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## **UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

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### **ECA Office for North Africa**

#### **Expert Workshop “Women: Source of Wealth and Job Opportunities”**

Tangier, Morocco  
11-12 April 2005

### **AIDE-MEMOIRE**

1. The ECA Sub Regional Office for North Africa is organizing an Expert Workshop on “Women: Source of Wealth and Job Opportunities” to be held in Tangier, Morocco, from 11 to 12 April 2005.

2. The Expert Workshop will be organized in preparation of a meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) (Tangier, 13-15 April 2005), which will tackle the issue of women’s economic participation in North Africa. The outcomes of the Expert Workshop will enrich and light up ICE debates and recommendations on this issue.

### **I. CONTEXT**

3. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have highlighted the importance of women’s economic participation, including it as a measurement indicator of Goal 3, which aims at the promotion of women’s equality and autonomy.

4. Several studies have established a link between the implementation of Goal 3 and other MDGs. According to ILO, since women account for the largest portion of poor workers, it is necessary to improve the conditions of women access to the job market and to meet their needs for a decent job to reduce poverty. For this purpose, it is necessary to put employment policies at the heart of economic and social strategies, but also to acknowledge the constraints, which women encounter, as well as their specificities in the labour market.

5. All the studies carried out on the economic participation of women in Arab countries (ILO, UNIFEM, World Bank, CAWTAR, ESCWA, UNDP), including those conducted by some North African countries, show that women in the sub-region are more and more turned towards the market sector of the economy (formal or informal) in order to ensure their survival and that of their families. This is evidenced by the upward trend (i) of women unemployment rates, (ii) of women engaged in the informal sector (very often, family-owned micro-businesses or home-based work), (iii) of women beneficiaries of micro-credits programmes, and (iv) of women owning micro- and small-sized enterprises.

6. North African women are holders of a cultural capital, which they use as part of their survival strategies, particularly in rural and sub-urban areas. They hold traditional and empirical knowledge related, for example, to the textile and garment industry, food production and processing, basketry, pottery, decoration, ... The produced goods and services are often unique and highly valorized in some internal and external markets. This “cultural capital” constitutes the main asset for millions of poor women.

7. The issue of North African women's economic participation is raised in a North African context characterized by structural economic transformations (in particular, the sharp rise of the private sector, service sector, tourism and ICT), as well as by major challenges (in particular, high structural unemployment, poverty and weak competitiveness). It is within this dynamic and complex context that the workshop will be called upon to examine how to strengthen and improve North African women's economic participation, while opening new venues for them to create wealth and jobs.

8. Experiences have shown that such challenge can be taken up if efforts are deployed in order to capitalize women's skills and to create synergies between employment promotion policies and programmes, with those aiming at promoting the private sector, the information and communication technologies, and the service sector.

## **II. OBJECTIVES**

9. The Expert Workshop will address two main questions:

Given the North African context, what are the innovating approaches, strategies and experiences that could be adopted in order to promote and reinforce the role of women as wealth and job creators?

Given ECA mandate, what are the activities, which could be implemented by the ECA Sub Regional Office for North Africa with its partners, in order to contribute to reach this goal?

10. More specifically, the ECA Sub Regional Office for North Africa would like the experts to address the following questions and, based on the debates, formulate recommendations on the following:

- a. How to transform "local knowledge" held by women, especially in rural areas, into a potential of wealth and job creation?
- b. How to create a virtuous circle between women's economic participation and the development of private enterprises of social services, in view of improving women's working environment?
- c. What are the innovative fields and sectors of activity which would enable women to create jobs and businesses, and at the same time respond to new needs rarely provided for (services to respond to youth needs; services to respond to the needs of environment protection, particularly in urban areas; services related to the promotion of ICT, ...)?
- d. How to transform and strengthen women's micro-enterprises in the industrial sector to allow them creating, in a sustainable way, more wealth and jobs?
- e. What funding systems could be set up, in the short and mid terms, in order to create and strengthen efficient and viable women-owned enterprises?

## **III. PARTICIPANTS**

11. The Expert Workshop will be attended by experts who, given their experience, will be able to provide answers to the above-mentioned questions. Experts will be representatives of governments, non-governmental organizations, private sector-organizations, United Nations System organizations, and research institutions.

12. Observers from Member States, sub-regional and regional organizations, bilateral and multi-lateral co-operation agencies, the private sector, NGOs and universities will also be invited to the Expert Workshop.

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