



## Economic and Social Council

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Fifty-ninth session**

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women  
and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled  
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace  
for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Virtue Foundation, 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.



## **Statement**

The Virtue Foundation is a volunteer-led, data-driven non-profit organization that focuses on projects in the areas of health, education, justice and empowerment. Underlying much of the programming at the Virtue Foundation is the belief that women are important drivers of change and development in local communities and globally. As a result, the Foundation places special importance on women's empowerment in all of its programmes, emphasizing the need to improve women's lives and opportunities. The Foundation's mission and belief in the advancement of equality, development and peace for all women is wholly in line with those elaborated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

### **Supporting women globally**

The conversation surrounding women's empowerment and rights is not new: women-centric conventions and agreements date back several decades. It has long been recognized that development and the upward movement out of poverty cannot happen if women are not included in the dialogue. Studies have consistently shown that the empowerment of women and girls leads to the improvement of their own lives and of their respective communities, and ultimately helps to address many of the world's social issues. For example, the empowerment of women helps to reduce poverty, lower infant mortality rates, reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, increase rates of employment and make communities more productive and self-sufficient. Thankfully, these facts are widely recognized and great strides have been made in the advancement and empowerment of women.

### **Data-driven programming and women's empowerment and health**

One of the ways the Virtue Foundation plays a part in the empowerment of women is by carrying out specific and targeted women's programmes that are shaped by data-driven decision-making. Every year, millions of dollars are donated by charities and philanthropies, yet these investments are not always effective because they are not directed to where they are needed. The use of "big picture" data in development projects does not reveal sufficiently granular data at the local level to highlight variance in resources and needs, making it difficult to develop targeted policy solutions.

To help address this problem, the Virtue Foundation has begun to develop smart map technology as part of its Data Mapping for Sustainable Development Initiative. These smart maps allow for cross-sector analysis by displaying existing data at the national, regional and, most importantly, local and institutional levels. The visualized data facilitate high-impact interventions by showing how and where resources can best meet needs.

The Virtue Foundation has adopted the use of data maps in many of its programme planning processes, particularly for those programmes that focus on women. One example of such data usage was a Foundation project to lower maternal mortality rates in Ghana. An analysis of maternal mortality rates by region in Ghana found that maternal mortality is highest in the Upper West region. However, an examination of institutional maternal mortality rates in Ghanaian hospitals found the rates to be highest in the Ashanti region. This information indicated that women in the Upper West region were not reaching hospitals, while women in the Ashanti region could access hospitals but were not receiving adequate care while there.

With this information, the Virtue Foundation was able to organize an intervention that was targeted and had a significant impact: the Foundation helped to arrange the donation of a vehicle that could transport women in the Upper West region to local health-care facilities and also organized a series of women's health-care missions to the region.

### **Judicial training for women**

Investing in women and girls has an incredible multiplier effect for community economic and social advancement. The Virtue Foundation and its partners recognize the important role that female professionals, especially women judges, can play in strengthening the rule of law, both through their contributions to an impartial judiciary and through their role in the implementation and enforcement of laws, particularly those that provide access to justice for women and girls.

Understanding the importance of supporting female judges, the Virtue Foundation has implemented the Women Judges in the Pipeline Initiative. This initiative supports women judges who are strong leaders and agents of change in improving access to justice, the rule of law and sustainable development. In particular, this initiative seeks to identify obstacles and offer practical solutions to increasing women's participation in judiciaries throughout the world.

In Ghana, the Virtue Foundation has also organized a Supreme Court clerkship programme. The programme aims to provide Supreme Court justices with needed research resources and support in their challenging role while providing clerks an opportunity for mentoring that will ultimately nurture talents for the Ghanaian judiciary. By attracting exceptionally bright and motivated women law school graduates, the programme provides a platform for the training of highly promising young women whose research, academic excellence and practice would be furthered by working under the guidance of the distinguished justices of the Supreme Court of Ghana.

### **Recommendations for furthering women's empowerment**

Thanks to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and other international efforts, an enormous amount of progress has been made on women's issues in the past two decades. However, now is not the time to rest. The global community must continue to work together to overcome the challenges women continue to face. In order to sustain the rate of progress recently achieved in women's empowerment and rights, Governments, international organizations and non-profit groups need to reinvigorate their commitment to work collectively towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The Virtue Foundation makes the following recommendations for furthering women's empowerment:

- (a) Employ the use of data and statistics to inform interventions on how to best serve women. As illustrated above, the use and application of information is critical to ensuring that development investments yield the desired results;
- (b) Support female professionals, especially those in positions of influence, so that they have the resources, knowledge and skills to further women's empowerment in their communities and countries as a whole;
- (c) Ensure that all development programmes, especially those in the areas of health and education, benefit women's rights in some way.