



SIGNING OF ECOWAS -NEPAD GRANT AGREEMENT ON BUSINESS
INCUBATOR FOR AFRICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS (BIAWE).

African Union Commission, Addis Ababa

12th July, 2012

Opening Remarks

By

H.E. Kadré Desiré Ouédraogo

President ECOWAS Commission

Excellences

ECOWAS Ambassadors to AU Commission

Representatives of United Nations Missions in Addis Ababa

Ambassador of Spain to Ethiopia

Distinguished Guests,

Representatives of the Media and Civil Society Organisations

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you to the signing ceremony of the ECOWAS–NEPAD Grant Agreement on Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs (BIAWE). A joint initiative between the ECOWAS Commission and the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA), supported by a grant of about One Million Euro from the NEPAD/Spanish Fund for African Women Empowerment.

The project is aimed at establishing Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs (BIAWE) in the ECOWAS region, to contribute towards the eradication of poverty and the economic empowerment of women. The business incubator project seeks to provide capacity building, technical assistance, and financial support to emerging rural women entrepreneurs who face constraints that make it difficult to sustain their businesses. The proposed business incubator project is

therefore, a regional strategy to enhance economic opportunities of rural women within ECOWAS countries.

ECOWAS Commission and NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA) have designed the project and elaborated a two-year implementation plan to accelerate the development entrepreneurial initiatives through an array of business support resources and services to rural women in West Africa. ECOWAS Commission as the implementing authority for the project will use its existing close working relationship with institutional structures in Member states to ensure that the business incubator not only meets a variety of economic, socio-economic and policy needs, but to also secure the commitment of the community to ensure sustainability of the project. Thus, with this approach it is expected that the successful completion of business incubator project would increase the likelihood that women start-up enterprises will be sustainable.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to use the opportunity offered by this gathering to reiterate the fact that one of the most demographic phenomena facing many countries in West Africa is the predominant representation of women in agriculture and other rural industries, with women producing more than 50 percent of food. Women in West Africa continue to innovate, diversify and invest in all spheres of business and culture across the region. Facilitated by the ECOWAS protocol of free movement of people, goods and services, cross border trade by women is increasing, cultural integration in clothing, food, music, films and the entertainment sectors with women as key players and consumers is also widespread. However, in spite of their contribution to the economy, rural women are among the most disadvantaged population groups.

It is for these reasons that the promotion women's enterprises through private sector involvement and diversification of economic enterprises are at the core of the ECOWAS Commission's strategy for women's economic empowerment. Some of the specific activities we have supported, include training to promote access and competitiveness for women entrepreneurs in Africa in partnership with the International Trade Centre, Geneva, Switzerland and the African Trade Policy Institute of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, provision of technical and financial support to women engaged in the processing of agricultural, sea and handicraft products in ECOWAS Member states, and facilitating the set-up and networking among the Federation of ECOWAS Business Women and Entrepreneurs (FEBWEB) are a few examples.

Thus, it is expected that the establishment of the Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs will add impetus to our existing regional programmes aimed at creating wealth through modernizing and professionalizing female-owned enterprises in line with MDGs 1 and 3 (to eradicate poverty and hunger and promote gender equality and empower women), and enhance Poverty Reduction Strategies of the countries involved.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like at this juncture to commend the Government of the Kingdom of Spain for the steadfast financial commitment to women's economic empowerment through laudable programmes such as the NEPAD/Spanish Fund for African Women Entrepreneurs. We are particularly pleased to be one out of the two Regional Economic Community's that will be piloting the Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs (BIAWE) with funding from NEPAD/Spanish Fund for African Women Empowerment. We are hopeful that the Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs will enhance the productive potential of women's economic enterprises, promote the creation of employment and social security for women.

The Kingdom of Spain is one of the major partner of ECOWAS and has remained on the side of West Africa even during difficult economic times. I wish to express ECOWAS profound gratitude for this steady cooperation.

I also would like to express appreciation on the good collaboration between ECOWAS and the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency which has resulted with this very important project.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentleman, Once again ECOWAS is highly honoured by your presence at this grant agreement signing ceremony and thank you all for attending.