The Millennium Development Goals And Women Empowerment In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent a worldwide collaborative effort set to put the wheels of national development in motion in Nigeria and other countries. They were to reduce poverty and hunger, tackle ill-health, gender inequality, lack of education, lack of access to clean water and environmental degradation etc. Although all the goals silently revolve around women, this paper highlighted the effects of the MDGs on women empowerment in Nigeria, using the secondary source of data and certain indicators which were derived from goals three and five of the MDGs. The paper revealed that despite the huge resources put into the implementation of the goals, the actual change in the status of women in the Nigerian society is far from the targeted standard. With the targeted year 2015 by the corner, the paper suggested some policy measures that will ensure the needed progress for reaching the 100 per cent achievement benchmark.

Key words; Women, National Development, Gender, Goals, MDGs, Policy Measures, Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

The principal objective of Nigeria's national development has been to achieve stability, material prosperity, peace and social progress. Nevertheless, a variety of problems have persistently slowed down the country's growth and its vision to attain sustainable levels of national development. These problems include; inadequate human development, inefficient agricultural systems, weak infrastructure, lacklustre growth in the manufacturing sector, poor policy and regulatory environment, corruption and mismanagement of resources etc (MDGs, 2010). A particular issue in this regards is the case of gender inequality. Moser (1993) asserted that women constitute about 50% of the African population and account for about 60 – 80% of the agricultural labour force. They produce up to 80% of essential food stuffs, which they process and sell in large quantities.

In the case of Nigeria, Amnesty International (2006) observed that women make up more than 50% of the Nigerian population. Above all, women bear more than 90% of the domestic production task. Indeed, they have the biological and social tasks of bearing, nurturing, and providing initial education for children and ensuring the well-being of the family and that of the entire society. This means that women participation in the process of development cannot be ignored, if the desired results must be achieved. By virtue of their physiology, women are the givers and nurturers of life, hence, their active participation in the society would definitely affect the overall development of the country and the achievement of the set goals.

However, the expected contributions of women to development have been marred with gross gender inequality in Nigeria. In fact, Action-Aids (2012) views Nigeria as one of the most unequal countries in the world. This inequality reflects widening gaps in income and gender access to economic and social opportunities; growing inequality between and within rural and urban populations; and widening gaps between economies in different parts of the federation (MDGs, 2010). The Human Development Index (HDI), which is a composite statistical measure of life expectancy, adult literacy, and income, is 0.459 placing Nigeria at 156 of 179 countries. The real value of Nigeria's human development is even lower at 0.278 once the HDI value is adjusted for distributive inequality across the population (UNDP, 2011). National development indicators mask wide regional disparities. Southern Nigeria has consistently higher scores for human development, gender development and empowerment. The North East has the lowest human development, followed by the North West (Action-Aids 2012) .While growth has improved significantly on average of about 6 % in the last seven years, this growth has not improved everyday livelihoods (UNDP, 2011)..

The grievous plight of women was acknowledged and incorporated in the United Nation's Millennium Goals (MDGs) (UN, 2005). The MDGs are currently the highest-level expression of the international community's development priorities. They are the world's time bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions – income poverty, hunger, disease, inadequate housing – while promoting gender equality, etc (UN, 2005). The MDGS committed the international community to an action agenda which emphasizes sustainable, human development as the key to fulfilling social and economic progress. All 191 Member States of

the United Nations pledged to achieve these goals by the year 2015. The Goals and their targets and indicators have been widely accepted as a framework for measuring national and global development progress MDGs (UN, 2005).

The first major development policy introduced by the federal government of Nigeria after the Millennium Declaration was the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). SEEDS and LEEDS were the corresponding strategies at state and local government levels respectively. Although they were not developed exclusively for the MDGs, many of the targets in NEEDS and SEEDS were aligned with the MDGs (MDGs, 2010). Out of the eight MDGs, the document expressly stated as its third and fifth goals, the pledge to promote gender equality, empower women and ensure their mental and physical well-being. In fact, gender equality is recognized as a key in achieving all the eight Goals. As an interim report by the Millennium Project on progress towards Goal 3 points out:

"Development *policies that fail to take women to be actors in those policies and actions will have limited effectiveness and serious costs to societies. The reverse is also true: the achievement of Goal 3 depends on the extent to which each of the other goals addresses gender-based constraints and issues'* (Abama and Kwaja, 2009).

