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Statement submitted by Helpline Foundation for the Needy, Abuja, 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

Empowering rural women through social protections

Social protection policies of any government plays a very important role in giving women access to the labour markets, addressing economic risks faced by working women, be it at the formal and informal settings, by making sure that poor families and households meet their basic needs.

Social protection is a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing and protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, throughout their life cycle placing a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups such as women, people living with disabilities, the aged and children.

Social protection has become prominent in the global development agenda over the past decades with social protection now being included as a target under the Sustainable Development Goals emphasizes the end of poverty in all its forms everywhere especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and especially among women. These have played very important roles in alleviating poverty, among all other impacts that are increasing the cases of extreme poverty.

One of the social protection policies target at women's development is the women at work trends. It provides data based evidence on studies of women's positions in the labour markets, examines the factors behind these trends which has hampered the social protections growth and policy implementations; successes of social protection programmes and goals targeted at women and girls especially in rural societies and explores the policy drives for transformational change.

We need to see the pictures of where women stand today in the world of work and how these social protection nets have aided their progress over the past years.

Today it is germane to link social protections to human rights. How do we encourage rights based organizations in their approach and advocacy for universal access to social protections?

The role of human rights frameworks in supporting the approach in supporting the social protection achievements goals cannot be overemphasized.

The social protection policies if appropriately designed and implemented, play a critical role in transforming women's and girls' lives by addressing lifecycle risks and transitions, increasing access to services and infrastructure and promoting women's and girls' agencies.

We can also deliver social protections through justice delivery and financing the programmes of actions in rural areas targeted at women and girl's equality with their male counterparts. Programmes that are in consonance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will always suffice here.

The extremely ambitious and transformative vision embodied in the vision 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a goal to achieve gender equality, must be sustained and implemented to the later if we can be categorized as a gender sensitive and social protectionist country for our womenfolk. This also emphasized a governmental commitment to its human rights obligations.

For example the cash transfer policy of the federal government, if well-funded and deliberately allowed to fester and if targeting emphatically the rural women, will go a long way to reducing poverty and lead to the empowerment of women. This will enhance the social protection level of rural women and serves the needed incentive to spur the social protection rights of women in rural communities.

We are therefore obliged to be conscious of the importance of the cash transfer programme as a component of national social protection floors.

The impact of social protection to rural women:

- Reducing poverty and inequality, its advantages to the rural women are that it provides a modest but regular income to rural households which also include women to close the social gap between the men and women in rural environments.
- They have the potential to reduce poverty and enhance women's economic empowerment. Women's empowerment is paramount for the promotion of human rights developments and inclusive growth not to mention a basic human rights.
- Improving the general well-being of the rural women and by extension, children and communities.
- Improving other dimensions of her well-being. According to the International Labor Organization's 2010 report, studies on cash and in-kind transfers in developing countries has shown that, in the short-term, social protection has helped to increase school enrolment and attendance and to improve the health and, to a certain extent, nutritional status of people in beneficiary households.
- Social protection policy in local government will also have a positive impact on non-monetary dimensions of poverty, it will among other benefits, increase access to education for girls, quality healthcare and reduce women dependency on the men folks.

Despite notable advances in many parts of the world, Nigeria is yet to achieve most of its articulated and avowed commitments to the social protections of women and above all gender equality. Against this backdrop, social protection policies of rural women needs to be reviewed from time to time by governments agencies supported by non-governmental organizations and well-funded programme implementation institutions created to implement programmes of actions if we are to achieve with other parts of the civilized world the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Social protection policies are nearly absent and consequently not implemented in most rural community governments called the local governments, so the government needs to create a legally compulsory implementation frameworks and guidelines for the states and local governments which binds them to implement and fund programmes of actions. The social protection policies of the rural women is key to the achievement of the gender equality goals. We can truly achieve this through the provision of a deliberate incentivised initiative which will serve as a buffer for the rural women to achieve their dream of economic, political, religious and above all social equality with the men.

Cash transfers have been increasingly adopted by countries worldwide as central elements of their social protection and poverty reduction strategies. A growing number of studies provide rigorous evidence on the impact of cash transfers, and the role of specific cash transfer design and implementation features in shaping outcomes.

Additionally, the feminists argued promotion of girl child education as a tool for empowerment; however it is also a form of promotion of the existing inequality gap between men and women given a number of initiatives and programmes that have been implemented to bridge the gender gap.

Like promotion of democratic governance and social accountability, respect for women's rights cannot solve women's inequality but rather engender gender

inequality. There is, therefore, need for a mechanism that can be adopted as a means to women empowerment beyond the viable need for promotion of women rights.

Social protection is a form of social transformation that can be adopted as a means to strengthening women voices in the development processes at all levels.

African countries where social protection instruments are being used to empower women like Mauritius, Uganda women movements need to engage with the social protection debates for promotion of women dignity and empowerment.

Social protection is not just an instrument, but it is a tool that can be adopted to fight the culture of violence that has manifested among the women especially the rural poor women. Above all social protection, if adopted, is a means for women economic empowerment.
