



Investing in Sustainable Development



**Opening Remarks
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Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality: The Role of TNCs
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Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this session of the World Investment Forum on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality: The Role of TNCs. I am particularly pleased to open this session, as I am personally committed to promoting a gender perspective in all the activities of UNCTAD, as well as supporting the work of UN Women, with which we have jointly organized today's event.

Not only is furthering gender equality the right thing to do, but we all benefit from the talents and skills that are unlocked when women participate fully in the economic and social life of a nation. Enabling women's potential is central to ensuring sustainable and inclusive development, as well as boosting economic growth.

At the global level, there has been measurable progress towards increased political, social and economic empowerment of women. Significant gains for girls and women have been made in education, employment and health. Nonetheless, gender discrimination, inequality and poverty among women are still widespread, and their continued existence calls for further action.

For instance, despite considerable advances in expanding education opportunities for girls, they are more likely than boys to be absent from both primary and secondary school. The gap between men and women widens after leaving school. In 2013, the global employment-to-population ratio for women stood at 47 per cent, compared to 72 per cent for men.

In mainstreaming gender into our work, we at UNCTAD are seeking to identify ways to empower women in developing countries. This includes research on the policies and measures that maximize the benefits of international trade and investment for woman and minimize the risks. Such risks include greater vulnerability, concentration of women in low wage sectors or jobs and inadequate access to training that leads to improved employment opportunities.

The study we are launching here today, *Investment by TNCs and Gender*, contains a series of recommendations for governments and the corporate sector to ensure that investment translates into real benefits for women. Through our programme on trade, gender and development, we are also carrying out a series of country case studies on the gender ramifications of trade policies. Like today's report, these case studies are finding that trade and investment can act as a catalyst for women's empowerment through employment. However, they suggest that targeted policies are needed to get the most out trade and investment and to mitigate potential negative effects.

In addition, we are focussing on women entrepreneurs. Our Empretec programme supports women's business start-ups and provides training that can help such businesses to grow. We are also publishing research, policy recommendations and practical guides aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs through information and communications technologies. ICTs are particularly important if women entrepreneurs are to link with the corporate sector, whether domestic and foreign.

In many cases, the corporate sector already makes an important contribution to fostering the economic inclusion of women. TNCs are key actors for job creation and can help reduce the gender gap in employment and pay. Importantly, TNCs can also support women's empowerment through the provision of training, skill upgrading and the promotion of gender non-discrimination policies and actions within their businesses and along value chains.

I hope that today's dialogue and exchange of experiences will contribute to our understanding of the impact of TNCs on women's employment and gender equality. And I anticipate that the discussion will offer specific suggestions for policies and cooperation between policymakers, multinationals and other players.

I also hope that this session will lead to future joint collaboration with our co-organisers, UN Women, so that we can, together, achieve more for women across the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's session will be moderated by Ms. Maria Cattai, former Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Commerce and managing director of the World Economic Forum. But before the interactive dialogue, it is with great honour that I introduce Ms. Mlambo-Ngucka, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women. Ms. Mlambo-Ngucka has a long history working on issues of human rights, equality and social justice with a particular focus on women's empowerment and gender equality. Ms. Mlambo-Ngucka I give you the floor.

Thank you.