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Statement submitted by Women Research Center, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Achievements of the Women Research Center in the area of the economic empowerment of Sudanese women

The Center was established in 1997, during a key historical period that saw many political, economic, social and cultural changes domestically and globally. The Center is concerned with promoting and elevating women, and enabling them to perform their role in development and in the implementation of the national strategy. The Center serves as an academic authority for governmental and civil society institutions in those areas. It aims to strengthen the status of women, empower them to achieve comprehensive advancement, unleash their capacities and grant them equal opportunity to take part in employment, productivity and public affairs. The Center undertakes numerous activities and produces academic works. Its main activities include maintaining a database on women; producing an annual and 10-year report on the development of women; documenting the progress of Sudanese women; publishing books, periodicals and theoretical studies; and providing training and capacity building. For many years, the Center has been concerned with vital issues of concern to women in various segments of society (educated and elite women, uneducated women, rural women, working women and youth). The research and studies conducted by the Center are practical, current, comprehensive and multidisciplinary. The Center is one of the leading women's research and study centres in the Sudan.

Vision

The Center is a national research institution concerned with women's issues. It is on a par with other similar institutions, regionally and internationally.

Mission

The Center seeks to develop itself as an academic authority on women's issues in the Sudan in coordination and collaboration with other institutions active in that field.

Goals

The goals of the Center are as follows:

1. Create a social and political environment that is supportive of women;
2. Raise awareness among both men and women to bring about fundamental change in gender relations;
3. Offer assistance and apply pressure to decision-makers to adopt policies to improve women's political, economic and social conditions;
4. Combat poverty and work to increase incomes by expanding employment opportunities that are suitable for women;
5. Enable women and children to obtain an education, with a focus on rural areas;
6. Provide women with knowledge and skills for using information and communications technology.

The organizational structure the Center comprises three levels:

1. A board of trustees;
2. An administrative committee;
3. An executive office.

Partnerships

The Center is a member of the National Network for Combating HIV/AIDS and Drugs and the Network of Women's Organizations. It is also has consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and the African Union.

Operating method

The Center implements its programmes through partnerships under agreements it has concluded with academic, governmental and civil society institutions.

Review of policies and laws

1. The Center, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development of Khartoum State, organized a workshop for the review of economic policies concerning women. Workshop participants reviewed policies and identified legislative gaps in the Constitution, laws and circulars as well as gaps between legislation and enforcement, and made recommendations for developing the economic and investment environment to help women obtain resources and opportunities to establish medium and large enterprises.
2. The Quarter-Century Strategy (2007-2032) has yet to incorporate gender into its three sections (constitutional, economic and cultural). The Ministry of Social Welfare commissioned the Center to review that strategy with a view to adding annexes concerning women.
3. The Center conducted a study on the Personal Status Code and identified areas of negative discrimination against women. The Center is working with other groups to pressure decision-makers to amend the Code.

Research and studies

The Center has produced a number of economic and social studies, books and academic papers concerning women affected by poverty and the stressful economic conditions that cause school dropouts and threaten general and maternal health and family stability. Those papers and studies include the following:

Academic papers

1. The lack of a gender dimension in the economic reform programme;
2. The limitations of policies aimed at women owning agricultural land;
3. A review of policies to integrate women into economic growth.

