Economic and Social Council

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-second session
12–23 March 2018
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 Right to Education Programme, 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

During the past decade, advances in information technology have facilitated a global communication network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public policy, private attitudes and behaviour especially of children and young adults. More women are involved in careers in the communications sector, but only few have attained positions at the decision-making levels or serve on governing bodies that influence media policy. The lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evident by the failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotype that are found in public, private, local, national and international media organizations.

Women's Empowerment and Media/ICT

Women's participation in Media/ICT

Though men and women have equal access to ICT, the access is not equitable. Men are more ICT inclined at education level as more boys and men get to complete their education having the requisite knowledge than women and girls. The stereotype of girls/women not being expected to participate in such skilled jobs keeps them away from studying to become experts in ICT. Girls should be encouraged to complete their education by providing their basic needs in schools. Parents, care-givers, teachers, religious and traditional rulers should also be sensitized to nullify the stereotype of ICT being masculine and encourage the girl-child to study it; Nigerian Media policy should be amended to be more gender sensitive.

Women's Access to Media/ICT

In the rural areas, men/boys have more access to ICT than women/girls as a result of culture and religious fundamentalism/restrictions, illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, low status in the society, discrimination when getting training and education.

Trainings and retraining should be organized for women and out-of-school girls in ICT to become technologically skilled and men and boys should be sensitised to deal with the issue of discrimination, while laws such as the Gender and Equal Opportunities bill be enacted and enforced to protect the interest of the women and girls so they do not drop out of school or learning.

Impact of Media/ICT on Women/Girls

The impact of Media/ICT has been both negative and positive. It has brought about the addiction of women to social media which leads to the neglect of their obligation to their families, home and work; stigmatization by projecting negative images of women in media communications — electronic, print, visual and audio affects their self-esteem; cyber bullying (e.g. female politicians) kills confidence and builds fear; advertisements and commercial messages often portray women primarily as consumers and target girls and women of all ages inappropriately and they are often projected as sex tools. However, it has most importantly been used to overcome constrains of seclusion and to fight against gender-based violence. It has created an avenue for learning/research/improved access to education and information sharing; it promotes local income generating opportunities, promotes best practices and opens doors for connection/networking with other business women in other regions.

Use of ICT as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women

ICT has been used for the mobilization of women and youth in the grassroot; used to demand justice and equity e.g. international mobilization for the release of

school girls that were kidnapped by Boko Haram and also used to train women to access the political arena.

Interrogating the Impact of ICT on Women's Rights

Access to infrastructure

The concentration of infrastructure in the urban areas undoubtedly increases the gender gap in access to communication and leads to urban-bias. This shows the urgent need to develop the rural areas as much as the urban areas to enable the rural women have access and reduce the pressure on urban infrastructure which leads to wear and tear; and Civil Society Organisations should be active in playing their part for the betterment of women and the society at large.

Freedom of Expression

Section 39 of the Constitution of Nigeria provides for the freedom of expression for every citizen of Nigeria but due to some uprising both globally and in the country; there has been some restrictions to the free-flow of information. There should be amendment of existing laws to protect women's right to freedom from violence without infringing on freedom of expression and the right to information; and Policies against censorship and filtering of sexual speech and sexual health content be developed.

Economy and sustainable development

The internet is a critical space for women's rights activism, where issues that affect women's economic and general well-being are discussed but with the government putting a watch on the internet due to abuses and views contrary to that of government's, restrictions were made. Gender equality and women's empowerment can be attained through strategic interventions at all levels of mass programming such as training and retraining for women's rights activists on sustaining their own platforms in order to control the content they produce; establishment of community-owned internet service centers where pupils can go on excursion to learn about computers; and contact of every small holder farmer both men and women should be documented so every beneficiary of the fertilizer will be contacted directly to stop siphoning them.

Privacy and autonomy

Privacy has long been a central issue for women's rights as in most cultures in Nigeria, women have been viewed as a property in both private and public spheres, which led to laws, policies and social values that control behaviour and limit opportunities, with violence against women as one way of enforcing these norms. Stronger privacy policies should be enacted for online platforms and workplaces and privacy by default and by design in applications. There should also be digital security training for women human rights defenders and women's organisations, sensitization to religious and traditional leaders to educate and sensitize their intending couple to imbibe the culture of trust for one another for a happy home and a healthy society.

STEM

It is no news that women and girls have been marginalized in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics [STEM]; some of the reasons include their exclusion from school and the perceived notion of STEM being a masculine profession which makes women in STEM careers face hostile work environments. Due to the gender gap in STEM, women are under-represented in the governance and development of the digital world.

Supportive and gender friendly employee polices should be put in place alongside policies that improve girls' access to quality education and ICT since most violence women face online could be prevented or responded to swiftly if women were more involved in developing tools, building spaces and making decisions.

Violence against women

ICT has been used to instigate violence in various parts of the country leading to the death of countless number of women and children, some of which were not even accounted for nor aired. Examples of such violent acts instigated by the use of ICT is the Jos religious crisis; 2011 post-election crisis; religious crisis in Kano state; Boko haram insurgency in the north east. Regulations and privacy laws should be enforced in the use of ICT to check hate speech and violence against women by use of information from them without their prior knowledge. Media watch groups can be formed to monitor the media and consult with them to ensure women's needs and concerns are properly reflected.

Women's participation and representation in media

Women have often been under-represented in the fields of print, radio and television media, especially in the areas of editing or producing programmes with the same issues been exhibited in the power structure of the online media. Most often, they are also portrayed as victims rather than being main subjects of news. Women are less likely to report on issues regarding politics, government and the economy due to cultural bias, male dominance, lack of education on and access to ICT. Women are more likely to face intimidation and threats in this line of work than the men.

Both government and international organizations should promote research and implementation of a strategy of information, education, and communication aimed at promoting a balanced portrayal of women and girls and their multiple roles. Policies in the media should promote gender equality. There is need to increase the commitment to women's human rights, especially freedom of expression and freedom from violence.

———————