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**PRESS RELEASE HDR 2015 - Sub-Saharan Africa Region**

## **Greater inclusion of women and youth in work will spur human development in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Reducing inequalities and the creation of work are critical for human development in the region, says the 2015 Human Development Report.

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 14 December 2015** — Significant gains have been made in human development in Sub-Saharan Africa, to strengthen progress there is an urgent need to address wide inequalities and gaps in opportunities, including in work. This is a critical message in the 2015 Human Development Report launched today in Ethiopia by Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Helen Clark, and UNDP's Director of the Human Development Report Office, Selim Jahan.

The report, 'Work for Human Development', promotes sustainability and equitable and decent work for all, through encouraging governments to consider work beyond jobs—such as unpaid care, voluntary, creative work and more. Only by taking a broader view can the benefits of work be truly harnessed for human development, the report says.

Since 2000, Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced the fastest annual growth rates in the Human Development Index (HDI) among all regions - growing at an annual rate of 1.7 percent between 2000 and 2010 and 0.9 percent between 2010 and 2014. Twelve countries in the region, including Botswana, Cabo Verde, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, and Zambia have levels that put them in the high or medium human development group, individually. However Sub-Saharan Africa, on average, remains in the low human development category and HDI levels are still low: a shortage of good work opportunities is preventing many from reaching their full potential and making decent livelihoods.

The region's overall official employment rate is 66 percent but 74 percent of working women and 61 percent of working men in Sub-Saharan Africa are in informal employment and nearly 25 percent of children between the ages of 5 and 14 work as child labour. Those in vulnerable work and the informal economy often lack decent work conditions and have lower earnings than other workers, the report highlights.

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*“Africa is experiencing higher levels of wellbeing and economic growth. Now governments must focus on better working conditions to improve lives and livelihoods, supporting the creation of jobs to sustain people and communities, and providing preconditions for greater labour participation by women and young people”* said Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, Assistant Administrator and Director of UNDP’s Regional Bureau for Africa.”

### **Widening inequality in work threatens human development progress**

The creation of work and the expansion of choices in the region are crucial for tackling inequality, according to the 2015 report.

Sub-Saharan Africa has 500 million of people living in multidimensional poverty – that is three of every five in the region. In addition, gains in human development, especially in health and education, are more unevenly distributed in Sub-Saharan Africa than in any other region in the world, as recorded by the Inequality-adjusted HDI. The region is facing a high cohort of young people in Africa due to population growth, addressing low literacy rates and building skills can help young people secure work opportunities.

*“Fast technological progress and deepening globalization are changing what work means today and how it is done.”* said Selim Jahan, lead author of the report. *“In a changing world, enhancing human development through work requires policy interventions. Unless action is taken, many people, particularly those already marginalized, might be left behind.”*

Sub-Saharan Africa has been particularly innovative in harnessing modern technology for financial activities. Mobile phone and internet-based economic activities are likely to continue expanding, according to the report. But the region is far from achieving equitable access to these technologies: today, only one fifth of the population in Sub-Saharan has access to internet. Greater access could help provide new opportunities to youth in the region.

Services and agriculture are where many jobs in the region will be in the near future, according to the report. Expanding social safety nets, investing in teachers and health professionals, preparing youth for a high-skill job market, and supporting opportunities for collective bargaining, unemployment insurance and minimum wages are critical for protecting workers and expanding their opportunities.

### **Addressing gender imbalances in paid and unpaid work**

According to the Gender Inequality Index, women in Sub-Saharan Africa are severely disadvantaged.

There has been progress in women’s political representation in the region - they hold more than 22 percent of seats in national parliaments, the second highest among developing regions. However, women still face glaring inequalities in healthcare access and in educational attainment.

Women also have fewer opportunities for paid work - their labour force participation rate is lower than for men (65.4 percent versus 76.6 percent) - and on average they earn 21 percent less than men. Conversely, women in the region shoulder the burden of unpaid work - typically responsible for more than three-quarters of the time their households dedicate to unpaid care.

The report urges efforts to improve women's lives by ensuring equal pay, tackling the harassment and the social norms that exclude so many women from paid work. Only then can the burden of unpaid care work be shared to help women to enter the labour force, the report suggests.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, a greater provision of care and basic services like improved water supply would reduce domestic time commitments. Investments in women's reproductive health services are critical for informed choices, the report states.

### **Setting the new agenda for work**

While policy responses to the new world of work will differ across countries, three main clusters of policies will be critical if governments and societies are to maximize the benefits and minimize the hardships in the evolving new world of work. Strategies are needed for creating work opportunities and ensuring workers' well-being. The report therefore proposes a three-pronged action agenda:

- A New Social Contract between governments, society, and the private sector, to ensure that all members of society, especially those working outside the formal sector, have their needs taken into account in policy formulation.
- A Global Deal among governments to guarantee workers' rights and benefits around the world.
- A Decent Work Agenda, encompassing all workers, that will help promote freedom of association, equity, security, and human dignity in work life.

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

*ABOUT THIS REPORT: The Human Development Report is an editorially independent publication of the United Nations Development Programme. For free downloads of the 2015 Human Development Report, plus additional reference materials on its indices and specific regional implications, please visit: <http://hdr.undp.org>*

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