However, the excellent policies and intentions in the MDGs have not translated into budgets or action to make the changes required for women to contribute effectively to Nigeria's development. UNESCO (2006) observed that in spite of the many declarations aimed at ensuring gender parity, education and empowerment, gender disparities persist throughout the education system. It is observed from data on enrolment, retention and transmission that girls and women lag behind boys in early childhood education, primary, secondary, and higher education and in non-formal and literacy education programmes as well. In addition, women have continued to bear the brunt of national and international economic policies that failed to lift their nations out of poverty. They suffer with the imposition of Structural Adjustment programmes, which has exacerbated the spate of poverty in most African States. Similarly, many women are being forced to seek for alternative-cum-additional income - generating activities for sustenance through multiple modes of livelihood. According to Roberts (1999), women often represent the majority of people in the informal sector. They work for low wages and the jobs are unstable. As the economy worsens, even women in paid employment often resort to private commercial activities to supplement their income. In addition, Abama and Kwaja (2009) stated that Nigerian women equally confront a male dominated power structure that upholds and entrenches male authority in the home. The National Gender Policy has yet to bear fruit, while the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been stalled Amnesty International(2006). This establishes the need for a pragmatic approach that can translate women empowerment programs into concrete realities. The gap between the goals such as the MDGs that promote women empowerment specifically (Gender equality and women health) and their actualization must be tackled if women are to occupy their rightful positions in Nigeria.

2. The Concept of Women Empowerment

Since the 1980s, the term empowerment became central to the work of many development organisations. Brian (2012) conceptualises empowerment as an emancipation process in which the disadvantaged are empowered to exercise their rights, obtain access to resources and participate actively in the process of shaping society and making decisions. However, there is a range of definitions and approaches used by different organisations. To some, empowerment is a political concept that involves a collective struggle against oppressive social relations. To others, it refers to the consciousness of individuals and the power to express and act on one's desires. These differences stem from the many different origins and uses of the term. Empowerment is an act of building, developing and increasing power through cooperation, sharing responsibility and working together (Bagudo, 2000). Olorode. (1997) affirms that empowerment is the act of taking power; this term implies the effective use of that power that is political when referring to the polity.

Thus, when a group, class or organisation is empowered, it either captures power or it is given power. In the second instance, power or some power is conceded or ceded to that group, class or organisation. Empowerment is a loaded concept socially, psychologically, economically and politically. It does not require a redistribution of power, rather it awakens the power that should be in every person by virtue of being a responsive and responsible human being as someone who can say and do things (Oni, 2001). On its part, the World Bank (2003) sees empowerment as an expansion of freedom of choice and action leading to an increase in one's authority and control over resources and decisions that affect one's life. It is obvious from the above definitions that empowerment involves a means towards women's increased welfare, self-reliance, efficiency, and equality.

According to Brian (2012) the concept of empowerment includes both the individual and collective dimension and participation in processes of decision making, strengthening of women´s organisations, acknowledging and valuing women´s work as well as controlling the means of production and resources. A major strategy of empowerment consists of building women´s power through organising and networking of movements on the

basis of their diverse experiences. There is an increasing recognition that economically empowering women is essential both to realize women's rights and to achieve broader development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, education and welfare.

In the past years, a broad range of organizations have committed themselves to the goal of women's economic empowerment. These organizations realize that economically empowering women is a win-win that can benefit not only women, but society more broadly. It promotes women's ability to achieve their rights and well-being while also reducing household poverty, increasing economic growth and productivity, and increasing efficiency. Brian (2012) provided strong reasons to emphasize women's economic empowerment in development programs, which includes the following;

i. Economic empowerment is one of the most powerful routes for women to achieve their potential and advance their rights.

ii. Since women make up the majority of the world's poor, meeting poverty-reduction goals requires addressing women and their economic empowerment.

iii. Discrimination against women is economically inefficient. National economies lose out when a substantial part of the population cannot compete equitably or realize its full potential.

iv. Working with women makes good business sense. When women have the right skills and opportunities, they can help businesses and markets grow.

v. Women who are economically empowered contribute more to their families, societies and national economies. It has been shown that women invest extra income in their children, providing a route to sustainable development.

