

Gender and Development: Challenges to Women Involvement in Nigeria's Development

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Abstract

The contributions of women to the national economy are increasingly being recognized, but more opportunities are needed to fully develop their roles. Women lack the training and the means to bloom and this is needed for advancing the position of women: strengthening their capacities and skills and expanding the opportunities for women to more fully develop their roles. Most women live and work under deteriorating material conditions due to economic and social decline and conflicts. There are developmental costs of ignoring women and denying them access to key resources and the severe economic constraints tend to undercut it. The continuing poverty and deprivation in the country, declining terms of trade and the burden of external debt create an unfavourable environment for development. Of the limited resources available, little is directly allocated to women. Structural adjustment policies pursued by government have had important gender consequences. Macroeconomic policies do not incorporate gender perspectives in their design and ignore the social relations that influence women's roles in production.

Women's inequitable gender relations, their poverty and powerlessness in society are interconnected. Nigeria must commit to eradicating gender inequalities; mainstream gender; create a standing committee for gender affairs. Policy-makers must work with women to improve their positions and accelerate national development. A comprehensive approach must be taken to remove the social, economic and legal constraints on women. New administrative arrangements must be found to support their education and make it more consistent with their needs. Gender biases must be taken into account to improve women's ability to take advantage of incentives.

Keywords: Women, poverty, gender, inequality.

1. Introduction

The fundamental contributions of women in their households and national economies are increasingly acknowledged within Africa and by the international community mainly because of their energetic efforts to organize, articulate their concerns and make their voices heard. At both grassroots and national levels, more women's associations are taking advantage of the

new political openings to assert their leadership roles. They are also pressing for an expansion of women's economic and social opportunities, and the advancement of women's rights. By improving their own positions, women enhance the country's broader development prospects. However, women in Nigeria continue to face enormous obstacles. A nation's population is usually almost divided evenly between males and females except under peculiar circumstances such as war or highly selective immigration which normally affect males more than females. Nevertheless, throughout the ages, the sharing of power, wealth, influence, employment etc, between men and women has never been close to equality. Even in the most advanced countries, gender inequality in wealth distribution has remained a live issue. Over the years, many women have faced daunting challenges of joblessness, no source of livelihood, widowhood, and single parenthood. These challenges notwithstanding, the roles played by women in national development and in all facets of human endeavors have been quite notable. Though there has been considerable progress in developing the capabilities of women, their participation in economic and political decision making remains very limited. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in its 2005 Human Development Report listed some examples to show that in spite of the considerable progress in developing women's capacities, women and men still live in an unequal world. The examples include the following: poverty has a woman face, because 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty are women: the increasing poverty among women arises from their unequal situation in the labour market, their status and power in the family etc ; women's labour force participation rose by just 4 percent in 20 years (from 36 percent in 1980 to 40 percent in 2000) ; women have relatively low access to credit from formal banking institutions because they mostly do not to have collaterals to offer; all regions record a higher rate of unemployment among women than men; among illiterate people in developing countries, the proportion of women is higher than men's; women's wages are below average. The UNDP report adds that in 55 countries with comparable data, the average female wage is three quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) of the male wage in the non-agricultural sector. In developing countries, women still constitute less than one-seventh ($\frac{1}{7}$) of administrators and managers. Women occupy only 10 percent of parliamentary seats and only 6 percent of cabinet positions. Women development is the process whereby women develop the capacity and the ability to control and direct those things which affect them. The growing recognition of their contributions has not translated into significantly improved access to resources or increased decision-making powers. Neither has the dynamism that women display in the economic, cultural and social lives of their communities through their associations and informal networks been channelled into creating new models of participation and leadership. Aside from the political challenges, the material conditions under which most women live and work continue to deteriorate due to economic and social decline, conflicts, and the spread of diseases. Nigeria is the most populous country in sub Saharan Africa and is also termed the ninth most populous country in the world. The 2006 National Census puts Nigeria's population at about 150 million about 50% of which are females. Many of the women in Nigeria largely live in poverty. Their personal poverty is a lot more pervading than that of the male and this threatens the very survival and health of the nation. Poverty has a woman face since 70% of people in poverty are women. This is a challenge to sustainable development. The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that involves gender equality and women's empowerment and poverty reduction has the target date as 2015. Women in Nigeria have

