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Statement submitted by African Aid Organization, Generation Initiative for Women and Youth Network, Idara-i-Talim-o-Aaghai (Centre for Education and Consciousness) Public Trust, Reach Out (REO) “N.G.O.”, non-governmental organizations 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

Three years have passed since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and national policies and programs designed to achieve the goals are steadily being rolled out around the world. There is a general consensus that gender equality and the inclusion of grassroots women and girls' voices in all Sustainable Development Goals-related decision-making processes is crucial to the success and sustainability of poverty eradication initiatives and programs. The achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 demands an inclusive, intersectional, and bottom-up strategy that places grassroots women and girls at the center of the design, implementation, and evaluation of strategies to end poverty and gender inequality.

Women Thrive Alliance, an initiative of Women Thrive Worldwide, unites and mobilizes 300 grassroots women's rights and gender equality organizations in over 50 countries to make sure governments deliver on their promise of reaching gender equality by 2030, in a way that prioritizes grassroots women's needs and solutions. In 2017, Women Thrive Alliance identified two main barriers to the inclusion of grassroots women and girls in Sustainable Development Goals-era implementation processes.

First, governments are not doing enough to actively engage and include grassroots women's rights and gender equality organizations in their efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals 5, in particular. Women Thrive Alliance collected data from 130 grassroots groups in 32 countries to measure their participation in government-led Sustainable Development Goal-related policy-making. Results from the data collected highlight that exclusionary decision-making structures, lack of political will on the part of decision-makers, difficult access to decision-making spaces, and lack of funding all impede their meaningful participation in these decision-making processes. Indeed, 73 per cent of surveyed grassroots women's rights groups have not been consulted by their government in Sustainable Development Goals-related decision-making processes; 60 per cent have not been invited by their government to Goal 5-related events or meetings (despite 59 per cent reaching out to their relevant government ministries or agencies); and 45 per cent do not feel that the needs of grassroots women and girls are reflected in the government's implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Second, Sustainable Development Goal-related funding and resources are not reaching grassroots women's rights and gender equality organizations, who need this critical funding to participate in national policy-making. The data collected shows that 79 per cent of those surveyed do not know where to identify donors who fund their work (specifically, advocacy) and 87 per cent have not secured funding for Goal 5-related programming.

In light of this evidence, Women Thrive Alliance members set forth the following recommendations for participants in the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women:

Governments should intensify their efforts to actively include grassroots women's rights and gender equality advocates in national-level Sustainable Development Goal-related policy-making and ensure their meaningful participation. Despite a narrative that promotes grassroots women's involvement and participation, key development players are still not seeing grassroots women or their advocates as equal partners. Their contributions must be at the center of development policy-

making — at both the national and global levels — to ensure that the needs, priorities, and solutions of women, particularly those living in poverty and rural settings, are reflected in development programs. As expressed by Women Thrive Alliance members in the development of this statement, rural women and girls need to tell their stories themselves if, in fact, no-one is to be left behind in the implementation process of the Sustainable Development Goals. As such, women and girls (and grassroots organizations as their conduits) need to be meaningful contributors in policy conversations that affect their lives, and not consultative or tokenistic witnesses.

Governments should expand and maintain civic spaces that allow civil society (and grassroots women’s rights advocates in particular) to advocate for their priorities and dialogue with decision-makers at local and national levels. The first three years of the Sustainable Development Goal framework have seen an alarming increase in attacks on and active closing of civic space, threats against women human rights defenders, and backlash on women’s rights in general. Public commitment to maintaining safe and active civic spaces are important if the Sustainable Development Goals are to be the inclusive and participatory process they set out to be.

The intersectionality of women and girls’ experiences and struggles must be reflected in the design of policies defining and programs implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, Agenda 2030 has ensured that gender issues cut across all goals and are also honoured in the standalone Sustainable Development Goal 5. However, thus far implementation processes have not broken the thematic silos that have traditionally (through existent policies, programs, and financing models) boxed in the various inequalities and violations women and girls face as if they were separable. Instead, governments should acknowledge that the struggles women and girls face related to violence, poverty, education, economic disenfranchisement, and political under-representation are inseparable and therefore, can only be addressed holistically. Policies and programs should reflect the diversity and interrelated experiences of women and girls, particularly in rural contexts, by consulting directly with grassroots and rural women’s rights organizations and advocates.

Governments and other development stakeholders must invest in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 by directly funding grassroots women’s rights and gender equality organizations. Grassroots groups have the needed experience in, understanding of, and access to communities necessary to effectively and sustainably implement and achieve the promises of the Sustainable Development Goals. Without direct and robust funding for their work, grassroots civil society cannot do their jobs nor ensure that no-one is indeed left behind.

This statement is endorsed by the following organizations:

African Aid Organization

Generation Initiative For Women and Youth Network (GIWYN)

Idara-E-Taleem-o-Aaghai Public Trust

Reach Out Cameroon