Generally, the concept of women empowerment is related to gender equality but it is distinct from it. The core of women empowerment lies in the ability of a woman to control her own destiny (Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender 2002). This implies that to be empowered, women must not only have equal capabilities (such as education and health) and equal access to resources and opportunities such as land and employment, but they must use those rights, capabilities, resources, and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions provided through leadership opportunities and participation in political institutions. Despite the huge advantages inherent in women empowerment as theory and practise, it has not yielded the expected dividends in Nigeria. The national gender policy, the MDGs and affirmative action encompassing women liberation movements, women empowerment programmes, first ladies- summits, family support programme, better-life programmes etc could not adequately integrate female group into the Nigerian political process for better socio, economic development (Ndubisi, 2005). The status-quo cannot be left unaltered, hence this study, to provide alternatives or workable solutions to bridge the gaps.

3. The Nexus between Goal Three and Other Goals

The problems of gender inequality are well known, but it remains extremely difficult to translate this knowledge into development policies and practices at the level required to bring about the desired transformation in the distribution of power, opportunities and outcomes for women. The MDGs with their concrete time-bound targets for action provide a glimmer of hope for a global change in the development of women and their nations. The existence of a separate goal on gender equality is the result of decades of advocacy, research and coalition-building at the international level concerning the actions to be taken by the global agenda for gender equality and women's human rights. Its very existence demonstrates that the global community has accepted the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment to the development paradigm. At the core of Goal three is an acknowledgement that gender equality and the empowerment of women is achievable with the necessary leadership and political will.

Gender equality in capabilities and access to opportunities can accelerate economic growth. Gender equality in farm inputs helps increase agricultural production and reduces poverty, due to the fact that women farmers form a significant proportion of the rural poor. Equal investment in women's health and nutritional status reduces chronic hunger and malnutrition, which increases productivity and well-being. Educated girls and women have greater control over their fertility and participate more in public life. A mother's education is a strong and consistent determinant of her children's school enrolment and their health and nutritional outcomes. A mother's education, income, and empowerment have a significant impact on lowering child and maternal mortality.

Greater economic independence for women, increases their ability to negotiate safe sex, create greater awareness of the need to alter traditional norms about sexual relations, provide better access to treatment, and provide support for the care function that women perform. Gender-equitable property and resource ownership policies enable women to manage them in more sustainable manner. Greater gender equality in the political sphere can also lead to higher investments in development cooperation.

4. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Women Empowerment in Nigeria
The empowerment of women and improvements in their political, social, economic and health status are essential for the achievement of sustainable development in the country. WARDC (2003) noted that without the active participation of women and incorporation of women's perspectives in all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. By implication, it can be inferred that the exclusion of women in any development process may lead to no development at all. The first two decades of development planning in Nigeria were largely characterized by gender- blind and gender-insensitive development policies (Ezeilo 2008). In the same vein, Nigeria, particularly since the wake of the 1980s, embraced pro-gender economic policies where women's interests were subsumed within the national interest and gender sensitivity was almost inconsequential, infinitesimal and a non-issue (Ejumudo, 2013). With the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals by the United Nations in September 2000, more interest has been generated and a better attention paid to the pursuit of gender sensitive policies at both the global and national levels. Specifically, the third and the fifth goals which were aimed at achieving gender equality, women empowerment and good health for women are both of intrinsic value and are at the heart of attaining all the other goals. To assess the impact of the MDGs in women empowerment in Nigeria therefore, the following indicators derived from goals three and five were used for analysis;

i.   Ratio of enrolment in education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels,
ii.   Share of women in wage employment in the non- agricultural sector
iii. Proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament and other political decision-making institutions
iv.   Rate of Protection from Violence Against women
v.   Availability of Health Facilities for Women Health

