

Opening Remarks by Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesili, Vice President for Africa, World Bank

Thanks to the Japanese Government and to JBIC and JICA for cosponsoring the event with the Bank. This workshop is an outstanding example of our cooperation for Africa's development.

In many developing countries women and children are the infrastructure which keeps households and communities running.

- Transport offers a striking illustration. Women in sub-Saharan Africa transport more on their heads in volume than is transported in vehicles.
- Women are the main users, providers, and managers of water in rural households and are the guardians of household hygiene. If a water system breaks down or if water becomes scarce because of climate change, women will most likely be the ones most affected.

This means women must forego other activities, be they attending school, engaging in income earning activities, or many others to improve their own lives and those of their families.

Infrastructure and infrastructure services are indispensable to achieve the MDGs, and are a catalyst to accelerate the achievement of the MDGs.

- Reducing maternal mortality: it is a question of modern lighting and safe water for safe deliveries, a question of access to transport hospitals.
- Reducing children's deaths and morbidity from diarrheal diseases: it is a question of safe water, and again, a question of energy to draw or boil water.
- Education for all: a question of transport and sanitation for boys and girls, of power to access educational materials through information technologies, of modern lighting in homes so that children can study at night.

Improving access to infrastructure is fundamental in promoting women's economic empowerment.

It increases agricultural productivity, frees time for productive activities, facilitates employment, and provides easier access to markets.

- Providing access to electricity and roads leads to greater agricultural productivity. Women contribute 70 to 80% of agricultural labor for food crop production and processing. Mechanical power improves their productivity, electricity for cold storage facilities and roads increase food availability, including marketing surpluses.
- Increasing women's ability to use various modes of transport increases employability.

Unfortunately, infrastructure is often not responsive to women's needs. Access to, use of and control over infrastructure facilities is linked to inequalities in intra-household relations, property rights and cultural restrictions. Women and men have different needs, priorities, and vulnerabilities. The HIV/AIDS crisis has increased women's burden as heads of households.

It is, therefore, important to have a gender focused approach that ensures infrastructure that helps women in priority.

In 2007, the World Bank launched a Gender Action Plan (GAP): Gender Equality as Smart Economics, and the World Bank's president reiterated the Bank's commitment at the 2008 Spring Meetings. The plan's objective is to advance women's economic empowerment by making markets work for women and empowering women to compete in four key markets: land, labor, agriculture, and finance. Investments in infrastructure are key to provide access to all of these markets. To-date, \$1.3 million of GAP funds were awarded to projects in the Africa Region, including on a regional study to better understand Gender, Infrastructure, and Time Use in Africa, and a project on land titling in Ghana. Today, we will learn from practitioners how to obtain significant results, lessons that can be integrated in infrastructure programs to benefit women and men in Africa..