, education, etc.), economic (access to jobs, wealth distribution, etc.) and others

Sadly in keeping large numbers of people excluded from participating and benefiting from development, including from access to economic resources and employment, health, adequate food, clean water and sanitation, education, skills and technology, the result has been a reduction of future productive human potential in Africa. For this reason, the obligation to address gender inequalities is born out of both international treaty standards and human moral and ethical perspectives. It would be difficult to find someone who thinks it is acceptable that a child dies before his or her 5th birthday of a preventable disease; that a mother dies giving birth simply because she did not have access to a skilled birth attendant; or that any woman, man or child does not have access to potable water and food. However, in the current environment of fiscal austerity – making the practical case for focusing on the worst-off in our societies also involves showing that growing inequalities have negative economic, social and political consequences on significant portions of our societies especially women and children.

Ladies and Gentleman, in Africa, national governments mostly create the enabling environment in terms of development of the policy framework, legislation and resource mobilization (funding from development partners). These interventions are aimed at supporting activities and implementing actions to ensure gender equity. However, funding pledges by governments have been inadequate and in some cases not forth-coming. This critically affects sustainability of successes achieved over the past decades. Thus governments alone cannot be relied upon to deliver on gender equality commitments.

The Women's Empowerment Principles are a set of Principles for business offering guidance on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and in the community. In the last four years since the launch of this initiative by UN Women and UN Global Compact, this initiative has grown globally, taken root at the national level and becoming a touchstone within a leadership group of companies. Some businesses across the continent have provided funding for gender equality projects, usually these are to women's small businesses in selected African countries to increase income and productivity. Again, funding in most of these programmes have been inadequate as required to meet the increasingly demand for support.

Some companies and academic institutions have mainstreamed critical gender concerns into organizational policies (in areas such as recruitment and selection- by quota system others have in place sexual harassment policy). Skills development opportunities over the last decade, continues to be provided by the private sector to women in the informal sector.

In the health sector, appropriate technology and convenient health care services exist on the continent, but concerns have been raised on issues such as affordability and geographical accessibility of these technology since most women and families still live in poverty and in rural areas with no access to these facilities.

The media and civil society organizations have been very instrumental in establishing some advocacy platforms as well as calling for accountability in relations to government's expenditure and its efforts at wealth distribution. In light of this, there is an increasingly call on governments and businesses to adopt gender-responsive planning and budgeting and monitoring and evaluation and their immediate implementation to address concerns of women and men across the continent.

However, research and skills development for practitioners and monitoring and evaluation on current gender-equality trends are still lacking. For example, Time- Use Surveys and Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys are not carried out in most Africa countries, and in countries where these surveys have been undertaken, the results have not been published. Such surveys provide clearer pictures on gender and the contribution to the economy for evidence based decision-making.

Some changes in the current political, social and economic agenda and the ethical principles needed as a platform for changes to be implemented successfully

The need to address all these challenges and gender concerns are important in ensuring that gender disparity or inequalities are eliminated. The fight for gender equality indeed must start from women and girls themselves who have a responsibility to empower themselves and believe in themselves, understand the issues at stake and begin to take action. However as experience has demonstrated, national institutions including parliaments, businesses, the media, and other development partners also need to initiate and support efforts aimed at promoting gender equality. To that end, the following transformational changes and ethical principles are recommended as a platform to ensure gender equity in Africa;

- ✓ Over the last few years UN Women has focused on a few key strategic issues which are aimed at promoting gender equality. Our efforts have been on removing the barriers that prevent women's political participation and women's economic empowerment. We have also worked on women peace and security issues, and on preventing violence against women and mainstreaming gender in national development processes. These changes are necessary in our societies where culture relegates females to the background in all spheres of development.
- ✓ Accountability and transparency- A major omission of most countries in Africa is the lack of mechanisms for citizens to hold governments accountable for progress towards global and indeed continentally agreed development goals in their nationally-adapted formulations. For example while some governments incorporated the MDGs in national development objectives – and allocated resources for these the capacity for monitoring and reporting effectively to its citizens were lacking. Rural dwellers, most of whom are women are usually not engaged in such processes. Mechanisms should be established for businesses and civil society groups to both participate in the setting of priorities,

strategies and allocation of resources and in the monitoring of disaggregated goals and targets – including at the local government level to enable citizens hold governments to account. Ladies and gentlemen we know that “if it isn’t measured, it isn’t managed”.

