



## TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

**Remarks by the President of ECOSOC,  
Ambassador Frederick Shava,  
at High-Level Panel on “Women in Innovation and  
Connectivity: The Role of the Private Sector”  
UN Headquarters**

**15 May 2017**

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Your Royal Highness, Princess Dr Nisreen El-Hashemite,  
Executive Director - Royal Academy of  
Science International Trust,

Your Excellency, Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the General  
Assembly,

Your Excellency, Mr. Maira Mora, Director General of the  
Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to participate in this High-Level Panel on  
“Women in Innovation and Connectivity: The Role of the  
Private Sector”.

It is a well-recognised fact that innovation and connectivity are  
key to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the  
achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Innovation can empower women and girls with new tools to  
improve their lives.

However, we must always recall that women’s role in  
innovation is not only as consumers, but also as innovators.

Given that they constitute half of humanity, the increased involvement of women in science and technology can only benefit the industry and increase its productivity. As such, companies, big and small, have a role and a vested interest in increasing the opportunities for women's engagement in innovation. It is also in all our interests to make innovation work for women and girls around the world.

Excellencies,

Despite improvements in a number of countries in recent years, in most countries women continue to be underrepresented in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). This is the case both in education and employment. Indeed, although the participation of women in higher education has increased, they are still underrepresented which heavily undermines their contributions to new innovations.

To give an example, in 2013, less than a third of those employed in research and development globally were women. Of those women employed in STEM, more are engaged in social sciences and biological, agricultural, and environmental life sciences than in engineering and computer and mathematical sciences.

This is an area of concern because the field of STEM provides skills that are increasingly important for technological change and innovation.

Beyond the formal confines of the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, there are a myriad of other, often less recognised sources of innovation. For

example, there are innovations, particularly in developing countries, which happen on factory floors, in storefronts, in back offices, in family businesses, and in small and micro enterprises. Innovation can happen anywhere where people are working, learning by doing and trying new methods.

Consequently, promoting gender equality as a crosscutting issue and encouraging women's participation in the labour force is key. Current figures show that we are still a long way from reaching our targets in this area. In 2015, the global average labour force participation for women was 49.6%, which is 26.5 percentage points lower than for men (76.1%). This trend is replicated among the youth with the labour force participation being 53.9% for young men and 37.3% for young women in 2016.

In addition to lower participation, women around the world work disproportionately in informal and lower paid sectors. They also typically occupy the lowest occupational categories, earning less and with fewer entitlements to social security and pensions.

Our discussion on this issue would not be complete if we did not delve into institutional and systemic barriers to women's participation. Here I must refer to the unintended effects of policies, or lack thereof, that create perverse incentives to discriminate against women in the labour market. We need deliberate policies that ensure women's rights in the workplace where it pertains to maternity leave.

Further to this, lack of access to and control of productive inputs such as land or credit reduce the opportunities available for women.

Differences in access to technologies is another critical constraint. Women and girls are, on average, 14% less likely than men to own a mobile phone. In 2016, the Internet gender gap was 12% worldwide, and 31% in least developed countries.

Excellencies,

All the challenges I have highlighted will remain difficult to overcome if we do not make concerted efforts to transform negative and harmful gender stereotypes. These stereotypes generally lead to discrimination against women in hiring, training and promotions and could even be enacted in laws restricting women's access to certain occupations.

Often times, women themselves have been taught to believe these stereotypes from an early age hence the importance of education in undoing these mind-sets.

These attitudes are not restricted to select regions but prevail in all parts of the world, regardless of the level of economic development.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The private sector has an important role to play in changing gender attitudes, in relation to innovation, connectivity and elsewhere.

Together, we have to:

- Increase the visibility of successful women today and in the past to help shatter old stereotypes and ensure that

young girls have positive female role models to look up to;

- Ensure that women have equal access to credit, financing and support for setting up small and medium enterprises;
- Increase the representation of women in the ICT and other innovation-related sectors;
- Bridge the gender gap in access to mobile phones, broadband internet and other emerging technologies;
- Integrate the gender dimension in research and innovation content; and
- Find innovative solutions to accelerate implementation of SDG 5 and other SDGs.

We need to act fast and we need the full engagement of the private sector.

Let's together create a world where women and girls benefit from innovation, and women have the opportunity to innovate for the benefit of humankind and the preservation of our planet.

I thank you