



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 December 2014

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-ninth session

9-20 March 2015

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Labour, Health and Human Rights Development Centre, 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

The state of insecurity and instability pervading the North Eastern part of Nigeria and its effects on girls and women in the area is making the progress that has been achieved on issues of gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria to appear as a farce. Nevertheless, progress achieved on principles of gender equality and women's empowerment is visibly seen in policy reformations and practices in the country since the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and the International Platform for Action in 1995.

The insecurity and terrorism in the North Eastern parts of Nigeria makes many girls and women targets of abduction in the hands of the terrorists thereby violating their fundamental human rights. Over 100 Chibok school girls in Borno State in the North East of Nigeria kidnapped by the Boko Haram terrorist group on the night of April 14, 2014 till now have not yet been rescued or found even with the Nigerian Government's continual efforts and assurances of securing their release. Similarly the state has not been able to secure the release of the Chibok girls and other women abducted by the terrorist group at different times. This pervasive injustice and inequality has continued in the North East of Nigeria with its continuous state of insecurity and instability. Thus, engendered instability conflicts prove a challenge to the implementation of the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Tradition and culture are also part of the challenges affecting the implementation and the achievement of enduring progress in gender equality and women's empowerment in some Nigerian society in this twenty first century. Women's rights are being curtailed in no small way by their culture, tradition and religion. In Nigeria, some of the ethnic traditions, cultures and religions still put women as second, making them subservient to their male folks. This belief subsists even with the gender policy reformations, transformations, considerations and mainstreaming that is being propelled in most parts of the country. Headships of families are still preserved and apportioned to male folks only in many parts of the country, since some in the society still cling to their traditional and cultural norms. For example, female members of the family are excluded from properties allocation, which include landed properties by some cultures and societies mostly in the eastern part of Nigeria. This is not only discriminatory but clearly hinders women's empowerment. Land ownership in the rural settings of an agrarian society is a pointer to financial empowerment.

In many parts of Northern Nigeria, especially the Muslim dominated area, records of attendance in schools still shows that the boys are still favoured for school education than the girls. All over Nigeria as a country at present, few women are also in politics and leadership positions because the traditions, culture, religions still remain an inhibiting factor. The challenge is to break the stronghold of the cultural and religious barrier that has been the bane in the enthronement of gender equality and women's empowerment in some parts of Nigeria.

The practice of gender equality and empowerment could be made possible by drawing up systematic and continuous advocacy by Civil Society, through continuous public education and enlightenment down to the grassroots. Development of intervention plans and putting in place workshop sessions, through organisation of training programs and step-down activities based on components of

the workshop process/sessions, integration of participatory methodology in training sessions, translation of manuals, the creation of networks and development of new programs and partnership is essential to furthering the principles of gender equality, women's empowerment, justice campaign and social justice. There should be systematic and rigorous documentation and maintenance as well as coalition of other records and information for knowledge sharing including town hall meetings with community leaders' or awareness workshop for community leaders plus media advocacy. These activities will go a long way to impact positively and throw up a team of better informed communities, with basic knowledge of the issue and as positive change agents. It will also generate community based response over challenges and promote popular participation and capacity building at the grass roots. In other words a lot could be done when civil society takes the message of gender equality and the need for women's empowerment to every door step in the most affected areas. It could also be enhanced or achieved when in every subset of the affected society, a pointer enlightened person/persons or group in the subsets could be identified with the sole aim of utilising the pointer person/persons or group as a connector and gender equality and empowerment message vector. Thus the Civil Society will have to enlighten the pointer person/persons or group in the acceptance of the principles and importance of gender equality and empowerment in order to give a necessary push and encouragement to join in the relaying of messages. Therefore the advantages of the concepts of gender equality and women's empowerment over the advantages of society's faith in tradition, culture and society practices on gender issues will need to be thoroughly highlighted, passionately explained and passed to the communities in the language they will understand. This is a way to compliment gender equality and women's empowerment programs and policy that has been endorsed and/or being pursued by government.

Nigeria being a signatory to the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and Beijing Declaration and international Platform for Action and United Nation's Millennium Development Goals recognizes gender equality as a right guaranteed under the 1999 constitution. The convention encouraged the enactment of National Gender Policy in Nigeria. Recently, a plus to gender equality and women's empowerment has been witnessed in some of the states in Nigeria, which included Lagos State (the metropolitan and commercial centre of the country) where maternity leave policy for civil servants has been extended to six months from three months. This package is commendable and worthy of emulation by other states in Nigeria, other arms of government and the private sectors which have more employees in the country. This policy shift is a product brewed from the agitation and enlightenment. This laudable program developed after the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The agitation and enlightenment for gender equality and women's empowerment has also re-shaped the political terrain in the country especially in South West Nigeria. In this South West part of Nigeria nearly all the Deputy Governors positions are occupied by women or more or less tactically reserved for the women folks as compared to 'all male-dominate' political office positions which always permeate the political leadership in Nigeria. The 'offer' has definitely encouraged the participation of women in aspiring leadership positions and thereby making the system recognize and accept women folks in politics.

Furthermore, we should campaign and further engage our national government to re-examine their Development program and gender policies shortly before,

simultaneously and right after the Commission on the Status of Women 59. Advocacy efforts should also include press conferences, seminars, road shows and establishment of gender clubs, gender champions, and gender movements at various strata of education i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary to sustain the campaign!