- ✓ It is also important to note that while governments report to continental and other world bodies such as the UN on progress made with regards to some of these commitments such as the CEDAW, in most cases the citizens of the countries are not aware of the content of such report. Indeed several citizens are not aware of such reporting systems. Having easy to understand tools to assess, monitor and manage the impact of a broad set of policies on economic, social and cultural rights is a necessity. For example, national development agenda could establish mechanisms (e.g. social impact assessments) to monitor the social impacts of a broad set of policies and strategies, to reduce negative social impacts and enhance positive outcomes;
- ✓ Increasing funding/investment into gender equality programmes and ensuring sustainability of funding. Investing in women whether in the formal or informal sector is the smartest thing to do as businesses expand and seek to create employment. Investing in women, in their training and leadership, and providing equal opportunities, bring high returns, a “gender dividend” as some have described it. One of the first companies to sign on to the Women’s Empowerment Principles, put it another way. They said: “We partner with women around the world to shape what’s to come: a more equitable workplace, healthier families and communities, and a more sustainable planet.”
- ✓ Harmonising the Africa Development Agenda with Global Goals and the AU gender policy, to reflect in national development agenda. The Africa Union Development Agenda and the international agenda must be harmonized to ensure effective implementation and evaluation at national levels. Further opportunities exist in the form of current campaigns such as the African Union’s Decade on Women, declared for 2010 – 2020. The theme of the Decade is “Grass-roots Approach to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment”, emphasizing a bottom-up approach to development. This is particularly significant since it can be used as a vehicle for promoting women’s participation in strengthening national mechanisms and holding them to account.
- ✓ Taxation exemption-incentive for private businesses to fund gender-equality related project such as time-use survey, mobile-clinics for rural areas and gender-responsive budgeting training for budget officers at the local level since most countries budget process starts at the local level. National governments need to encourage the private sector in taking up research activities associated with gender equality. These researches should be continuous to guide progress towards gender equality.

- ✓ Willingness of women as groups or as individuals to own the process. Women themselves must share and own the gender equality agenda, through education, skill development and mentorship at early ages of schooling and as part of career development

Let me share some success stories;

And I would like to start with The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP). The WEP is a partnership of UN Women and the UN Global Compact, and it offers a platform for businesses to drive purposefully the advancement of women in the workplace, in the marketplace and in the community. Three key areas - workplace, marketplace, community – are addressed deliberately as each, and all of them together, are necessary to build healthy economies, strong societies and a sustainable environment. The WEP is also a set of Principles for businesses offering guidance on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and in the community. The seven Principles provide a roadmap for companies to integrate gender equality throughout their enterprises. A company's interest and influence do not stop at its front door, but extend along the supply chain and into communities where employees come and go every day.

Advancing women's leadership is the first of the Women's Empowerment Principles. Companies are taking this forward in so many ways. Some are setting gender diversity targets to increase representation of women at management levels and establish equal pay agreements. Others are advocating equal representation of women on boards of directors. Still more are investing in local activities to support girls' education in science and technology.

One business designed and conducted an economic empowerment program for acid attack survivors. For those of you who do not know, these crimes are usually targeted at women and girls. The offenders throw acid at their victims with the intent to injure and permanently disfigure them. This company is responding by providing ICT training for 100 women survivors so they can work in call centers, restoring their dignity and place in their communities. As business leaders you know that increasing the talent pool is essential. That is why companies are reaching out to youth –girls and boys—to nurture interest in science and engineering. Others offer 'networking academies' to attract and retain young women. Others are making workplaces more flexible to meet the needs of parents.

Another way that companies are advancing women's empowerment is by connecting women entrepreneurs to finance so they can grow their business. In Haiti, artisans are making products from sustainable materials that meet international quality standards and selling them on the international market. Involving over 900 craftspeople, the enterprise supports 15,000 others.

Also, regional level cooperation has strengthened the dissemination of new strategies and mechanisms in Africa. For example, the current interest in gender-responsive budgeting is the

result of such cooperation. These regional processes also help to increase skills and resources for certain kinds of undertakings. It is these improvements on the ground that have resulted in more interest in policy and legal reforms. Other success factors are the gradual growth of civil society organizations and their positive influence and impact through policy advocacy.

Among the recommendations to ensure gender inequality in Africa are as follows:

- ✓ Financial and human resources need to be commensurate with the mandates of national gender machineries. Where multiple national mechanisms exist, their mandates need to be reviewed and harmonized. The means by which institutions are coordinated need to be settled and consistently implemented.
- ✓ Data disaggregated by sex, location, age and monitoring, evaluation and performance indicators are urgently required.
- ✓ Staff recruitment needs to pay attention to gender equality expertise, while existing staff should be more rigorously trained, particularly in collecting and analysing data from gender perspectives.
- ✓ Relations with civil society need to be institutionalized, while ensuring the autonomy of civil society actors.
- ✓ The active involvement of a broad and diverse range of institutional actors from the public, private and voluntary sectors should be encouraged in order to work for equality between women and men.
- ✓ Finally, as several years have passed since the institution of the Beijing Platform for Action, it is important to take a fresh look at how national mechanisms have performed and we should begin to integrate new questions into this framework for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing inequality alongside upholding human rights, peace, security and sustainability should be the cornerstone of the continent's development agenda. It should also apply to our businesses. A more inclusive and equal society is more likely to be sustainable.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me state that, in today's world, no discussion on democracy or democratic consolidation including in the business environment can be complete without a focus

on gender equality in all facets of life. At the same time, the mere existence of democratic institutions do not guarantee gender equality or increased participation of women at the political, social and economic levels. Therefore, women and leaders should know that the law can establish and uphold rights but it is our responsibility as women and men and as African societies to make that rights work for us.

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