4.1 Ratio of Enrolment in Education - at the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Levels
To excel as a nation, the female population require training and re-training, so as to raise the living standards of households and the nation, to improve the level of health, preserve the environment as well as transform resources to productive use (Herz and Sperling, 2004)..
However, in Nigeria, the trend in gross enrolment ratio of girls in schools has been abysmal.
According to Action-Aids (2012), the national educational statistics for years 2006-2010 from the Federal Ministry of Education indicate progressive decline in gross enrolments in public primary schools by 12% in 2010. Private primary school enrolments, which account for approximately 10% of total enrolment, increased during the same period. The private sector is becoming a significant provider of education partly due to perceptions of poor quality in government schools and the increasing hidden and open levies being charged in public schools. The actual number of girls enrolled in public primary schools has decreased since 2007 nationally (Action-Aids2012). The trend for both boys and girls is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1 National enrolment in public primary and junior secondary schools over time

Year	Primary Schools		Junior Secondary Schools	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
2007	11,086,997	9,382,398	1,688,295	1,310,077
2008	10,252,000	8,728,395	1,899,060	1,552,018
2009	10,154,860	8,663,684	2,081,305	1,676,788
2010	10,215,179	8,826,988	2,260,585	1,864,626

Source (Action Aids, 2012)
Table 1 show that the actual number of girls enrolled in public primary schools has decreased since 2007 in Nigeria. The 1977 National Education Policy, which was amended in 2006, stipulates free basic education for

every Nigerian child. The 2006 National Gender Policy and its Strategic Implementation Framework emphasizes the central role of female education as a key determinant for achieving broader development objectives. However, the national primary Net Enrolment Rate for girls in 2010 was 55% compared to 60% for boys. At least 53% of the "out-of-school" children were girls. Many female children do not enrol in secondary school and this has not changed much over the last 20 years (Action-Aids, 2012). The figures show wide disparities between States and across communities. 70.8% of young women aged 20-29 in the North-West are unable to read or write compared to 9.7% in the South-East. Several reasons explain this: early marriage, early childbirth, poor sanitation, and the shortage of female teachers (British Council 2012).Even the tertiary level of education has not been better in terms of enrolment for female applicants. In addition, the British Council (2012) stated that Nigeria has the largest number of out-of-school children in the world.

A greater challenge in this regard is inadequate public spending on education, which has been 4 % (on average) of federal allocation instead of the 26 % recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Action-Aids, 2012). The Federal Ministry of Education budget share dropped progressively from 8.6% of the national budget in 2006 to 8.35% in 2008, 5.3% in 2010 and 3.1% in 2012 (National Assembly, 2012). The general trend of policy atropism is characteristic of the wider governance environment owing to poor institutional capacity to set up efficient monitoring mechanisms. Yet, with respect to gender policy, it is worsened by a pervading culture of male dominance in private and public spaces, reinforced by a predominantly patriarchal belief system that combines to generate gender bias in institutional behaviour (Imam, 2009; Para-Mallam et al. 2011). There is also a high degree of resource mismanagement in the education sector through corruption. Faced with these challenges, it is unlikely that the aspect of goal three in the MDGs, which deals with empowering women through education, will be achieved at the end of the target year.

4.2 Share of Women in Wage Employment in the Non- Agricultural Sector

The British Council (2012) asserted that income inequality in the formal sector has grown since 1999. Despite International Organization (ILO) conventions, there are significant income disparities, with women earning half or less of the incomes of men. Only one in every three employees in the privileged non-agricultural formal sector is a woman. Regardless of their educational qualifications, women earn consistently less than their male counterparts. In some cases they earn less than men with lower qualifications. Women occupy fewer than 30% of all posts in the public sector and only 17% of senior positions (British Council 2012). The FOS (2009) reported that about 5 % of the female labour forces are engaged in the industrial sector, 20 % in services, 23 % in sales, and only 6 % in professional, technical, administrative or managerial positions.