always participated in productive labour. The National Report for the 2004 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development indicates that at least 40% of Agricultural production activities and 85% of agricultural produce, processing and marketing are performed by women. Women constitute the majority of the poor and the illiterate in both urban and rural areas in Nigeria. In 1994 over 3,000 women converged at the African Women's Preparatory Conference to articulate an African position for the Beijing Fourth Women's World Conference. The resulting African Platform for Action identified several priorities. These included combatting the increasing poverty of African women; improving women's access to education and health services, with a special focus on reproductive health; addressing women's relationship to the environment; increasing the involvement of women in the peace process; advancing the legal and human rights of women; highlighting the special concerns of the girl-child; and "mainstreaming" gender concerns within economic and development policy-making by disaggregating data along gender lines. The Beijing conference of 1995 stressed the empowerment of women as one of the central development goals of the 21st century. It adopted a Platform for Action which called for the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the design, implementation and monitoring of all policies and programmes, including development programmes. It committed countries to design their own specific programmes and activities in consultation with women's groups and other NGOs to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. Despite such positive moves, there has been insufficient political will and sustained commitment to meeting the needs and interests of women by local authorities and governments. Nigeria has ratified UN agreements such as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which guarantees women equal rights and protection from discrimination. However these have not informed policy-making or translated into better living and working conditions for women. National development is hampered by excluding the perspectives, skills and dynamism of half the population. Without meaningful commitment in the form of policy changes and the provision of resources to deal with the root causes of women's conditions, the country cannot hope to see a breakthrough in its development and renewal. Within the international development community, there has been a shift in thinking from the initial "women in development" (WID) approach, which focused narrowly on women's productive roles, to a broader "gender and development" perspective, which takes into account all spheres of women's lives and seeks to bring gender analysis into the core of development policy. UN agencies such as the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and UN Development Programme (UNDP) support gender awareness training for policy-makers, provide technical assistance and build strong gender components into their own programming and projects. Similarly, the Commonwealth Secretariat has commissioned several studies on gender and economic policy-making and applies a gender perspective to analyze the effectiveness of governmental policies and public services. The World Bank also emphasizes the developmental costs of ignoring women and denying them access to key resources, and urges countries to draw up gender action plans.

However, the severe economic constraints that Nigeria faces tend to undercut these new emphasis and shifts in approach. The continuing poverty and deprivation in the country, declining terms of trade and the burden of external debt create an unfavourable environment

for development. Of the limited resources available, little is directly allocated to women. In addition, structural adjustment policies pursued by the Nigerian governments in conjunction with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have had important gender consequences. Governments' macroeconomic policies do not incorporate gender perspectives in their design and ignore the structure of households and the social relations that influence women's roles in production in the country.

2. Women in Nigeria

Among the majority of rural and low-income urban dwellers, women perform all domestic tasks, while many also farm and trade. They are responsible for the care of children, the sick and the elderly, in addition to performing essential social functions within their communities. Many rural and urban women belong to women-only mutual-aid societies, benevolent groups in churches, cooperatives and market women's groups, some of which allow them to pool resources to reduce their workload and to invest in savings societies or cooperative ventures. Cooperative societies have provided women access to resources. Informal rotating credit associations have been used by the estimated 55 per cent of economically active women in the non-agricultural informal sector to invest in businesses and farms, home improvements and school costs for their children. Women rarely have the same access to resources as men. In the past some resources were available to them. Wives in many Nigerian societies were not fully economically dependent upon their husbands. Mba (1989) affirms that women's power and spheres of influence largely disappeared under the impact of colonialism and external religions, which upset existing economic and social complementarity between the sexes. New "customary" laws on marriage created in response to men's anxieties about the independence of women transformed the previously fluid and negotiable relations between them into rigid duties and obligations of wives and women. Women came to be regarded as primarily dependent on men, making it unnecessary to plan and provide for their needs; they were to work in the fields and home to produce food and other crops to support their men, who worked in visible, documented activities.

