



## Economic and Social Council

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

**Sixty-seventh session**

6–17 March 2023

**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 Rozaria Memorial Trust, 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

Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT) a community-based organisation in Murewa Rural District – Zimbabwe, whose mission is to support initiatives that foster education, health & entrepreneurship for young people, especially girls in rural communities welcomes the theme for the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” and the review theme on “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”.

The theme directly speaks to the priority issues that we are engaged with as an organisation working with young women and girls in rural and resource-poor communities. Limited access to education, poor connectivity and availability of digital tools for advancing gender equality are most pronounced in the life experiences of girls and young women in rural communities with visible indicators related to child marriage, teenage pregnancy, mortalities and experiences of sexual and gender-based violence.

Availability, accessibility and affordability of gender-sensitive innovations and technologies in rural communities to advance social and economic rights, including education, health, justice and other services is longer just an option or a privilege but a must and a right, if we are to bridge the digital divide and advance opportunities for all women and girls without discrimination. We have had painful experiences with COVID-19 where those who could afford were able to continue learning. At the same time, the closure of schools for two years or more in our countries, resulted in many girls falling pregnant, experiencing child marriage and facing exploitation. In Africa, the situation is exacerbated by high levels of poverty, the humanitarian crisis and strong negative patriarchal values and practices. Many research and reports by Rozaria Memorial Trust and its partners, as well as by the African Union Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage, Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda have consistently raised the issues with proposed solutions over the years.

The key challenges in rural communities include poor internet infrastructure and connectivity in our schools and other learning centres, especially in rural communities. The high costs of data are inhibiting factors for access. The challenges around the lack of green and sustainable energy sources for enabling that connectivity. While mobile telephony has been an opportunity in Africa, however, there are still issues of affordability for data bundles, and having the quality gadget that can surf and research. The education systems and curricula in many countries make an assumption that learners have access to technology.

Rozaria Memorial Trust runs a range of community and in-school Nhangas – girls’ safe, feminist and empowering spaces for mentorship, leadership and skills building in Zimbabwe. The Rozaria Memorial Trust community training and resource centre, the library and the Dendere Shelter are all community-rooted innovative services in rural communities. Innovating with culture, sports and technology have been the hallmark, and a best practice in our work. Evident in our work is the thirst for knowledge, of opportunities and equally the resilience informing the community solutions.

We, therefore, recommend the following:

1. Availability & affordability of quality connectivity by investing in IT Infrastructure in rural communities – Services industries that capture, transmit and display data and information electronically have become a basic need in the new normal. Data infrastructure is vital to the delivery of critical services and is required for the functioning of essential sectors of the economy, including financial systems,

public utilities, industrial supply chains, media channels, and telecommunications. So long as these remain below the minimum global standard in rural communities across Africa, women and girls will not have equitable access. Rozaria Memorial Trust recommends that there needs to be investment by governments in Information and Communication Technology to ensure connectivity in rural communities in order for young women and girls from rural communities to remain relevant and competitive connectivity is key to ensuring they are part of the global discourse. Connectivity will also allow women and girls across the globe to share best practices and challenges in order to co-create solutions for the communities with insight from across the globe.

2. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education for girls, so that we co-create solutions in technology that advance gender equality – Mentoring girls and women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics remains one of the most central pillars for an equitable and secure sustainable future of Africa. Along with encouraging girls and young women to pursue stem in education, this needs to be coupled with mentorship talks, laboratory demonstrations, creating links of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects to careers and showing their relevance to society. Ensuring Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics classes in upper secondary school is essential.

3. Leveraging and scaling up innovations with traditional and cultural leaders in changing social norms – Traditional and cultural leaders remain the custodians of communities across Africa and are best placed to affect positive behavioural change which is cognisant of the full realisation of human rights. There needs to be increased engagement with these stakeholders as they also ensure the sustainability of development programs for women in communities. Rozaria Memorial Trust recommends that this be done with a bottom-up approach which ensures that the traditional and cultural leaders are at the forefront of designing and documenting innovations in which governments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders provide technical assistance.

Examples of this include the redesigning of the “Nhanga” as a space model rooted in culture and the “tseketsa ku mwana sikana” which is a model which ensures the economic empowerment of young women from an early age through providing them with livestock and assets for wealth creation. In addition, transformative leadership of traditional leaders is aptly exemplified by the establishment of the Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa (COTLA) facilitated by UN Women, and Rozaria Memorial Trust’s work in Zimbabwe on bylaws on ending child marriage supported by Plan International, HIVOS, IM Swedish Development Partner, ELMA Philanthropy and UNICEF over the years.

4. Innovations with sport – Beyond its immediate physical health benefits, sports can be a vehicle for well-being, and tolerance and a means of raising awareness and lessening gender-cultural, social and economic divides. Sports can also play an important role in addressing and raising awareness of key societal issues. Further sports can be an excellent common denominator for tackling cultural barriers in society, particularly in relation to mental health. Rozaria Memorial Trust recommends that sports be used as a vehicle for driving gender justice for young women and girls living and working in rural communities.

5. Resourcing and funding for women’s networks and organisations – Community rooted organisations are the sustainable infrastructure for empowering women and girls, providing non formal education, transforming social norms to advance women’s rights. We strongly recommend that they are resourced with necessary infrastructure such as technology and green energy source as well as adequate and accessible funding that enables them to also generate own resources for sustaining the work.