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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: Priority Theme: “Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication”

Statement submitted by The Centre for Public Health, 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 Centre for Public Health (CPH) is a non-governmental, non-profit, non-political, non-religious organization in Nigeria that was founded in 1997. Working in collaboration with regional health centers, community centers, and educational institutions, the CPH raises awareness of health issues facing rural Nigerians and other parts of the world.

In recent years, the CPH has increased its efforts to reduce domestic violence within rural Nigerian communities through microloans. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant increase in the number of domestic violence cases globally. In the face of this alarming trend, the CPH began developing a microloan program to encourage the empowerment of rural women. The loans are given to women with 2% interest, a fraction of the average interest rate of 30% in Nigeria. This loan is typically around one hundred dollars and allows women to create a small business. A portion of the profits goes to cover the cost of healthcare.

When a woman is financially empowered, she is more likely to escape domestic violence. If a woman has children, she may also be able to take them with her. This removes children from abusive environments and shows them a woman in an empowered role. This can help break cycles of abuse and ensure that children have access to adequate medical care.

The success of the CPH microloan program allows for women to have increased medical access as well as financial freedom. These programs can be seen in local markets and small businesses throughout rural Nigeria. The CPH encourages more organizations to pursue microfinancing to empower women financially and increase access to medical care.

The efforts by the Centre for Public Health (CPH) to visit schools and educate students are a critical component in the broader struggle for social justice and women's rights in Nigeria. By focusing on issues like period poverty, cervical cancer prevention strategies, and breast cancer initiatives, CPH is directly addressing some of the key challenges that Nigerian women face in terms of health and empowerment.

Period poverty is a significant issue that affects girls' and women's education, health, and overall well-being. By going into schools and educating students about menstrual hygiene, CPH is working to break the stigma and silence that often surrounds menstruation. This education is vital for ensuring that girls feel empowered to manage their periods with dignity and without shame, which can improve school attendance and help to close the gender gap in education.

Furthermore, the CPH’s initiatives on breast cancer mirror the importance of early detection and treatment. By raising awareness about breast cancer, teaching self-examination techniques, and promoting regular screenings, CPH is equipping young women with the knowledge to take proactive steps in their health management. These initiatives not only help in combating breast cancer but also contribute to the broader goal of empowering women through education.

Cervical cancer prevention is another critical area of focus. In Nigeria, like in many parts of the world, cervical cancer is a leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women. It is estimated that more than 90% of cervical cancer cases are linked to HPV infections. CPH’s work in educating young women about prevention strategies, such as the importance of the HPV vaccine and regular screenings, is pivotal in reducing the incidence of this disease. This proactive health education can lead to early detection and treatment, which significantly improves outcomes.
The HPV vaccine was first approved in 2014 and has been used in high-income countries ever since. In Nigeria, this vaccine has not been accessible and has since been heavily stigmatized. However, in October of 2023, the HPV vaccine was approved to be included in the National Immunization Program in Nigeria. The CPH sees this new policy as a huge step in the right direction for protecting the health of women and girls. Although the vaccine still has its public misconceptions, the CPH is hard at work with educational campaigns to advertise the importance of the vaccine and put any rumours to rest to break the HPV vaccine hesitancy.

CPH's work is a clear example of the social determinant factors intersection/relationship between health promotion/health education (eradication of ignorance) and women's empowerment (poverty reduction). By focusing on these critical health issues within the educational setting, the organization is helping to create a foundation of knowledge and awareness that young women can carry with them throughout their lives. This empowerment through education is essential in challenging and changing the cultural and social norms that can hinder the rights and well-being of women in Nigeria.

Such educational interventions are integral to the broader fight for social justice. They ensure that women's rights, particularly in domestic issues, are not only a matter of legal protection but also of community and individual awareness and empowerment. By addressing these health concerns and educating young women, the CPH is laying the groundwork for a more informed and equitable society.