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Keynote Address

by

**H.E. Mrs. Tumusiime Rhoda Peace
Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture
African Union Commission**

**at the Session on
“Unleashing Women’s Potential: Investing in Women in Agriculture at the
Center of Africa Transforming and Rising”**

during the 2014 Africa Green Revolution Forum (AGRAF)

Session collaborators/partners



African Union
a United and Strong Africa

Africa Union Conference Center | Nelson Mandela Hall

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Dear,

Dominique Charron; Director for Agriculture and Environment, IDRC

Elisabeth Atangana; President of Cameroon's National Dialogue of Peasant Organisations; President of the Sub-regional Platform of Peasant Organisations of Central Africa; and, FAO's Special Ambassador for Rural Cooperatives

Tacko Ndiaye; Policy Advisor on Economic Empowerment at UN

Women

Sipho Moyo; Director for Africa, ONE Campaign

Leslie Hannay; Attorney and Land Tenure Specialist , Landesa Center for Women's Land Rights

Distinguished participants;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you in this session on– “***Unleashing Women's Potential: Investing in Women in Agriculture at the Center of Africa Transforming and Rising***”. I am glad to be with this outstanding panel. As head of the AU Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture, I am happy to see the due recognition given to agriculture as the engine of growth and transformation. Also, having been responsible for policy and leadership in women in development in my earlier years elsewhere, I remain passionate about women being in their rightful place and playing their rightful role in the socio-economic development of communities and nations.

Let me, first of all, convey to you the warm greetings and best wishes from Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission whom as you know is an enthusiastic supporter of women empowerment and women entrepreneurship especially in agriculture and agribusiness. She often says that women not only constitute fifty percent of Africa's population but also are responsible for the production of the other fifty per cent of the population. Even in her statement on Tuesday at the official opening of the Fourth

African Green Revolution Forum, she delivered her statement from the lenses of a woman and a mother as she spoke about how the Africa We Want by 2063 should be like particularly in the context of agricultural transformation for food and nutrition security, employment opportunities, wealth creation and shared prosperity.

Indeed, women already contribute significantly to the development of households, communities and nations. Yes, they are the mothers of African citizens. They are also the care takers of families. They are the pillars of economic growth and development considering their predominant role in agriculture which is the backbone of most African economies. Therefore, when Africa is said to be resilient to the global economic and financial crisis where many regions faced depression as Africa maintained impressive economic growth figures, between 4 and 5 per cent, we know who are responsible. When Africa is said to have 7 of the world's 10 fastest growing economies, we know who are responsible. But we also know that women have not had a fair share of the fruits of their labour and they continue to endure hardships from all corners. And, this is partly why they have not yet fully exploited their potential. Hence the relevance and pertinence of the topic we are addressing ourselves to in this session: ***“Unleashing Women’s Potential: Investing in Women in Agriculture at the Center of Africa Transforming and Rising”***.

We nonetheless remain optimistic and determined to ensure that we take full advantage of existing and emerging opportunities to reassert ourselves because it has been proven that no one will give you your rights, you have to claim your rights.

We are therefore encouraged to see many women young and old across the continent organizing themselves and networking to empower one another to share experiences, best practices and success stories with a view to scaling them up and replicating them. That is the way to go. Indeed, women empowerment begins with women themselves. It is only then that our men folk can come in to support us. We have seen this happen where women have proven themselves be it in politics or in business and they win the support of both men and women. This can also be done and it is indeed being done even in agriculture and agribusiness. But, while the gains made are appreciated, we are saying

this is not enough; we need to do more to unleash the enormous potential of women.

And let me tell you this and I know you know it: no country can develop without the other half of its population, so, women matter. Fortunately, going by the messages that emanated from the yearlong commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU under the Theme : ***Pan Africanism and African Renaissance***, all AU Member States indicated especially in recent times that they want to develop and that they want their populations to prosper. The same message has resonated during the continent-wide consultations for the Africa Agenda 2063 being finalized. This means they will as a matter of necessity involve and empower women. So, when it is said the 21st Century is for Africa, we should know that this is also our century as women of Africa.

I must also add that the African Union Commission's Strategic Plan 2014-2017 adopted by Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Addis Ababa, 27 May 2013, sets out to accelerate progress towards a stable, peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa within a good governance environment, while paying particular attention to women and youth among others. And I must say that the first priority in that strategic plan is human capacity development focusing on health, education, science, research, technology and innovation, with women and youth at the centre.

You must therefore count the Commission as your partner in pursuit of women empowerment. And specifically for the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture that I head, women are at the centre of our policies, programs and projects especially as we begin to implement the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated African Agriculture Growth and Transformation. We are committed to ensure that agricultural production is increased and so women will be empowered to boost agricultural production and improve productivity. But we are not going to restrict women to production only, we are working towards enhancing women participation in the entire agricultural value chain and that is why we are placing emphasis on women in agro-processing and agribusiness. I should add that the second priority of the AUC's Strategic Plan is agriculture and agro processing. This is one sure way of unleashing women's potential in Africa's socio-economic transformation through agriculture so that as the vision of the African Union goes, Africa

becomes **“An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena”** be it in trade especially trade in agricultural commodities, be it in politics and global governance or in other aspects of international relations but most importantly in feeding ourselves instead of importing the food we eat where the annual import bill is nearing USD40 billion - and feeding the rest of the world. We have the potential. It is within our hands. To unleash it and make the desired difference. We welcome all stakeholders and our partners, including the International Development Research Centre and UN Women, UNDP, AGRA and others to work with us more closely in this compelling drive of transforming Africa’s agricultural and agribusiness landscape, where Africa’s rising is anchored. The 2014 AU Year of Agriculture and Food Security is a momentous year for all actors, Governments, Private Sector, Development Partners, Civil Society Organisations and all of us to seize the moment and move from rhetoric to real actions that will ensure that women and youth have the skills, resources, and services to increase agricultural productivity and actively participate in agricultural value chains.

Looking at the Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa (S3A) also adopted by our Heads of State and Government, we see it cutting across the entire value chains of the agrifood systems and help, over the next 10 years to support investment in the majority of Africa’s population, the women and the youth through entrepreneurship and labor and time saving technologies that will bring shared prosperity and improved livelihoods for the continent.

To invest in women and youth to harness their potential in agriculture will require all of us to enhance our investments and actions in:

- Enhancing science, research, innovation and technology – in particular technologies that improve productivity of the smallholder women farmers,
- Leveraging ICTs to improve risk management through effective and efficient market linkages throughout national, regional, continental and international value-chains,
- Enhance preservation of nutrient quality of grains, cereals, fish, poultry, meat, vegetables,

- Expanding entrepreneurship of groups of women and young people,

One other issue I should have mentioned is that given the importance of land in development and in order to address challenges including those that women face in land ownership, land use and land tenure, the AU Heads of State and Government adopted the AU Land Policy Framework and Guidelines. The AUC, through my Department, in collaboration with the African Development Bank and the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa, is championing Guiding Principles from the Land Policy Initiative on the multifaceted issues surrounding large scale land based investments (LSLBI). These Guiding Principles are available from the Land Policy Initiative website and, when adhered to they directly address the issues of access to and control of land by women, smallholder farmers. The AUC's Chairperson's Initiative on Empowering Women, supported by UNDP, focusing on catalyzing women leadership in agriculture is to be applauded and supported.

I thank you for listening to me and I look forward to fruitful deliberations.