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peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Women’s Board Educational Cooperation Society, 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

Challenges of gender equality and women empowerment for sustainable development in Nigeria

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action towards the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women had 12 strategic areas of action: women and poverty; education and training for women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanism for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and media; women and the environment; and the girl child. These areas are deemed critical for gender equality.

In Nigeria, relatively speaking, there have been improvements in some areas relating to the treatment of women and the girl child. Today, for example, more parents encourage and help their daughters to receive a postsecondary education, i.e., tertiary level of education. This is unlike past practice, where only the sons were trained to the tertiary level, and girls were given out in early marriage. However, we still see a lot of inequality in the treatment of women compared to men. For instance, if one looks at politics, very few women are nominated to a party ticket that would enable them to compete in elections. As a result, there are relatively few women who hold political office compared with the number of qualified women in the country.

During the 2015 election, for the positions of Governors, Deputy Governors, House of Representatives, Senate, Vice President, and President – representing a total of 292 positions – only 31 women were elected to Senate, House of Representative, and Deputy Governor posts. Among political appointments in 2015, only six women were appointed as ministers out of the 36 ministerial positions available. The percentage of women in political position is less than 7 per cent, which is a far cry from the 30 per cent prescribed by the platform for action. Considering that women make more than 50 per cent of the population, we find this an unfair distribution.

The challenges affecting increased participation of women in politics include stigmatization, meeting schedules, the patriarchy society of the nation, low level of education of the age range of women who could participate, financing, political violence, and religious and cultural violence. It is critical these challenges are overcome for more women to be recognized and appointed or elected to political office.

Education is the primary tool with which these challenges could be eradicated. However, the platform has identified education itself as one of the key areas that must be improved for gender equality to be achieved. Education and training can help women to gain the knowledge with which they can empower themselves and to develop the self-esteem and confidence that will them succeed in the economy, in politics, and in society at large.

When women are not educated, their chances of getting into positions that can help to improve their status is diminished. When the educational level of a woman is raised, she is equipped to obtain a better job, positively impacting her family and society. She will be able to play a more equal role with men in nation building.

Educated women will be able to help to proffer solutions to the problems that affect other women in the society. When such women hold elected or appointed positions in the nation, they will be able to use their influence to help other women reach their potential and ensure that women generally, are not marginalized in decision-making.

The 2003 and 2005 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report indicated that literacy among women was only 54 per cent, and Nigeria was still at the risk of not achieving the Education for All goals. Today, the growth of women education in rural areas is still very low. This is further heightened with insurgencies in these areas, particularly the north eastern part of the nation and in other regions where schools are being attacked. As a result, a large number of women remain illiterate, weak, and exploited.

Our work on empowering women with vocational and leadership skills has shown that when women are empowered with education and training, they become more confident and can contribute to the nation's progress through their activities.

For achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is imperative that the world take a strong stand on the education of women. We would like to call upon the government to increase its budget for education and to ensure that more girls are trained from primary school through postsecondary education. Training in vocational skills also should be encouraged, as it provides hands-on experience that is necessary for the technical development of the nation. Importantly, school security must be enhanced to thwart kidnappings of young girls from their places of learning. As of today, about 112 girls are still missing from the 276 young girls who were abducted from their schools in Chibok in 2014 by Boko Haram.
