



PRESENTATION

BY

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AT THE

**INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR WOMEN AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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Madam Moderator
Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The African Union Commission is pleased to be part of this very important Panel on “*Green Economy and Corporate Social Responsibility: Opportunities and Challenges*”, taking place as it is on the eve of the 17th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (known as COP17) and the 7th Meeting of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP7), which together represent a platform for the world to take a significant step towards a future climate change regime, as we prepare for Rio +20 next year.

The 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit would be remembered as the first United Nations Conference to respond to women’s voices on environment as it was through Agenda 21 and precisely at the women’s tent in Rio, that the Earth Summit Agenda on Women and Environment was born. Indeed, the Women’s Environment Tent in Rio was building on the Miami Women’s Conference of 1991 that conceived the concept of women’s centrality in environmental governance being championed at the time by women environmentalists including the late Professor Wangari Muta Maathai from Kenya, the renowned philosopher Vandana Shiva from India, the late United States’ Congresswoman Bella Abzug, among others.

Twenty years after Rio, women have continued to fight climate change from all fronts - from planting trees, protecting herbal species, taking care of water catchment areas, fighting alien species, confronting desertification, to playing the role of custodians of wells, rivers and of nature itself, including cultural heritages. We continue to witness the resilience of women as they contribute in no small measure towards the much talked about adaptation and mitigation measures against climate change so as to safeguard our future and that of our planet which has been loaned to us for safe-keeping for future generations.

No doubt the initiative to convene this International Forum for Women and Sustainable Development is as timely as it is necessary. At every natural calamity that the world experiences, as we all have witnessed, we are reminded that a green economy approach is indeed an unavoidable reality, demanding urgent action on our part as well as a shift in social and economic policies. Because women are the most vulnerable group affected by the effects of climate change, and yet are mostly responsible for the management of natural and household resources, it is evident that the discourse, planning and implementation processes on economic development, social progress, environmental protection and management, as well as innovation, adaptation and mitigation measures in response to climate change can only attain the desired results if women’s voices are included.

In light of the above, I would like to seize this opportunity, on behalf of the African Union Commission, to thank the Government of China and the All China Women’s Federation (ACWF) for organizing this Forum which aims to promote a gender perspective and advance women’s concerns in the preparation of Rio +20.

With its low per capita ecological footprint and a low level of development, Africa, in subscribing to a green economy, faces the challenge of striking a balance between improving access to basic services, promoting the welfare of its citizens and attaining high standards of socio-economic development on the one hand and ensuring that the natural resource base and the quality of the environment are not compromised on the other. How this can be done includes but is not limited to paying due consideration to the role of the private sector in promoting green technology and complementing the role of the state in promoting the green economy through prudent natural resource management.

For us at the African Union Commission, advocacy for the move towards a green economy is therefore premised on the following tenets and principles:

1. Greening of economies holds the promise to be the new engine of sustainable growth, to create new jobs, and to reduce persistent poverty across a range of sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, water management and energy.
2. Public and private sector participation and investments are critical to ensure added employment to offset any job losses along the path to a green economy.
3. Through sustainable forestry and ecologically friendly farming methods, we can expect conservation of soil fertility and water resources.
4. Transition to green economy paves the way for adoption of policies that reduce or eliminate harmful or pervasive subsidies, addresses market failures and stimulates investment.

Greening the economy offers immense opportunities of improving human wellbeing and social equity while at the same time reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. Preserving the Congo Forest Basin, ensuring sustainable livelihoods through the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel, and efficient management of trans-boundary water resources, feature among Africa's key efforts in this regard. Other illustrations of landmark achievements so far include:

- Uganda's policies to promote organic agriculture which has generated 200,000 certified farmers (male and female) with exports growing from close to \$4 million in 2003 to nearly \$23 million today;
- Rwanda's Forest Ecosystem Restoration Programme;
- Accessing the emerging potential under the UN's Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Programme (UN-REDD) by the Democratic Republic of Congo;
- The solar power partnership between countries in North Africa and European companies which promises to be transformational;
- South Africa's Green Economy Plan with a primary focus on investments that create more decent jobs; and related to this, investments in infrastructure of nearly \$ 1 billion being spent in railways, energy efficient buildings, and water and waste management;
- Kenya's new green energy policy, including a Feed-In Tariff and a 15-year power purchase agreement, based on wind and sugar wastes-into-energy systems, stimulating a rise in the country's installed capacity of over 40 per cent;

- Egypt's recycling of dump waste which has continued to create jobs for poor urban women in the city of Cairo;
- Liberia's improved cassava production in Nimba County through value addition using new processing, marketing and management skills that sustain profitability and increased incomes and yields.