Studies and books

1. A study of the social, economic, demographic and educational conditions of the villages of Tamtam (Khartoum State) and Ja'irin (Blue Nile State) to identify means of production and sources of wealth, and to formulate development programmes suited to the region. The study was conducted with financing from the UNESCO Chair at Sudan University.
2. A study on the conditions of displaced women in South Kordofan. The study covers the conditions, problems and challenges facing these women and ways of mitigating their impact.
3. A study on early marriage among primary-school age females. The study was conducted in five states (Khartoum, North Kordofan, Blue Nile, Nile River and Kassala) in cooperation with the National Council on Child Welfare. The Plan Sudan organization financed the first phase of the study, which concludes that poverty is driving early marriage.
4. A study on the causes and effects of divorce in Khartoum State, where divorce has been on the rise recently. This field study treats urban and rural women. It identifies a number of causes of divorce. Some have to do with concepts and visions, but the primary driver of divorce is stressful economic conditions, which create tensions and pressures that disrupt family stability, with the children paying the price.
5. A book on women and the communications revolution. The book sheds light on opportunities for women in the information age. It advocates empowering women with technology, Internet services and social media sites.
6. A study on the problems facing reproductive health. Progress has been achieved in lowering the maternal mortality rate. Nonetheless, the rate remains high and there are still many threats to reproductive health.
7. The Center published a book on women's volunteer organizations in the Sudan. The book treats their areas of activity and the challenges facing them.
8. A book on girls' education. The book follows the progress of girls' education from pre-historic times to the present. It discusses a strategy, plans and programmes for addressing the problems impeding girls' education and for improving enrolment.
9. The Center publishes a quarterly entitled *Masarat Ma'rifiyah* (Paths of Knowledge), which treats policies, strategies, laws, phenomena, conditions, studies, reports and databases concerning women. Four issues have been published.

Situation reports

- The Center prepared a report on the situation of women covering the period 2000-2015. The report focuses on demography, education, health, politics, economic development, peace and conflict resolution, and legislation. The report was funded by UNESCO and prepared in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Welfare.

- The Center conducted a survey on the employment situation of women in higher education institutions. The survey was financed by UNESCO and conducted in cooperation with the Central Bureau of Statistics.

Training

Woman combatants face a miserable transition once they return to their lives following the stabilization of conditions. Conflict zones are characterized by a lack of vegetal cover, desertification and high population density. Female combatants, in order to reintegrate socially, must be rehabilitated psychologically and socially. They must also be provided with subsistence livelihood and given training in management, promotion, and marketing to enable them to make a decent living. The Women Research Center has held the following courses in cooperation with the Peace and Development Organization and with funding from the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission:

- South Kordofan State, 116 beneficiaries, 2013;
- Blue Nile State, 115 beneficiaries, 2013;
- South Darfur State, 170 beneficiaries, 2016.

Regarding poverty among families and women, in view of the increase in the dependency ratio among women to 28 per cent, the Center held a number of courses to build and develop the capacities of women to enable them to increase their incomes and raise the standard of living of their families. The courses, which were held in several localities in greater Khartoum (Bahri, Omdurman and Khartoum), effected positive change, empowering the participants to increase their incomes and improve their families' standard of living.

Workshops and seminars

The effects of climate change on traditional agriculture and a shortage of job opportunities have increased the rural-urban migration of men in search of work, while women have remained in the rural areas. This trend has increased the burdens of women, who must not only bear the burdens of the family but must also engage in productive farming, grazing and food processing and preserving activities.

The Center held a rural women's workshop in which papers were presented on the following topics:

- Expansion of the production base of women in the agricultural sector;
- The role of micro-financing in the development of the Red Sea state;
- Obstacles facing rural women.

The Center also held a seminar on the economic crisis and its repercussions for women.

Challenges

- Legislative gaps and negative discrimination against women.
- Poverty, economic pressures and the international embargo.

- Predominance of negative stereotypes concerning women at all levels of the State, society and family.
- The lack of general awareness of women's issues in academic, research, legislative and executive institutions.
- Intensification of the economic, cultural and social challenges facing women and the challenges facing women in conflict zones.
- Lack of training and capacity building for women.
- Lack of coordination and networking among women's centres and institutions with common concerns.

Recommendations

1. Legislation concerning women should be reviewed with a view toward eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.
2. Action should be taken to combat poverty and provide resources and opportunities to women.
3. Groups should be formed to lobby decision-makers to empower women with access to decision-making positions.
4. Education policies should be advocated that ensure access to educational services for all girls of school age.
5. Action should be taken to provide a healthy environment for women and to lower the maternal and infant mortality rate.
6. Women should be incorporated into in peacekeeping operations and provided with opportunities for a life of dignity in conflict zones.
7. The economic sanctions against the Sudan should be lifted.