

ORAL STATEMENT FROM WOMEN'S CONSORTIUM OF NIGERIA (WOCON)
A NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION IN SPECIAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS WITH THE UNITED
NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
TO THE 56TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Preamble: Rural Women in sub Saharan Africa constitute about 70% of the women population and although they are the major food producers they however live in extreme poverty. The excruciating economic conditions constitute a critical factor to the vulnerability of the rural women to various forms of violence and societal abuse most especially the trafficking of women and girls for exploitative labour and prostitution. Rural women are unable to protect themselves from gender violence neither are they able to protect their children especially the girls.

The economic powerlessness of rural women also makes the women voiceless in the affairs of their communities and their respective nations at large resulting in the underrepresentation in decision making positions.

In addition the lack of resources, infrastructures and modern technology in the rural areas contribute to the aggravation of the women's work load and the pressure on their health needs including their reproductive health needs and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

We Commend the strides taken by Governments in their commitments under the various international and Regional instruments and covenants such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discriminations CEDAW, Beijing platform for Action (BPFA) Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of women in Africa, the Africa Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are welcome steps towards women's development.

We are however concerned that the implementation of these commitments have not had the desired impact on the rural women. A situation where the Government institutions and machineries for the implementation of the policies and programmes are the least funded and are under budgeted leads to the failure of policies and programmes towards the implementation of Government commitments.

WE THEREFORE urge Governments to take the following steps:-

- Ensure periodic monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of policies and programmes targeting rural women to ascertain their effectiveness.
- Provide adequate budgetary allocations to the Government institutions and Agencies charged with the implementation of these policies such as the Gender ministries or Ministries of women Affairs.
- Provide basic amenities and infrastructure such as portable water, electricity, Primary Health facilities and schools in rural areas.
- Design Poverty alleviation schemes with the participation of rural women at the planning and implementation stages, incorporating the special needs of rural women in joint collaborative efforts of Government and CSOs for maximal effects and grassroots reach.
- Strategic and constructive steps should be taken by Government, its Agencies and CSOs to ensure that rural women have access to information technology, life skills, modern agricultural implements and renewable energy to improve their standard of living and expose them to international economies.
- Protect rural women against gender violence, discrimination and societal abuse.

Addressing the poverty of rural women will in turn reduce significantly the incidence of gender violence and enhance the participation of rural women in decision making. Attaining sustainable development of women cannot be achieved unless the necessary tools for the economic and political empowerment of rural women who constitute the majority of women are available and accessible to the rural women.

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