



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
11 November 2024

English only

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-ninth session

10–21 March 2025

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

“The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) of 1995 is a visionary agenda for the empowerment of women. It still remains today the most comprehensive global policy framework and blueprint for action, and is a current source of guidance and inspiration to realize gender equality and the human rights of women and girls, everywhere”. (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome, reprinted by UN Women, 2014, Introduction).

The 23rd special session of the United Nations General Assembly, held in 1999, reaffirmed commitments made in Beijing and reviewed progress in implementing the BPfA. The year 2025 will mark 30 years since 189 Member States adopted the BPfA. This significant milestone cannot be marked without an assessment of the current challenges that affect the implementation of the BPfA since its inception and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Platform for Action covers twelve critical areas of concern that are as relevant today as almost 30 years ago: poverty; education and training; health; violence; armed conflict; economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights; media; environment; and the girl child. These areas have a crucial role in enhancing developmental outcomes, including prospects for the coming generation and driving sustainable development.

According to the Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The gender snapshot 2024, progress has been too slow to meet the 2030 deadline, not a single indicator under Goal 5, gender equality, has been fully achieved. “Overall, 24.3 million more females live in extreme poverty compared to males. By 2030, a projected 8.1 per cent of females (compared to 7.6 per cent of males) will linger in extreme poverty, missing the SDG target. Ending extreme poverty for women and girls will take an additional 137 years if this trend continues”.

### **Africa Regional Beijing + 25 Review**

In the assessment of the progress of the BPfA, the Africa Regional Review Summary Report 2015–2019, states that African countries have continued to review, adopt and maintain socioeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty. In line with SDG 5, many governments in Africa either prioritize to implement, or have implemented, a range of gender-responsive social protection interventions, mainly contributory social security systems, non-conditional cash transfers, and public works programs. There are also direct income support programmes that involve direct funding or social grants to vulnerable and excluded groups, such as women and girls.

In Nigeria, 2015 the education ministry joined up with several development partners to launch the ‘Safe Schools Initiative’, boosting enrolments. In 2018, another Federal Ministry collaboration with development partners dubbed ‘Education Cannot Wait’ provided safe and equitable access for 194,000 conflict affected children, 52 per cent of whom were girls.

### **Nigerian National Beijing + 25 Review**

The national report stated that the Government of Nigeria is continually seeking entry points which enable a focus on improving the situation of women and girls through multi-sector collaboration and partnerships at different levels. ‘Within the past five years, Nigeria has made tangible progress in the following areas, when it comes to progress with gender equality and the empowerment of women: Equality and non-discrimination under the law; Gender responsive social investment

programming and budgets; Poverty eradication, agricultural productivity and food security; Women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises; Digital and financial inclusion for women, among other achievements. It is important to emphasize that the achievements of the past five years would not have been possible without the hard work and sustained engagement of women focused non-governmental organizations and women's rights activists within the academia'.

### **The role of Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) in achieving the BPfA**

We cannot overemphasize the fact that it is only through strengthening women's economic, social, political, legal, and cultural standing that sustainable development and economic progress can be achieved. The cornerstone of sustainable development is equitable social development, which acknowledges the importance of enabling the disadvantaged, especially women, access to environmental resources and economic opportunities.

In view of this, NGOs have been influential in shaping the current global policy framework on women's empowerment and gender equality. As the third sector, at national and international levels they are always in the forefront of service delivery to the needy and pursuit of human development, human rights, humanitarian action and other public actions thereby lightening the burden of women for a balanced and sustainable development.

Across the nation, several organizations are centering efforts on driving progress by empowering women in Nigeria and their communities. With the help of Women's World Banking efforts in Nigeria, the country has achieved a historic milestone with women holding the position of Chief Executive Officer in eight out of its 24 commercial banks in 2022. (The Borgen Project 2023)

As an NGO, our work addresses some of the critical areas of concern that hinder the achievement of women empowerment and equality through our thematic focus in education, leadership and health. We appreciate that employment opportunities are critical for women to achieve equality; hence, we operate four hospitality schools in Nigeria which promote women gaining access to education and training. Over the years, we have helped over five thousand women and girls graduate into paid employment and entrepreneurship; allowing them to compete in the labour market, enhance their personal development and improve their quality of life.

Within the period of July 2022 to November 2023, we successfully completed a partnership project which empowered returned migrants and women at risk of irregular migration with employable and entrepreneurial skills. In five batches of fifteen women each, seventy-five women were empowered with culinary, business and entrepreneurship skills, mentoring, time management tips, human rights knowledge and effects of irregular migration. Building on the success of this project, sixteen vulnerable women earlier trained were assisted to transition from training to entrepreneurship. They received additional financial literacy, business development sessions, mentoring and seed funding for their startup ventures. The project which started in May will end in October 2024.

### **Challenging Trends in Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

Despite progress recorded in regional and national levels women still experience various obstacles and social problems such as domestic violence, stereotypical perception, labour market discrimination, increasing burden of unpaid work and the struggle to obtain food and ensure the survival of their families especially in women headed households. Lack of access to land and properties, credit facilities, technology, extension services and formal education and skills training are key barriers to women's empowerment and advancement in society.

The worldwide rise in inflation has also created a huge setback for many businesses. Some women have shut down their businesses because of spiralling inflation and huge currency devaluation that has affected developing countries.

A typical example of this barrier is the fact that, women comprising approximately 49 per cent of the Nigerian population has a far lower representation in government compared to other countries on the continent. In March 2022, the National Assembly rejected five gender-related bills that were submitted. The bills sought to advance women's rights on a number of fronts. The rejection of the bills showed that the assembly wasn't interested in gender parity in politics. It has 469 members and only 21 are women. This is a tragedy for Nigerian women, whose representation in politics falls short of the goal set by the National Gender Policy in 2006. This policy demands that 35 per cent of women be involved in all governance processes. (The Conversation, 2023)

### **Recommendations**

The Platform for Action was designed for nations to adopt and implement policies with specific programmes and activities suitable for their development yet, there has been insufficient political will and sustained commitment to meeting the needs and interests of women by local authorities and governments. With only six years remaining until the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs, we hereby recommend the UN Women's new flagship report which highlights gender equality actions points to achieve the BPfA in the 2024 Gender Snapshot report as stated below;

- Invest in education and training for young people, especially girls because the economic cost of gender inequality is extremely high.
- Implement right policies and investments to bring about a better world and healthier economies to lower rates of domestic violence.
- Close digital gender divide and increase women and girls' leadership in science, technology and innovation.
- Invest in social protection systems and care economy to create jobs and increase women's labour force participation.

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