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Opening Remarks

By

H.E. Ambassador Josefa SACKO

Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable  
Environment (ARBE), AUC

**WOMEN IN BLUE ECONOMY WORKSHOP**

16 June 2022 | Abuja, Nigeria

- 1. Honourable Sharon Ikeazor, Federal Minister of State for Environment of the Republic of Nigeria**
- 2. Representatives of Regional Economic Communities**
- 3. Participants from African union Member States**
- 4. ALL Protocol Observed**

It is a pleasure to be back in this great country where I lived at some stage in my life as a student and ever since I feel at home whenever I arrive in the Republic of Nigeria.

Honourable Minister of State, let me thank you for being here to grace this workshop aimed at promoting the role of women in Blue Economy. I would also like to recognise the warm hospitality accorded to me and all the delegates since our arrival in this beautiful city of Abuja. We are therefore grateful to the leadership and the people of this great nation.

The African is the richest continent, in terms of its natural and human capital. The purpose of this workshop is to unpack the potential of two of our most underutilised and overlooked assets: on one hand, our aquatic resources, and on the other, the women demographic dividend.

#### ***Honourable Minister of State, Distinguished Participants***

Blue economy is an important pillar of Africa's development and transformation. The continent shares a coastline of over 47,000km, and its maritime transport continues to grow in terms of volume of goods transported, since is the main trade route for the continent. More than ever, it has become relevant for the African continent to look towards its seas and oceans and inland waters not only for food security, but also as a pathway for connectivity, innovation, trade and nature-based solutions for the various challenges that the planet is facing.

At the same time, our oceans, seas and waters are in peril, as human activities continue to exert pressure on them to breaking point. Climate change is leading to warmer and more acidic seas, with devastating impacts on highly sensitive ecosystems and species, including coral reefs and fish stocks. Pollution, including plastic pollution, agricultural and industrial run-offs emanating from land sources, is choking up our aquatic ecosystems and has made its way into our food systems. Overfishing and overexploitation of our resources means that we are destroying the foundation of the blue economy before we have even fully understood, explored and mapped the resources that we have. At the same time, we have an endemic issue of weak governance frameworks, poor access to data, and challenges in terms of technical capacity and infrastructure that is hindering our ability to protect and sustainably manage our blue economy.

I believe that Africa's women are central to our efforts of developing a blue economy which is sustainable.

#### ***Honourable Minister of State, Distinguished Participants***

The triple shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis and food insecurity, especially as a result of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict, have impacted women heavier than most. It will take 267 years, according to the World Economic Forum, to close the economic gender gap, which includes access to economic opportunities, finance, equal pay, and full legal rights. This means that, we will not see full economic parity in our lifetimes. Neither will our daughters, or grand-daughters.

It is a very bleak picture, but it also means that, if we want to improve the lives of women in the present and future generations, we must do so by all possible means, and we must do so now.

The blue economy represents one pathway for women to access more opportunities. At the same time, the participation of women will surely catalyse the blue economy.

In the fisheries sector, women play an important role in post-harvest aspects of the seafood value chain, including processing, marketing, and selling seafood. Very often, this contribution goes unseen as it is done on a subsistence scale, in the informal economy, or it is undervalued. We do not have the full picture of women's contribution, and women remain excluded from the higher levels of decision-making around fisheries. The complex nature of fishing agreements, processing, and trade exacerbates this situation. Already, it is estimated that while the fisheries sector in Africa is valued at \$24 billion, most of this revenue does not, in fact, go to African stakeholders, let alone African women.

In the science and technology sector, which is the backbone of the blue economy, women's representation also remains low. Because of safety concerns, or societal norms which discourage women from considering a career at sea or in the maritime sector, Africa is missing out on the contribution that women could be making for the benefit of the continent. Today's workshop aims to address precisely such gaps.

***Honourable Minister of State, Distinguished Participants***

As an agronomist by training, I have seen over and over how women's contribution in the agricultural sector has positive outcomes and a multiplier effect on food security, social innovation, and income generation. It is estimated that every \$1 invested in women in agriculture yields dividends of up to \$31, not least because women are more likely to reinvest in communities and families than men. Women are also the key agents in ensuring food security and building sustainable food systems. It stands to reason that the economic case for investing in women in the blue economy is equally compelling.

***Honourable Minister of State, Distinguished Participants***

Improving women's participation and representation in the blue economy is not only a long overdue moral imperative; it is also an economic one.

As such it is my hope that during the next two days, we engage with each other, develop a network of support for women in the blue economy in Africa, and identify concrete ways of ensuring that more women participate in the building of the blue economy at every level, and are adequately rewarded for it.

Thank you.