Ogbomo (2005) asserts that initially women shared in the promises of independence and saw gains in their access to education, formal sector employment, health care and nutritional profiles; their life expectancy at birth rose from 37 to 50 years by the end of the 1960s. But development plans continued to be formulated and implemented without an adequate understanding of women's contributions to the economy. Women were also absent from formal positions of decision-making and power. The lives of women in Nigeria have been profoundly affected by three main developments since the onset of economic and social decline in the 1970s and 1980s. First, the Structural Adjustment Programme implemented in the country in 1983 emphasized demand management and supply-oriented measures narrowly focused on export-led growth and efficiency, often to the detriment of social welfare. The programmes also introduced liberalization of trade regimes and of the financial sector, as well as privatization and reduction in the role of the state in economic life. Owing to their specific roles and positions within society, women have been among the worst affected by cuts in social sector spending, where substantial costs have been shifted from the state to the household.

Therefore, women have been forced to take on an increasing burden of unpaid work in caring for the sick, obtaining food and ensuring the survival of their families more generally. Second, there has been increased civil strife, unrests and conflicts. UNIFEM (2004) notes that most displaced persons and post-conflict returnees are usually women and children. Conflicts and civil unrests have increased violence against women and worsened the social and economic conditions under which they live. Third, there is the AIDS crisis, high and increasing rates of HIV infection and the costs in human lives. UNDP (2008) reports that just over half of the estimated 20 million cases of HIV in Africa are female. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable because of their lack of power over their sexuality and reproductive functions.

2.1 Marriage, Households and Women's Welfare

Women head about 31 per cent of households in urban and rural areas. In many rural areas, women contribute unpaid labour to the household's agricultural production and spend up to 50 hours a week on domestic labour and subsistence food production, with little sharing of tasks by spouses or sons in the household. Studies have documented that women work 12-13 hours a week more than men, as the prevalent economic and environmental crises have increased the working hours of the poorest women. In some areas, women may have separate access to land and work independently in farming or in some other income-generating activity. But in general they have fewer opportunities to earn income. They combine their unpaid labour with independent production to meet the needs of their families and to attain some measure of autonomy and self-reliance. Their income is indispensable for family survival regardless of the presence of men, since the system of allocation and distribution within many Nigerian households usually imposes individual responsibilities on men and women to meet their personal needs. Women are expected to actively generate the means to meet the daily expenses for themselves and their children, but also may receive loans or advances from their husbands to set up petty trading operations.

With the decline of national and local economies, many men have been unable or have refused to contribute their share of household expenses. This has increased household pressures on women, raising the numbers of women living in poverty and the numbers of households in the poorest categories headed by women. For women's welfare and production to be improved, planners and funding agencies need to take into account intra-household differences in resource use and control. While men may control more resources and earn higher incomes, this does not translate into improved family or household welfare. Rather, women's incomes and spending patterns are better indicators of the welfare of household members, since women spend more of their increased earnings on food, medicine and education for their children and other dependents. Improving women's incomes is both a matter of equity and a prerequisite for child survival and welfare.

3. Women in Economic Life

3.1 Mainstay of Rural Production

Women provide the backbone of the rural economy in the country. About 80 per cent of the economically active female labour force is employed in agriculture and women comprise about 47 per cent of the total agricultural labour force. Food production is the major activity of rural women and their responsibilities and labour inputs often exceed those of men in most areas. Women provide much of the labour for men's cultivation of export crops, from which they derive little direct benefit. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (1996) notes that women's contribution to the production of food crops ranges from 30 per cent to 80 per cent in Africa with estimates for most countries tending toward the higher end of the scale. Women are responsible for 70 per cent of food production, 50 per cent of domestic food storage, 100 per cent of food processing, 50 per cent of animal husbandry and 60 per cent of agricultural marketing. Women also have taken advantage of new opportunities to produce vegetables for urban markets on fringe land using highly labour-intensive practices. In parts of Nigeria where social practices of female seclusion prevent them from working outside the home, they engage in food processing and trade with the assistance of young girls. To develop a more productive, sustainable, and equitable agricultural sector, Nigerian women cannot be neglected. The constraints that women face must be addressed for agriculture to be the engine of economic growth.

4. The Constraints

4.1 Access to land

The first of these constraints is access to land. Agricultural intensification, population growth and economic change have led to substantive shifts from common property systems of tenure towards more centralized resource control. In the process, women and poorer people generally have lost out. Women rarely own land and when they do; their holdings tend to be smaller and less fertile than those of men. Where land reform schemes have been introduced, they often have displaced complex systems of land use and tenure in which women had certain rights in common law and local practice, if not in legislation. Arising from "women in development" and NGO activities, some women have been granted land to start communal gardens from which they generate income. When these gardens are visibly remunerative, women's continued access rights become vulnerable and subject to encroachment by male landowners. The low incomes and increased uncertainties and risks that women face in their production activities, compounded by the lack of access to land, is pushing many of them out of traditional agriculture.

