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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty
to achieve sustainable development for all**

Statement submitted by the Society for the Widows and Orphans, a non-governmental organization 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Poverty and Rural Livelihoods in Nigeria — Society for the Widows and Orphans (SOWIPHANS NIGERIA)

Introduction: The Global socioeconomic indicators published periodically have consistently classified Nigeria among the poorest nations, despite the orchestrated position of the country among the oil rich nations. Most subsectors of the economy fall below the internationally acceptable standard.

The current population of Nigeria is 192,748,373 as at Thursday, November 16, 2017, based on the latest United Nations estimates, the largest in Africa, and one of the world's highest economic growth rates, averaging 7.4% according to economic report released in July 2014 by the World Bank.

Poverty in Nigeria remains significant despite high economic growth with almost 100 million people living on less than a \$1 a day. Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics said 60.9% of Nigerians in 2010 were living in “absolute poverty”.

That fact stands out in the World Bank's 2017 Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals, which shows that 35 million more Nigerians were living in extreme poverty in 2013 than in 1990.

Overview of Rural Livelihoods: Poverty means that opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied.

Poverty is especially severe in rural areas, where up to 80 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, and social services and infrastructure are limited. The country's poor rural women and men depend on agriculture for food and income. About 90 per cent of Nigeria's food is produced by small-scale farmers who cultivate small plots of land and depend on rainfall rather than irrigation systems.

The astronomical population rise has caused the reduction of the quantity of available farm lands which are over cultivated with the consequent reduction of yields.

Fertilizers from the government are within reach of the urban rich who in turn inflate the prices which the rural poor could hardly afford.

The rural people has extremely limited access to services such as schools and health centres, and about half of the population lacks access to safe drinking water.

Neglection of rural infrastructure affects the profitability of agricultural production. Lack of rural roads impedes the marketing of agricultural commodities, prevents farmers from selling their produce at reasonable prices, and leads to spoilage as there are no storage facilities. Most produce are sold in local markets so as to be able to buy some other needed items, food and materials.

Escalating environmental problems further threaten food production. Land degradation as a result of extensive agriculture, deforestation and overgrazing are already severe in many parts of the country. Drought has become common in the north, and erosion caused by heavy rain, floods and oil pollution is a major problem in the south-south and south-east.

There have been several poverty alleviation programmes; however, these programmes have largely failed to overcome the reasons for this persistent poverty,

which are: Income Inequality, Long Term Ethnic Conflict and Civil Unrest, Political Instability and Corruption.

- **Income Inequality:** The variance between Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product per capita and the actual average income of the population reflects the problem of income inequality. Income inequality refers to the manner in which income is unequally distributed amongst the population. The fact is that oil revenue is poorly distributed among the population, with higher government spending in urban areas than rurally. High unemployment rates render personal income worse. Moreover, the process of oil extraction has resulted in significant pollution which further harms the agricultural sector thereby reducing their income.
- **Long Term Ethnic Conflict and Civil Unrest:** Nigeria has historically experienced much ethnic conflict. Militants from religious and ethnic groups have become markedly more violent. While this unrest has its roots in poverty and economic competition, its economic and human damages further escalate the problems of poverty and increase in mortality rate. For instance, ethnic unrest and the displeasure of local communities with oil companies has contributed to the conflict over oil trade in the Niger Delta, which threatens the productivity of oil. The terrorist activities of Boko Haram in the northern parts of the country have further exacerbated the poverty problems in the area as both human and economic resources are destroyed. Civil unrest also has contributed to the adoption of populist policy measures, for instance, declaration of emergency rules which work in the short run but impede poverty alleviation efforts in the long run.
- **Political Instability and Corruption:** Nigeria's large population and historic ethnic instability has led to the adoption of a federal government. The resultant fiscal decentralization provides Nigeria's states and local governments considerable autonomy, including control over 50% of government revenues, as well as responsibility for providing public services. However, the lack of stringent monitoring systems often leads to corruption that has hindered past poverty alleviation efforts.

Some of SOWIPHANS Accomplishments in these Areas: Our organization has been going on advocacy visits to major stakeholders including government officials on Poverty Alleviation, Good Governance, Peace and Conflict Resolution issues.

We have so far economically empowered one hundred and twenty indigent women and older Orphans on Skills Acquisition and Petty Trading.

We take care of community based Orphans and Vulnerable Children through our 6+1 interventions (Education, Health, Protection, Nutrition, Life Saving Skills, Economic Strengthening and Psychosocial support).

We carry out education and sensitization programmes on Value Re-orientation, Peace and Conflict Resolution, targeting Niger-Delta youths and Community Leaders.

We partner with the Media and Anti-Graft Agencies and have carried out interventions on Transparency, Accountability, Participatory and Open-Budget Processes in Nigeria. This earned our Executive Director a position in the State Advisory Committee for Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission.

Challenges:

- Lack of Political will and Commitment from key Stakeholders is a major challenge.
- Lack of Partnership and Funding for Non-Governmental Organizations to carry out targeted poverty alleviation interventions.

Way-Forward:

- Continuous advocacy, Networking and Partnerships for development.
- Effective, efficient and people oriented policy making and implementation will reduce poverty and make lives more meaningful to Nigerians especially the teeming poor population in the rural areas.
- Creating enabling environment for Civil Society Organizations to operate.
- Empowerment and involvement of rural inhabitants in planning and Implementation of development programmes. (Leave no one behind).
- More consultative and participatory approach will definitely improve the quality of policy implementation in Nigeria and enhance transparency and accountability.

Closing Remarks: Poverty is consequently becoming an inheritance — a dynasty — whereby the children of the poor will, in all likelihood, end up poor. Increasingly, the rich would not be able to sleep because the hungry and angry poor are awake. The key to sustained poverty reduction is access to opportunities by all.
