



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 November 2019

English only

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

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 Association of Christian Counsellors of Nigeria and Centre for Corrections and Human Development, non-governmental organizations 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

Women empowerment and gender equality in Nigeria: a review

The world has achieved some levels of progress in empowering women and gender equality under the Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, but in Nigeria, we still have a long way to go. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a comprehensive agenda for women's empowerment, aims at accelerating the implementation of Nairobi 1985's forward-looking strategies for the advancement of women and the removal of obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural, and political decision-making. It means that the principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between men and women. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Gender equality includes equal access to primary education between boys and girls, yet women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence in Nigeria.

The economic gap between job creation and growth in the number of job seekers have worsened the employment situation for women and girls. Economically, women constitute the majority of the peasant labour force in the agricultural sector, while most of the others occupy the bottom of the occupational ladder. In the corporate labour market, women face bigger challenges because of their relative lack of education and training, the tendency to channel women into certain occupations, and the continuous heavy burden of unpaid domestic work, including childbearing and childcare. All these restrict the time and energy available for income-earning activities for women. Certain jobs do not employ women of childbearing age, and it is difficult for women to climb to very high positions in some establishments. An often unmentioned form of discrimination is the requirement that women obtain permission from their husband before attempting to do certain jobs or even to work at all. All these obstacles work seriously against the women excelling. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action's Strategic objective F.1. states: "Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions, and control over economic resources." The Nigeria Government, corporate institutions, and other stakeholders should domesticate this by, facilitating women's equal access to resources, employment, market, and trade. They should strengthen women's economic capacity, eliminate occupational segregation, and ban all forms of employment discrimination.

Politically, Nigerian women are a negligible and undermined force. Despite the return of democracy 19 years ago, women are yet to occupy 15 per cent of elective positions in a country where the voting population of both men and women are almost equal. No woman has been elected president or vice president. According to the National Population Commission and the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria has a population of about 193 million people, with approximately 51 per cent males and 49 per cent females. In the last election of 2015, women secured only 6.2 per cent of the seats in the senate, while men held 93.8 per cent. Some of the factors affecting female participation and representation include funding, awareness, culture, religion, party system, and structure, among others. The consequence of unequal status between men and women is a high-level of economic and political powerlessness among women – powerlessness that in turn retards development at all levels. The Government, therefore, should implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action's Strategic objective G.1.: "Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making."

The Nigerian culture perceives and treats men as superior to women. It is manifested in the son-preference syndrome that is prevalent in Nigeria. Male children often enjoy preferential treatment, such as exemption from house chores and an unlimited right to education, the girls can be trafficked by greedy parents for economic gains in the home. The culture equally disinherits wives and daughters. In some homes, women are subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment. Our culture strictly restricts women to the stereotyped role of home-keeping and childrearing, e.g., “She is to be seen and not heard.” The subordination of women by our culture knows no boundaries, and is not dependent on social, educational, or economic status of Nigerian women. Uneducated and poor women in rural communities suffer as much subordination as the educated and rich women. A new challenge and serious concern facing Nigerian women involves terrorist groups using them as suicide bombers and kidnappers in public places, such as markets and worship centres (mosques and churches). For example, Boko Haram in the northern part of Nigeria, the Niger Delta militants in the southern part of the country, and others are coercing women into their trade of armed robbery, political violence, and the fomenting of instability all over the country. In response, strategic objective E.4. of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action aims to: “Promote women’s contribution to fostering a culture of peace.” It also eliminates trafficking of women.

The persistent and increasing burden of poverty of women is another area of major concern to women empowerment and gender equality, and it has greatly heightened in Nigeria. The world data lab’s poverty clock of June 2018 shows that Nigeria overtook India, a country with a population seven times higher than Nigerian’s population. According to the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, 86.9 million people out of the estimated 180 million people in Nigeria are poor – and it is likely that women and children form 60-70 per cent of that number. All of the 13 states of the North East in Nigeria, including Abuja have internally displaced people’s camps. Borno State, alone, has 32 camps, with up to 2,000 people in a camp, and the majority of them are women and children. These are people who have been driven out of their homes and removed from their means of livelihood from attacks by terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, and other ethnic militias. Increasingly, more and more women and girls are driven into poverty and homelessness due to a steady dwindling of the economy, occasioned by poor leadership, bad governance, corruption, inconsistent economic policies, discriminatory policies, and ethnic conflicts. Ending poverty in Nigeria will entail improving the country’s economic productivity and opportunities for all its citizen. This will require investing in human capital, creating jobs for women and young people, increasing financial access and opportunities for these groups in rural communities, and advancing technological innovation. Strategic objective A.1. of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action addresses the issue of women and poverty directly: “Review, adopt, and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty.” In addition, Strategic objective A.2. states: “Also revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women’s equal rights and access to economic resources.” In addition, women should be provided with access to savings and credit mechanism and institutions.

Poor access to education is a major hindrance to women empowerment. In Nigeria, there is currently a lack of a robust educational system, yet every child no matter where they live or what circumstances they confront have the right to quality education. The United Nations Children Emergency Fund supports children’s access to school. One out of every five of the world’s out-of-school children are in Nigeria. Although primary education is officially free and compulsory, about 10.5 million Nigerian children, ages 5-14, do not attend school. There are no schools in displaced camps, and usually more girls are out of school as result of ethnic and religious biases. Women empowerment provides disadvantaged women a safe space, education, and

awareness of their rights; and sometimes comes with vocational training. It is through education that women can gain understanding, appreciation, and the means for expressing their liberties. The gender equity index has been developed to measure situations that are unfavourable to women and to facilitate international comparisons. B.1 stake holders, therefore, should ensure women's equal access to basic education, so that illiteracy can be eradicated among women. Furthermore, women's access to vocational training, science, technology, and continuing education should be enhanced.

This statement is submitted by Centre for Corrections and Human Development, and supported by the Association of Christian Counsellors of Nigeria. The above non-governmental organizations are in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.
