

## **Keynote Address by Director General of GIABA at the EGDC Strategic Planning Workshop**

### **Keynote Address by Director General of the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing in West Africa (GIABA), at the opening of the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre Strategic Planning Workshop, Saly, 3rd of July 2007**

Madam Chairperson,

Esteemed Development Partners of the ECOWAS Gender Centre,

Directors of the ECOWAS Commission,

Heads of ECOWAS National Units,

Focal Points of the ECOWAS Gender Centre,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honor and privilege for me to have the opportunity to deliver this keynote address on this very important occasion of the opening of the Strategic

Planning Workshop of the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre.

2. This strategic planning workshop is not only pertinent, but auspiciously timely because it is taking place at a time when the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is repositioning itself strategically and sequencing its attention on creating the necessary conditions for a robust and comprehensive regional integration process, including the maintenance of peace and security, democracy and good governance, accelerated growth and sustainable development. I have no doubt that during the next three days, we shall devote all our time and energy sincerely towards this important planning exercise.

3. As you might all be aware, ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government recently adopted a Strategic Vision, which seeks to, inter alia, integrate West Africa into a borderless region where the citizens can create and avail themselves of opportunities for sustainable production by harnessing West Africa's enormous resources.

4. The main thrusts of this Action Plan include citizens' ownership, service delivery, transparency, partnership, subsidiarity, results-based management and sustainability. The Plan will be implemented within a period of 13 years (2007-2020), and will ultimately transform the region from an ECOWAS of States into an ECOWAS of peoples by the year 2020. Such a comprehensive integration process promises to harness the resources of this region, promote synergy, complementary and strategic allocation of resources towards an accelerated infrastructural development, poverty alleviation and gender empowerment.

Madam Chairperson,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

5. Globalization, in tandem with technology advancement, has spawned significant changes in the social, economic and political spheres of society. Whilst this development provides a quantum of opportunities, it has also posed formidable challenges, especially for institutions and capacity building. Thus, the need for organizations to develop the right vision and strategic niche to anticipate and respond to such changes in very innovative and sustainable ways in order to continue to be relevant and competitive in this increasingly globalized world.

6. Development organizations, such as the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, are therefore faced with the challenge of undertaking effective planning for the purpose of setting viable long-term goals and creating conditions for achieving such goals in a sustainable and consistent manner.

7. It is therefore commendable that the ECOWAS Gender Centre has decided to undertake this exercise, which is aimed at preparing a strategic plan that will re-position the Centre and enable it to effectively anticipate and respond rapidly to the changing social, economic and political needs of women and men within the ECOWAS region especially, and in a changing global environment. The plan is also expected to enable the Gender Centre to maximize the utilization of its human and material resources to respond to its unique challenges and for achieving its organizational goals.

Madam Chairperson,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

8. The ECOWAS Gender Development Centre was set up in January 2003 by the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, as a multi-purpose specialized agency, with the responsibility to establish, develop, facilitate, coordinate and follow-up the strategies and programmes aimed at ensuring that matters related to the disparities between men and women in the integration programmes of the Community, as well as women empowerment, are incorporated and fully promoted within the framework of the of the ECOWAS Treaty.

9. Over the years, the Gender Centre has gone great lengths to fulfill this mandate through the organization of several sensitization and capacity building activities at both national and regional levels. The evidence of its success speaks volumes. Yet, the legitimate agitation for a sort of balance, or as some will say, equity and equality remains an important agenda on our development strategy. Without being controversial, permit me to state the obvious: that as a matter of fundamental logic, it would appear that attaining gender equality is a mirage. There is, however, reasonable opportunities to attain some degree of gender balance, and I think this is the fulcrum of the overall initiatives under the framework of the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre: precisely, to empower and promote the rights of, and opportunities for women and children. This, to my mind is very pragmatic and achievable because these are supposedly the deprived segments of the society. I strongly believe that this can be realized within the Millennium Development Goals and within the framework of the ECOWAS Strategic Vision.

10. It is in this context that I have the strong conviction that this strategic planning activity that starts today will enable us to identify the challenges in terms of the attainment of gender balance in the ECOWAS region and to seek ways of overcoming such challenges in a comprehensive and consistent manner.

11. It is also my firm belief that this workshop will place the Gender Centre in a strengthened position to play a pivotal role in the efforts to achieve the targets set by the Millennium Development Goals, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the ECOWAS Strategic Vision. I wish to reassure you on behalf of all the men that are here and those that are not here, of our full unflinching support towards this noble goal.

12. Permit me madam Chairperson to end this remark on a lighter note by informing you that I am a strong advocate and promoter of gender balance, and this is reflected in the structure and composition of the organization I lead. In GIABA, out of the seven professionals, three are very strong women, each one of them is equal to two men in influence and equality! And in everything we do, it is usually women first after men! (sic)

13. Finally, I wish to reiterate that there is high expectation on this gathering to develop a plan of action that is not only evidence-based, comprehensive, integrated and impact-oriented, but also simple, practicable and realistic in its objectives, implementation modality and expected success indicators.

14. It is now my honor and privilege to humbly declare this strategic planning workshop open. I wish you meaningful and successful deliberations.

15. I thank you for your kind attention.

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