



**International Women's Day 2010**  
**Message on behalf of the UNIDO Director-General**  
**“Equal rights, equal opportunities: progress for all”**

On the occasion of International Women's Day, we celebrate the economic, political and social achievements of women in the past, present and future. We recognize the invaluable contributions that women have made and continue to make, across all boundaries, whether they are national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political.

We also seek to ensure that women have equal rights and opportunities to live a full and decent life. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Women as a group suffer from discrimination of many types, but particularly with regard to access to decent work, resources, skills and capacity development. This is perpetuating poverty and creating a multiplier effect in poor households and communities.

UNIDO believes that poverty cannot be reduced without wealth creation. And we apply this belief across all our services. We also believe that the key to lifting women out of poverty is to enhance the opportunities available to them to engage in productive activities and earn an income. This requires capacity development in skills, know-how, technologies and finance.

For UNIDO, today also marks the start of the High-level Conference on the Development of Agribusiness and Agro-industries in Africa, hosted by the Government of Nigeria. The conference, which is organized by UNIDO in cooperation with the African Union (AU), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, (ECA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and other partners, is expected to help raise awareness on the pivotal role of agribusiness and agro-industries for sustainable economic development.

The reality is that in many parts of the developing world, particularly in rural Africa, women are predominantly engaged in agricultural activities of various forms. They participate in crop production, livestock care and off-farm activities, in addition to working as independent small farmers or agricultural labourers. Despite such vital contributions, however, gender-based constraints and lack of equal rights hold them back from increasing their productivity and moving up the agricultural value chain. They lack access to productive assets, keeping them engaged in survival through rural subsistence. UNIDO believes that with adequate support and training, women can be encouraged to engage in more profitable agricultural activities and improve their livelihoods.

For developing countries to continue to survive in the globalized world of today and achieve the MDGs, we must increase our efforts to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women. If women are able to access credit to invest in business ventures, markets to sell their products, knowledge to expand their businesses, diversify and undertake value addition, they will be in a position to better contribute to economic growth and development.

On this International women's day, we join the rest of the United Nations system and the world in calling for equal rights and opportunities for women, with the ultimate goal of progress for all.

*Kandeh K. Yumkella*

*UNIDO Director-General*

*8 March 2010*