IGAD Launch of Gender Milestones

Opening Statement

Ms. Geraldine J. Fraser-Moleketi   Special Envoy on Gender
Honorable Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Abdoulkader Kamil Mohamed, H.E. Hasna Barkat Daoud (Minister for the promotion of Women and Family Planning), H.E. Amb. Febe Potgieter-Gqubule (Representative of H.E. Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, AUC Chairperson), Ministers, Honorable Executive Secretary for IGAD Ambassador Mahmoud Maalim, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am honored to join you as Special Envoy on Gender, representing the President of the ADB Dr Donald Kaberuka, to participate in the launch of the milestones that the IGAD member states have achieved in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women.

The Bank has been committed to addressing and mainstreaming gender concerns across Africa, including in the IGAD member states, over the years. As the Special Envoy on Gender, it is my role to further strengthen this commitment, ensuring that more innovative and practical measures and modalities are developed and/or supported, based on the needs of our regional member countries.

In May 2000 the cover page of the Economist magazine read- “Africa: The Hopeless Continent”. In December 2011, the very Economist magazine regretted the label and the December edition read “Africa Rising: The Hopeful Continent”. We are in a context where Africa is growing and is seen to be the next frontier, it is Africa’s time!

With respect to gender equality, Africa is rising too. Just recently Rwanda broke its earlier record, having the highest number of women in Parliament, as we saw an increase in the number of female Members of Parliament from 56% to 63%. Furthermore, seven of the 25 countries with the highest women’s representation in parliament are from Africa.
Africa now has 2 female Heads of State, and a woman heads the African Union Commission. Africa is rising, and African Women are rising too!

The Bank Group Strategy places a renewed emphasis on Gender equality and mainstreaming as a prerequisite for Africa’s Economic Transformation. This is in recognition that women make up over fifty percent of the continent’s population, and successful transformation of African economies will entail the unlocking of the continent’s potential through removing gender barriers to allow women to fully participate in the economy. Yet, African women still have less access to productive resources (water, land, energy, credit, education and training etc.) which are key to economic empowerment and alleviation of poverty.

In furthering this vision, the Bank is finalizing a Gender Strategy 2014-2017, which allows the Bank to re-examine its engagement with Regional Member Countries on gender and to deal with the persistent factors that hinder the achievement of women’s rights and women’s empowerment globally. The Gender Strategy therefore prioritizes three areas of work, namely: 1) Legal Status and Property Rights of Women; 2) Economic Empowerment of Women; and 3) Knowledge Management and Capacity Building.

The Bank also places great emphasis on fragile states. The President of the Bank established a High Level Panel on Fragile States chaired by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to review it work in this area.

The Bank is very conscious of linkages that exist between fragility and gender. Through its policy work and operational investments, the Bank has consistently emphasized the need to address gender concerns as well as fragile states. However, the Bank has embarked on a growing
realization of the need to more closely link its policy and operational approaches to fragility so that they do not diminish or reject gender. Our Ten Year Strategy 2013-2022 speaks to this, as inclusive and sustainable growth can never be achieved without gender equality and community participation playing central roles.

Therefore, the Bank is working to introduce more gender-sensitive interventions that are tailored to the realities of the distinct fragile states where it works. We will work to increase that focus as part of my mandate as the Special Envoy on Gender. We will seek to better define gender risks and better leverage gender opportunities across various sectors in the diverse group of our regional member countries.

In transforming our approach to more effectively address gender and fragility simultaneously moving forward, the Bank remains cognizant of the existence of fragile states within the IGAD region and how fragility affects all IGAD member states.

I take note that one of the milestones being launched today is the Regional Action Plan for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 and the IGAD Women and Peace Forum.

The Bank has established a facility that solely addresses countries in this situation. The Fragile States Facility is designed to provide support to eligible regional member countries via three pillars: 1) the Supplemental Support window for funding infrastructure, state capacity
building and accountability 2) the Arrears Clearance window and 3) the Technical Assistance and capacity building window. I encourage the Member States in this region to particularly liaise with the counterparts in Planning and Finance Ministries, to ensure that the projects that receive the Banks funding under this facility are inclusive of the special gender needs in conflict and post conflict situations.

