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Statement submitted by Non-Governmental Organizations Coordinating Committee, 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

The Non-governmental Organizations Coordinating Committee, on behalf of a network of 97 non-governmental, community-based, and faith-based organizations in Zambia, wishes to assert its position in its aspiration to champion women's empowerment and gender equity and equality. Over the lifespan of its existence, the organization has continued to provide leadership and support to the gender agenda and ensure that women's and girls' empowerment is prioritized and accorded the necessary attention it deserves. This is in light of Zambia's implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Legal framework

Zambia has made strides through strengthened policy and legal framework, which have impacted the situation of women and girls. Zambia's Constitution (Amendment) Act No. 2 of 2016 confirms the equal worth of women and men and their rights to freely participate in, determine, and build a sustainable political, legal, economic, and social order status. However, due to the country's dual legal system, which consists of statutory and customary law, there has been perpetuation of discrimination against women and children when it comes to inheritance rights such as land and property, as well as marriage and conflict resolution. However, despite the above, the human rights record for Zambia remains challenged going by the shrinking space for civil society organizations and various governance players in holding government to account and hence hampering gender equity and equality.

Women in power and decision-making

Zambian women's participation in political and other leadership spheres continues to increase steadily, albeit at a slow pace due to the absence of quotas for women and general affirmative action to accelerate ascendance and appointment of more women to key decision-making positions. The proportion of parliamentary seats held by women only increased from 14 per cent in 2011 to 18.1 per cent in 2016, while that of women at local government levels increased by a paltry two per cent over time from seven per cent in 2011 to nine per cent in 2016. In addition, the number of women who have taken up decision-making positions – including the Vice President, the Chief Justice, Heads of Commissions, and Chief Executive Officers of Parastatal Companies – have also increased (Zambia National Women Lobby, 2018), further providing a basis for more women to be appointed to similar strategic decision-making positions.

Violence against women and girls

Zambia has enacted a comprehensive legislation to end sexual and gender-based violence and expressly provide for fair and prompt litigation of cases. However, despite this status quo, the number of sexual and gender-based violence cases reported in the country have been on the increase from 15,153 in 2014 to 22,073 in 2018, out of which 99 per cent affects women and girls (Zambia Victim Support Annual Statistics). Child marriage has also become a serious human and women's rights violation resulting from negative cultural and social norms in communities. Traditional leaders have stepped in to facilitate positive change in prevailing negative attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and cultural practices in order to reduce the incidences of child marriage. However, the strategy has not been fully implemented and lacks effective coordination among key partners. The multisectoral coordination of sexual and gender-based violence has improved the response to the scourge, including positive steps towards availability of support services and the capacity of law

enforcement agencies to respond and speedily prosecute violence-related cases. However, the opening up of fast-track courts in the seven provincial capitals of the country has not translated into mitigating the withdrawal of violence related-cases. This remains a source of concern for the women's movement.

Women and the economy

Zambia has observed a positive trend in the Gender Inequality Index, which has continued to fall from 0.627 in 2011 to 0.587 in 2015 and 0.526 in 2016 (World Economic Forum, 2016). The percentage of women with access to land increased from 14.0 per cent in 2014 to 28.3 per cent in 2015 and 32.0 per cent in 2017 (Ministry of Lands, 2017). The increase in access to land resulted from the country's ongoing reforms in service delivery, reinforced by the presidential directives on land allocation to at least 30 per cent for women as an affirmative strategy, while the remainder should be competed for by both females and males.

Women and health

The country continues to record significant improvements in the health and well-being of women and girls. The maternal mortality rate declined from 398 per 100,000 live births in 2014 to 278 per 100,000 live births in 2018 (Zambia Demographic and Health Survey, 2019). The positive developments in the area of health provide an opportunity to realize the aspiration of universal coverage to primary health care and accord all women and girls an equal opportunity to access services when and where they need them. However, challenges remain with regard to access to quality health services, especially by women and girls in rural areas where health facilities are sometimes inaccessible or inadequate. According to the Zambia Population-based HIV Impact Assessment 2015-2016, women also remain more vulnerable than men and have higher infection rates at 14.9 per cent, as compared to men at 9.5 per cent. This is because women lack the choice and power to control their sexual and reproductive health, also known as choice disability.

Education and training of women

Furthermore, the country has made strides to ensure inclusive and equitable access to education and lifelong learning opportunities for girls and young women. The percentage of women with at least secondary school education increased from 25.8 per cent in 2015 to 52.3 per cent in 2016 (Educational Statistical Bulletin, 2017). However, the quality of education remains a challenge due to largely inadequate learning facilities, materials, and equipment. Girls still face challenges to progress within the education system as a result of unavailability of support systems such as menstrual hygiene services, boarding facilities to cater for long-distance school facilities, as well as bursaries for vulnerable female learners.

Women and poverty

Poverty still predominantly carries a female face and a rural phenomenon with poverty levels in rural areas as high as 76.6 per cent, compared to 23.4 per cent in urban areas. According to the Zambia Living Conditions Monitoring Survey (2015), the proportion of the population living below the poverty line in Zambia is 54.4 per cent. The report further indicates that male-headed households continue to have higher levels of monthly income, with a mean monthly income of \$200, compared to \$130 among female-headed households. At the national level, 53.8 per cent of male-headed households are poor, compared to 56.7 per cent of female-headed households. However, despite these positive strides, the high poverty level among females – at nearly 60 per cent – in relation to the poverty level among males point to the limited participation of women and girls in social and economic activities of the country.

Institutional mechanisms

Zambia has the national gender machinery across government, civil society, and private sectors to advance gender and development being coordinated under the Ministry of Gender. However, due to inadequate resourcing of this machinery, progress has been slow in mainstreaming gender across all sectors of the country due to inadequate capacity building to enable implementing officers to mainstream gender in their programming. There have also been inadequate monitoring mechanisms to determine the pace of implementation of gender-mainstreaming activities at the national level, making it difficult to track progress in a more coordinated manner.

In conclusion, it is our considered view that the twenty-fifth anniversary review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action must come up with practical and actionable interventions by the Member States to accelerate progress for the advancement of women and girls. The sixty-fourth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women must recommit to dealing with the pushbacks around language and women's and girls' access to justice for violations such as: sexual and gender-based violence; entrenched structural discrimination that continues to marginalize women; the absence of women in various leadership and decision-making positions; as well as addressing the changing and unpredictable weather patterns that have had adverse effect on the energy sector, which has subsequently affected productivity in most sectors. The most affected by these climatic changes are women who are mostly small-scale farmers and constantly interacting with the environment given their roles at the household and community levels.
