



## Transcript of podcast with Hilma Mote: “Africa Must Make Women a Priority”

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**March 8, 2017**

**MR. EDWARDS:** Hello, I’m Bruce Edwards and welcome to this podcast produced by the International Monetary Fund. And on this International Women’s Day....

**MR/MS. MOTE [soundbite]:** *“There’s nobody else who can assist African women. Than making sure African governments make their women their priority, to say enough is enough, and we can no longer walk ahead with 50 percent of the rest of the population remaining behind.”*

**MR. EDWARDS:** Last month, trade union leaders gathered here at the IMF to discuss how workers around the world are being affected by the changing global economy. Hilma Mote of the African region’s International Trade Union Confederation sat down with me to talk about the challenges African youth, especially women, are facing with Africa’s rapidly growing labor force.

**MS. MOTE:** I think you are right that the workforce is expanding in Africa. Africa has the biggest number of people between the ages of 15 and 29—very youthful population. The question is, can we provide opportunities for those young people?

By 2050, Africa will have the biggest number of young people. If we don’t do anything now to structurally transform African economies to be able to add value to our mineral resources, for instance before we export them, to make sure that the jobs remain on the continent, if we don’t do anything about it now, it actually means that we are bringing up young people again for labor on other continents. They will continue to die in the various seas trying to cross to find opportunities elsewhere.

We have lots of mineral resources; they continue to discover many more. So, the point is we should say: let’s add value to this on the continent. Let’s create opportunities for our people. Let’s invest in our people.

If it means that we need people to assist us in terms of skills, that can be done. It can be a program of a few years. But it’s really high time that we stop this exportation of jobs to somewhere else. I think we should begin to do something on the continent.

**MR. EDWARDS:** So, your organization has worked really hard to bring more women into the workforce all over the world. Do you think the situation for women in Africa is more challenging than for women in, you know, other regions?

**MS. MOTE:** I think generally women everywhere tend to be at the lowest economic level, but, of course, more so in Africa, and maybe East Asia is another continent that one can compare a little bit. Women in Africa generally tend to have lower education levels, especially in countries where

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discrimination was institutionalized, in South Africa as an example. And in some countries, it's just merely because of patriarchal value systems that continue to dominate and to prevent women from achieving their best potentials. So, it is a difficult life for a lot of African women.

I think the issue of burden of care is really serious, especially given the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. And as I was saying yesterday, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa about two years ago is a case in point. It is women who mostly lost their lives because they were taking care of somebody who has contracted Ebola, for instance, and in the process because they care generally. And it's a woman's job, perceived to be, to care. They end up also contracting the illnesses. But the burden of care also then stops sometimes women from excelling in the labor market.

In the absence of proper physical infrastructure, for instance, most women travel long distances from home to work because there's no proper public transport, and maybe before then they had to drop a child at school on foot or they had to get up very early and take the child to hospital before they get to work, and that impacts productivity. With all those conditions, I mean, if you compare a woman in Sweden to a woman in Malawi, for instance, trying to do exactly the same thing, it's almost impossible.

**MR. EDWARDS:** And what about access to education? Do boys and girls have equal access now?

**MS. MOTE:** Although in recent times there has been at least some level of equality in terms of women or young girls surpassing boys in terms of primary education, you will still find that there are more men who excel in science and technology. And if you have science and technology education, you are regarded as the best possible person to employ, I mean, compared to somebody who has done maybe health sciences or social sciences.

And even in this day and age, you find that a lot of young girls continue to opt for feminized education programs dominating the education and the health services, which are crucial, but, unfortunately, those are also the sectors that sometimes, even in the public sector, are, in terms of incomes, undervalued, underpaid, overworked.

And African girls tend to drop out of school due to teenage pregnancies and there are no sufficient programs to ensure that these girls return to school, for instance. And that becomes a cycle and affects generations, becomes a generational issue. Because if a mother had dropped out of school, she's most likely not to get a good job and hence—even her children become trapped in that kind of cycle.

And the girl grows up without a lot of role model. A lot of African girls have got no proper role models. I mean, they have mothers who are value-laden—who are, in some cases, extremely religious and spiritual, the only thing they hold on to, but not mothers who are excelling in politics, who are excelling in big corporations, for instance. And then what will happen then? Girls grow up thinking this is how far a woman can go.

So, we do need a lot more African women role models for young girls to look up to if we are going to change the status quo.

**MR. EDWARDS:** So, do you think that governments and policymakers consult enough with trade unions and women when they're developing or forming policy?

**MS. MOTE:** Unfortunately, it's not—I think in the past it used to be completely absent. There has been a bit of attempt in recent times because sometimes it's the donor conditionality. But if

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something is done because somebody else wants you to do it, I don't think that's good enough. You should be doing it because you have respect for your society, you have respect for the views of your people, and you believe that whatever they tell you is what they really are going through. So, it's better to listen to them.

But it shouldn't be done just because you want to tick off a box by some donor to give you money for consultations, for instance, or for good governance, for instance. So, it should be part and parcel of governance that you have to consult and you have to consult widely, especially those who are groups of people who are representing constituencies.

There's nobody else who can assist African women. Than, making sure that African governments have to make their women their priority. Nobody else can help them. Development aid assistance has been there, a lot of money has been pumped into gender work. People have become a bit more sensitive or have a little more awareness of the importance of gender equality, but we are not there yet. And it takes political will, it takes acceptance by African leaders to say enough is enough, and we can no longer walk ahead with 50 percent of the rest of the population remaining behind.

**MR. EDWARDS:** That was Hilma Mote, executive director of the Africa Labor Research and Education Institute, which is part of the International Trade Union Confederation.

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