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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by the African Women’s Development and Communication Network, Akina Mama Wa Afrika, Association of African Women for Research and Development, Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women and Women in Law and Development in Africa, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2011/1.

Statement*

We, on behalf of the African Women's Caucus,

1. Recognizing that education and training for girls and women throughout their lifetime is a fundamental human right to which Member States have committed themselves through various regional and international human rights instruments from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989;
2. Acknowledging that in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially Goals 2 and 3, which aim to achieve universal and equal access to primary education, a majority of African countries have adopted policies and committed substantive resources to the achievement of basic education for all, and this has led to a significant increase in the number of boys and girls accessing education;
3. Noting with great concern that although gender parity in primary school enrolment has been achieved in most African countries, millions of girls, particularly from poor families and rural communities, still do not have access to primary education;
4. Further noting that the rates of retention, completion and transition to higher levels of education for girls is still low compared to that of boys, and this is due to several factors including the feminization of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, early marriage and childbirth, the gender stereotyped socialization of children, the heavy burden of domestic responsibilities borne by girls, the lack of gender-sensitive school facilities, the feminization of poverty, and gender-based violence;
5. Highlighting that limited access to quality, relevant and appropriate education and training for girls and women, including poor career guidance schemes, contributes to their under-representation in science and technology fields of study and work, and in leadership and decision-making positions both in the public and private sectors;
6. Recalling that Governments recognized that formal and informal human rights education is an essential component of basic education, but continue to rely on non-governmental organizations to provide this education on an ad hoc basis and with inadequate resources;
7. Further recalling that Governments committed themselves to increase women's access to and participation in science and technology through the Beijing Platform for Action, but that African women engaged in the agricultural sector largely have limited access to agricultural knowledge, science and technology, and are unlikely to benefit from extension services, farm input programmes, and innovative agricultural technologies and research;
8. Disturbed that despite the fact that the number of African girls and women accessing education and training at different levels has increased considerably in the last 10 years, this has not necessarily translated into increased employment opportunities, decent work or higher earnings for women;

* Issued without formal editing.

9. Deeply disturbed that women's participation in paid labour and access to decent work is limited by the gendered burden of unpaid domestic and care roles, which also contribute to the acute time-poverty that challenges African women and girls on a day to day basis;
10. Underlining the persistent social forces and patriarchal norms that segregate women into certain types of employment which are often vulnerable and suffer a considerable gender wage gap, particularly in the formal sector;
11. Disappointed that equal opportunity for women in the formal employment sector has remained a policy issue without much political will or implementation on the part of many African Member States;
12. Having widely consulted, we, the African women's rights organizations and networks thereby call on:

African Leaders and Governments to:

- Take appropriate measures to address the root causes of gender disparities in school enrolment and retention at all levels of the formal education system both in rural and urban areas, especially those that stem from the family and community context
- Implement a holistic approach to education for women and girls by integrating practical, relevant and age-appropriate social survival skills, such as leadership and decision-making, analytical and financial skills, and management of intercultural relations, into school curricula
- Refrain from rhetoric asserting that girls' increased access to education comes at the expense of boys' access, and promote gender parity as a win-win strategy for accelerating development in African societies
- Institute enforcement measures for universal primary and secondary education in the form of truancy officers and other interventions, to increase enrolment and retention rates both for boys and girls
- Prioritize the implementation of sustainable retention strategies including incentives and affirmative actions for girls' participation and completion of secondary and tertiary education, such as re-entry policies for adolescent mothers
- Accelerate the implementation of existing policies and action plans that address the special needs of women and girls with disabilities to access and participate equally in educational and training opportunities
- Revitalize and commit adequate resources for implementation of rights-based compulsory functional adult literacy programmes that include provisions for ongoing education and re-training beyond basic literacy and numeracy, and that are available in local languages to increase the ease of learning for women
- Take the lead in developing and delivering human rights education programmes through the formal and informal education systems, both in urban and rural areas

- Collaborate with the private sector to finance research, and promote women's and girls' participation, in innovation, science and technology at the various levels of education
- Improve career guidance schemes that support girls and boys to identify their talents and areas of interest early in life and provide mechanisms like scholarship and tutoring programmes for girls' participation in mathematics, science and technology programmes at secondary and tertiary levels
- Introduce a component in teacher training colleges on gender-responsive pedagogy both in theory and in practice, to support teachers to be cognizant of the important gender aspect of their work
- Invest in increasing the gender-responsiveness and relevance of school curricula and instructional materials to suit the new and ever changing global environment
- Enforce zero-tolerance school safety programmes to address sexual harassment and other violence against girls by students, teachers and administrators
- Support African scholars, in particular the younger generation, to be involved in the improvement of the educational system on the continent through evidence-based policy formulation
- Take immediate measures to collect gender-disaggregated data to track women's share of wage employment in non-agricultural sectors
- Enhance women farmers' ability to adopt new technologies and thus their contributions to agricultural production by adopting community-driven approaches to technology development, and taking special measures to increase the number of women extension workers involved in research and extension services
- Invest in labour-saving technologies to address the heavy burden of domestic labour on women and girls, and further take concrete steps to capture women's unpaid work in national statistics in order to inform resource allocation and compensate women for their time spent sustaining families, communities and nations
- Adhere to labour rights and standards for women including maternity leave, minimum wage, and the right to unionize

Development partners to:

- Support indigenous research on gender and education in Africa to encourage policy changes based on reliable and relevant studies
- Support multi-lateral and bi-lateral trade agreements that will create more formal, decent work in African economies and ensure that women benefit from this job creation

Civil society organizations to:

- Monitor the allocation and expenditure of education budgets to ensure gender-responsiveness and to safeguard against corruption

- Introduce mentorship programmes between the women in science and technology careers and girls at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education
 - Intensify advocacy on gender-based violence in schools, and advocate against impunity for educators found to have sexually or otherwise violated students
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