

Keynote Address by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At World Bank Seminar
on “Women in the Private Sector: Good for Development and Business”
Tokyo International Forum
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Thank you, Carolyn [Anstey], for that introduction.

Distinguished Panelists;
Our Moderator;
Distinguished Participants;

I am very pleased that the World Bank Group is working to highlight the importance of women’s entrepreneurship. This is an issue that is important for growth and development in Liberia, in Africa, and in the world.

The call for gender equality goes as far back as the 1945 Charter of the United Nations, in which the Preamble “reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.”

Yet, today, women have not achieved equality with men in any country.

Where do women currently stand and how equipped are they to compete in the private sector?

Of the world’s 1.3 billion poor people, nearly 70 percent are women. According to reports by UN Women, women perform 66 percent of the world’s work and produce 50 percent of the world’s food, yet earn only 10 percent of the world’s income and own only 1 percent of land. The majority of women earn an average of three-fourths of the pay of males for the same work, outside of the agriculture sector, in both developing and developed countries. Women also work approximately twice the unpaid time that men do. Worldwide estimates suggest that the value of women’s unpaid housework and community work is between 10-35 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), a contribution not captured in national accounts.

A series of UN-sponsored international conferences have highlighted the need to promote more equity and equality for the world’s women. There is also the UN

resolution requiring a 30 percent women's participation in all societies' endeavors as a means of compensating for women's historical and social disadvantages.

As a result of these concerted efforts, changes are taking place – in constitutions, statutes and policies at national, regional and international levels – aimed at altering the status quo to ensure that women are equivalent to men in terms of rights, responsibilities and opportunities.

As the barriers fall, the number of women in the public sector continues to increase, as is the case for elected office. Women in politics and women in business executive positions continue to rank high as the world's most powerful and influential.

Women now hold 20 percent of the seats in the world's parliaments. Rwanda, at 56 percent, has the highest representation worldwide. There are currently 20 female Heads of State, the highest in history. Although disappointingly low, 7 percent of Cabinet members are women. *Fortune* Magazine's latest ranking of America's 500 largest corporations includes more women CEOs than ever before. Women lead 18 of those 500 companies including, within the last year, Hewlett-Packard and IBM. There are an additional 21 female CEOs in the *Fortune* 501-1000, some of them managing steel, oil and energy companies.

The data from emerging economies have shown that social and economic empowerment of women can yield huge development results. Thus, recent efforts worldwide have focused on the need to empower more women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors and throughout all levels of economic activity. This has led to programs and interventions aimed at promoting more women in the private sector and in ownership of business entities.

From June 2009 to March 2011, *Women, Business and the Law* recorded 461 legal and regulatory changes occurring in 39 economies that affected the indicators of women. Forty-one of these changes were aimed at achieving greater gender parity and reducing legal differentiation between men and women.

Results are beginning to show in many developing countries. Almost 40 percent of entrepreneurs running small or medium-sized businesses are women; and in key sectors, such as textiles and agricultural commodities, the female share of employment could be as high as 80 percent.

Despite the progress, challenges do remain. In many places, women are prevented from achieving their full potential simply because they are women. It is more difficult for women to gain access to finance for their businesses. On average, only 5-10 percent of women-owned entities have access to commercial bank loans and only 3 percent of venture capital investments globally. Lack of access to land and inheritance rights limits women's access to credit. Moreover, in many developing countries, the lack of data generally, and disaggregated data in particular, constrains efforts to formulate policies and design appropriate interventions to expand the level of women in business.

Recognizing that improved economic opportunities for women lead to better outcomes for families, societies and countries, UN Women established a partnership with the UN Global Compact – the world's largest corporate citizenship initiative with more than 8,000 business participants and other stakeholders in more than 135 countries – to formulate the women empowerment principles. Under the theme Equality Means Business, seven indices were established to help the private sector focus on key elements integral to promoting gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community.

Let me now say a word about the courageous business women in the informal sector in Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. According to UN data, in Africa women account for 70 percent of the agriculture work force, producing the same percentage of the continent's food. They are responsible for 70-90 percent of its marketing. In cross-border trading that expands the supply chain, these women travel, at great risks, across the continent to buy consumer goods for sale at home. They are the driving force that represents growth in small and medium-scale enterprises. The mobile money banking system in Kenya, where women are the major users, is revolutionizing the way business is done in trading commodities across that country. Although there are countless women in women-run firms throughout sub-Saharan Africa, they are more likely to be informal, smaller and operate in lower value-added sectors than companies run by men.

Several interventions have opened opportunities for women in business in Liberia. In 2008, Liberia became the first pilot project of the World Bank's Global Adolescent Girls Initiative. *The Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) Project*, which provides training in business development, has enabled 2,491 young women to keep their businesses open and their projects growing. *The Goldman Sachs Foundation's 10,000 Women Global Initiative* has

trained over 250 more entrepreneurs in business management and leadership skills. The Central Bank of Liberia's Credit Stimuli has provided loans to 24 women-owned businesses which, in turn, provided jobs to 2,917 persons. An additional facility extended to microfinance institutions, credit unions and village savings and loan associations has benefitted 34,759 women.

We need to continue to find means to make it easier for women entrepreneurs to grow their businesses by finding innovative ways for them to access credit. The key is to identify what policies really work to increase women's economic opportunities, and concentrate on them, as was done in Liberia and as a success in Kenya.

We must encourage development, not through philanthropy, but through a concerted effort of:

- a. Better education for girls and women – vocational education and skills training that will allow those who aspire not to go to college, but to enter a vocation that allows for entrepreneurial and job opportunities;
- b. Equal opportunity for jobs, particularly access to the formal economy through banking and other financial services;
- c. Development of integrated frameworks in the private sector that will enhance and support opportunities for women;
- d. Government policies and strategic frameworks, where appropriate, quotas which provide preferences for women businesses and women enterprises.

The promotion of women's entrepreneurship to strengthen the private sector, create jobs and advance women's economic rights is enhanced through positive mentorship, education and partnering.

Everyone has a role to play in this regard. The public sector can make sure that policies and laws offer women an equal playing field to rise, based on their own merits. Banks can develop more women-targeted financial products and services to reach out to the women's market. Large business enterprises can outsource services to women entities. All that is required is innovation, bold action and risk taking to provide opportunities for women.

African economies are on the rise, broader, deeper. Women's participation is expanding, a correlation which suggests that, indeed, Women in the Private Sector is Good for Business and Good for Development.

Thank you.