Many women also do not benefit from the formal laws and policies guaranteeing maternity protection or equal pay for equal work (NBS 2009). Fapohunda (2012) on his part observed that women's formal sector participation rates dropped with 2.5 million women losing their jobs between 1985 and 1990 as part of the Structural Adjustment Programme aftermath. Women accounted for 31 % of retrenched workers, although they were only 6 % of formal sector workers. Women dominated the lower echelons of the social services sector, which faced the heaviest budget cuts then. Many of such retrenched women relocated to the informal sector (Fapohunda, 2012). Table 2; show the rate of disparity in senior staff appointments in the public service.

Table 2 Male and Female Senior Staff Appointments in the Public Sector 2001-2007

Judges				Permanent Secretaries		
Type	Women	Men	%Women	Women	Men	Women%
2001	146	724	16.8	135	657	17.0
2002	178	764	18.9	131	697	15.8
2003	184	787	18.9	149	787	15.9
2004	198	809	19.7	154	802	16.1
2005	208	887	19.0	163	839	16.3
2006	208	913	18.6	178	826	17.7
2007	226	901	20.1	208	797	20.7

Source: NBS (2009).

Table 2 confirms the fact that there is gross gender disparity in the level of appointments into senior positions. This gap has not been closed even with the MDGs being implemented actively in Nigeria. 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 (Fapohunda, 2012).

With the contraction of formal sector jobs, the informal sector became a "safe haven" for 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 their jobs or cannot secure formal sector employment. In general, however, women's lack of access to affordable credit, information, technical advice and services prevents them from expanding their enterprises (Fapohunda, 2012). The informal sector in which women predominate is characterized by low productivity and disguised unemployment.

4.3 Proportion of Seats Held By Women in the National Parliament and Other Political Decision-Making Institutions

Women's participation in the political process is of strategic importance, not only for women's empowerment but because it has wider benefits and impacts on the nation at large. Equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential for building a sustainable democracy (British Council, 2012). Democracy cannot truly deliver for all of its citizens if half of the population remains underrepresented in the political space. Women should be represented at decision-making levels – locally, regionally and nationally – particularly in areas where crucial resources are allocated African countries are being encouraged globally to preserve at least 30% seats in their national parliament for women. The target of 35% is the benchmark towards gender parity in the parliament in Nigeria. This target has not been realised and much work is still required. Women are underrepresented in all political decision-making bodies and their representation has not increased since the inception of democratic rule (British Council, 2012). Even though an increasing number of women are finding their way into boardrooms and providing leadership for blue chip companies, the majority of women in Nigeria only minimally participate in economic development or politics (Olufade, 2013).

Generally, women involvements in political activities in recent times have been on the decline. In the (2003) elections, three women made it to the 109-member upper house, while 21 were elected in the 360-member lower house. Six women were appointed ministers, with three as subordinate ministers and the other three as full ministers. This is a very poor representation. Only 9% of those who stood for election in Nigeria's April 2011 National Assembly elections were women. Out of the 360 members of the House of Representatives in 2011, only 25 were women. Only 4% of local government councillors are women (British Council, 2012). This is below the global average and well behind South Africa and Rwanda. The lack of women in decision-making positions may be one explanation for Nigeria's low investment in sectors that are crucial to human development outcomes, such as health and education.

It takes conscious political actions to address the issue of women's political marginalization, which has increase the negative rate of women invisibility in government and strengthens men's arrogance in power. There are nagging fears that the exclusion of women might continue indefinitely (Okome, 1997). In this circumstance, the MDGs, which relate to women empowerment, stand the chance of being rubbished. Efforts must be put in place to consciously reverse these negative trends in the Nigerian socio-political space. This disparity is shown in figure 1 below.

