



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 November 2016

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-first session

13-24 March 2017

**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 Consortium of 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Empowerment of indigenous women (with particular emphasis on the NIGERIAN Indigenous Woman)

Women are crucial, and have potentials to excel in all spheres and endeavours and at the family level, community, State or National levels. A woman is a woman anywhere, any day, home or abroad, whether home-grown, local, thorough-bred professional or in the urban centre. A woman is always an asset. Investment in a woman is always to the benefit of a State, Entity, Community or Nation. This is why the all-round empowerment of an indigenous African woman with particular emphasis on the Nigerian woman, is imperative in the scheme of affairs in contemporary times.

Limited opportunities have described the status and situation of the indigenous woman in Africa as in most parts of the world. The indigenous woman is the local, native but primitive woman, who has limited opportunities to earn money, little exposure and or enlightenment, no assets, with little or no access to funds or information, etc. and most times have so many children.

The terrific news today is that the local, inbred Nigerian woman is now in the limelight; all attention is drawn to her although it will still not be fair to say that the indigenous woman is not side-lined. Despite the collaboration of faith-based Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, Non-governmental organizations, the Federal and State Governments and the Local Government Authorities who are all working towards ensuring that the native woman becomes fully empowered and economically and socially independent, the indigenous woman still needs more attention and the glare of the publicity.

What part does she need to play in her empowerment — the native woman needs to learn to seize the moment, which in the affairs of our Nation Nigeria, is NOW; she needs to make the best of it in order to create a most rewarding future for herself and her family despite her seeming limitations.

What rights accrue to her in the 21st century, she needs to experience and to be aware of all of the following to be fully empowered:

- Gender equality
- Ability to stand up for her rights in so many ways
- Literacy rights
- Access to good health and awareness creation of health hazards and healthy living and wellbeing
- Rights to land for farming which is a major source of livelihood the local or traditional woman
- Support from the Government for women-owned businesses through greater access to capital
- A unified voice, one voice that will serve as a Platform to fight for her many rights.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

The point is how can the indigenous woman make more money? What help can non-governmental organizations/civil society organizations render in all of these. What has been done in the past and what plans are currently on ground?

FARMING AND LACK OF BASIC INFRASTRUCTURES ESPECIALLY ROADS: According to the statistics provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization, women make up an average of about 40% of the agricultural labour force. A major activity which the cultural or local woman participates in, is farming, but the lack of accessible roads makes their goods perish before they get to the market, so having accessible roads linking rural areas to urban centres strengthen their economic activity.

CAPACITY BUILDING ON FARMING with cost effective veterinary support will empower the indigenous woman.

LAND OWNERSHIP: To succeed in agriculture, ownership of land remains a challenge especially in areas where cultural norms do not permit women's right to own land.

SKILLS ACQUISITION: (i) Setting up income-generating Skill Acquisition Cooperative ventures for female Community dwellers.

TRAINING: (i) Training on income management and generation for poverty alleviation to build her capacity so she can make sound and informed business decision for her family and community, (ii) Training and Advocacy against the infringement of local women's human rights and such other types of Training that will unite and involve local women in activities that will raise their standards of living and create Communities free of violence.

CAPACITY BUILDING — Capacity building workshops to enhance their capacity in Politics and Education will assist a great deal in helping them in their quest for human rights.

FEMINIST ACTIVISM — Ensuring feminist activism gains ground so that issues like gender bias will be tackled.

PROVISION OF UP-TO-DATE HEALTH FACILITIES — Access to affordable healthcare. Danger posed to her health is a hazard to the entire populace. Most of the victims of human trafficking are faced with the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and the dreaded Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. Implement Sensitization and Awareness Creation Programmes on Health Reproductive Rights.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT & CIVIC EDUCATION — Educate the native or rural women as well, not only the Community Leaders on issues relating to voter rights, registration process, voting procedures, vigilance to avoid voting irregularity, prevention of electoral violence and the adverse consequences of selling votes. Also, offering training to the rural women to ensure their equal participation in governance and the electoral process and the training of women in politics.

PROVISION OF WATER AND ELECTRICITY: Most women lack water and power so the provision of these two will empower them to participate more effectively in economic activities. Water makes them and their family healthy and increases their productive hours.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA: The focus of Women's Consortium of Nigeria's work on the frontline of combating human trafficking has been to lift the veil of ignorance, to educate, retrain, improve living conditions and eliminate the causes of poverty that make children particularly vulnerable to exploitation. There is a rising phenomenon of trafficking in women which has been attributed largely to the economic conditions and rise in the level of population of Nigeria. In the last 2 decades, our nation Nigeria has witnessed an all-time poor economy with unprecedented rise in unemployment and wish this women have become victims of human trafficking who easily fall prey to inducement of lucrative jobs from traffickers and their sponsors. The poverty level in Nigeria was felt more in the rural areas hence, the migration to urban centres. That the rural woman is an easy prey, manifests the societal inequality especially the unequal distribution of wealth which discriminates against the women. The women constituting a larger percentage of rural communities consequently also form a larger percentage of the poor.

Low level education particularly amongst the indigenous women is another factor responsible for trafficking in women and this greatly reduced the capacity of the women in the formal labour section, making rural women vulnerable to traffickers for cheap labour and prostitution. Poverty seems to wear a woman's face. Hence, the need to empower the indigenous woman becomes imperative. She is vulnerable and when there is poverty in the community, State or family, poverty wears a woman's face!

We acknowledge the great efforts, plans and actions that Commission for the Status of Women, Women's United Nations Report Network and UN Women and the entire United Nations have done and continue to do to ensure the indigenous woman is fully empowered to bring her from obscurity to light and we plead that they continue the good work and if feasible, increase the scope of their impact. The benefits, we all know will revamp failing economies, compliment what their male counterparts have done in the rural areas and will build a greater nation where women are not dependent on the shoulders of men who are already over-burdened by the enormous task of being a loner in the provision of shelter, food, and other basic amenities for the rural woman and her offspring.

It is pertinent to reaffirm that all efforts geared at empowering the local woman in Nigeria can never be a wasted effort, this is because she is full of potentials, a woman of purpose, hope, strength, vigour and character. A great mum, a lifeline, a life giver, a woman with great potentials, a nation-builder.

Women Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON), a non-governmental, non-profit making, non-partisan and non-religious Organization committed to the enforcement of Women and children's Rights and the attainment of equality, development and peace, holds a United Nations Special ECOSOC status.