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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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Umuada Igbo Nigeria, 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 Millennium Development Goals were established by the United Nations to help underdeveloped countries to overcome problems of illiteracy, poverty, low health status and quality of life. This written statement will focus on goals 1, 3, 5 and 6.

Millennium Development Goal 1 — Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Challenges

There are many underweight children in Nigeria. This is due to poverty, which can be seen in the rural areas in Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi, Abia, Delta, Rivers and other states. The reason is that most villagers are farmers using hoes in their subsistence farming and most of them are dying off. Most youth, on the other hand, migrate to the urban areas. This results in inadequate food supply from and for the rural dwellers.

In the villages and urban areas some of the children drop out of school because their parents can no longer pay their school fees. It is almost impossible to find jobs in the public service. In these areas one finds graduates who have no jobs. Some, when interviewed, reported that the condition they found themselves in pushed them into crime. Their siblings were out of school and hungry. They said they had no alternative than to take the suicide mission of going into crime, preferring to die in the act instead of facing hunger in their homes.

Achievements

Recent economic growth, particularly in agriculture, which has been partially mechanized, has reduced the proportion of underweight children from 35.7 per cent in 1990 to 23.1 per cent in 2008. However, growth has neither generated enough jobs nor reduced poverty.

Umuada Igbo Nigeria and an umbrella body in the diaspora have also embarked on projects in agriculture to provide food for families and the nation at large. We operated a maize and cassava farm at Ufuma, Anambra State, and had large harvests of both crops. In a bid to expand farming, we are proposing to embark on mechanized agriculture in the six states of Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Delta, Imo and Rivers to reduce extreme poverty and hunger there. We have engaged an agriculturalist and an agronomist to test the soils and identify the type of crops that will grow well in each of the states.

Millennium Development Goal 3 — Promote gender equality and empower women

Challenges

We operate in areas where women are marginalized. They do not own land. They are seen, not heard. In a situation where a man has only female children, he is castigated because it is believed that women are not important because they cannot inherit property.

Widows are likely to forfeit their husband's property to their brothers-in-law, who see this as natural. These women suffer a lot. Some are even thrown out of their husband's house together with their children.

What Umuada Igbo Nigeria is doing about these problems

Umuada Igbo Nigeria feels bad about how women and widows are treated. We now have a legal section that deals with their situation. We take up their cases free of charge. We are also into arbitration and settle disputes without going to court.

Umuada Igbo Nigeria has disbursed grants to women and young persons through a community bank to empower them economically. Though the recipients could not pay back most of the money, their lives changed for the better and they did not go back to the street to beg and their children went back to school.

In northern Nigeria, some girls marry at a very tender age so they do not go to school. Some practise child marriage. The women are protesting against this and some people now listen to them. Economic incentives are urgently needed for boys to attend school in the south-east zone of Nigeria.

Millennium Development Goal 5 — Improve maternal health

Challenges

Maternal mortality fell by 32 per cent, from 800 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2003 to 545 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2008. The proportion of births attended by a skilled health worker has remained low and threatens to hold back further progress. Some women go to unskilled birth attendants. More hospitals, clinics, doctors, trained nurses and midwives are needed.

Our organization partnered with VISION in 2003 and 2004; the Society for Family Health in 2007 and Ipas since 2008. We carried out grass-roots mobilization for community sensitization on family planning and reproductive health and rights in different states of Nigeria.

Medical records show that 5,000 Nigerians travel to India every month for medical treatment. These are rich people who can afford it. Our organization is worried about Nigerians who die an untimely death due to cancer, kidney failure, heart attacks, hypertension, childbirth and lack of equipment for proper diagnoses, etc.

The Omogho community in the Orumba North local government area of Anambra State gave us 7.7 hectares of land for a state-of-the-art hospital and diagnostic centre. Dr. Alex Ekwueme, former Vice-President of Nigeria, did the architectural design free of charge. This project will save lives.

Umuada Igbo Nigeria championed the cause of the victims of the so-called "Opi rape saga", when young boys 17-25 years of age raped women 60-80 years of age. We went to the town, prayed, and warned the boys of the consequences of their acts. We also took the case to the Enugu State House of Assembly in conjunction with other women's group. The House deliberated on the issue, set up a committee that followed up and today there is peace and tranquillity in Opi.

Millennium Development Goal 6 — Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

A marked success was the fall in the prevalence of HIV among young pregnant women aged 15-24 from 5.8 per cent in 2001 to 4.2 per cent in 2008. However, some states still have high prevalence rates, which requires urgent policy attention.

Some girls resort to prostitution due to poverty. This exposes them to sexual harassment and HIV/AIDS infection. We sensitize women on the causes and prevention of HIV/AIDS and on how to assist the victims. More awareness is needed.

The Federal Government, under President Goodluck Ebelechukwu Azikiwe Jonathan, is making efforts by giving women important ministerial posts, such as Dr. OkonjoIweala at Finance; Princess Stella Oduah at Aviation; and Mrs. Dizeani Alison-Madueke at Petroleum. Joy Ogwu is the Permanent Representatives of Nigeria to the United Nations, and there are others. State governors have also appointed women commissioners in their ministries. We want more.
