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Statement submitted by Women for Water Partnership, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Women for Water Partnership and its members span the globe, connecting women from different walks of life, having local membership in over 100 countries, connecting grassroots' organizations and global networks. These women's networks work closely together with other women's networks both at global and local level because we believe in women leadership and power is in "numbers" and joined wisdom.

Our statement to the 65th Session of Commission on the Status of Women has a few main themes: who holds the purse, how do we expand the knowledge base and who are defined as the leaders?

The United Nations and member states staged all kinds of events in 2020 celebrating Beijing 25. Yet, we were crying and asking, how can you celebrate something that has not been implemented enough?

We would like to reiterate that Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Beijing platform of action, Johannesburg platform for action and Sustainable Development Goal 5/Agenda 2030, the Paris agreement and its gender policy, Addis Ababa, etc. should be reconfirmed by all member states. We need serious implementation measures, real action on the ground which is a matter of extreme urgency given the COVID 19 pandemic. This document suggests for the Commission to assist in taking action on the ground.

Who holds the purse and what's in it?

Ms. Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund (and formally world bank) said very recently that macro decisions have micro consequences; and added that we should get money into the hands of women. The United Nations Secretary General, Guterres, also made a similar statement very recently. If we want action, implementation, then we seriously need to look at the mechanisms used to disseminate funding – according to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, not reaching the women's organizations (only between 0,1 and 2,5%). Current systems discriminate against women by setting the current type of criteria and very high minimum amounts. Tools like gender-sensitive budgeting are still not yet widely used but could help to identify good and best practice. Access to credit (loans) and financial products such as insurances are also limited for women.

The Commission on the Status of Women can appeal to the donors and sponsors, both public and private, to revisit their practice, use available alternatives and tools and ensure it actually does assist women in their endeavours – so they can be actors, not just victims.

Many countries are currently supporting workers and companies to survive the lock downs as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. However, if looking at the criteria, again the money to support, in the majority of cases, does not end up with the women who are mainly affected. Criteria such as who is the formal head of household, has a bank-account, who has collateral (land, house; see also below), who owns the company is used. Yet, women are not eligible because many work in the informal sector. Again, the Commission on the Status of Women could endeavour to assist in supporting governments and institutions to develop better, more equal criteria as well as access to capacity building for gender sensitization.

The lock-down also leads to women going back to the rural areas where there is no support mechanism or money for them to lead a decent life. Re-migration may be

a solution for some, but only if governments then also support the rural communities with support for the returnees.

We must involve Women

There still is underrepresentation of women in government at all levels including specialized agencies like water boards. Apart from stereotypes existing, the fact that a lot of election-mechanisms are based on landownership/tenure (only 14 per cent of all land and water rights are in the hands of women) makes it very hard for women to get on the elections list. In many countries women cannot speak in farmer organizations or have access to training programs since they do not have legal ownership. Reviewing electoral systems for their impact on the participation of women is crucial. For that reason, the Commission on the Status of Women needs again to also point to constraints since women do not have land and water tenure and encourage countries to change legislation and enforce it. Access to water and sanitation is a key-factor for economic development, public engagement and gender equality.

The Commission on the Status of Women should recommend that more resources are made available for women entering vocational training but also for mentoring to assist them in learning how to take their place in the governance structure. Chairs have to be trained to ensure that women do have a voice and are not just present in the room. Participation needs to be meaningful and impactful. All employers, including governments, the public and private sectors, sports leagues, Non-governmental organizations, international organizations and others should ensure that staff receive training on gender equality and discrimination, and the essential role of women in leadership and decision making.

There is extremely good and educational material from all the special advisers on human rights (e.g. on gender and human rights to water and sanitation); the Commission on the Status of Women and the Human Rights Council should work much more closely together to disseminate these findings and tools.

We can learn from existing traditional and informal ways in which women have a voice. Academics and policy makers need to be enticed to look for these existing practices and advise how good practice can be incorporated, new legislation be tested to prevent good practices being lost.

It would be advisable that the Commission on the Status of Women develop a communication strategy to ensure that findings and guidance from the Commission on the Status of Women reach other (United Nations) mechanisms. Multilateralism and horizontal coordination is crucial here. For sure women's organizations that work with different ministries and agencies can be of assistance here if being timely involved (and supported).

What we (do not) know (yet)

Although Sustainable Development Goal 17.18 is very clear on the need for disaggregated data and give guidance, current practice is that these data are still largely missing or get lost in the high level of aggregation method of reporting. While Sustainable Development Goal indicator 16.7.1(b) covers inclusive representation in public service ("proportion of positions in public service (all basic, life-determining services included) compared to national distributions by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups"), data collection on the indicator has not yet even commenced (United Nations Development Program (UNDP). It is necessary to free-up expertise, finance and energy in order to make this data collection and analysis happen – it would give a major boost to enhance better policies and appropriate action.

Another major concern is the continued focus on Information and communications technology/internet dependent information exchange. Access to timely information is crucial to improve actions and collaboration on the ground. However, there is a big digital divide (42 per cent have no access to these tools at all). In addition, the growing use of algorithms that probably contain a lot of existing stereotypes, is clouding the value and reliability of the information collected even more.

The Commission on the Status of Women should point to these areas of concern, call for stronger guidance for statisticians and programmers to modernize their thinking and ensure other ways of communication being used and supported as well.

And in addition again: National jurisdictions and United Nations agencies must upscale efforts to ensure legal standards are applied to online behaviour, and work with the digital technology sector to respond to online discrimination and harassment, including the development of national, regional and international regulations to ensure parity of standards to prevent online gender-based discrimination both in language and access and secure the safety of women and girls when participating in public-life, leadership and decision-making.

Co-signed by:

International Federation of Business and Professional Women

Soroptimist International
