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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 Youth Bridge Foundation, 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

Our intervention seeks to share and emphasise how digital innovations and technologies can be advanced and positioned as catalyst for educational progression for young girls in rural Africa. We will showcase the important contributions of civil society organizations such as Youth Bridge Foundation in advancing this agenda in Ghana stressing the value of a multi stakeholder model (government-civil society-private sector) to achieving gender equality and further make a case for education as a tool for gender equality and empowerment of girls. Aside drawing on practical results of Youth Bridge Foundation's work, the statement would also share perspectives from delegates of the 14th African Youth and Governance Convergence, Lusaka 2022 held under the theme "Harnessing Technology and Digital Innovation to Advance Africa's Youth Development Agenda".

Aligned with AU Agenda 2063 "to accelerate Africa's transition to an innovative-led and knowledge-based economy", Youth Bridge Foundations convened the 14th Youth and Governance Convergence, Lusaka 2022 that brought together 50 youth delegates from 23 African countries and the diaspora (Canada and USA), researched and brainstormed on how Africa can advance and position technology and digital innovation as catalyst for responsive Youth Development Agenda. The value and potential of digital technologies to impact youth development was reinforced but two of the striking outcomes was the urgent call for (a) inclusiveness and (b) offline resources particularly in education. Having brainstormed for 3-days in plenary and committee Sessions, youth delegates:

Urged the AU Member States to consider, as a matter of urgency, the implementation of an affordable hybrid education system that takes cognizance of varying learning needs and infrastructure to increase access to education at all levels for all, utilizing fit-for-purpose traditional classroom instruction and commendable online learning activities;

Charge African governments, the private sector and academia to invest adequately and equitably in offline educational resources and infrastructure for rural communities to enhance access to quality education;

UNESCO predicted that the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown affected over 1.5 billion learners; representing more than 91 percent of total enrolled learners globally in 2020. This dramatic impact on the world's human capital investment still carries high social and economic costs for people across communities; particularly severe for the most vulnerable and marginalized rural girls and their families. This aggravates already existing disparities within the education system but also in other aspects of their lives; like empowerment.

Young girls risk the exposure to exploitation during such moments. More girls experience early marriages increase, suffer sexual exploitation, teenage pregnancies become more common, and child labor grows especially in the rural areas where economic shocks place pressure on children to work and generate income for financially distressed families; all hindrances to achieving gender equality and women/girls' empowerment.

Although governments across Africa, made substantial efforts to ensure remote continuing education opportunities amidst COVID-19, there were observed gap in students learning and capacity of teachers to offer quality tuition with the loss of time and need for new methods of teaching. Reliance on technology as an alternative to in-school instruction with a shift from classroom – and teacher-centred model has exposed the glaring digital divide that exists. In 2020 Youth Bridge Foundation championed the use of radio as an alternative teaching innovation to serve a majority

of rural students in the Western Region of Ghana – where radio has a widest coverage at lower cost. In rural settings where personal radio sets still remain expensive, we will demonstrate how community horn public address systems are used to serve households who gather around it to be tutored with the support of a trained facilitator.

By virtue of Youth Bridge Foundation’s conceptualization and implementation of the ‘mobile science clinics’, practical and hands-on science laboratory lessons are moved to hard-to-reach deprived rural communities. Aided by offline resources, students have demonstrations to practicalize lessons.

The Youth Bridge Foundation concur that teachers are at the heart of education and the most important school-side factor in student learning. The overly focus on students; including the girl-child, to the neglect of teachers erodes an important factor. Having established the Teachers’ Volunteer Corps, under the Tullow Funded Project, Youth Bridge Foundation work to support teachers through progressive capacity development including modern online and offline technologies. This has positively affected the girl-child learning.

Fully aware that Africa’s current demographic dynamics presents both threats and opportunity for national and continental development; it is imperative to harness existing digital innovations and technologies to inspire progression through continuous teaching and learning for girls in rural Ghana.

About Youth Bridge Foundation

Accredited with ECOSOC Special Consultative Status since 2011 and headquartered in Ghana with operating offices in Zambia and the USA, Youth Bridge Foundation has since 2005 been a leading youth-oriented non-governmental organization (NGO) committed to youth development across Africa and the diaspora. Youth Bridge Foundation sets agendas to advance youth development through cutting-edge and evidence-based initiatives, research and sustained advocacy. We currently work with a network of youth and experts in about 43 African countries through our flagship programme; the African Youth & Governance Convergence and the Youth Bridge Builders; a youth volunteer corps across Africa.

The Foundation recognises that, youth development isn’t the single responsibility of African governments alone, thus the adoption of complementary and collaborative approaches with government and private sector has been key in advancing this cause across Africa.
