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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 Intervention Council for Women in Africa, 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

As the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, scheduled to take place from 14 to 25 March 2022 is fast approaching, concern has shifted to helping women and girls achieve gender equality and empowerment in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction.

The theme of the conference clearly coincides with our just concluded research on women and climate change in Africa, “Empowering women as key leaders in promoting community-based climate change adaptation and disaster risks reduction initiatives in Niger Delta region” of Nigeria. It was funded by IDRC and hosted by the Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED), Benin City Nigeria, in collaboration with Intervention Council for Women in Africa (ICWA).

There is no gainsaying that the whole of mankind is currently facing climate crisis that is threatening health, ecosystems, and economies at a global scale. Climate change has and will continue to impact people in all countries, but its effects are being shaped and worsen by gender inequality and other geographic factors.

The African continent and its inhabitants are almost the most susceptible populations of the world, because of the sensitivity and fragility of its natural environment, and its high dependence on environment-based livelihoods, such as agriculture and fishing.

Even within this enclave of vulnerability, women are hardest hit due to their heavy reliance on environment-related livelihoods which includes their predominance in subsistence agriculture and also their contribution to the production of economic crops, and retail trade,

Women are therefore, more likely to feel the impacts of climate change first, and relatively, worse than men.

During our investigation we discovered that women in rural communities are highly vulnerable to climate-related disaster challenges. At the same time, they are the ones relied upon as effective incubators of community-based adaptation strategies. These strategies are often initiated and led by women who play crucial roles in building the social fabric that make such adaptation possible. We also confirmed, among other things that, apart from physical infrastructure

- Climate change has a dramatic impact on our natural resources,
- Economic activities,
- Food security and
- Health

Which are all domesticated with women, even when these women are not carried along in matters of decision making.

It is also a known fact that in African countries , gender inequality and economic marginalization mean that women do not have the same capacity to cope, or have the same access to resources, as their male counterparts, yet these women are the life-wires of their families; the primary water collectors in their communities. As climate change continues to cause water shortages, women may be burdened with extra responsibilities, including walking for increasingly longer distances to reach clean water, or keeping girls’ home from school to help with water collection duties.

Although the African continent has pledged commitment to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, action in the area of equality still leaves a lot to be desired due to the entrenched cultural belief that men are superior to women. Intervention programs will be viewed more favourably if they take into account these local factors, such as customs and laws to create sustainable solutions.

Any serious effort to increase the scope, and scale, of local projects to mitigate climate risk or disaster, as well as, emerging projects to create sustainable social and

environmental change at local levels, must involve the active participation of women as key stakeholders. The reason being that the prevailing situation does not favour them, despite the fact that:

- Women are the Caregivers,
- Homemakers
- Food, water, and wood producers and gatherers
- Women are less wealthy than men
- They experience the effects of climate change more often and therefore have reason to find ways to adapt and promote sustainable solutions.

Several other barriers to women's participation, including a lack of education, also make it difficult for women to lead and participate in tackling the challenges that come with climate change. It will therefore be helpful to

- Give the local women right of opinion on matters that affect them.
- Deliberate investments (or grants) are necessary to address existing inequalities in terms of skills, training and capacity building

In view of the obvious limitations which African women face, the INTERVENTION COUNCIL FOR WOMEN IN AFRICA is calling for serious and deliberate strategies and measures that should be made available and appropriate for addressing adaptation needs of women and girls.

African countries, are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, the region's vulnerability arises from significant exposure to current climate variability and low adaptive capacity.

Presently, apart from low funding, local research on climate change has been generally weak and quite limited and this has kept climate change awareness at lowest ebb in Africa.

As both disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation grow, there is increasing recognition that these two fields share a common focus: reducing the vulnerability of communities and contributing to sustainable development. Improving communication and collaboration between the climate change adaptation and disaster risk management in local communities will contribute immensely in managing the challenges ahead.

Responding to climate change through adaptation initiatives in Africa will require policy makers at the national and regional levels to engage in a concerted effort to implementation actions to reduce the vulnerability of the people to climate change impacts.

Policymakers should endeavour to find better ways of adapting to the changes that are coming, and to many that are here already. This means action on many fronts, to reduce the vulnerability of communities and people, including:

- Strengthened flood prevention measures,
- Early warning systems and sound building codes,
- Planting trees on exposed coastlines,
- Drought resistant crops in dry areas,
- Educating the children and communities about disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

These are likely to include a wide range of actions that can be categorized as structural, institutional, or social. Measures may be graduated into:

- Short-term adaptation- Next few years
- Medium-term adaptation- Few decades

- Long-term adaptation- up to century

Others will include:

- Providing resources to support women's decisions and actions.
- Creating opportunities for women to be agents of large-scale change.
- Collaborating with the locals on culturally accepted strategies/messages.
- Actions must also be tailored to specific size and needs of women.

It is a well known fact that adapting to environmental realities and change has always been the hallmark of women's roles in family and community survival. As the impact of climate change comes under study in vulnerable communities and regions, we see evidence of women's leadership in coping with changing circumstances.

Ultimately, we expect that the outcome of the CSW66 will contribute to socially equitable development by promoting women-led, community-based initiatives on climate-change adaptation and disaster-risk reduction.
