

**Statement by the Minister of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment as a special Guest at the International Trade Centre (ITC Joint Advisory Group in Geneva 10<sup>th</sup> July 2017**

**Ambassador of Australia (The Moderator)**  
**Executive Director of the ITC**  
**Secretary General UNCTAD**  
**Director General WTO**  
**Ambassadors**  
**Ladies and gentlemen**

Good morning to you all. First and foremost I bring you best greetings and wishes from the New Gambia. New in the sense that if you may all recall that on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, the Gambian people decided at the ballot box for a better Gambia.

When the defeated President refused to cede power, The Gambia was put in the spotlight throughout the world. During this event, the Gambian people remained resilient and determined to the cause and of their hard earned change. The world applauded us and stood by us. We, as the new government, are aware of all the support and encouragement we received from people and organizations – many are present here today. In that regard, I would like to seize this opportunity to once again extend to your countries, government, individuals and organizations our gratitude.

In the same spirit, we assure all of you as our trading and development partners, as donor countries and organizations, our readiness to embrace the rule of law in the dispensation of our duties and responsibilities. The President of the New the Gambia H. E. Mr. Adama Barrow and his government are strongly committed to uphold democratic principles for the good of the people and the country.

We have and will continue to commit our government to the rules of the multilateral trading system. We envisaged that through this system, we will be able to benefit and maximize the gains of international trade, leveraging investment opportunities, and increasing production and value addition.

## **The Moderator**

I would like to express my gratitude to ITC for the invitation accorded to myself as the Minister of Trade to say few words at the 2017 Joint Advisory Group, with a focus on sharing thoughts and practices on connecting women and youth to international value chains.

## **The Moderator**

To enable us to speak on the importance of inclusive trade for the benefit of women and youth, I would like to align myself with the scholars and economists who have shown that indeed trade opening can be a force of good.

But who benefits from this trade opening? It is noted that consumers ultimately do, because open trade can help to lower prices and expand the quality and quantity of goods and services available. Companies, including small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can also benefit because more open trade diversifies risks and channels resources to where returns are highest.

When this open trade is accompanied by proper domestic policies and measures, trade openness also facilitates competition, investment and increases productivity, and as well as create jobs.

However, in our countries, the question to ask ourselves is do we equally share the expected growth from trade among all members of society? Do our trade policies equally impact on women and men? And does the participation in international value chains create jobs and economic opportunities for our youths?

## **Distinguished guest ladies and gentlemen**

First, with regard to gender and trade - we know for a fact that gender inequality inhibits long-term growth. Unless we are able to address gender inequalities in general, the cited positive trade impacts will not fully benefit the women. The relationship between gender and trade may be country specific depending on sector policies, measures and practices applicable, but research shows that globally women are still not benefitting as much as they should. And when women do not benefit it undermines the full productivity of our economies.

## **Ladies and gentlemen**

Studies have indicated that the feminization of the export labor has been accompanied by a decline in the quality of work environment for women. At the same time, there has not been any considerable positive impact on the gender wage gap. Increased participation in the labor force has not been matched by a decrease in women's share of reproductive and care sector work, leading to a double burden on women's time and energy.

Despite the prevalence and growth potential of women entrepreneurs, they face significant constraints to enhance their competitiveness in their businesses and participation in international trade.

Access to land ownership is also a key factor for women in developing countries who often face formal legal and cultural barriers to land ownership. Women's access to land is central to women's economic empowerment, as land can serve as a base for food production and income generation, as collateral for credit and as a means of holding savings for the future.

## **Distinguished guest ladies and gentlemen**

The use of resources - land, labour, physical and human capital are essential in the trade promotion agenda of countries – thus Trade liberalisation measures should be taken on a multilateral basis and complemented by appropriate employment, labour and education policies, so that the benefits of trade can be shared with all members of society.

In The Gambia, women make up 50.1 % of the population (approximately 1.8 million, 2013 census) but constitute only 38% of the labour force. Women work primarily in the agriculture sector – mostly in horticulture, rice and fisheries and as well as services such as small-scale trading.

The Gambian economy is characterized by players in the informal sector. Women play a pivotal role. 63% of MSME's are micro enterprises and 90% of the micro enterprises are informal with 80% comprising of women involved in distributive trade, gardening and other handicrafts & artisanal trade.

Our women entrepreneurs are predominantly active in rural areas, often in lower paid sectors, and responsible for unpaid care work, they often face barriers to access information, finance and labor - saving devices/technologies in order to increase their incomes through productivity.

**Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen,**

Women's economic empowerment is very high on our country's development agenda especially in the work of my Ministry. The government also has made efforts to promote gender equality through the establishment of the National Gender Policy 2010-2020. The most recent Private Sector Development Strategy 2015-2019 also identifies numerous gender issues that still need to be addressed such as lack of adequate sex-disaggregated data, low skills and limited access to market opportunities for women entrepreneurs, and male dominant attitudes of existing policies and laws.

In our experience it helps to analyse the obstacles from a sector or industry specific lens. For instance, the Gambia Diagnostic Trade integration Study (DTIS) that was carried out under the EIF helped us identify specific gender- sensitive obstacles in the fisheries sector covering the entire value chains – from processing to marketing to policy implications.

**Ladies and gentlemen**

I wish to commend the ITC for all the work it has been doing in the Gambia over the years. In keeping with its mandate the ITC is a strong partner of all WTO Members, especially the Least Developed Member countries, in the efforts to meet the challenges of SMEs and trade, provision of trade information through its trade maps and market information, and in helping to build sustainable value chains. ITC has worked with the Ministry of Trade in the implementation of some of the activities of the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) project ranging from training of cashew, sesame and groundnut producers on quality issues, and also the establishment of a trade information centre.

In addition the ITC's work in connecting women entrepreneurs to global trade, through the "SheTrades" initiative, is particularly positive for our sustainable economic development and

growth as countries. ITC's work on empowering women to benefit from trade to increase their economic growth constitutes an important step in the process to ensure that our women in trade have access to the international market. This initiative will also reinforce women entrepreneurs' knowledge on important Multilateral Trade Agreements, procedures, and as well as market rules and conditions to enable them to enter markets.

In that regard, I appeal on behalf of the government of The Gambia to the ITC and its partners to extend its "Shetrades" programme to The Gambia. With such programmes, this will build the women's capacity on trade, and expose them to the existing market access opportunities and programmes on how to address obstacles that are hindering their ability to trade or export.

### **The Moderator**

Our second preoccupation relates to the opportunities we create for our youth. The population in the Gambia, like in many African countries is very youthful. Youth unemployment and underemployment remains as a major barrier to The Gambia's development. According to the Gambian Labour Force Survey in 2012, the youth unemployment rate stood at around 38%. The rate is slightly higher for young women than men and rural areas are affected more.

Young people's exclusion from the labour force does not only affect generational cycles of poverty, it also affects social cohesion. The lack of opportunities back home has led to a whole exodus of young Gambians in search of greener pastures abroad. Irregular migration – what we call "taking the back-way" is a particular problem for our society. Gambia ranks among the countries with the highest rate of irregular migrants – and that in spite of its small population of 1.9m people. This irregular migration has not only brought unspeakable suffering to those involved, but it also affects progress and development in the Gambia as we lose a whole generation of youths who lost hope in our country.

My Ministry has been working tirelessly to mitigate youth unemployment. Among our chief objective is to develop a skilled, versatile, dynamic and efficient workforce in the formal and informal economy.

Earlier this year, we launched the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) – a 4-year project, supported by the European Union Trust Fund for Migration and implemented by ITC in collaboration with my Ministry and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS). The YEP is here to support and act as a catalyst for the empowerment of the Gambian youth, creating employment opportunities and facilitating the path for youth to becoming entrepreneurs.

With YEP we decided to take a market-led and an outward-looking approach. The Gambia is a very small country with a small domestic market. By participating in international value chains we can enhance our competitiveness and can create quality jobs for youth.

To activate these opportunities we are working with ITC to develop “youth and trade roadmaps”. These roadmaps identify viable business opportunities in the international, regional and domestic market and match these with the interests of our youths. We selected three main sectors, namely agro-processing, tourism and ICT and identified specific areas for value addition where the youths can be key actors. In parallel, we are working with institutions across the whole country to provide the vocational and technical training support and business development services that enable youths to embrace these opportunities. .

This initiative is still new but I’m a hundred percent convinced that this approach will yield benefits and help us create jobs – not any jobs, but quality jobs that offer avenues to our youths to build a new and prosperous Gambia.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In the new Gambia, we want to assure all especially our women and youth that there is hope. The Government of President Adama Barrow is an all-inclusive administration, which is poised to listen to all and take on board the relevant ideas and strategies from all including women and youth in particular in the designing of the National Development Plan.

I am again honoured to have been invited by Arancha to address you today and I hope that you will all contribute to the Roundtable for The Gambia that will be held on Wednesday during the Global Review. I thank ITC, WTO and EIF for making that happen.

Thank you for your kind attention.