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Statement submitted by Modern Advocacy, Humanitarian, Social and Rehabilitation Association, 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

African Woman and Traditional Roles in Environmental and Disaster Risk Reduction Perceptions

In line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, and further related General Assembly resolutions for women economic empowerment, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through gender equality of all women and girls, in the context of environmental adjustment practices, and disaster risks reduction policies, will require a further in-depth into the community context roles of men, boys, women and girls within family and community circles in different cultural and socio-political setups or zones.

Agreed conclusions of the sixty-first session, Commission on the Status of Women, over women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work (E/CN.6/2017/L.5), indicate the need for strengthening education, training and skills development, providing universal access to equal and non-discriminatory quality education for all and at all levels, most especially, ensuring that women and girls have equal access to career development, training, scholarships and fellowships, and adopting positive action to build women's and girls' leadership skills and influence. The agreed conclusions also highlight the need for applying gender-sensitive measures for the prevention of abusive punishment, and the protection of women and girls against all acts of violence in public and private spaces, including by facilitating changes in gender stereotypes and negative social norms, attitudes and behaviours, inter alia, through inclusive cross-sectional community mobilization efforts. Are these expected efforts duly and succinctly applied in consideration of involved cultural relativist aspects in different parts of the world?

The Traditional African Women Perspective Contribution in Environmental Progress

In the traditional African context, the role of the woman and a man is customarily defined as per particular family structure and community based setting. Since the Beijing Platform for Action, substantial cross-sectional actions and efforts from diverse entities have promoted structural adjustments and socio-behavioural improvements that consider gender equity measures towards gender equality goals. Such have elevated the status of women within traditional African societies, yet, there is still further need to enhance the contribution of women in environmental progress assessments, in due consideration of their traditional African roles. A woman is the matured form of a girl child thus, the basics for proper womanhood is harnessed through the girl childhood. The Platform for Action outlines the contours of discriminatory aspects against the girl child with regards to negative cultural attitudes and practices, biases in education, health, economic exploitation and awareness and participation in social, economic and political life. However, there is still need to strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl child, and lay gender equity emphasis upon such family roles which today, because the majority of homes lack such understandings, violence against women, incertitude of how to contribute in family welfare and environmental sustenance, has remained a persistent setback (E/CN.6/2015/NGO/167).

Traditional African women are predominantly responsible for the management and conservation of resources for their families, inter alia, collecting and storing water, securing sources of fuel, food and fodder, and managing land resources from forest to wetlands, or agricultural terrain. They play a critical role in managing natural resources at family and community levels and are most affected by environmental

degradation. From the girl childhood stage within local traditional set-ups, are they taught to understand how their future actions, though respecting their cultural positions in the family and community, could be harmonious and beneficial to environmental sustenance expectations?

The Traditional African Women Perspective Contribution in Disaster Risk Reduction

Traditional African women by instinct are gender submissive characters that understand the language of family-first and loyalty to the man of the house. Their vulnerable socioeconomic power affects their psychological stability and limits their self esteem and their ability to react to early triggers that may lead to environmental hazards. Their sensitivity with respect to family issues, makes them the most diligent party for mapping-out disaster risks and activity vulnerabilities within family circles, however, they are sadly not aware of such potentials. As farmers and home care providers, they bear a heavier burden in case of land degradation and home basic supply shortages. They are overworked round the clock, from farming activities to home management chores, as well as, pleasing of their husbands in bed, thus, leaving them in continues situations of instantaneous pressure and limited broader vision. They need time to think freely and forecast home and other occupational activity risks, as well as, get involved in risks analyses and procedures for calculated actions in minimizing vulnerabilities and disaster risks. A single woman can be taught at a time to enhance such risk management procedures within the family and community circles she belongs to, and vice-versa. The African mother is the main tutor and model for her African daughter, thus, the African girl childhood is bound to learn and copy from the motherhood that raises her. Adopted practices could spread throughout the society and help avoid or limit the adverse impacts of hazards, or generate the spirit of preparedness within the broader context of sustainable development.

Probable Actions to Enhance the Traditional African Woman's Roles in Environmental and Disaster Risk Reduction

Government Actions. Enact both advisory and legally enforceable texts, and policies that promote the agreed conclusions of the sixty-first session, Commission on the Status of Women (E/CN.6/2017/L.5); ensure such legal texts are propagated in local comprehensive terms and languages; ascertain through local government actions, that explanatory audio-visual opportunities are used within local traditional societies; and make locally trained counsellors readily available to address misunderstandings between objective human rights orientated issues and derogatory customary practices. Government formal educational syllabuses at the primary level should include strategic considerations for building the girl childhood, as well as, edifying the boy childhood, towards accepted roles and responsibilities of the womanhood contributions to disaster risk reduction frameworks.

Institutional Actions. Organizations need to build conventional emergency management plans that consider succinct disaster risk reduction activity schemes within their institutional management systems. In most traditional societies, socially-constructed gender roles determine what norms and behaviours are acceptable for women and men, and girls and boys. In some cases, women who take majority responsibility for home-based tasks, may be reluctant to leave their assets in the case of hazard warning; and often do not learn survival skills that can help in disaster situations. Institutional actions therefore require strategic gender-sensitive approaches that identify how disasters affect men, women, boys and girls differently and shape working policies that address people's specific vulnerabilities, concerns and needs. Social care support organizations, therefore, need policies for personnel

orientation and field works vis-à-vis beneficiaries, to enhance women's and girls' contribution in home, community and societal disaster risk reduction goals.

Other Actors

Join efforts of civil society organizations, religious bodies, private institutions and influential men and women with concern, need unidirectional goals and bottom-top intervention ventures within traditional communities and other local set-ups. Since much is expected from these actors, they need rudimentary training and capacity building in analysis on gender equity dimensions, and in defining the socioeconomic responsibilities and environmental protection roles between men and women, before carrying-out interventions. Other actors need to understand that the mentality of the cultural man needs scrutiny adjustment, for him to understand that his role and responsibility for the home, as the man of the house, is a privileged gender equity consideration which should not in anyway, be taken as a requisite for dominance within the society, nor an excuse to implicitly or tacitly allow his traditional woman, undertake in perpetuity, uncalculated and/or non-assessed disaster risk home care duties. Other actors also need to foster opportunities for dialogue between traditional couples and communities. For optimum results, the family man would be made to understand several other gender equity reasons, apportioning other socio-cultural responsibilities for the woman, thus, granting the status of equality and mutual support, which is not mistaken for the type of favours that demand appreciative returns in subordination ([E/CN.6/2015/NGO/167](#)).

In the context of gender equality towards addressing climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction issues, focused on the local and traditional African perspective, coordination and combination of efforts need to be concentrated within the target zones. The socio-cultural mentality adjustment phenomenon, that targets most essentially the community men, is way paver to achieving women's and girl's orientated change objectives. The women and girls as well, need to fully understand for certainty, how their day to day actions and non-actions are important or detrimental to environmental protection.
