



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

**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 Int’l Centre for Women Empowerment & Child Dev., 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

We are immensely pleased and honoured to participate in the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, taking place from 9 to 20 March 2020 at the United Nations headquarters in New York, United States of America.

A non-governmental organization, the Int'l Centre for Women Empowerment & Child Dev. works to promote the rights and empowerment of women and girls in Nigeria. Since its inception in 2004, the organization has made gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls the cornerstone of its concerns, interventions, and pre-occupations. In this regard, the promotion and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Nigeria has been a major focus and priority objective of our organization.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was in every respect a landmark – a major milestone in the struggle for women's rights and advancement. It was comprehensive, extensively examining virtually all the critical challenges women face, notably poverty, gender-based violence, women in armed conflict situations, women and the environment, the girl child, economic challenges, education and health problems, human rights, the institutional mechanisms for women's advancement of women as well as the participation of women in politics and decision-making. The recommendation of the conference is still considered a reference in the quest for gender equality.

This year, it will be twenty-five years since the Fourth World Conference on Women and five years since the Sustainable Development Goals, another seminal international development blueprint that highlights the vital importance of gender equality, was introduced.

This is a source of encouragement and motivation for us at the Int'l Centre for Women Empowerment & Child Dev., fuelling our desire to double our efforts and accelerate action towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Nigeria. Our determination has never been more pronounced. It has never been stronger.

Surely, the challenges are huge and the general outlook unflattering and somber. Consider the following facts and figures on women's and girls' situation in Nigeria:

- Maternal mortality rate in the country is currently estimated at 576 per 100,000 live births – the fourth largest in the world. While Nigeria represents 2.4 per cent of the world's population, it contributes about 10 per cent of global deaths among pregnant mothers.
- Nigeria has the highest number of child brides in Africa. According to available statistics, 23 million Nigerian women and girls were married as children.
- At 27 per cent, the prevalence of female circumcision or female genital mutilation among women and girls aged 15-49 is believed to be lower than in many countries where the odious practice is carried out, but Nigeria still has the third highest absolute number worldwide of women and girls (19.9 million) who have undergone female circumcision.

Furthermore, Nigeria accounts for more than one in five out-of-school children across the world. A large majority of out-of-school children in the country are known to be girls. For example, only 41 per cent of eligible girls receive a primary education in the North East and North West regions of the country respectively. With the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency having its biggest impact on the two regions, the disruptive effect of the crisis on schooling in the North East and North West regions is reportedly getting worse.

In addition, women and girls constitute the vast majority of poor and marginalized persons in Nigeria. Similarly, women are underrepresented in leadership positions in government, business, and public service.

However, working side by side and sometimes in collaboration with the United Nations including the Commission on the Status of Women, several other development partners – international and local – as well as governments in Nigeria, significant progress has been made towards combating and addressing challenges including pervasive poverty among women, gender-based violence, political and economic underdevelopment of women, legal and social inferiority of women, et cetera, which undermine the rights and empowerment of women and girls in the country.

With the dearth of data – always a problem in Nigeria – it is difficult to speak with exactitude about the level of progress that has been made. Over the years, however, more women have gained access to education and modern health services. More women have joined the workforce as public servants or entrepreneurs. More women now participate in politics and are increasingly occupying leadership positions. There are now more protective measures in the form of laws and social intervention programmes directed at curbing gender-based violence. In the same vein, there is now greater awareness and greater social acceptance and recognition for women's rights in society.

Notwithstanding the progress realized, formidable obstacles persist. These obstacles impede and continue to undermine our collective efforts and interventions, threatening to erode the progress made to date.

Age-old customs and tradition deriving from our patriarchal society constitute a major constraint towards addressing the problem of gender imbalance in our society. Under our male-dominated culture, harmful and discriminatory gender values, which require girls to be submissive while boys are expected to be dominant and aggressive, are inculcated into boys and girls from childhood. Overcoming these deeply ingrained socially approved discriminatory attitudes and practices against women has not been easy.

In the face of these barriers, advocacy, sensitization and public education programmes, enforcement and implementation of laws and policies that promote gender equality and resource mobilization and allocation for the promotion of gender equality hardly ever produce meaningful results.

Tied to their customary values and beliefs, a large majority of people are skeptical and doubtful. Laws and policies formulated to address gender inequality are treated as mere formalities, while advocacy and awareness creation campaigns are regarded more often than not as mere ceremonies.

Furthermore, advocacy and sensitization campaigns are usually not of the scale that will make a meaningful impact in society. In most cases, the enforcement and implementation of relevant laws and policies are poor and ineffective.

A weak justice system, manpower deficiencies, lack of political will, corruption, and inadequate financial commitment are some of the factors that account for failure in the implementation and enforcement of laws and policies. Indeed, poor funding and lack of political will are perhaps most critical limitations and challenges hampering the achievement of gender equality in Nigeria.

Not the least of the problems associated with funding is that the bulk of the programmes and interventions directed at addressing gender inequality in the country are provided by external donors. The sustainability and grave risk it portends are worrisome. As a result, there is now a growing realization that the government

(federal, state, and local governments) must begin to allocate more funds towards addressing the problem.

Poor planning and inefficient management of resources, absence of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, lack of data and research, as well as weak coordination of efforts and measures are also among the critical factors that have continued to undermine progress in the fight against gender inequality in Nigeria.

These challenges are not insurmountable. We believe that with concerted efforts of all stakeholders, efficient mobilization of resources from international and domestic sources, as well as efficient management of these resources, the goal can be achieved.

We urge all stakeholders to join hands towards this goal, especially because it is now common knowledge that without gender equality the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals may not be feasible.

Int'l Centre for Women Empowerment and Child Dev. is committed and ready to partner with other stakeholders to address the problem of gender inequality in Nigeria.

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