

Women's City Village: Empowering rural and urban women

Opening Greetings by Diane Quarless,
Director of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Subregional
headquarters for the Caribbean



7 March 2018

Port-of-Spain City Hall, Trinidad and Tobago

Mr Hillan Moreen, Deputy Mayor of Port of Spain,

Ms. Aasha Permanand, Alderman of the Port of Spain City Corporation,

Representatives from the Ministries of Social Development and Family Services, the Office of the Prime Minister, and Public Utilities; The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, the regional corporations and the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited (NEDCO),

Ms. Jan Ryan, President of the InterClub of Trinidad and Tobago and its members,

Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Representatives of civil society organizations and grassroots networks,

Representatives of local companies and women entrepreneurs,

Colleagues of the UN System in Trinidad and Tobago,

Members of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ECLAC is truly pleased to be a part of today's Women's City Village, as we celebrate women this week.

For us, promoting gender equality and the empowerment autonomy of women and girls of all ages is a daily imperative, and is a key consideration in the work of our Office, through both advocacy and analysis. I am sure by now that most of you are aware of the important global development agenda with its 17 SDGs that the entire international community has committed to implementing. This week we put the spotlight on the stand-alone cross cutting goal on gender (Goal 5) that specifically speaks to the need to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Indeed, *we advocate that without gender equality, development is neither genuine nor is it sustainable.*

Now in the Caribbean, thanks to the activism and advocacy of generations of Caribbean women, some progress has been made in the adoption of legal and policy frameworks that promote and protect the rights of women.

While women have also made some important advances in education, labour force participation, political participation and equality before the law, gender inequalities persist; much more remains to be done for the Caribbean to achieve gender equality and autonomy for women and girls in the context of

sustainable development. Across the subregion, the economic sectors that have traditionally provided employment and contributed to the livelihoods of poor women and their families have undergone significant decline. These economic realities, together with other factors of gender inequality, including the gender employment gap, the gender pay gap, and the burden of domestic and unpaid work, contribute to perpetuating inequality between men and women in the Caribbean and to reinforcing the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

We need to improve women's access to and control over productive assets, such as land and capital. It is also important that we strengthen the institutional infrastructure, such as national women's machineries and effective gender policy frameworks, to promote the integration of gender perspectives in national development.

But this morning I want to emphasize the importance of individual and community initiative to making a difference in the lives of women and girls, and indeed their families as a whole. Yes, I am speaking of the power of the people, beginning at the grassroots level. It is this latent power that we celebrate today in our Marketplace. The theme for observance of the International Women's Day of this year: **"Time is now: rural and urban activists transforming women's lives"** speaks precisely to that power. **Today we celebrate the work of you, the activists, individually and collectively, who have resolved to do your part in making a difference for your families and communities.**

I saw some wonderful, inspiring examples of this initiative at the opening event launching this week of activity at the University on Monday. I saw women working to take control of their lives and supporting their communities, whether through emotional support and counseling or by starting business ventures; initiatives like the work of the Cashew Gardens Community Council, and the production of moringa by the Palmasolar Farms; like the talented artisans of the Central Artisan Association CHATT. We are here to celebrate and support women's initiative; women's efforts to help themselves, and in so doing, transforming the lives of their families and communities.

So we are very pleased to be part of this Women City-Village. It offers you a unique opportunity to interact with and learn about more than 25 organizations ranging from Government institutions, community based networks to local businesses, which will present their initiatives, products and services in this Marketplace dedicated to spotlighting the many dimensions of need in the lives of

both rural and urban women and girls; be it health and wellness, safety and security, financial management or microenterprise development.

In fact, the FAO estimates that 20% of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean live in rural areas and of these rural dwellers, 48% are women. While the situation varies widely from one country to another, rural women everywhere are a largely invisible and diffuse group, but one that is growing and crucial to achieving sustainable development.

I am convinced that we have barely begun to tap the immeasurable potential of rural and urban women. We just a little help we can empower our women and girls to allow them to become more independent in both their economic and personal decision making. Today's event is an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of sisterhood, kinship and solidarity, that will no doubt bolster individual and collective resolve for the work that will still need to be done when we leave this place.

And so I extend my heartiest congratulations to the multi-stakeholder team involved in transforming City Hall today into a 'Women City-Village'. I know very well the effort that goes into putting on an event like this, and we in the ECLAC Port of Spain Office have been privileged to play our part. Time is now. The essence of the sustainable development process is participation. I therefore invite you to participate to the fullest today. Enjoy our marketplace, and leave this place inspired to become an agent for transformative change to improve the lives of women and girls here in Trinidad and Tobago and across the region.

I am uplifted by the words immortalized in song by Denise Plummer:

"When it comes to caring, sharing and achieving, woman is boss!"