



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 November 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixtieth session

14-24 March 2016

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 Non-Governmental Organizations Coordinating Committee, 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

The Non-governmental Organisations Coordinating Council is an umbrella network of 104 Non-Governmental Organizations, Community Based Organizations and Faith Based Organizations active in addressing gender and development in Zambia. With its mandate of championing gender equity and equality, Non-Governmental Organisations Coordinating Committee specifically works to empower women as an affirmative action strategy for their full participation and benefit from political, social, economic and cultural development.

In this submission on the 2016 Commission on the Status of Women priority theme as it relates to the status of women in Zambia, we reflected on former United Nations Secretary General, Koffi Annan's observation that, "There can never be meaningful sustainable development without the involvement of both men and women in the development process of the country ... and there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women." Similarly Julia Gillard of the Global Partnership for Education and former Prime Minister of Australia said "the recently launched global Sustainable Development Goals recognize women's empowerment as a precondition to eliminating poverty, reaching gender equality, and achieving food security globally.

Though women constitute 50.7 per cent of Zambia's population, the empowerment of women has remained low in all spheres. While the overall poverty head count is around 80 per cent, poverty rates are higher in female-headed households and stands at 62.1 per cent versus 60.1 per cent for male-headed households.

Zambia in the last five years has made significant improvement in appointing women to strategic decision making positions including the appointment of the first ever female Vice President, the Chief Justice and the Inspector General of Police".

However, the number of women in decision-making positions still remains low across sectors. Zambia has one of the lowest rates of women's parliamentary participation in sub-Saharan Africa, with 14 per cent being female and 6 per cent as councillors at the local government level. This is despite Zambia being a signatory to the 1953 Convention on Political Rights of Women, in which Article 3 states that "Women shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination".

With regard to education, Zambia has achieved an equal enrolment rate between boys and girls at primary school level, female dropout rates from school begin to assume significance in Grade 4, such that by the end of secondary level, only about one-third of the students are female. At tertiary level, the male-female gap widens further, with females representing only about 20 per cent of students. Vocational and technical training reveals similar trends of low female enrolments. One of the contributory factors to high dropout rates for girls at primary level is the incidences of child marriages and teenage pregnancies. Zambia has one of the highest child marriage and teenage pregnancy rates in the world with 42 per cent of women aged 20-24 years married by the age of 18 and the adolescence pregnancy rate is as high as 146 births per 1,000 women.

Gender equality in the classroom is a prerequisite to gender equality in society: educating girls is the entry point for achieving women's empowerment and

systemic, sustainable change. Women who have completed secondary school are more likely to be in wage employment, participate in decision-making, take up leadership roles and are more likely able to own a business. They will earn up to 25 per cent more, and invest 90 per cent of their income in their families — which will be smaller and healthier.

Women in rural areas of Zambia are the most marginalized and underrepresented group in the country and disadvantaged by poverty, geography and gender, with the least access to employment and public positions and influence. They have not enjoyed benefits of economic growth, which has disproportionately affected urban areas: rural poverty is high at 58 per cent and rural women are the least likely group to own assets or property. In addition, only 23 per cent of women say they participate in economic decision-making in Zambia, making it one of the lowest rates in Southern Africa. Zambia will not achieve sustainable development if the country does not work at improving the social economic status of women and girls.

In order for the country to achieve sustainable development, there is a need to place rural women at the centre of a cycle of change by inherently diversifying the Zambian economy through placing agriculture and tourism as a corner stand of the country's economy. This will enhance women's participation in the development agenda of the country.

Generally, targets towards enabling women's empowerment are woven through the individual goals. We note that the Sustainable Development Goals explicitly aim to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. This is widely acknowledged as the single most effective strategy in tackling poverty. And Investments in gender equality yield the highest returns of all development investments'.

Further, in reflecting on the review theme: "The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls", Zambia as a country is grappling with the problem of addressing the high rate of Gender Based Violence. This is despite interventions by government and civil society. The enactment of the Anti Gender Based Violence Act of 2011 enabled the country to have a progressive law in the fight against Gender Based Violence.

However, the law lacks a legal framework to be justifiable. Subsidiary legislation and the drafting of the rules of court to enable the full implementation of the Anti Gender Based Violence Act are still in progress. In addition the Gender Based Violence Fund and the shelters for survivors of violence, as provided for in the Act are also yet to be operational and fully established respectively. There is therefore need for Zambia as a country to prioritize the fight against Gender Based Violence with transformation of the social cultural relations and the placement of mechanisms that are going to prevent the occurrence of Gender Based violence rather than mitigating its impact only.

Gender Based Violence infringes upon the rights of women and girls and diminishes their abilities to protect themselves against HIV. Gender Based Violence is a result of unequal power relations between men and women and a reflection of the low status and negative attitudes towards women. According to a Gender In Development Division report of 2000, violence against women and children is linked strongly to the socio-economic situation of the country.

Further, Zambia's current constitution operates on a dual legal system, based on both statutory and customary laws. The National Constitution that is the supreme law of the land still has claw back clauses that allow for discrimination in matters of personal law. While statutory laws provide for more equality for women such as inheritance and the control of and access to such productive resources as land and credit, the day to day life of the majority of the Zambian population is governed by the local courts that administer customary laws, which is primarily based on male power, authority, and domination over women.

Non-Governmental Organisations Coordinating Committee network has taken note that the 57th Commission on the Status of Women welcomed the contributions and participation of governments at all levels in making progress to address violence against women and girls. In the Commission's agreed conclusions, states were to take steps such as adoption of relevant laws and policies, implementation of preventive measures, establishment of protection and appropriate support services for victims and survivors as well as improvement in data collection, analysis and research, as critical interventions to this cause.

Zambia therefore needs to design and implement national policies that aim at transforming those social norms that perpetuate violence against women and girls, and work to counteract attitudes that impede the advancement of women and girls in the development processes of the country. There is a need to focus the development agenda of the country in empowering women with access to land and to financial resources and the technology that is going to enhance productivity in the agricultural sector in order for the country to attain sustainable development.

The country also needs to address the cultural, social and legal impediments that are affecting the advancement and the participation of women in decision-making. The participation of women in decision making positions will enable the development processes of the country to take on board the views and needs of both women and men, hereby bringing about sustainable development to the country.
