

UNIDO CONFERENCE

15-17th July 2020

We are now at the end of this three day important conference. I would like to thank UNIDO, the Italian Government, and FAO for bringing us together.

This was a truly constructive conference, where through the sessions an essential dialogue, and a sense of engagement was created. Contributions from the various participants were so enlightening.

A number of issues have come to the fore, which I believe are highlighting.

Issues that I believe need to be kept high on our Agenda as UNIDO, and other international organisations, but even more so on the Agenda of our governments.

Practically all governments across the world are committed to the Sustainable Development Goals and it has surfaced time and time again during the deliberations of this conference that by 2030, we need to implement SDG 5 that specifically speaks on Gender Equality.

We have heard during the sessions that any intervention to empower women along value chains need to be holistic. That we need to address the deeply rooted social discriminatory norms and mentality, and structural barriers in our societies. In this context also, I must mention the important issue that was raised and which needs to be

addressed, regarding Violence and Harassment to protect female workers.

We need to ensure that equal access to education and training with a particular focus on technology, STEM, ICT and services.

We need to introduce Gender friendly policies and gender-responsive procurement processes.

Undoubtedly, all this has to go hand in hand with culturally sensitive measures.

Another important issue which was raised was the importance of governments focusing on programmes to improve the diversification of economic activity, so that in crises the negative effects of the macroeconomy are reduced.

It was emphasized that the private sector must also play its part by ensuring gender equality environments and in particular arrangements for flexible working, together with the promotion of gender equality aimed at their potential buyers.

All of us participating in this conference acknowledge that with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was emphasized that business is definitely not as usual.

The issue of upskilling women was mentioned as being paramount for the adaptation to the digital transformation. COVID-19 has shown that technology and AI are already seen as a means to overcome such crises.

However it was further emphasized that through indicators; we know that a female digital divide is prevalent, and therefore, we need to invest in our girls' education and training to overcome this divide. It is then that we can be sure that women will be able to contribute and reach leadership roles.

It was said that the circular economy should also be seen as an opportunity for women empowerment, if governments and the private sector apply a gender lens to policy design in the sector.

The circular economy can be a comprehensive solution to enhance resilience in times of COVID-19. It can offer opportunities for women to play a role in new business models, innovation, digitalization and research both at home and in business.

We definitely still have a tall order as has been stated many a time. At the launching event to this conference, where we heard our distinguished speakers mentioning global statistics that show, that how far away, women are, from achieving equality and equity in our societies.

However, there were a number of practical examples from different countries, that are also evidence of political will and determination to address gender inequalities.

Tunisia comes to mind. The Start Up Act is an important step forward, as is also the Egypt Entreprenelle experience.

On the other hand, we also must advocate for more efforts.

We need a holistic effort.

We need a global effort to put gender discrimination and inequality to history.

70 years ago, when the UN Declaration on human rights came into being, the world was relieved. It was stated that we are all born free and equal.

25 years ago, when the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was agreed, the world was excited.

5 years ago, when the SDGs were agreed, the world had hope.

We have all we need to be guided.

Governments, the private sector, civil society organisations all know what to do.

We cannot be complacent and accept and feel comfortable with the small steps forward.

We need a concentrated effort by all to put Gender Equality a priority in our lives and within our communities and societies.

Finally I urge all of us to work harder together to be the generation to usher in this fundamental human right, together with men, where true and effective gender equality becomes a way of life, in the world of work and business.