Indeed, COP17- CMP7 to be proudly hosted by South Africa on behalf of the African continent from the 28th of November to the 9th of December this year, comes at a time when there is much awareness across the Continent about the impact of climate change on Africa, and hence the importance of a green economy supported by an expanding body of research, adaptation and mitigation practices on the ground. A real opportunity is offered to showcase some of the Continent's important initiatives and activities, draw from the knowledge and experiences of wide-ranging actors, and ensure that Africa's development and climate change concerns are at the forefront of the discussions during RIO+20.

To mark this occasion, Africa will mount its first ever dedicated discussion and exhibition area at the Conference of the Parties Venue called the "**Africa Pavilion**". To give a brief background on the Africa Pavilion, it was indeed an African Union Assembly Decision on the Sixteenth Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Sixth Conference of Parties of the Kyoto Protocol (Assembly Dec. 342(XVI)) that mandated the African Union Commission in liaison with the Republic of South Africa and the African Development Bank to take responsibility for the project. It is our hope that the Pavilion will not only serve as a hub for African activity and informal networking outside of the formal negotiations, but also facilitate women's empowerment in COP17 in the following initiatives:

- Lobbying and advocating for extra support from the governments for financial assistance and infrastructure and also marketing of organic foods;
- Addressing the issue of pest control through research study and facilitation;
- Encouraging the protection of herbal trees, as is the case in Rwanda;
- Implementing few instruments that recommend networks working in the area of gender and climate change;
- Developing reporting mechanisms;
- Protecting herbs and trees like the tick trees for timber (grown in South Sudan) which are becoming extinct; and
- Campaigning against the use of plastics.

In the just concluded 4th Ordinary AU meeting of Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from the 2nd to the 3rd of November 2011, a solidarity statement was adopted in support of the Gender Agenda at COP17 as a critical component of the African Agenda to be negotiated by the African Union Ministers of Environment.

As we cannot speak of green economy and corporate social responsibility without including social development, allow me to share also with you that the African Union (AU) Heads of States and Government had declared in 2009, the period 2010 to 2020 as the African Women's Decade (AWD). The Decade could be best described as an implementation framework to accelerate social development, particularly through addressing the human and social developmental gap between men and

women, and also to enhance the commitments on Beijing+15 as well as other legal and political instruments on gender equality and women's empowerment.

The AWD is centered on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, a grassroots approach focusing on 10 themes, namely: Fighting poverty and promoting economic empowerment of women and entrepreneurship; Agriculture and Food Security; Health, Maternal Mortality and HIV and AIDS; Education, Science and Technology; Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development; Peace and Security and Violence Against Women; Governance and Legal Protection; Finance and Gender Budgeting; Women and Decision-making; Mentoring Youth (male and female) to be champions of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment; all of which aim to protect, promote and implement women's human rights in the present context and in the future as defined in many sustainable development policies.

The Commission is pleased to note that it has worked closely with the All China Women's Federation in implementing Theme 3 (Maternal Mortality and HIV and AIDS) in 2011 and would like to publicly express appreciation to the Government of the People's Republic of China and the All China Women's Federation for the contribution of Medical Equipment towards the reduction of Maternal Mortality in the Continent.

Let me seize this opportunity to invite your organization to support Theme 2 on Agriculture and Food Security, which has been selected for implementation for 2012 by the afore-mentioned just-concluded Meeting of Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs. This Theme will focus on:

- Value addition of food agricultural products through on site processing to curb post-harvest wastage and facilitate distribution;
- Increased food production through water harvesting and simple irrigation techniques at farm level;
- Facilitation of markets and outlets for agricultural products, particularly organic products;
- Linking African Women's agricultural products to global food supply chains.

We believe African women can benefit from the green economy through partnership between Chinese and African women. As this theme is closely linked to Theme 5 on Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development, and within the context of this Forum, Rio+ 20, and the hosting of COP17 in Africa in the coming weeks, I will conclude by saying that African women look forward to benefiting from your continued support particularly in formulating appropriate policies and implementing programmes to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

The All China Women's Federation and the African Union Commission partnered in implementing Theme 3 of the Women's Decade Programme in 2011. We look forward to consolidating this partnership and support to the Decade Themes annually and to working closely with the women of China through the proposed Africa-China Women Encounter, which can bring our womenfolk even closer together.

I wish this forum a successful outcome and thank you for your attention.