



CONCEPT NOTE

African Women Business Linkages FORUM

“Building Linkages to Break Barriers.”

Nairobi, Kenya 11th to 15th August 2014

Introducing the AU/UNDP “ Initiative on Women’s Empowerment in Africa.”

The Bureau of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission in partnership with the UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa has designed a new regional Programme focusing on “**Building an Enabling Environment for Women’s Economic Empowerment and Political Participation in Africa.**”

The programme seeks to respond to Africa’s development priorities and challenges in line with the African Union Women’s Decade (2010-2020) and UNDP Strategic Plan and Gender Equality Strategy. The African Union’s Agenda for the African Women’s Decade (2010-2020) is based on ten priority themes and the first and main theme focuses on “**Fighting Poverty and Promoting Economic Empowerment of Women and Entrepreneurship.**”

This Initiative by the African Union Commission Chairperson seeks not only to enhance leadership participation of women in public and private institutions both at national and regional levels as one of the major outputs, but also to train women on needed skills and resources to compete in markets, as well as fair and equal access to economic institutions. To *have the power and agency to benefit from economic activities*, women need to have the ability to make and act on decisions and control resources and profits. During the implementation of this project, it will be of central importance to address the underlying factors that contribute to women’s economic disempowerment. That is identifying resources needed to provide the building blocks for women to draw from, to succeed economically or exercise their power and agency. These will include: *human capital* (e.g. education, skills, training); *financial capital* (e.g. loans, saving); *social capital* (e.g. networks, mentors) and *physical capital* (e.g. land, machinery).

It is in this regard that the Program in Partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry at the African Union is organizing an African Women Business Linkages Forum to further highlight and provide networking opportunities for African women in business. The theme of the Business Linkages Forum is “**Building Linkages to Break Barriers.**”

BACKGROUND

Women in the business sector face many challenges. Female owned enterprises are less likely to register their businesses, and they perceive tax rates and customs as greater constraints to business growth compared to men. Discriminative practices in the inheritance and ownership of land and other properties pose fundamental constraints to women entrepreneurs, especially as they restrict their access to formal financing mechanism.

Access to finance is rated as the single-biggest constraint that is preventing women from growing their businesses. Even though, microfinance is a great poverty reduction tool, it offers only limited support for women who wish to grow their enterprises beyond the micro level. Women business owners who have grown the maximum from micro-finance institutions have great difficulties obtaining loans from commercial banks. Gender-based discriminatory barriers associated with, financial resources, and business-related services pose serious problems for women entrepreneurs. For instance, because women rarely have fixed assets, which are important for use as collateral in accessing financial services in the formal banking sector, their main recourse has been micro-credit institutions as well as private informal sources such as, money lenders and family members, most of which tend to be unsustainable and detrimental to their economic advancement. Such considerations point to the need for women to organize themselves in business and trade associations for collective action to circumvent or challenge the discriminatory barriers they currently face. At present, many entrepreneurs are isolated in micro-businesses and do not belong to the larger networks, such as chambers of commerce, which themselves tend to be male dominated and discriminatory.

Women entrepreneurs often have less experience than men dealing with complicated procedures, including financial arrangements, and little information about sources of help. Surveys of financial literacy find that women have less understanding and confidence in making financial decisions than do men (OECD, 2005a). Yet women are disadvantaged in accessing financial information and resources because they are less likely to be able to afford these services and **are not linked to mainstream business networks**. Women also have more problems obtaining business credit in all countries. This is despite evidence that women demonstrate high loan repayment rates as well as

default rates significantly lower than those of men. Banks and financial institutions traditionally have little experience in lending to women and may have a bias against them as poor credit risks.

The female credit crunch is particularly severe in poorer countries due to the disadvantaged position of women and their lack of legal rights; most banks require that borrowers be wage earners or property owners who can provide acceptable collateral.

This forum will be a timely opportunity for women to network, discover sources of funding, share experiences and build new partnerships to enhance their entrepreneurial capacities. These experiences will focus on addressing some of the challenges faced by women in business and providing a platform for peer learning from successful businesswomen that have overcome these challenges.

OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The Business Linkages Workshop for Women in Business WiB, aims at bringing African Women in Business together to network, conduct B2B, share experiences and good practice, motivate each other and show case their businesses and be an inspiration to one another. The forum will:

- Facilitate collaborative learning and sharing of experiences to increase success rates for business startups among women entrepreneurs.
- Identify and promote business opportunities for women entrepreneurs within the emerging intra-Africa trade Agenda
- Identify Women Champions in business to act as Mentors for young female entrepreneurs.
- Identify and promote opportunities for women entrepreneurs in dynamic sectors of the African economy including extractives and agri-business.

African Women Business Linkages Forum

Date: 30 July – 1st August

Nairobi, Kenya

Draft Agenda

Day one:

Welcome Message from the Government of Kenya

Opening Session:

- UNDP Resident Representative Kenya
- UN Women Representative
- Chairperson of African Congress for Women Entrepreneurs
- Director Trade and Industry -AUC
- Opening Address – AUC - Chairperson

Key Note Speech

The Role of Women in Social and Economic Transformation of Africa

Panelists:

1.....

2.....

3.....

1. Plenary Session 1 – **WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND AGRO-INDUSTRIES**

- **Key note Presentation:** The economic Contribution of Women in Agriculture and Agro-industry in Africa

Panel Presentations:

- Supporting value chain Agricultural Production in Africa – success stories of women in value chain production.
- Success stories of women in Agriculture and Agro-industry (presentation from each region)

2. Plenary Session 2- WOMEN IN EXTRACTIVES

- **Key Note Presentation:** The role and contribution of women in Extractive industries in Africa
- **Panel Presentations:**
 - Emerging Opportunities for women engagement in extractive industries
 - Success stories of women in Extractive industries in Africa (regional representation)
 - Women in mineral Value chains

Day Two

3. Plenary Session 3: FINANCING FOR WOMEN IN BUSINESS IN AFRICA

- **Key Note Presentation:** Sources and opportunities for financing women in business in Africa – UNDP Business directory Presentation

Panel Presentations

- Outcomes of the 3rd African Women’s Economic Forum and opportunities for Women – New Voices New Faces
- Financial instruments targeting women entrepreneurs in Africa – presentations by various financial institutions and banks (3-4 banks: SADB, ECHO Bank, Equity.....)
- Successful Women in the Finance Sector(Banks) Enat, Tanzania, Equity Funds (SA, Kenya, Nigeria)

4. Plenary Session 5: AFRICA’S INTRA TRADE AGENDA AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

- **Key Note Presentation:** Africa’s Intra Trade Agenda and Opportunities for Women

Panel Presentation:

- Eliminating Trade Barriers through improved trade facilitation for Women
- Enhancing Opportunities for Women through Trade Information Networks

Day Three

5. Plenary Session 4: ICT; E-COMMERCE

- **Key Note Presentation:** Opportunities for women in Information, Communication and Technology

Panel Presentation:

- Successful women entrepreneurs using ICT and or E-commerce
- Social Entrepreneurship Opportunities for Women in Africa
- Social Media and the opportunities it presents for Women Entrepreneurs

Plenary 4: **ROLE OF REC'S IN PROMOTING WOMEN IN BUSINESS IN AFRICA**

- **ECOWAS**
- **COMESA**
- **EAC**
- **SADC**
- **ECCAS**
- **IGAD**