4.2 The Labour Challenge

Labour is a challenge to females because men have left rural economies in search of more viable livelihoods and women have lost access to male help or the money they may have

previously provided. For most women to increase their yields is through even harder work, using more labour-intensive methods. Where technical innovations such as irrigation techniques have made more than one cropping season possible, increased women's labour has been crucial in meeting the intensified work demands. Women have not simply accepted increasing demands on their labour time, women often have bargained with men to increase what they get in exchange for the labour they expend especially on family fields.

4.3 Credit and Other Inputs

In addition to land and labour, women face problems of access to other inputs, including credit, technology, extension services, training and marketing. Banks demand collateral in the form of landed property. In agriculture for instance most resources and technical assistance have been focused on men growing export crops, with improved seeds and tools going to larger commercial farmers, almost invariably men. Only 5 per cent of the resources provided through extension services in Nigeria are available to women, although, in some cases, particularly in food production, women handled 80 per cent of the work. Only 17 per cent of total extension agents at work in the country today are women. Food security cannot be assured without improving the situation of women producers. Women have shown themselves to be ready to take advantage of new opportunities. If women had the same human capital endowments and used the same production factors and inputs as men, the value of their output would increase. Raising the productivity of women to the same level as that of men would increase total production significantly, eliminating a key constraint to food security. Unfortunately, some of the obstacles that women confront have been worsened by the impact of structural adjustment programmes. Greater emphasis is placed on export crops, which usually are grown by men, the domestic terms of trade, have therefore tended to shift against food production, where women predominate. Most of the women farmers do not market enough of their own produce to benefit from higher producer prices and the increased acreage devoted to export and other cash crops has increased labour demands on women.

4.4 Women's Employment

The ongoing economic crises and the gulf between job creation and the growth in the numbers of job seekers have worsened the employment situation for women and men alike. But women face greater vulnerabilities in the labour market because of their relative lack of education and training, the tendency to channel women into certain occupations, and the continuous heavy burdens of unpaid domestic work, child-bearing and child-care, which restrict the time and energy available for income-earning activities. According to the UNDP, women are two-thirds less likely than men to get waged employment. Only 3 out of 10 women in the labour force in the country are paid employees. In 2008, the Federal Office of Statistics reported that about 5 per cent of the female labour force worked in industry, 20 per cent in services, 23 per cent in sales, and only 6 per cent in professional, technical, administrative or managerial positions. Employees in both the public and private sectors earn steady, albeit low, incomes. They also work to predictable schedules, in contrast to the self-employed, who are more insecure and who often must make substantial investments in time and energy. Despite International Labour

Organization (ILO) conventions, to which Nigeria is a signatory, there are significant income disparities, with women earning half or less of the incomes of men. Many women also do not benefit in practice from formal laws and policies guaranteeing maternity protection or equal pay for equal work. Fapohunda (1992) observes that women's formal sector participation rates dropped from 57 per cent in 1970 to 53 per cent in 1990, with 2.5 million women losing their jobs between 1985 and 1990 as part of the after effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme. Women accounted for 31 per cent of retrenched workers, although they were only 6 per cent of formal sector workers; women had predominated in the lower echelons of the social services sector, which faced the heaviest budget cuts. Many of such retrenched women relocated to the informal sector. The non-agricultural informal sector employs about 25 per cent of the female labour force, mainly in petty trading and home-based processing and manufacturing, where they have little access to official sources of credit or information. These women workers also do not benefit from minimum wage and social security provisions and have to provide for their own health and retirement needs. With the contraction of formal sector jobs, the informal sector has become a "safe haven" for both men and women because of its low capital requirements and ease of entry. For the majority of women, participation in the informal sector is a survival strategy, although they tend to face stiff competition from new entrants, including men who have lost or cannot obtain formal sector employment. Informal sector workers have built associations to protect their interests and mobilized traditional savings and credit schemes to offer sources of capital for women. In general, however, women's lack of access to affordable credit, information, technical advice and services prevents them from expanding their enterprises. The informal sector in which women predominate is characterized by low productivity and disguised unemployment. Providing credit, information, services and infrastructure to the informal sector would enhance its productivity, thus supporting women's efforts to maintain their families and provide services to farmers, artisans and other producers.

