



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

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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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Gender equality is the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) among the seventeen global goals adopted in September 2015. It has a sub-goal and nine targets which echoes loudly key actions to take to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Yet the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030 according to the Sustainable Development Report 2023: Special Edition.

The Global Gender Gap Index introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006 annually examines the progress towards gender parity and compare countries' gender gaps across four dimensions: economic opportunities, education, health and political leadership. According to the report, this year's results show that across the 146 countries covered by the 2023 index, the health and survival gender gap has closed by 96 per cent, educational attainment by 95.2 per cent, economic participation and opportunity by 60.1 per cent and political empowerment by 22.1 per cent.

The World Economic Forum report stated that Health and survival, educational attainment, continue to display the least amount of variation of scores, whereas the economic participation and opportunity and political empowerment sub-indexes continue to show the widest dispersion of scores in both the 2022 and 2023 editions. Furthermore, a closer look at performance across the five indicators composing this sub-index reveals that an important source of gender inequality stems from the overall underrepresentation of women in the labour market. The global population-weighted score indicates that, on average, only 64.9 per cent of the gender gap in labour-force participation has been closed.

The gender equality index of African Development Bank Group shows that African women are held back from fulfilling their potential by many constraints, whether as leaders in public life, in the boardroom, or in growing their businesses. This in turn holds back the potential of the continent's economy. African women spend too much time at unproductive pursuits, such as fetching water and wood. While African women work 50 per cent longer hours than men, the pay gap between men and women is very wide. (Gender Equality Index, AfDB)

Gender inequality is a common characteristic in every society. Presently, Nigeria ranks 123 out of 146 countries in the Overall Global Gender Gap Index from 2006 to 2022. This have raised concerns among civil society groups that the country may be regressing in female representation in leadership. While the Nigerian Constitution provides for gender equality and non-discrimination, women continue to suffer injustices and marginalization. This is often as a result of discriminatory laws, religious and cultural norms, gender stereotypes, low levels of education, and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women (Human Rights Watch 2022).

With seven years left to achieving the 2030 global goals, there is urgent need to give voice and empowerment to women irrespective of their circumstances as the benefits cannot be overemphasized. Gender equality and empowerment improve participation and inclusion of women in social and economic development in urban and rural areas thereby enabling them to engage effectively and influence the achievement of the SDG 5 in Nigeria. Strengthening the capacity of women through advocacy, trainings on gender equality values, financial managements, human rights and digital information technology is necessary for women to participate effectively in decision making processes, lead development initiatives and grow businesses to meet basic social needs in their communities.

Our objective at Women's Board - Educational Cooperation Society as a not-for-profit, Non-Governmental Organization is to contribute to the development of the Nigerian woman through educational and economic empowerment opportunities

achieved through professional trainings in Hospitality, Health, Tourism management, Leadership, Mentoring, and Community outreaches. Women's Board also provides academic support to young girls living in five states of the country.

Over the past five decades, we have established four Hospitality Schools and have trained over 4,000 students. The majority of these graduates have secured gainful employment within the Hospitality sector while the others have ventured into small businesses thereby becoming employers of labour themselves and positively influencing the lives of many.

In addition, we have trained 633 young women for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Lagos State Employment Trust Fund (LSETF) scheme of providing skills for the youth; 168 Niger-Delta women received Professional training courses in Catering and Hotel services, Agri-food production, processing and marketing and 591 women were trained in various community service projects to provide culinary skills for income generation. More recently, 14 returned migrants were trained in culinary skills and approximately 75 returned migrants and vulnerable women at risk of being migrated have either received training or are receiving training in culinary skills to help re-integrate them back into the society.

With the high cost of living, many families do not have enough resources to enable them to train their wards in higher institutions; and in such cases the girl child suffers as her education is placed on hold or suspended as she drops out of school and may get married at an early age. Our vocational institutions offer young girls from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to receive skills which will empower them and make them escape poverty. This we are able to do by providing full or partial scholarship for girls in need.

The benefits of the training received in our vocational institutions are immeasurable, participants are educated, empowered and become economically independent. With the training received, they become competent professionals in the Hospitality industry and contribute positively to the economy of Nigeria; at the same time improving their lives and that of their families. This way, we are involved in creating employment opportunities, reducing poverty, and promoting gender equality which is the major aim of the UN SDG 5.

The World Bank looking at the issue of Gender equality and its relationship with poverty, clearly states that gender equality is a fundamental human right and essential for a more peaceful, prosperous, and liveable world. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are central to addressing the world's unprecedented intertwined global crises from food insecurity and climate change to conflict, fragility, and violence, to sluggish economic growth.

Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls requires a wholistic approach that addresses poverty, strengthens institutions, and finances initiatives with a gender perspective. It is only when this is achieved that we can create a world where women and girls have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute to their communities.

It is pertinent for government agencies, private sector and civil society to invest and promote economic growth and create opportunities for women's economic empowerment through establishments that are focused on poverty eradication and gender equality. This can be achieved by providing access to grants, funds and credit, and supporting entrepreneurship and skills development among women. Tackling gender-specific issues, such as the gender pay gap, unpaid care work, and lack of access to land and productive resources, is also of essence.

We recommend that key attention be given to providing equal access to quality education and vocational training for girls and women. This can be achieved by

eliminating gender stereotypes in education, providing scholarships for girls to stay in school, and learn in safe environment. Additionally, promoting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education for girls can help bridge gender gaps in these fields.

Bad policies, cultural norms, customs and religious practices enable gender disparity to thrive. Hence, government agencies and development institutions must enforce institutional reforms to guarantee equal rights and opportunities for women and girls. This involves eliminating discriminatory laws and policies, promoting women's participation in politics and leadership, and ensuring the effective implementation of gender equality laws. In addition, harmful gender norms should be challenged, while promoting positive social attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls.

Therefore, to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and empower women and girls in a comprehensive and sustainable manner it is critical to work collaboratively with governments, civil society, private sector and international organizations to ensure the successful implementation of these measures.

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