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Statement submitted by Women’s Board Educational Cooperation Society, 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

Ensuring affordable information and communication technologies for young girls and women.

The agreed conclusion of the 47th session of the Commission of Status of Women in 2003 urged Government and other affected agencies, programmes of the United Nations and organizations including civil society and private organizations to take some necessary actions to ensure that the participation and access of women to the media and information and communications technologies is improved.

Almost fifteen years later, Nigeria like other developing countries still faces the challenge of not being able to provide affordable internet, information and communication for its citizens. The 2014 Affordability report of Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) noted that almost 60 percent of the world's population — most of who live in developing countries — are offline. Close to 70 per cent of households in the developing world do not have Internet access, and while Internet penetration rates have increased dramatically in recent years, the pace of change seems to be slow. The report particularly identified that women face some of the highest barriers to Internet affordability. Of the two billion people in developing and emerging countries priced out of accessing the Internet, women form part of the group least likely to be able to connect affordably.

In Nigeria, several government agencies and organizations are all involved in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) capacity building initiatives for young girls and women. However, these initiatives have not been able to achieve as much as they could or should, because they are not part of a comprehensive government policy for gender access and participation in information and communication technology. They are more like sporadic interventions which are set apart from the general policy of the government; as they are undertaken by those involved with support from donor agencies.

As a result of this, there is not enough resources and support from the government to ensure sustainability and continuity over a period of time. Other factors that mitigate the efforts being made not yielding the desired results includes poor publicity of the benefit that can be accrued from information and communication technology, level of acceptance of women into the core information and communication technology sector (it is still being viewed as a male dominated sector), lack of continuous funding to sustain the initiatives, poverty level and education of women.

As part of our effort to ensure that participants of our programmes acquire the right skills to empower them, Women's Board- Educational Co-operation Society through her projects ensures that training in information and communication technology is included in the overall training given.

One of such initiative undertaken was seizing an opportunity provided by Google to train students of one of our Hospitality Schools, Wavecrest College of Hospitality on Digital Skills. The training sensitized the students on digital marketing and opportunities available online. The training empowered the young girls as they gained knowledge on how to maintain a strong presence online, increase customer rating, position one's business and meet new customers.

Knowledge such as this is important to empower women especially in the field of Hospitality as they become exposed to the vast opportunities available to them.

Having the knowledge of what is possible with information and communication technology is one thing, the availability and affordability of the technology itself to women and the general public is another. Due to the level of poverty, most girls and women cannot afford to buy a Smartphone with which they can easily access the internet. Those who can, find it difficult having constant data to enable them make use of the internet.

Another area of deficiency is presence of functional computers in schools, family homes or among individuals. For most public schools, there are no computer rooms with functional computers for the students to learn basic computer skills which will form a foundation to enable them appreciate all they can achieve with information and communication technology.

As we discovered in a project carried out with students from some public secondary schools in Lagos, the girls had little or no knowledge of basic computer. The project was designed to help the students read and study after school so as to improve their grades and training in basic computer had to be included because of the deficiency observed. Despite this effort, little could be achieved as the girls only had opportunity to practice on a computer when they are at the centre where the computers are located. They do not have access to computers at home or in their schools.

There is therefore an urgent need for intervention to make the use of information and communication a tool for empowering women.

To achieve this, we would like to make the following recommendation:

- That public schools offer basic computer training right from primary school level by ensuring that teachers and the teaching resources are available in such schools.
- That the government makes the tariff of internet subscription affordable for the general public so that opportunities of making a living online is greatly utilized by everyone especially women who have the task of taking care of their family and most times will need to work from home.
- That government should also encourage indigenous companies to produce computers by granting them tax relief or exemption so that the cost of purchasing a computer system is reduced.
- Finally, public access centres such as telecentres or information centres especially as part of existing institutions such as health centres, schools, community centres should be developed.