



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Sixtieth session

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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”**

### **Statement submitted by Hydroaid, 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

Since 2001 Hydroaid works with the mission of transferring technical knowledge on sustainable water resource management to developing and emerging countries. In our approach, however, the goal of contributing to sustainable development is not limited to technical training, but it is enhanced by a number of key elements such as synergic cooperation, inclusiveness and gender embedded in sustainability.

In targeting beneficiaries, we work with a constructive long-term perspective, bringing women and men to strengthen their personal and professional skills that will eventually have an impact on their communities and living environments. The transmission of know-hows thus adds a concrete value to the capacity development of trainees because it becomes a tool for emancipation and empowerment in their countries of origin. Providing education and vocational training, for instance, has proved to be an effective trigger not only for gender equality but also for economic opportunities, as research shows that a higher and correct employment of women and girls in the workforce can increase a country's Gross Domestic Product significantly. As debated in these days at the Third World Forum on Local Economic Development in Turin at the presence of the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, people as individuals, including members of marginalized groups such as women, are the centre of local economic development. As economic growth generates discriminations and contradictions, innovations and a mindset orientated to sustainability are the way forward in achieving better progress. And such elements, which are necessary to reconcile economic growth and equality, can only be produced by people feeling like members of a larger and interdependent community.

In the case of Hydroaid, this process is carried out through technical training designed on the basis both of local needs and in consideration of the most vulnerable groups: courses and activities are free for the beneficiaries, addressed to broad target groups thanks to the use of distance learning technologies, and with a special attention to women's applications.

In the past few years, we have incremented the female participation rate in training courses and we are committed to raising it further. The involvement of women in education and training allows them not only to gain some valuable tools of knowledge but also to open themselves to new opportunities. In particular, the promotion of access to information and communication technologies is a key force for the empowerment of women. Only by ensuring such opportunities and promoting a "culture of gender" is it possible to imagine "social sustainability", as the ability to achieve a level of human well-being equally distributed throughout class and gender.

With the idea of expanding the benefits of the transferred knowledge to entire communities through the dissemination action of trained beneficiaries, Hydroaid supports a development model promoting integrated and inclusive water resource management. In this crucial process women can become the first protagonists due to their traditional role in water management as well as for their social role in the relational pattern of a society and the nurturing of future generations. For this reason it is essential to facilitate women's access to the policymaking process that

affects their living environment, including their local natural resources, climate change issues and, in particular, water and sanitation access.

Is it possible to talk about socially sustainable development in countries where gender distinctions exist? What cultural resources could we leave to future generations in the context of discrimination?

Nowadays, one out of three women in the world is subject to psychological and sexual violence. Yet, in too many societies, women are considered an object or vehicle for physical and material needs with the risk of being trapped in exploitation and oppression dynamics. This mechanism starts from the very perception that women have of themselves, which influences their ability to react to impositions. To this regard, access to information, training and participative processes is not only a way for contributing to development in terms of poverty eradication and higher living standards, but also for triggering the gears of awareness and self-esteem in women. It is this personal growth that can lead them to affirm a stronger role in society by reaching new and different social positions, responding better to forcing and defending their dignity. In this path of consciousness, women will eventually come to consider themselves like a precious resource, a treasure that must be protected. This achievement goes inevitably through an active use of transmitted tools of knowledge and capacity development: by turning expertise into action, women will acquire the ability of recognizing and interpreting the value of their contribution to their communities and living environments.

The increase in personal and professional skills can thus become a strong asset for facilitating the emancipation process. The real change consists in raising gender awareness and orientating the mindset towards a way of thinking that overcomes inequalities. Once initiated, positive impacts on the political, social and economic layers of a country will follow naturally.

Many of our training activities are located in contexts where there are the highest percentages of victims of these abuses. Especially in the African context, where 36.6 per cent of all women are victims of violence, or in the Middle Eastern region, where they account for 37 per cent, and in Southeast Asia with 37.7 per cent.

Although some progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment under the Millennium Development Goals (including equal access to primary education between girls and boys) has been achieved, violence against women and girls is still one of the most grievous human rights violations and much work is left to be done. With the new Sustainable Development Goals 5, commitments towards improvement of women's conditions have been renewed: in line with these principles, Hydroaid will continue to strive for an upgrade in the social condition of women in all its efforts.