



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Sixty-fifth session

15–26 March 2021

**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 Action Lab For Development, 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 Platform for Action (1995) underlines the participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particularly women's groups and networks and other non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, with full respect for their autonomy, in cooperation with Governments, are important to the effective implementation and follow-up of the Platform for Action. It addresses women in power and decision making in critical areas of concern. It recommends the achievement of gender-balanced composition in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administration and in judiciary bodies, including through setting specific targets and, if necessary, the establishment of a positive action policy. The Beijing Platform for Action also made achieving gender balance within the UN system a priority. The 25th year review of its implementation in 2020 has brought renewed attention to the situation of women's participation in public life and gender-responsive institutions and to the need to accelerate the closing of gender gaps therein, noting that "women's representation in national and local elected deliberative bodies has been steadily increasing, but change is incremental and not sufficiently transformative" (E/CN.6/2020/3).

The data tells us that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making; most countries today fall short of the "gender balance" target established by the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. The global share of women in national parliaments (single/lower house) is 25 per cent. Data from 133 countries show a higher share of women in local government, at 36.3 per cent as of 1st of January 2020. Only 13 per cent of countries have reached gender balance (40 per cent or more) in national parliaments, while 15 per cent in local government. The 2020 review of the Beijing Platform for Action found that over 25 years, women's representation in national parliaments doubled from 12 per cent in 1995 to an average of 24.3 per cent globally in 2019, with the global median representation of women at 21 per cent. Only 17 States (9 per cent) had achieved or surpassed the target of gender balance in their parliaments.

To explore critical barriers to women's participation in decision-making that prevents women from realizing their civil and political rights, particularly women facing intersecting forms of discrimination, the agreed conclusions of Commission on the Status of Women 41 (1997/2) emphasized that attaining the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making was important for strengthening democracy and achieving the goals of sustainable development. In Commission on the Status of Women 50 (2006) agreed conclusions (B), the Commission "emphasized that without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace could not be achieved." It furthermore "underlined the importance of the empowerment of women and their effective participation in decision-making and policymaking processes as critical tools to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence," recognizing the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as an enabler of women's equal participation in decision-making.

The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women calls on State Parties to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life and to ensure women's equal rights, (a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof; and to hold public office perform all public functions at all levels of government, and (c) to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country (Article 7). It also notes that the adoption of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto

equality between men and women should not be considered discrimination as defined in the Convention (Article 4).

As the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women begins its work, it is critical that governments acknowledge all of the factors that drive inequities in girls, the women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence. This means focusing on high-profile, widely-accepted solutions, and committing to action on deeply entrenched norms, behaviours, and structures that continue to drive inequalities and imbalances.

Political will, together with robust resources, are required to create mechanisms that effectively protect the rights of women and girls and promote women's empowerment throughout their entire lives. Despite contributing significantly to their families and economies, too many women are deprived life options and opportunities, and strategic action is vital to create the conditions in which they can develop their full potential. Protecting and promoting women also contributes to the sustainable development of societies as a whole. Partnership with the business sector can contribute to raising awareness and support advocacy for gender equality.

Education is a fundamental human right. It directly determines the integration, participation and contribution to the well-being of society. All levels of education are crucial for children, youth and other members of the family to have an equally developed society. Today, so many women and girls have limited access or no access to the basic education. Recognizing this issue, Action Lab for Development plays an active role in ensuring that education and vocational capability reach women and girls among the socio-economically disadvantaged community.

We bring together elements that promote accelerated learning that allow women to acquire skills, access jobs to work, earn and save, start small business enterprises as a way to secure better futures for themselves and their families. We provide tools and training with a focus on sustainability to reach at least 200,000 underserved women and girls.

Our activities begin with a market scan where the workforce skill demand is established in various sector industries, gaps in women and youth skills training demands. Information from the market scan is used to decide what courses to offer and to develop the curriculum for each course. Once women and youth have been recruited, they undergo an induction process in which they are trained on vital life skills. Upon completion of the training program, women and youth are linked to real internship and job placement opportunities. Program review is done to identify areas for both improvement and affirmation before the admission of new batches as follow-ups of women and youth progress in internship and work continues through the monitoring and evaluation activities.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the crucial importance of gender equality as both a goal and a means of implementing the Agenda. With its interconnected and mutually dependent goals and targets the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a comprehensive and transformative agenda for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. It offers, inter alia, a framework for the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment, ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making, adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels, and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable

development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

This may seem like a big task, but we have the know-how. What we need is the political will and the partnerships to move from rhetoric to action. We need more mechanisms for meaningful engagement with girls and women, more resources devoted to marginalized groups, and more sex and age disaggregated data to inform the design of systems and infrastructure so that they are truly gender-responsive. This means including the voices of the girls and women in system, service, and infrastructure design and implementation, along with the voices of civil society, the private sector, and academia.

We urge the Member States, in agreeance with the Agreed Conclusions of Commission on Status of Women, to focus on promoting and respecting the right of girls and women to education throughout their life cycle, especially those who are the most marginalized, by providing access to quality education, to ensure inclusive, equal and non-discriminatory quality education, promote learning opportunities for all, ensure completion of primary and secondary education, to eliminate inequalities.

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