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3 (b): Population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development

Statement submitted by Women's Board Educational Cooperation Society, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council²

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.

¹ [E/CN.9/2020/1](#).

² The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Advancing sustainable development and food security through the empowerment of women in hospitality education, nutrition classes and literacy

Food is the first in the three basic needs of man, others being clothing and shelter. Nigeria has overtaken India in extreme poverty ranking (CNN 2018) for many reasons, the most important being her inability to harness her natural resources and wealth as the largest oil producer in Africa to achieve national food security for her teeming population and raise the standard of living.

Food security refers to the availability of food and one's access to it. A household is considered food secure when its occupants do not live in hunger or fear of starvation (FAO 2001). Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Idachaba, 2006). Nigeria is lagging behind in all four factors that determine food security (availability, accessibility, utilisation and stability) due to the neglect of agriculture after the discovery of oil, corruption, flooding, drought, farmers-herders conflicts, insurgencies, poor basic amenities and infrastructural facilities.

This statement addresses relationships, challenges and possible solutions to issues of population, food security and nutrition for sustainable development. As a result, it is important to analyse the topic based on the first four sustainable development goals: SDG 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere; SDG 2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, promote sustainable agriculture; SDG 3 - Ensure healthy lives, and promote well-being for all ages and SDG 4 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

It cannot be overemphasized that a country like Nigeria having high population with low productivity will suffer underdevelopment, this is a classic theory of development. Women and girls are always the most affected and vulnerable to the consequences of underdevelopment. Low food production in Nigeria can be attributed to the fact that farming is largely carried out in rural areas where farmers practice subsistence farming and lack the literacy skills, funds and technologies to adopt mechanized farming methods. Families depend on women and children to make up the labour force in cultivation, crop harvesting, trading of farm produce and the final processing of food crops in the home. Other factors affecting food production include climate change, pests and diseases, bad road network, poor storage facilities, inability to access funds, fertilizers, or improved seedlings, and lack of implementation of Government policies.

Culturally, women bear the burden of caring for their families and very often their services are unpaid for and their roles are undermined. Analysts suggest that if women would have the same access to productive resources as men, women could boost yield between 20 and 30 per cent, raising the overall agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 per cent. This gain in production could lessen the number of hungry people in the world. Reducing gender inequality and recognizing the contribution of women to agriculture is critical to achieving global food security. There is consistent and compelling evidence that when the status of women is improved, agricultural productivity increases, poverty is reduced, and nutrition improves.

A way of turning challenges to opportunities for social impacts necessitated the establishment of four hospitality schools in different parts of the country, and establishment of the Iroto Rural Development Centre and Abidagba Health Centre both in Ijebu Ode, Ogun State. These two projects in Ijebu Ode and the hospitality

schools have carried out numerous programmes and services to benefit rural women, smallholder farmers and their communities.

The Ijebu Ode area is well known for cassava growing and the women are responsible for cultivating this crop while the men often seek formal work in the towns. The end product of the cassava, garri, is a popular carbohydrate that costs many hours of work harvesting, peeling, grinding the tuber and frying the end products. The Iroto Rural Centre introduced simple methods to ease the work of the women on the farm and bring better results through classes given to them in literacy and other related topics. The women began to develop self-esteem and confidence and having been situated in a subservient place in their society, started to realize the great potential they have.

The health centre in line, with one of UNICEF's child survival strategies, embraces female literacy which ultimately aids better nutrition for the children and family life improvement. It attends to common and treatable ailments and offers classes in nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, child care and elementary medicine with obvious benefit to the health of the community. The nurses and doctors go to the homes of women in the villages to teach them practical ways of supplementing food products necessary for well-balanced diet, the use of soya beans and their by-products and new ways to prepare vegetables.

The people began to recognize early symptoms and realize the importance of early treatment of diseases such as Kwashiorkor, beriberi, scurvy, rickets, diarrhea and other infectious diseases. The oral rehydration therapy is now well known and well used, frequently saving lives of the infants of these villages.

Our organization supports families and national development by setting up hospitality schools. Hospitality services is the backbone of the family and society as it takes care of the essential needs of man. It is paramount for humanity to promote this profession, which has a lot to offer the family and society. In addition, hospitality is one of the professions where a woman through the delicacy of her intuitive perception can excel. We impart the professional skills needed to take care of these basic needs of man and thus help women acquire a professional approach in running their homes, employments and businesses.

We give entrepreneurship skills to young girls and women from underprivileged background low-income families in the towns and surrounding villages. This way, the school focuses on achieving the SDGs especially 1 and 2. Thus, these girls are able to break the vicious cycle of poverty and do not succumb to the pressure of early marriage, involuntary domestic servitude and falling prey to the lures of traffickers.

One testimony of the impact of hospitality training given to young girls is told by Faustina, a former student of one of the schools. Faustina's family, although originally from the southeast of Nigeria, lived in northern Nigeria where her father earned his living as a welder. When the Boko Haram attacks became dangerous, he fled with his family to the city of Benin, in southern Nigeria. He established himself as a bus driver in his new city, but without improved economic condition. The family got in touch with a lady who knew about the Iroto School of Hospitality. Faustina has recently completed her two-year course and is undergoing her industrial training in Ibadan. She is very happy that she can now help her family and her younger brothers and sisters.

We are challenged with a lack of funds to expand the structures of the schools to admit more young girls, adequately equip the schools to industry standard, transportation, finance and lack of personnel willing to stay in rural communities. We hereby recommend diversification of the economy and investment in health and education; government intervention to increase agricultural production; promotion of

education of women for human and social development; investment and empowerment of youth in rural areas to encourage a reduction in rural-urban migration.

Our organization has come a long way since its inception, the road ahead is wide and long and in spite of the challenges the vision of the future is a stimulus to do more and better. Partnership in the three sectors (government, private sector and civil society) of the economy is the most successful way to achieve the sustainable development goals for food security to match the growth rate of population.