4.5 Women and Social Services

4.5.1 Education and Training

Education for women advances their economic empowerment, and also promotes development more **generally**. Lack of access to formal education and training is a key barrier to women's employment and advancement in society. In Nigeria, female illiteracy rates were over 50 per cent in 2007, compared to 38 per cent for men. Literacy classes for women have limited impact but programmes linked to income generating activities have been most successful. In some areas, parents still prefer to send boys to school, seeing little need for education for girls. Again, adolescent pregnancy, early marriage and girls' greater burden of household labour are obstacles to their schooling. Girls especially in the rural areas often do not go beyond primary education, and school curricula have not been guided by this reality and their content is not geared to helping girls acquire basic life skills. Furthermore the curriculum is full of gender biases and leads girls into stereotypical "feminine" jobs in teaching, nursing and clerical work. Few women are found in scientific or technical education where they could develop better skills to secure better paying jobs. Fapohunda (2010) indicates that though there have been

improvements in the net enrolment of girls at primary levels, disparities persist in comparison with the enrolment of boys. Female enrolment numbers decrease as girls move up the education ladder. Prospects for increasing the access of women and girls to education have been undermined by economic crisis, budgetary cuts, and debt servicing burdens. UNESCO (2008) notes that average per capita education spending in most African countries declined from \$41 in 1990 to only \$26 in 1995 and was \$25 in 2005. Meanwhile the proportion of foreign aid allocated to education declined from 17 per cent in 1985 to 9.8 per cent in 2000, increasing slightly to 10.7 percent in 2010. In Nigeria percentage budgetary allocations to education have continuously been on the decline. Cuts in state spending on education have led to a slower rate of increase in gross enrolment rates, while drop-out rates for girls have risen as they have been withdrawn from school in response to new fees and "user charges," and other economic factors. In 2003, only about 46 per cent of school-age girls were enrolled in primary or secondary school. The teaching profession indicates a similar level of female participation. In 2004, women accounted for about 57 per cent of primary teaching staff in the country, while their proportions in secondary schools was 43 per cent in the 2006, at the level of tertiary education in 2008 women accounted for a mere 22 percent of the lecturers. Women are largely absent in technical fields, with the exception of home economics and secretarial courses, depriving girls of needed role models. A woman's education beyond primary school is a reliable route to economic empowerment and long-term change in the status quo, as well as a determinant of a family's health and nutrition. Education beyond ten or more years of school is also a reliable predictor of lower fertility, improved infant survival, reduced maternal mortality and enhanced levels of infant and child development and educational attainment. However, the current economic and policy situation, combined with socio-cultural factors, threaten any real advances in the education of women and girls. New administrative arrangements and partners must be found to support their education and make it more consistent with their needs. Training programmes are needed to help women develop their technical competence, to enable them to be better informed, better infiltrate the political and economic structures and gain maximum competence and means.

4.5.2 Health and Sanitation

Inadequate potable water, sanitation and waste disposal in urban and rural areas leave populations vulnerable to water-borne and other environmental diseases. These conditions are compounded for women by some unhelpful or even dangerous religious norms and practices centred on their reproductive and productive functions, their heavy workloads, high birth rates and socio-cultural factors that limit their dietary intake. Maternal and infant mortality remain high in the country. The Federal Ministry of Health affirms that up to 40 per cent of pregnant women in the country have no access to antenatal care, while the percentage of births attended by trained personnel has declined, though the ministry has recorded some improvements as a result of maternal and child health programmes. High infant mortality, the opposition of male partners and religious and cultural factors result in levels of contraceptive use of only around 15 per cent. The health of women and girl-children is also jeopardized by female genital mutilation (FGM). Besides the immediate pain and trauma FGM inflicts on its victims, it can result in infertility, incontinence, painful sexual intercourse and obstructed

labour, in addition to severe psychological trauma. The high and growing incidence of AIDS also highlights women's lack of power over their own sexuality. Arising from cultural and economic reasons, many women feel unable to refuse the sexual advances of partners even when they know they risk infection. Poverty has pushed some young women into sex work. In 2005, HIV prevalence rates of 15 to 20 per cent were reported for female sex workers in the country. HIV/AIDS infection is on the rise among women of childbearing age who also are vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases. Women and girls bear the burden of caring for infected family members and for orphans and abandoned children, at the same time as governments have reduced expenditure for the health sector. While reproductive health issues are important, there is also a need to focus on women's general well-being. Overall, there has been slow progress in improving the health of women in the country. Programmes to promote the health of mothers through maternal and childcare services and family planning services have been undercut by reductions in government expenditure in the health sector, shortages of drugs, scarcity of medical personnel and inadequate health infrastructure. Deteriorating environmental and economic conditions, the resurgence of old diseases and the rising incidence of AIDS could reverse the modest gains in women's health.

