On March 8 of each year, as is customary, the international community celebrates International Women’s Day. The theme chosen by the United Nations, to celebrate International Women’s Day in 2019 is, “Think equal, Build smart, Innovate for change.”

This theme is an invitation to all to not be content with slogans and fashionable attitudes, but to think about actions that need to be taken, so that gender equality is concretely implemented beyond petitions of principle.

Thinking equal should be interpreted as the effort to understand the reality of gender inequality and to take into account this differentiated starting point when proposing appropriate solutions with a view to achieving equality on a socially conceivable and possible horizon. If this requires affirmative action policies that are women-friendly, one should not rule out such policies in the name of equal treatment.

Furthermore, this is the attitude recommended by the Network of local elected women in Africa (REFELA) when it mobilizes for the strengthening of women’s leadership in the political and administrative governance of local authorities in Africa, and when it launches the campaign of African cities favorable to the economic emancipation of women; a campaign in which all African cities are invited to participate without delay. This is why REFELA supports the achievement of SDGs 4 and 5 more than ever, and urges all national, subnational and local governments, as well as all other stakeholders, to support the achievement of these goals.

It takes intelligence to overcome preconceived ideas about the ‘natural nature’ of gender inequalities, or their religious justification. Intelligence implies taking into account social constraints, linked to the historical contexts in which gender equality must be advocated, but without ever sacrificing the imprescriptible principle of male-female equality.

Which human being can seriously think that his mother, sister or daughter are inferior beings and do not deserve to be treated like him? How can social stories influence our ways of thinking and acting, sometimes in contradiction to our deepest convictions? The need to resolutely question social practices whenever they conflict with our convictions and our principles takes courage, because it is difficult to question ideas that are socially accepted norms.

Certainly, for the triumph of equality between men and women, one must innovate, first, in the narrative of stories that illustrate the importance of gender equality for the progress of societies. Many members of UCLG Africa will remember that the matriarchal system formed the basis on which family was organized in African traditional societies, and in many respects, still exists in many African communities.

UCLG Africa is not afraid to strongly support innovations for greater equality between men and women when these are proposed, as is currently the case in Tunisia, because deep down such innovations reconcile African societies with their ancestral practices.

Happy Women’s Day
To all women, our mothers, our sisters, our daughters.