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Africa Industrialization Day

20 November 2023

"Accelerating Africa's Industrialization through the Empowerment of African Women in Processing for an Integrated Market,"

Joint Statement.

On the 20th of November, annually, Africa commemorates Africa Industrialization Day (AID). This is a significant activity agreed upon by the African Union Heads of State and Government in July 1989 through **Resolution AHG/Res. 180 (XXV)** and the United Nations General Assembly in December 1989 through **Resolution 44/237**. This day serves as a global platform for African Union Member States and the rest of the world, through the United Nations institutions to reaffirm their commitment to Africa's industrialization.

The theme for this year: "***Accelerating Africa's Industrialization through the Empowerment of African Women in Processing for an Integrated Market,***" underscores the importance of empowering women in processing to propel inclusive sustainable industrialization in Africa.

Despite the fact that women represent the majority of the African population, their involvement in the overall development process, especially in industrialization, is limited. According to a UNIDO report, women in Africa constitute only 38% of the manufacturing workforce, despite being responsible for up to 80% of food production and processing. Moreover, women are estimated to make up to 70% of the informal economy in some African countries.

Women in processing play a crucial role in various industries and services sectors. They contribute significantly in the sectors of agriculture, industry and tourism in Africa. Further involving women is not only imperative for gender equality. It is also important in fostering accelerated socio-economic development. The OECD estimates a 12% increase in Gross Domestic Product by 2030 if women's participation rates match those of men.

African women in processing have the potential to contribute in the implementation of the Agreement and Protocols of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This will be leveraged by coming up with a separate protocol on women focused on their involvement in intra-African trade through the AfCFTA. Their involvement will contribute not only to trade but also the areas of product diversification, spatial development, job creation, inclusive growth, and, among others, cross-border industrial clustering.

From these, it is clear that economic integration is an important lever for promoting inclusive sustainable industrialization in Africa. By fostering collaboration among African nations, Africa breaks down trade barriers. Africa is also better positioned to improve infrastructure and open up more opportunities for inclusive growth and sustainable development which are critical to the attainment of both the UN SDGs and AU Agenda 2063.

However, women in processing face significant challenges, including limited access to finance, insufficient skills set for adopting modern processing techniques, absence of support institutions, restricted market access, as well as limited access to modern technologies.

To address these challenges, there must be heightened commitment in supporting African women in processing. Key measures include industrial skills development, creation of opportunities for targeted industrial upgrading for women-owned enterprises, improved market access and also technology transfer in relevant productive sectors. To emphasize, affirmative action policies to boost women's presence in the processing industry is critical.

On this Africa Industrialization Day, we, the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) call upon governments, development partners, academia, the private sector and civil society to enhance collaboration in creating an enabling environment for the emergence and spread of women in processing industries across Africa. By collectively addressing gender disparities and providing equal opportunities for women in industrialization processes, we can accelerate Africa's journey towards inclusive growth and sustainable development.

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