4.5.3 Legal Rights and Political Participation

The Nigerian government has ratified conventions and international legal instruments on women's rights. Often, however, these have not been enacted into national law. Moreover, many women are ignorant of the existence of laws that recognize their rights and can be invoked for their protection. Various systems of customary law, religious ideologies and cultural stereotyping have been used to treat women as minors in the law and household, with few women having equal access to political offices and positions. Socialization and educational processes reinforce this situation; women are raised to believe that they are inferior to men. Traditional women leaders have not been given the same recognition as male chiefs who have been co-opted into new positions of power in their societies. Women are under-represented in high offices of state and positions of decision-making in government, the military, central banks, finance and planning ministries.

Notwithstanding the 30 per cent minimum threshold in decision-making for women recommended in UNDP 1995 *Human Development Report*, average female representation in politics is less than 5 per cent in the country, and many of the women are nominated, not elected. Although they are active in community affairs, women also are not adequately represented, except where conscious efforts have been made to guarantee a quota for them. Women's representation in the judicial system has improved through the growth in numbers of new female lawyers, magistrates and judges but the proportions still tend to be low. Despite the presence of some women in judicial and parliamentary systems and in top ministerial and decision-making positions, their low numbers hamper their effectiveness in initiating change for women. Agomor (2004) observes that in the public service, women's representation at the highest levels of decision-making was 4.3 per cent in 2002. An important area for a greater presence of women is in the media. Given the role of the media in influencing people's opinions

and attitudes, the increased participation of women, coupled with gender-sensitive education, can lead to more positive portrayals of women, their activities and their capabilities.

5. Overcoming the Challenges

Over the last two decades, several women's associations have been formed or revitalized, and the quality of their work has improved significantly. They have taken advantage of new political openings to raise issues in new ways and to form alliances with other civil society groups to advance women's rights with emphasis on African agenda-setting, and the development of organizational potential. Women and gender studies programmes also have been set up in many universities, both to teach and to engage in fundamental and applied research to improve the conditions of women. Rather than the "development discourse" of the 1970s and 1980s, issues affecting women now are discussed most often within the framework of rights. Women have entered into debates and action on gender concerns that formerly were perceived as divisive and unpopular, such as violence against women, sexual harassment in addition to economic, political, legal and cultural issues. Sub-regional and regional affiliations of women also have emerged and have identified key areas for action. They act as pressure groups, network with each other, form regional and global alliances and aim to direct resources and attention to women and the issues that concern them. For instance the Women's World Banking and AFWE address the lack of credit for women entrepreneurs by acting as collateral grantees and providing matching funds to give poor women better credit access. Women's World Banking advocates the establishment of a continental bank for women. FAWE brings together female ministers in charge of education, university chancellors, permanent secretaries and other influential women to work towards increasing girls' access to education. It also presses for implementation at national level of the strategies for educators and policy-makers contained in the Ouagadougou Declaration and UNESCO's Priority African Programme, which call for a regional consensus on girls' education as a priority for development, outline a regional framework for action to improve girls' educational opportunities and seek to mobilize new resources and partners to support these goals. Again, gender dialogues have been developed as a lobbying tool and they have worked with other groups to form an Equal Opportunity Commission and to push for implementation of affirmative action programmes. These groups have held consultations with other women's groups from around Africa to share experiences, both of the obstacles that women face and of successful strategies that might be replicated. Women also are organizing on the issue of peace. They are demanding resources and legal recognition to rebuild their lives, as well as participation in peace-building, conflict-resolution and early warning mechanisms, citing both their traditional peace-making roles and their right to equal involvement. The growing organizations of women are making a push for systemic changes in women's lives. Governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies and other NGOs must cooperate for meaningful change to occur, in the lives of women themselves and in society as a whole.