Figure1
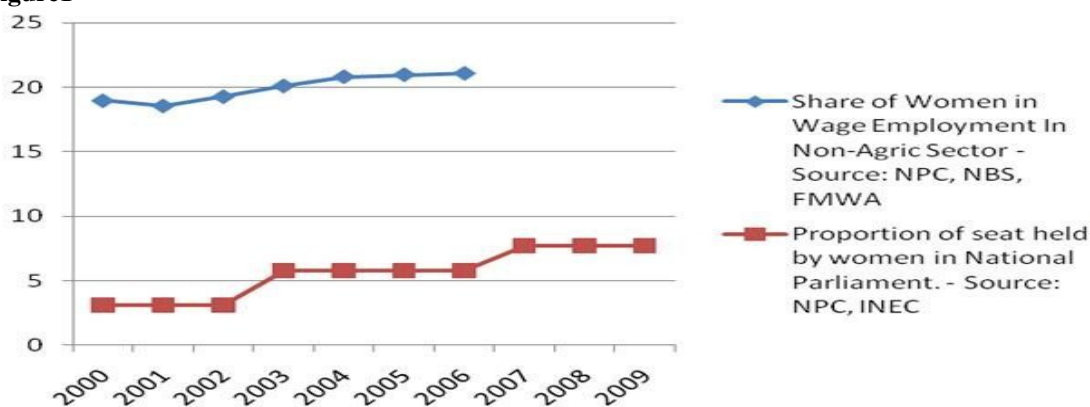
Source (GAB, 2014)

Figure 1 show that nothing much in terms of women empowerment has changed over the years 2000 to 2009 due to the gross gender disparity in Nigeria,

4.4 Rate of Protection from Violence against women
Violence against women is one of the most ubiquitous violations of women's human rights. This menace involves physical, economic, psychological, social and sexual abuse, and affects all strata irrespective of age, race, culture or status. Violence has compounded and reinforced the disadvantaged position of women and their exclusion in Nigeria. Issues like sexual harassment, trafficking in women and girls, sex selection, early marriage, female genital mutilation etc are fast becoming epidemics plaguing Nigeria. This situation is un-abating globally and has elicited public outcry leading to the intervention of the United Nations General Assembly as well as member states coming out with several treaties, laws and policies on women in a bid to protect women from the dehumanizing violation of human rights. The United Nations General Assembly on 25th November 1999 set aside 25th November every year as the international day for the elimination of violence against women (Nnadi, 2012).

Mahdi (2011) opined that the threat and exercise of violence against women underpins and enforces the gender subordination and unequal gender relations that produces poor outcomes experienced by girls and women in Nigeria. Low productivity by women has been the outcome of such traumatic experiences. It should be noted that data on violence are notoriously unreliable because much of the literature focuses on reports of violence that capture only a fraction of the actual number of cases. Victims are unwilling to report certain types of violence, such as rape, because of the shame and social stigma, so that very few cases are brought to court in Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2006). In Nigeria, a conspiracy of silence has concealed the nature and extent of the problem amongst Nigeria's 80.2 million women and girls (British Council, 2012).

One in three of all women and girls aged 15-24 has been a victim of violence. Women who have never married are more likely to have been attacked than married women. One third has been subjected to violence, while one out of every five has experienced physical violence (British Council, 2012). Research has suggested that despite the MGDs, implementation, violence is endemic in some public institutions, including the police and certain educational bodies, where an entrenched culture of impunity protects perpetrators of rape and other violence (British Council, 2012). These crimes are under-reported and very few cases are brought to court. Theses cases of violence in their different forms can deter girls from going to school and impact on almost every aspect of their lives as productive and active citizens. Table 4 shows the rate of violence against women in Nigeria.

Table 3 Levels of physical violence against women in Nigeria

Percentage of 15-24 Year Olds Who Have Experienced Violence		
Region	**Have Married**	**Have Never Married**	**All 15-24 Year Olds**
National			
Rural	13.0	32.9	22.8
Urban	12.0	31.8	20.1
North-East	16.1	34.3	28.1
North-West	8.9	23.5	13.3
North-Central	6.7	31.7	10.2
South-East	17.7	25.4	21.8
South-West	17.2	26.7	24.5
South-South	34.5	47.5	43.7
	18.1	33.4	28.8

Source: NBS (2009).
The table confirms that one in five women has experienced some form of physical violence. Women in the 'never married group' are more likely to have suffered physical violence than women who have been married. Women in urban areas are also more likely to have experienced violence than those in rural areas. The highest proportion of women who experience physical violence is found in the South-West and South-South. The North-

East and North-West report relatively fewer cases of domestic violence, although this could be an indication that violence in households is under-reported.

