

PRESS RELEASE

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UN Ghana calls for redress of persisting challenges facing women in the informal economy

Accra, Ghana: 8 March 2017 – Today 8 March is celebrated globally as the International Women’s Day (IWD). As the world marks this important day, our attention is being drawn to the rapidly changing environment in the world of work, the different jobs, roles and business opportunities women encounter in their work life, and the need to enhance their economic empowerment. Hence the theme “Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50:50 by 2030”.

The team of United Nations Agencies working in Ghana and its Gender Team take this opportunity to recognise women’s contributions to national development through all manner of work, including in the informal economy.

It is particularly timely that the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection is leading Ghana’s celebration of IWD by calling for the “economic empowerment of rural women.” This is where most women work, but it is not always productive and decent work that provides a pathway out of poverty. As UN Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres said in his message for IWD 2017: “Empowering women and girls is the only way to protect their rights and make sure they can realise their full potential.”

Realising their potential is the key to sustainable development. Research has shown that women’s full participation in the labour force creates opportunities and growth that could add some USD 12 trillion to global GDP by 2025.

Empowering women economically helps to reduce poverty and hunger, improve child health and education, and build resilience to disaster and climate change. Also, increasing the share of household income controlled by women changes spending in ways that benefit their children, and thus drives future growth.

The Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) sector accounts for the bulk of Ghana’s economy, and is dominated by women. This sector constitutes part of the informal economy, such as small trading and unpaid family work, which is characterised by lack of coverage under employment law and regulations that govern hours of work or wages, by low productivity, and by inadequate representation and voice in political and business affairs.

But this is the best livelihood available to many women. World Bank statistics from 2010 estimate that four out of every five Ghanaian women that work are in “vulnerable employment,” meaning unpaid family work or self-employment. Lack of education, discrimination, inability to save and borrow money to grow their businesses, balancing home responsibilities and income-earning activities are among the barriers to better, more productive, and higher-paid work.

Women need a level playing field in the world of work. They deserve to have access to training, markets, credit, financial services, infrastructure, public procurement opportunities and social protection programmes.

It is rightly recognised that the Government of Ghana has put in place some programmes that aim to address the specific needs of women in the informal economy. The National Gender Policy promotes institutions and programmes such as the Microfinance and Small Loans Centre (MASLOC), the Local Enterprises and Skills Development Programme (LESDEP), and the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) programme, among others, that help meet the needs of women who operate in the informal economy.

“When we talk about women at work, we often leave out women in the informal sector,” says UN Resident Coordinator for Ghana, Christine Evans-Klock. “Today, as we mark International Women’s Day, we would like to particularly recognise the hard work and the economic contributions of women in the informal economy. We need to support their efforts to transform their farms, learn new skills, and grow their businesses.”

The theme “Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50:50 by 2030” reminds us of the goal of gender parity and how this is a cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was adopted by nearly 200 national leaders in 2015. Sustainable Development Goal 5 specifically calls for gender equality and women’s empowerment, but it is central to the achievement of all 17 Goals for economic, social and environmental development, for leaving no one behind and ensuring access to justice for all.

Women’s rights are human rights. “Around the world, tradition, cultural values and religion are being misused to curtail women’s rights, to entrench sexism, and defend misogynistic practices,” says UN Secretary-General. As Ghana celebrates its 60th anniversary of independence, cultural traditions and respect for diversity of religious beliefs can instead be a powerful force for respecting women’s rights, for removing barriers to productive work, and for more fully unleashing women’s creativity, talents, and determination to propel forward national development.

Empowering women economically requires removing structural and cultural barriers that are holding them back from achieving their full potential. Their future and Ghana’s future depends on it.

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