



Inter-Regional Gender Learning Forum

Closing Remarks

by

Mr. Charles Dan, ILO Regional Director for Africa

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Dear colleagues – friends from Africa and all over the world,

I am truly happy to see all of you in Addis Ababa. Thank you so much Jane for proposing to have this cross-learning exercise organized jointly by the Gender Bureau and ILO Africa. Thank you for your leadership - and for your friendship.

I would have loved to be with you at the opening of this Forum. Even more so, because I was told that you had a great reception last Monday and as many of you know I am always available for a great get-together.

But I had to stay in Johannesburg longer than initially scheduled as I was invited to address the 2nd Plenary Session of the Pan-African Parliament yesterday - Five representatives per African country - meaning about 235 Members of the Pan-African Parliament - a key opportunity to advocate for Decent Work and Gender equality as a cross-cutting issue.

In my address, I stressed that the official unemployment rate is politically meaningless in the current African context. Much more telling is the rate of *vulnerable employment*.

About 258 million women and men in Africa were in vulnerable employment in 2009 representing 70.3 per cent of the total employment; and about 201 million women and men were poor workers i.e. living with their families on less than US\$ 1.25 a day. And women are still mostly concentrated in low-paid and low-skilled jobs in the service sector, in the informal economy and in agriculture.

This poor employment situation has been aggravated by the severe impact of the global economic and financial crisis.

Of course, there is no single answer or magic recipe. But I insisted that we should never forget that there is no development without investment in human resources. It is a key role of leadership to put in place governance structures that ensure people's empowerment.

My personal commitment to Gender as ILO Regional Director for Africa stems from this very simple fact: whenever you empower women, you empower Africa. And whenever you empower Africa, you enrich the world.

And I highlighted five policy directions: Opportunities - Protection - Rights - Organization - and Dialogue.

First, we should create opportunities - for both women and men, with a specific reference to tackle gender inequality and address any legal discrimination against women. This requires strategic policy decisions to invest in education and workers' skills development, skills upgrading and reskilling, productivity and sustainable enterprises.

Second, we should establish a "social protection floor": by ensuring access to basic social services to the poor and vulnerable. As you know, such a basic social protection floor could consist of two main elements: on one hand, the services which means geographical and financial access to essential public services (such as water and sanitation, health and education); and on the other hand, the transfers, a basic set of essential social transfers, in cash and in kind, paid to the poor and vulnerable to provide a minimum income security.

Together with Sector III, our Regional Office is organizing a major Conference on the key role of Africa's leadership in promoting a basic social protection floor in Yaoundé, Cameroon from 5-7 October 2010, and we invite the Gender Bureau to play a key role in this endeavor.

Third, we should guarantee workers' rights - from the eight core conventions on fundamental principles and rights at work to other international labour standards that support the economic and jobs recovery and reduce gender inequality.

Fourth, we should encourage organization. Poor and vulnerable people can gain voice and influence by joining forces with each other. It means encouraging the social economy (cooperatives, micro-credit institutions, mutual benefit associations, local development and community-based initiatives) as a "connecting bridge" between formal and informal economies that have been dichotomized for too long.

And fifth, we must engage in social dialogue - as a strong basis for building the commitment of social partners - employers and workers - to joint action with governments, including in the design of national policies.

Opportunities - Protection - Rights - Organization - and Dialogue: these issues are at the heart of the global ILO Gender Action Plan, the ILC Resolution on Gender that you have discussed and of course on the Global Jobs Pact.

And I am pleased to learn that one of your outcomes is the identification of the gender mainstreaming tools that already exist across regions. You were able, if I understand correctly, to list almost 32 different tools. We need to know more about these tools and how to use them.

You also came up with concrete suggestions on how to address the gender dimensions of the impact of the global financial and economic crisis. In this connection, let me say here how pleased I was to collaborate with the Gender Bureau in organizing the Pan-African Forum on Women's Entrepreneurship Development in Cairo in October 2009. Given the tremendous success of the Forum, we have decided to organize this event every two years as a key African tripartite "rendez-vous" for women economic empowerment.

You also established synergy and areas of collaboration with the Turin centre in terms of regional and national activities. For us in Africa, it is important because as I said earlier skills development is the cornerstone of empowerment and development; and we consider that Turin is the world capital of training and the Turin centre is both a facility and an opportunity.

Coming personally from the social dialogue and social partners, I noted that you have stressed the necessity of involving our social partners, ACTRAV and ACTEMP, and recognized the urgent need for capacity building on gender so that they can serve as policy champions for mainstreaming gender.

Your ILO's Global Gender Network of Gender Specialists, Gender Coordinators and Focal Points spans the entire field structure. It's a great invention - a fantastic instrument. It shows in practice that gender in the ILO is not only a thematic cross-cutting issue but also a geographic cross-cutting commitment.

So we expect to benefit a lot from your Network, through our connecting points, Mwila and Fatime - as our senior leaders on gender issues in Africa - but also through all our colleagues delivering on this issue in Africa.

But the ILO is a rights-based organization - and I have a complaint to put forward as Regional Director for Africa. Sincerely, I don't understand why the Regional Directors are not part of the ILO's Global Gender Network. Gender is a cross-cutting issue. It is a key issue. You meet annually. So you should invite all the Regional Directors.

You know, at each GB and ILC sessions, we organize a dinner of ILO's Regional Directors. This is not a network. This is simply a dinner. So I don't know if I should put this request on the agenda of our next dinner. But I think that my sister, Jane, should invite all the Regional Directors to address you every year to make sure that we are all on track on our gender commitments and deliveries.

No doubt, the richness of your achievements comes from your diversity. When I look around in this room today, I do not see ILO bureaucrats. I see decent work militants. Indeed gender is a political issue which requires both convictions and commitment. And in politics, you create the movement. This is precisely what you are doing every day in the world - advocating - promoting - implementing - communicating on gender as the bottom line of Social Justice in the world.

So as this meeting is coming to an end - as you are going back to your duty station, your families - and colleagues, let me just conclude with two words:

Pride: we are proud of your work. Keep it up.

And happiness: we have been truly happy to host you this year - to have you sharing for some days our life here at the Regional office in Addis Ababa. But we also have 12 other offices in Africa - ready to welcome your Forum any time. So, I hope that you will come back to Africa.

Thank you so much for your attention.