



PANEL ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

The discussion panel on women's leadership recorded six (06) panellists who took the floor consecutively.

The first presentation was made by **Mrs. Mariam Dao GABALA (Senator - Ivory Coast)**. This presentation focused on her own personal opinions on the fight for women's empowerment. She advocated for an increased representation of women in the country's decision-making bodies. Her arguments focused on several areas, including the objective of achieving sustainable territories. To her, a sustainable city is a city showing existing infrastructure that can last long while being useful to future generations. She described this vision as "building, focusing on human value" and not only on infrastructure. According to Mariam Dao GABALA, there is a need for inclusive participatory development, involving women who are constantly showing leadership skills. Secondly, addressing the food economy issue, the panelist stated that women's involvement is significant from the production level to the marketing level as far as food crops consisting the basis of people's diet are concerned. However, this leadership is not sufficiently praised because not related to cash crops (coffee, cocoa, cashew nuts, etc.). In addition, Mrs. Mariam Dao GABALA, considers the social value of women's leadership as important. However,

she regretted the absence of women at the level of decision-making bodies as the main obstacle to a notable societal change (Government, Senate, National Assembly, etc.). Referring to the specific case of communal management, the panellist ended her intervention by stressing that the main obstacle to the inclusion of women in participatory development is the mentality of women themselves. She believes that women have been educated to remain in men's shadows by playing second fiddle. Change will therefore come through the commitment of women to lead at the top level because they are already sufficiently involved at the bottom one.

She was followed by **Mrs. REKI Djermakoye (CEO of 2M INVEST Niger)**, who shared Niger's experience on the issue. She said that participatory development in Niger dates back 30 years. This is focused on the contribution of women at the level of large cities, at the communal level as well as in rural areas. Organised in groups or cooperatives, the early steps in women's participatory management were the contribution to pooled funds, self-generated funds to carry out economic projects. This model owes its success to the support of local authorities in backing and supporting this initiative. The progress achieved in the contribution of women to the development of areas in Niger triggered their involvement in decision-making and political bodies in order to further promote their leadership. Furthermore, increasing women's responsibilities and resources will immediately improve the conditions of households and families and further contribute to the well-being of societies in terms of health, education, food security of the population, etc. Therefore, Mrs. REKI Djermakoye concludes by stating that the success of a real participatory development requires to rely on women by providing them

with training and support and by significantly involving women in the decision-making bodies.

Mrs. Carolina TORO (Political scientist, expert in public management policy - United States of America), briefly presented the situation of women's leadership in Mexico. She noted that there is an increasing trend of women's mobilisation to claim their rights. According to her, Mexico is witnessing an empowerment of democracy and citizen power by women. This was demonstrated by the strong mobilization of women during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep the population alert and to participate in decision-making. Furthermore, she pointed out that Mexican women exert strong pressure on the legislative power for the adoption of laws. According to Mrs. Carolina Toro, in Mexico women held 49% in the Senate and 50% in the Parliament, which represents a significant step forward for participatory democracy. She concluded her presentation by indicating that women in general are revolutionising the world, they acted like catalysts for the claims for a world of Rights.

As for **Mrs. Espérance MWAMIKAZI (Programme Coordinator at APEF asbl - Democratic Republic of Congo)**, she also shared her experience in terms of women's leadership in Congo. She believes that women's involvement in participatory development is one of the keys to the Congolese model. According to the panellist, while it is undeniable that the barriers to women's involvement are widening, the imperative for women to be at the forefront of decision-making must prevail. She advocated for more joint (men/women) decision-making, as women's ideas and expectations still serve the overall common interest of society.

With regard to the hopes she nurtures for the progress of women's leadership, Ms. Espérance MWAMIKAZI is pleased to note that in Congo there is an increasing number of young girls attending school, a decrease in the practice of forced and early marriages, and the inclusion of women in positions from which they were excluded in the past, etc. She particularly insisted on women's promotion to high decision-making positions so that they can serve as role models for youth and invited men to consider them as their equals. To conclude, Mrs. Espérance MWAMIKAZI stated that educating a nation starts with educating women, and the only alternative to the integral development of society is the development of leadership in the gender aspect. In this context, she stressed that gender inclusiveness, in line with the SDGs 2030, promotes more extensive gender equality.

Moreover, **Mrs. KONAN (Federal of women's associations of Cocody)**, also shared her views on the issue of women leadership. For the first leader of the Cocody women's association, inviting women to these discussions is a sign of their involvement by the authorities in participatory democracy. She also thanked the IOPD for the opportunity provided to Côte d'Ivoire, through the municipality of Cocody, to discuss topical issues. Responding to the question that guided her comments, namely how women's leadership helps in enhancing participatory democracy in our society, she assumed that the notion of women's leadership is at the core of the discussions, and especially given the fact that this notion is becoming more and more prevalent in professional training programs. This seems rather encouraging in terms of strengthening women's managerial skills, leadership, self-empowerment to perform at a high level and to compete in sectors that were previously

restricted to men. She added that decision-makers should consider the social challenges that affect women most significantly, in order to find sustainable solutions for a more important role for women in high-level administrative, political and economic positions. However, she blamed women's domestic and family burdens for hindering their efforts to get involved and participate in solving socio-economic challenges. She concluded her intervention with the hope of a gender parity for a participatory development with an increased involvement of women.

The sixth and last presentation was made by **Mrs. N'ZI Odette (4th Deputy Mayor of Cocody)**. The main point made by Mrs. N'ZI Odette was that women's leadership goes hand in hand with the gender approach. According to her, it is necessary to reposition women in society, starting with the education of young girls. This education, according to Mrs. N'ZI Odette, must include not only the values of family-oriented responsibilities, but also the values of an autonomous woman capable to lead and influence her generation.

At the end of the presentations of the different panellists, the facilitator, **Ms Cristina Bloj (Lecturer and Researcher at the University of Rosario - Argentina)**, opened the floor to a series of discussions. To this end, Mr. PINDOU from the Democratic Republic of Congo, took the floor and asked a question to the 6th panelist. His concern was to know the role of women with disabilities in the fight for women's leadership; and to know the strategies put in place by the Cocody municipality to reach the same level of leadership as those who are in decision-making bodies.

The second intervention in the audience came from Mrs. DIALLO from Mauritania. She questioned the fact that all the panellists dealing with the

issue of women's leadership were women. The third and last participant was a Mauritanian woman who made a comment. The key point she raised was to reposition women in society.

In response to these various concerns and comments, the 6th panellist, Mrs. N'ZI Odette, was reassuring about the situation of women with disabilities. According to her, these women are taken into account, they are constantly supervised and involved in the activities of the Cocody municipality. Finally, addressing the Lady of Mauritania, she said that positive discrimination towards women was necessary for a more equitable society.