The 8th of March marks the International Women’s Day (IWD) every year. This year’s theme for IWD, “Equality for women is progress for all” emphasizes how gender equality and the empowerment of women are essential to achieving sustainable industrial development and a world free of poverty.

Statement by UNIDO Director General Li Yong on the occasion of International Women’s Day 8 March 2014

At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders declared that ‘progress for women is progress for all’. The theme of this year’s International Women’s Day, Equality for women is progress for all, is rededicated to this fundamental principle. Few, if any, policies are more effective in promoting sustainable development and economic growth than the empowerment of women and girls.

This is why, since being elected as Director General in June 2013, I have sought to reorient UNIDO’s central focus to inclusive and sustainable industrial development (ISID). We cannot afford to leave anyone behind. When men and women become more equal, economies grow faster, fewer people remain in poverty, and overall well-being increases.

We do have achievements to celebrate, with female employment gaining ground in many industrial sectors. A rise in the female to male employment ratio has been estimated to have a direct impact on GDP growth rates, increasing GDP by more than 30 per cent in some countries. In fact, when discriminatory barriers against women are removed, a country’s productivity can increase by up to 25 per cent. This clearly shows that equality for women is progress for all.

Economic growth also has a positive effect on gender equality, with industry-based growth being especially good for women. Women tend to benefit more from growth in light manufacturing. In East Asia, growth in the textile and food processing industries has particularly increased women’s waged work and improved female and child health and education. Investing in women-owned enterprises, which are typically smaller and more informal, can also have a multiplier effect on job creation for women.

UNIDO continues to play a significant role in promoting and creating opportunities for women’s economic empowerment in industry. In Pakistan, UNIDO’s Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme has provided 6,000...
women with the resources and support to establish themselves as entrepreneurs and an additional 10,000 women with the training and knowledge to enter into entrepreneurial activities in creative industries. In Burkina Faso, the livelihoods and health conditions of almost 2,000 women working in food processing have been improved through UNIDO’s installation of energy efficient cook stoves and promotion of universal access to cleaner technologies.

Yet, despite the clear benefits of women’s economic participation, the reality is that women still remain the most underutilized asset in the global economy. Women are more economically excluded than men on virtually every global measure. The UN estimates that globally almost half of women’s productive potential is unutilized, compared to about one-fifth of men’s. Aggregate productivity growth and industrial development are adversely affected by underutilization of women’s potential. We cannot afford this to continue. As governments struggle to stimulate their economies, momentum is therefore growing for an inclusive and sustainable industrial era that will focus on effectively tapping into the enormous pool of female talent. Realizing the potential of inclusive and sustainable industrial development and combining our efforts for the common good through partnerships with all stakeholders will be the top priority for UNIDO as we witness and support the discussion on the post-2015 development agenda and beyond. By encouraging investment in women-owned businesses, strengthening female networks, improving access to markets and providing training, technology and clean energy solutions for inclusive and sustainable industrial development, UNIDO is helping to create a world where women can thrive.

There is much more to do, and we each have a role to play. Today, on International Women’s Day, I encourage you to join us in investing in women and girls for the full realization of their rights, their potential, and their contribution to sustainable development and shared prosperity.

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How the International Women’s Day has been commemorated around the world:

- See UNIDO’s video for the International Women’s Day
- Click here to read the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon’s message for IWD 2014.
- Click here to see the message of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, for International Women’s Day 2014, and here to see the newly launched HeforShe campaign.
- Watch the webcast of the UN IWD debate with Ban Ki-moon, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Hillary Clinton and other dignitaries.
- The #UN has manifested the International #WomensDay since 1975. See how it was marked this year on Twitter! Follow the hashtags and join the conversation now! #IWD2014 #EqualityMeansJobs #HeforShe
- Check out the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women taking place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 10 to 21 March 2014.