6. Equality of Responsibility

An important issue is equality of responsibility between men and women for gender equality to become a reality. In order for more women to reach the same high positions as men in various fields, more focused education and socialization are needed for better burden-sharing and a fairer division of labour between the sexes in the home and society. Not only should governments' macroeconomic policies incorporate gender perspectives in their design, they also need to take into account intra-household differences in resource use and control, recognizing that improvements in women's incomes promote equity as well as child welfare. Most economic programmes overlook the unpaid economy, where women predominate. They also assume that males and females respond to incentives in the same way, thereby ignoring gender and power relations within households and communities. But gender biases and rigidities may strongly affect women's access to productive resources and markets, ultimately frustrating economic reform policies. It therefore makes economic sense to take into account gender biases and tailor planned interventions to improve women's ability to take advantage of incentives, thus enhancing overall economic efficiency.

7. Access to Resources

As regards access to resources, governments and local authorities must demonstrate commitment to removing legal impediments and socio-cultural obstacles against women, especially in the rural areas where the majority of women live and are economically active. The constraints on women's access to land, credit, extension services, inputs and new technologies must be removed, and opportunities should be created for their enterprise. Measures to improve women's access through institutional reforms must be pursued and monitored for effectiveness. Governments must build partnerships with the emerging associations of women to create an enabling policy environment which should include making credit available to women at affordable rates, with the private sector assisting government efforts to get credit to women.

8. Labour Time

In addition, there is the need to reduce labour time. Appropriate technologies for household chores, food processing, preservation and storage are needed, as are farm tools that are appropriate for women. The increased provision of potable water and cheap and reliable energy sources are also needed to reduce the long hours that women work and to remove the drudgery from their lives.

9. Education and Health

Gender biases in the educational system, training and employment must be consistently attacked to give women new opportunities for achievement, while school curricula must incorporate concepts of gender equality and peace at all levels, so that students will

incorporate them throughout their lives. Young women need role models to motivate them and must be given usable education and skills to play meaningful roles in society and to safeguard them from harmful practices which mortgage their health and lives. It is clear that there are interconnections between women's inequitable gender relations, and their poverty and powerlessness in society. There must be a frontal assault on all of these issues. Enabling women to protect themselves involves improving their social and economic status; and providing a method over which they have sufficient control.

10. Leadership and Organization

Women's leadership skills in their communities, groups and associations need to be harnessed and formalized to give them political and decision-making power. Women's commitment to their households, local and national food security, local production and the environment should be reflected in equitable representation on all bodies that make decisions in these areas, as well as in broader economic programmes that affect women's lives. Implementation mechanisms need to harness women's own energies, through their associations. Technical units in government departments and ministries should be established, along with data banks and resource centres at local and national levels to support actions on behalf of women and they should be adequately funded and staffed. The viability of women's institutions and mechanisms for decision-making in the community, market places and trades must be recognized, and they should be utilized to increase women's participation and decision-making power in society. To develop the country the leadership of the women must be developed.

11. Conclusion

This paper concludes that it is clear that there are interconnections between women's inequitable gender relations, and their poverty and powerlessness in society. The signing of Gender Declaration by Nigeria commits her to eradicate gender inequalities in the country; mainstream gender in all its activities; create a standing committee of ministers responsible for gender affairs; and set up focal points dealing with gender in all sector coordinating units as well as a gender unit in its Secretariat. Policy-makers must listen to and work with women to improve their positions and thereby accelerate national development. A comprehensive approach must be taken by governments in conjunction with development agencies and women themselves to remove the social, economic and legal constraints on women. National action plans which must be adequately funded and staffed must be designed in broad consultation with women's groups. Similar institutions have been marginalized, under-resourced and used as a dumping ground for gender issues. Women's institutions must be recognized and utilized to increase women's participation and decision-making in society. New administrative arrangements and partners must be found to support their education and make it more consistent with their needs. Gender biases and tailor planned interventions must be taken into account to improve women's ability to take advantage of incentives. The constraints on women's access to land, credit, extension services, inputs and new technologies must be removed, and opportunities should be created for their enterprise. Measures to improve women's access through institutional reforms must be pursued and monitored for

effectiveness. Enabling women to protect themselves involves improving their social and economic status; and providing a method over which they have sufficient control.

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