



## 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 twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Peacebuilding Solutions, 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

### Women's Empowerment and its Link to Sustainable Development

The subject of women's empowerment and how it links to sustainable development has become an emerging topic over the past 15 years in international development. Much of this can be attributed to the Millennium Development Goals such as Goal 3 that is meant to "promote gender equality and empower women". This includes promoting more women in the work force, gaining access to education, and improving the overall visibility of women in international development. In terms of humanitarian aid, women's empowerment is a critical tool in creating sustainable communities. For international development and humanitarian aid overall, women's empowerment is about creating and implementing strategies that provide opportunities for women's voices to be heard and counting in the decision-making processes that affect their communities. To that end, non-profit organizations and international organizations should strive to include women in decision-making processes, address gaps in access to employment and housing, as well as create safe spaces for women to voice their concerns and ideas.

How can we help to ensure that any programs we create are driven by a gender equality perspective as an organization? Peacebuilding Solutions has the firm belief that women's empowerment begins with the inclusion of women in the decision-making process during the conception and implementation of any intervention or program. As a humanitarian aid organization, Peacebuilding Solutions has designed many of its interventions based on qualitative research conducted in the field. While working in Port au Prince, Haiti, we found that when we approached communities oftentimes the men were considered the main leaders with many of the committees being run by them. Often, the main decision-making is left to the committees but we have found that addressing the women separately has led to leadership for the women of the communities we serve. In one instance, after speaking with one internally displaced persons community, the women of that community decided to create their own committee to ensure that the needs and wants of the women and children were being met. Therefore, during the planning and implementation phases, the women in communities are asked about their concerns or what they may think are priorities for them in terms of sustainable development. This comes from in-depth interviews with the women as well as group discussions. However, the largest and more important piece to this puzzle is ensuring that the information gathered from these interviews is used during the implementation of our programs. For us, this is the first and critical step to developing sustainable practices and strategies.

Addressing gaps in access to employment and vocational education has proven to be a crucial step in empowering women. The many barriers such as gender roles and economics often restrict access to these critical areas. We found that while interviewing women in an internally displaced persons camp in Gressier, Haiti, many of them stayed in abusive relationships because the man was the sole source of money for the family. Creating or providing entrepreneurial opportunities for women is key to sustainable development. For many women, access to employment equals economic freedom. This can be done through micro-finance for women-owned businesses as well as vocational training. Many of the women we interviewed in Gressier stated that training in midwifery, agriculture, and

cosmetology were the preferred areas. Again, by interviewing the women separate from the men, we were able to uncover where we can help empower the women. In terms of safe and equal relationships, access to employment also provides an avenue for women to leave abusive relationships by creating financial independence. Overall, when women have access to financial opportunities and education, communities tend to thrive in a more sustainable manner due to the multiple and varied sources of income.

Women's empowerment begins and ends with creating safe spaces for women and young girls. Creating safe spaces for women and young girls promotes self-efficacy and allows for their voices to be heard. Sometimes, women will withhold information or not express their opinions due to possible ramifications from the men in the community or due to gender roles, may not be allowed to speak during group discussions. So, Peacebuilding Solutions has developed strategies such as identifying safe spaces for women to have group discussion as an avenue to hearing their voices. This can include finding a location within the community where the women feel like they will not be overheard or perhaps ensuring that the information gathered from these meetings is not shared outside of the group. Either way, this creates a space for honest dialog and therefore leads to the empowerment of women. In developing sustainable development strategies, it also serves to address gaps that might not have appeared during other interview sessions.

In conclusion, women's empowerment is not only important but also necessary to the development and sustainability of refugee and internally displaced persons communities around the world. Sustainable development begins with addressing the community holistically. Often women are the backbone of these communities and their voices need to be heard. Addressing issues of decision-making, employment and vocation education, as well as creating safe spaces are just a few of the strategies that can be used to ensure that women are included in the overall discussions about their communities.

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