



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**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 Umuada Igbo Nigeria, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

After the Beijing declaration and platform of action, there have been changes in some parts of the world concerning advancement and women's empowerment. Women's empowerment has become a household name, but much needs to be done to enforce it in every part of the world especially in Africa and particularly in Nigeria.

### **Women's human right — Women's inheritance**

It has been the practice in some states in Nigeria, especially in some parts of the South East zone that a female child does not have the right to inherit her father's property especially landed property.

In April 2014, the Supreme Court voided the Igbo law and custom which forbids a female from inheriting her late father's estate on the grounds that it is discriminatory and in conflict with provision of the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. The court held that the practice conflicted with section 42(1)(a) and (2) of the 1999 Constitution. The judgment was on the appeal marked: SC.224/2004 filed by Mrs. Lois Chituru Ukeje (wife of the late Lazarus Ogbonna Ukeje) and their son, Enyinnaya Lazarus Ukeje against Cladys Ada Ukeje (the deceased's daughter).

We have been fighting the custom. We organized lectures and sensitized people especially women on their inheritance rights. We are also planning advocacy visits, rallies and meetings to communities, villages, and towns to educate on inheritance rights. Most of the victims may not have access to Radio and Television.

### **Women's dignity and bodily integrity**

Rape/defilement: There are incidences of rape cases in several communities. One of the most appalling is the raping of old women of 60-80 years by young men of 17-25 years. Our organization in collaboration with other Non-Governmental Organizations and Enugu State House of Assembly fought against the raping of these old women in Opi town in Nsukka, Enugu State.

Our organization offers free legal services to rape victims, widows and the needy. We encourage women and girls to report rape cases to ensure that the culprit is brought to justice. The challenge is that victims shy away from reporting because of the societal stigma attached to it.

### **The girl child**

#### **Girls' education**

Girls' dropout rates are high. Higher percentage of young women aged 20-29 in the North-West are unable to read or write compared to those in the South-East. Several reasons explain this: early marriage, early childbirth, poor sanitation, and the shortage of female teachers. However, two reasons stand out:

User fees: Girls from the poorest wealth quintile are most likely to be out of school, and parents say that cost is a major reason for withdrawing girls from education. In theory education is free, government provided free Universal Basic Education from Primary 1 to Junior Secondary School 3 but in practice parents pay fees, which disproportionately burden the poor.

Poor quality of education: Girls' exam results are falling; the reasons for this need urgent investigation. Poor quality teaching is one explanation, but this does not fully explain why girls are performing worse than boys. The challenge is how to improve the culture of teaching and learning for all, including girls from the poorest families.

## **Child marriage**

In Nigeria, 39 per cent of girls are married off before their 18th birthday. Sixteen per cent are married before they turn 15. The prevalence of child marriage varies widely from one region to another, with figures as high as 76 per cent in the North West region.

Importantly, education is a strong indicator of whether a girl will marry as a child. Eight two per cent of women aged 20-24 with no education were married by the age of 18, as opposed to 13 per cent of women who have at least finished secondary education.

The Child Rights Act of 2003 sets the national legal minimum age of marriage at 18. To be effective, however, state assemblies must take necessary measures to implement the Act, and to date, only 23 of Nigeria's 36 states have taken concrete steps to execute the minimum age of marriage.

While data shows a 9 per cent decline in the prevalence of child marriage since 2003, action is needed to prevent thousands of girls from being married in the coming years. If present trends continue, United Nations Population Fund estimates that 4,615,000 of girls will be married as children by 2030.

## **Women and health**

### **Maternal mortality**

Nigeria has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world. One Nigerian woman dies in childbirth every ten minutes. Spending and implementation have not matched policies. Nigeria needs to increase her budget on health care need.

Mothers in the poorest quintile are 6.5 times more likely to die than those in the wealthiest quintile. Almost nine in ten women who have higher education and two thirds of women with secondary education give birth in a health facility; one in ten uneducated women do so.

### **Women, leadership and decision making**

In 2011, there were 13 female governorship candidates, 90 that is 9 per cent of women contested senatorial seats, 220 women for seats in the House of

Representatives and 90 for the various Houses of Assembly; and more importantly, a woman contested a presidential primary for the first time, under the umbrella of the Peoples Democratic Party.

The lack of women in decision-making positions may be one explanation for Nigeria's low investment in sectors that are crucial to human development outcomes, such as health and education. Women are underrepresented in all political decision-making bodies and their representation has not increased since the inception of democratic rule.

Nigeria House of representatives has 360 members. Of these 25 are women. Only about 4 per cent of local Government Councillors are women.

Despite the poor performance of women in the 2011 National Assembly elections, there is an improvement in the number of women political appointees as reflected in the number of women in the current Federal Executive Council led by President Goodluck Jonathan. Out of the 42 ministers appointed before the 13th September 2013 cabinet reshuffle, 13 are women, representing 31.0 per cent.

Similarly, there are 11 female permanent secretaries out of 43 constituting 25 per cent, and 5 female advisers out of 13 representing 38 per cent. Chief Judge of the federation is a woman.

Also, another important milestone recorded by women under the present regime was the appointment of female ministers to manage key ministries hitherto managed by men, e.g. Petroleum ministry manned by Mrs. Diezani Alison-Madueke, Finance Ministry by Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Aviation ministry formerly manned by Princess Stella Oduah. Also some Nigerian Ambassadors like Prof Joy Ogwu, Permanent Representative to the United Nations who is also one time Chairman United Nations Security Council etc.

It is interesting to note that women have occupied important and key administrative and political positions since 1999.

The performance of women as Ndi Okereke Onyiuke, former Managing Director of the Nigerian Stock Exchange; late Prof. Dora Akunyili, former Director General, National Agency for Food and Drugs Control; Dr. Obiageli Ezekweseli, former Senior Special Assistant to former President Obasanjo on Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (otherwise known as Due Process Unit); Mrs Evelyn Oputu, Managing Director of Nigerian Bank of Industry; Prof. (Mrs) Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufai, former Minister of Education; Mrs. Ifueko Omoigui Okauru, Immediate past Executive Chair Federal Inland Revenue Service; Prof. (Mrs.) Grace Alele William, former Vice Chancellor, University of Benin; and Dr. Okonjo Iwela who as Minister of Finance during Obasanjo's administration worked indefatigably and secured a reprieve for Nigeria's external debt among others. Their roles have lifted the pedigree and profile of Nigeria women.

## **Women economic empowerment**

Fifty-four per cent of Nigerians still live in poverty and the proportion has doubled since 1980 (when about 28 per cent were classified as poor). Nigeria's human development indicators are also worse than those of comparable lower middle-income countries. Forty-two per cent of Nigerian children are malnourished.

Nearly six million young women and men enter the labour market each year but only 10 per cent are able to secure a job in the formal sector, and just one third of these are women.

Without land title, it is hard for women to raise the finances they need to start productive enterprises. One in every five businesses is run by a woman but they are constrained by lack of capital.

We thank President Goodluck Jonathan for urging women to form cooperatives and pushing money for them to do business.

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