This region has also often borne the brunt of climate change evidenced by recent severe droughts. This means that gender work must also be considered in the contact of drought resilience and mitigation strategies. The Bank and IGAD, supporting governments, have been at the forefront on this area and currently a project is being implemented that seeks to support The Governments of Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and IGAD Secretariat to promote drought resilience and sustainable livelihoods in the Horn of Africa.

Today, one of the milestones being launched is the regional strategy for higher representation of women in decision making positions. Despite some positive trends in the region, gender inequality in leadership is still pervasive. The obstacles for women’s effective participation in politics must be removed. Financial impediments, lack of access to information, mobility and public safety, coercion, intimidation and violence are some of the reasons that keep women away from leadership. Second, women in leadership positions need to be supported to use that space to influence laws and policies that will benefit all.
I also want to emphasize that as institutions responsible for promoting gender equality, there is a need to recognize that real changes in gender equality will come if we focus also on influencing the “hard sectors”. In Africa the largest investments are in Infrastructure and especially in energy and the extractive industries. So these are the areas that have potential for greatest results. This should include influencing how these sectors benefit women, but also how women get into the board rooms of these sectors.

The Bank would like to offer its support to IGAD in realizing its Gender Milestones through its own work in IGAD member states. Though IGAD and the Bank may operate differently as institutions, we share a common and increasing commitment to meaningfully address gender inequalities, inequities, and disparities. There is great potential to explore various points of entry and use select operations the Bank finances in IGAD member states to enhance this common commitment. The following are some areas through which the Bank can work to support and further reinforce IGAD’s Gender Milestones:

- Strengthening civil society organizations to empower the voices and capacities of women and other vulnerable groups
- Increasing the participation of women and other vulnerable groups in peace negotiation settlements and building their skills sets to better do so
- Conducting practical research on augmenting cultural and social understanding of gender in the context of fragile states and amongst key local, national, and regional actors
- Addressing structural barriers that limit women’s access to decision-making forums
Leveraging on opportunities to increase women’s participation in both informal and formal decision-making institutions beyond capital cities

Sensitizing informal and formal institutions that serve to perpetrate gender biases and further diminish the status of women and other vulnerable groups from engaging in peace and security activities

Developing indicators, influenced by actual realities on the ground, to better assess gender inequality in the fragile states

- Can build upon the extensive work already done by other indexes with the aiming of having more regionalized and contextualized indicators
- Those other indexes include, for instance, the Gender-related Development Index, the Gender Empowerment Measure, the Gender Equity Index, and the Gender Gap Index

Yes, women are frequently victims. However, they can also be powerful agents of transformative change where gender is concerned. Now is the time to shift perceptions, and IGAD’s Gender Milestones are a critical step in that direction.

As I stated from the onset, the Bank applauds IGAD in the launching of its Gender Milestones.

- The Bank intends to provide its support, as deemed relevant, to promote and ultimately achieve greater gender
equality and representation in fighting various forms of oppression.

- The Bank intends to provide its support to build and promote peace and security as well as participatory decision-making around peace and security that centers on the integral roles of women and other vulnerable groups at all levels.
- The Bank intends to leverage the social capital of women and other vulnerable groups at the community level and beyond.
- Finally, the Bank intends to encourage the undertaking of robust gender assessments in its projects and programs that is centered on determining the needs and priorities of women and vulnerable groups in interventions that specifically support peace and security initiatives which IGAD has identified.

I also note that this meeting will also be considering the progress that member states have made in implementing the African UNiTE Campaign on ending violence against women. Violence against women as we know is a great impediment to growth. The costs of violence against women in the continent go into billions of dollars, and this is a huge dent in national economies. When the campaign was launched in 2010, the Bank was proposed as one of the co-chairs of the African UNITE. I want to re-emphasize the Bank’s commitment in supporting this campaign and we will be speaking with the Campaign secretariat to agree on the details.
In conclusion, I urge that you situate gender equality in the broader spectrum and momentum of development initiatives in Africa and globally. The world is now working on the post 2015 agenda. It is imperative that as advocates of gender equality, we position the gender agenda in the global development goals. Africa has launched in vision 2063. We need to ensure that gender is at the centre of this agenda. Many of us may not there be in 2063, but let those following us celebrate the fruits of the efforts we are making today.

I thank you and wish you success in these initiatives.