



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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### Statement submitted by People of Good Heart, 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**

### **Introduction**

The lives of middle class Nigeria women differ greatly from those of most western women since pre-colonial days women retained certain economic opportunities with the social system in fact, before the middle of the twentieth century Nigeria women traditionally played a more significant role in society than western women. Tradition or tribal society in Nigeria expected woman to be significant wage earners in the family. They laboured in Farming, Fishing, Herding and commerce (for instance pottery, cloth making and craft work) alongside Nigeria men.

In fact, women traditionally had the right to profit from their work, although the money usually served as a contribution to the family income.

### **Marriage**

In Nigeria, women expect very little from men in terms of companionship, personal care, and fidelity. Their relationships exist without the emotional elements.

Polygamy is a crucial component of many women's lives. Women depend on the other wives of their husbands. The younger co-wives take on many of the household and financial responsibilities. As women get older they have the comfort of knowing that the burden of their marriage does not fall solely on their shoulders.

A woman's position in society changes vastly once they marry since she becomes a possession, with relatively no rights in her husband's family. In fact, the husband's mother and sisters have much more of an influence over him than his own wife. The wife resents this lack of control or even respect within their marriage.

The Nigerian system of inheritance reflects the lack of male responsibility to his wife and children. If a husband dies, the woman usually receives nothing, although the law entitles her to a share. If she has no children, the treatment is worse. Since property can only pass between the same sexes, women can never inherit from their fathers.

Within marriage, women have an obligation to have children. Traditionally, society blames the woman for a marriage without children.

### **Economy**

By the virtue of the population of Nigeria the potential female labour force is 50 per cent but the actual value is 31 per cent. The proportion of women in the formal sector is very minimal. This is noticeable in the industries and the civil services; statistics indicate that in the Federal Civil Service, which the highest employer in the country is, women are mostly found in the junior categories.

Women are mainly involved in petty trading, selling wares in the market and street hawking in urban areas. According to statistics 78 per cent of women are mostly engaged in the informal sector, which are farming and petty trading. Despite this, their contribution is not commensurate monetarily. The women's unpaid labour is twice that of men, and its economic value is estimated to be up to 30 per cent of the nation's Gross National Product.

Women self-advancement has been curtailed by the burden of reproduction, particularly in Nigeria with a very high birth rate as well as the cultural roles associated to women — role of child bearing, child raising and homemaking.

The Economic freedom was much different from many western societies where women had to fight for the right to work, these traditions still survive in western Nigeria.

However, Nigeria men do not value the economic contribution of their wives, they do not view the woman's job and household work as especially taxing. For the most part, Nigeria men consistently take their wives for granted moreover even with economic opportunities.

Nigeria women lack certain rights, as a rule, men do not have any legal responsibility for their offspring and they often abandon women, expecting them to carry the financial burden of the family.

Women are mainly involved in arduous manual task in farming and food processing. They do not have access to land but can only use the land at the benevolence of their husbands and brothers. Women also have limited access to agricultural inputs.

## **Education**

Lack of education has been a strong visible barrier to female participation in the formal sector. The social pressures on females such as early marriages, and other extraneous factors as well as consideration of female education as secondary to that of boys and certain inhibit religious practices in some parts of Nigeria are the major causes of the high illiteracy rate among women. As the impact of teenage pregnancy and early marriage makes abundantly clear, girls are at a double disadvantage in educational access, especially in the north, where these practices are most widespread.

More generally, girls' educational opportunities tend to be circumscribed by patriarchal attitudes about gender roles, which result in some parents attaching greater importance to the education of boys than girls. This is always the likelihood when the parents lack resources to enrol all children in schools. One must quickly add that there would not have been cause for that if the government has been committed to the provision of free and functional education as a social service. But this is not so under capitalism more so in the era of neo-liberalism when all the concession towards social services has been removed in line with the dictate of IMF/World Bank.

In some families, investing in girls' education is regarded as investing for the benefit of the family she will eventually marry into, unlike in the case of boys. This argument holds in particular for higher education, which involves greater expenditure and is seen to be less necessary for females whose main role will be in home keeping and child raising.

What definitely still exists is the gender stereotyping in the school curriculum and the academic streaming process. For instance, certain subjects, such as the sciences, mathematics and other technical disciplines are tagged masculine, while secretarial studies and home economics are tagged feminine, thereby denying both sexes the opportunities to benefit from exposure to all subject areas or a wider choice of subjects. In general, the female inferiority complex established from childhood through social interactions in the home, including the differential levels of support

and motivation, influence the aspirations and eventual learning achievement of boys and girls.

## **Tradition**

Most cultures believe that it is a waste of time and resources training a woman. Most women will end their education in primary school because the fund will be kept to train the male children. Time has shown that educating a woman is no mere waste of time and the families that managed to train their female children fare better. Women as a powerful force for growth and development, require attention of policy makers. Labour market policies, programmed and initiatives may be developed to ameliorate these situations and promote their participation in the labour market. Empowering women will be making important contributions to the economy as workers and entrepreneurs. However, the relatively low level of female labour force participation rates and the significant regional variation in Nigeria are in conflict with the equity and efficiency goals. These issues; right skills, adequate funding, and timely information will no doubt enhance national productivity.

Nigeria still falls short of the desired result of giving males and females' equal opportunities and equal access to opportunities to advance socially, economically and politically. Evidence abounds of several forms of gender-based discrimination in gender relations in Nigeria. Gender-based division of labour, disparities between male and female access to power and resources, and gender bias in rights and entitlements remain pervasive in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

The view of our society is shaped by religion, tradition, folklore and fables, which are unfair to women by relegating them to background. And this reflects in our social and political lives. Most religions and traditions tenaciously hold the belief that women must not occupy leadership position in the society but can only play second fiddle. And, everybody, men and women, is expected to be a conformist. There are many challenges facing women which must be addressed in order that they will rise to their rightful position in the scheme of things both economically and politically. Female poverty rate is particularly high in Nigeria because of race, religion and social-political backgrounds. Many women in Nigeria still lack formal education and there is the need for emancipation and high-level awareness.

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