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Statement submitted by Centa for Organisational Development Ltd/Gte, 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

Few months after President Muhammadu Buhari took over the country's administration on May 29 2015, the rebased Nigerian economy rated largest in Africa was plunged into recession following three consecutive quarterly negative growths of its Gross Domestic Product. 18 months after, the economy is showing signs of recovery.

Nigeria's woes are rooted in its political leadership elite whose policies and practices are discriminatory especially against rural women and girls but favour few privileged elite characterized by autocracy, impunity, clannishness, false religiosity, intolerance and bigotry.

Rural women and girls in Nigeria face triple tragedy of poverty, illiteracy, and lack of access to resources to address the challenges of inequality and inequity in Nigeria's socio political and economic systems.

With its policy and development trust hinged on the fight against corruption, Nigeria in March 2017 was ranked the World's Most Corrupt Country by Transparency International. Among many high-profile cases currently trending in the country, this administration is yet to respond to corrupt allegations of its suspended Secretary to Federal Government Mr. Babachair Lawal.

Corruption exacerbates inequality and fuels poverty such that Nigeria is one of the most unequal societies in the world. Approximately 20 per cent of the population own 65 per cent of the national wealth. In May 2017 Oxfam-Nigeria research report, entitled 'Inequality in Nigeria, Exploring the Drivers' the report said, "extreme inequalities undermine Nigerian economy and ferments social unrest". Yet, there is no targeted government policy, program or project aimed at addressing or reducing rural poverty among women and girls. The combined wealth of five richest Nigeria's estimated at \$29.9 billion, could end extreme poverty in the country, if harnessed for use in Nigeria.

Inequality fuels insurgency and violent conflicts in north and south of the country. It is the bases for religious and other social unrests including restiveness and Niger Delta Militancy in the oil rich region. Rural women and girls are victims of Boko haram insurgency, armed conflicts and constitute majority of Internally displaced persons. This group abducted and still abduct, maim, kill, and hold hostage thousands of rural women and girls including the 295 Chibok school girls abducted from their school on April 14, 2014 in Bornu state. 103 of these have been released to the federal government as at May 2017.

Nigeria currently has the highest number of internally displaced persons estimated at over two million persons including victims of insurgency and ravaging Fulani herdsmen who due to desertification and global warming are migrating to southern Nigeria in search of green grazing fields for their cattle and herds. In the process, they have violently dislodged communities in Agatu in Benue and Enugu States.

More than 112 million Nigerians live in acute poverty from 69 million in 2004, a rise of 62 per cent. Meanwhile, the number of millionaires in Nigeria increased by 44 per cent during the same period, due to high levels of corruption and excessive influence big business and wealthy elites have over government. The poor, especially rural women and girls hardly benefit from Nigeria's wealth.

Furthermore, rural women and girls are not captured in the benefits of economic growth because they are either unemployed or in low-skilled, low-paid informal jobs. They represent between 60 per cent and 79 per cent of Nigeria's agricultural labour force but are five times less likely to own their own land than men. They are not empowered for self-reliance with technical man power development. Rural women and girls are also less likely to have any education. Over three quarters of the poorest women in Nigeria have never attended any school. They lack safe and clean water, adequate sanitation and more constitute over 70 per cent of 10 million children out of school.

Nigeria's under-five mortality and maternal mortality are among the highest in the world. Poverty and deprivation exacerbates vulnerabilities especially for women and girls who for these reasons are exposed to human trafficking, prostitution, violence and abuse. They are victims of child marriages, incest, rape and exposed to versico verginal fistulae.

North west and North east geo political zones have the largest number of out-of-school children. They also have the largest number of girls not completing basic education due to cultural and religious practices that encourage child marriages. They have the lowest levels of women giving birth in hospitals and health clinics, and the highest infant mortality, maternal mortality and morbidity rates in Nigeria according to Emir of Kano.

To address these daunting national challenges, the current federal administration on April 7, 2017 launched its Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) that principally seeks to domesticate the 17 sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its development framework and plans.

It established the National Social Investment Office (NSIO) with the mandate to implement the administrations Social Investment Programmes, designed to reduce poverty, while jumpstarting progress on human development by addressing goals 1, 2, 3, and 5.

These programs include:

- Home-grown school feeding that aims to provide one meal a day to a target 5.5 million primary school children from locally sourced foods;
- The National Cash Transfer programme: aims to provide a monthly payment of N5,000 to 1 million beneficiaries in poor and vulnerable households;
- N power- aims to provide jobs for 500,000 graduates and 100,000 non-graduates as artisans;
- Growth Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP): targets 1.6 million beneficiaries by providing access to credit facilities particularly for women, entrepreneurs, farmers and youth.
- These programs have impacted less than ten percent of its targeted rural women and girls and a dismal failure in creating transformative routes out of poverty as poverty among rural women and girls continue to grow.
- The office of Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs (OSSAP-SDG) created in 2016 to implement goals 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 lack coherent, open and inclusive work plans, with clear timelines on government priorities at national, state and local levels. The activities of OSSAP-SDG do not show it is inclusive in its approach nor seeks to leave no one behind. The agencies of government

do not seem to be working together to promote a coherent policy position with clear timelines, targets, indicators of success and measurable goals.

In most of their plans and activities, rural women and girls are left behind.

Civil society organizations in Nigeria literally beg for inclusion in the SDG implementation process. They have not been offered a free, fair and level playing ground needed for inclusivity in the spirit of Leave no one behind principle and mantra of the SDG. There is also the paucity of funds for SDG implementation.

Following from these, we call on the Commission on Status of Women to impress on Nigerian Government to set up modalities for citizens engagement as a right and not a privilege in the implementation of SDGs in Nigeria. As many organizations, as have presented themselves for engagement at local, state and national levels should be allowed to engage the systems and processes without excessive gate keeping.

Governments in Nigeria at national, state and local levels as well as the private sector should make funds available for the implementation of goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 14 and 17 aimed at poverty eradication, elimination of hunger and achieving gender parity and empowerment of rural women and girls in Nigeria. These would impact rural women and girls positively. Change cannot be achieved except in the atmosphere of absolute peace.