Up to a third of women in Nigeria report that they have been subjected to some form of violence, including battering and verbal abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, marital rape, sexual exploitation, or harassment within the home (Nigeria NGO Coalition, 2008). Unmarried women in the Christian Southern states of Nigeria are the most frequent victims of violence. In parts of Nigeria, the figures are as high as 70% (Obi and Ozumba, 2007).

4.5 Availability of Health Facilities for Women Health

i. Historically, a great many excellent policy initiatives were introduced in response to the health challenges facing Nigeria's women. According to British Council (2012), they include among others:

ii. The National Health Policy revised in 2004 to provide a link to the Millennium Development Goals, and the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS).

iii. The National Reproductive Health Policy and Strategy 2001, which aimed to reduce pre- and neo-natal morbidity by 30%.

iv. The National HIV/AIDS Policies and Strategic Plan 2003, which provided an integrated approach to addressing transmission of the HIV virus from mother to child, among other measures.

v. The National Guidelines for Women's Health developed in 2002 by the Government with help from UNICEF to establish services friendly to women.

vi. The National Strategic Framework and Plan for Vesco-Vaginal Fistula, developed by the Federal Government in 2005.

vii. The road map for accelerating achievement of the MDGs that cover maternal and newborn health, 2006. This set out priorities and strategies for reducing infant and maternal mortality.

viii. The Policy on the Health and Development of Adolescents and Young People in Nigeria, 2007. This aimed to reduce by 50% unwanted pregnancies and marriages among people younger than 18, and by 75% maternal mortality among young women.

ix. The National Health Bill, proposing the introduction of a National Health Insurance Scheme (decreed in 1999, implemented in 2005).

x. An Integrated Maternal Newborn and Child Health Strategy, developed by the Ministry of Health in 2007. It sought to build synergy among the many programmes designed to reduce maternal, neonatal and child mortality in Nigeria (British Council 2012).

Obviously, Nigeria had an impressive policy framework for women health, but neither the budget allocation nor health outcomes matched these good intentions. The Millennium Development Goal number 5 seeks to improve maternal health by reducing maternal deaths and improving access to reproductive health care by 2015. The specific target is to reduce maternal mortality by three quarters between 1990 and 2015. Despite this provision, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world.

According to the British Council (2012), there has been a focus basically on maternal mortality, because it's the only MDG where the least progress has been made. In 1990, the base year for the indicator, the maternal mortality rate for Nigeria was 1,100 per 100,000 live births (FMH, 2011). The target was to bring it down to about 275 per 100,000 live births. Currently maternal mortality is estimated to be around 545 per 100,000 (compared to 340 in South Africa and 480 in Botswana). This figure is still nearly double the current global average of 290 per 100,000 live births. Nigeria's maternal mortality rate means that 144 women die each day and one woman every 10 minutes from conditions associated with childbirth (British Council, 2012).

Maternal mortality rates vary significantly within Nigeria. They are higher in rural areas, where the rate is estimated to be around 828 per 100,000 live births (nearly three times the global average). In urban Nigeria, the average is 351. There are also significant regional disparities between the poorer North and the wealthier South. The North-East has by far the highest rates of maternal mortality, at around 1,549 per 100,000 live births (over five times the global average). The lowest rates (in relative terms) are recorded in the South-East, 165 per 100,000 live births. At almost half the global average, this compares fairly well with some western and middle an income/transitional economies (British Council, 2012). To make an impact on this MDG, the whole of the health system would need to work more effectively and this would improve health outcomes more widely. Moreover, reduction in maternal deaths requires action from the entire health system.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women are Nigeria's hidden treasures or resource. Investing in women and girls through women empowerment has the ability to trigger productivity and sustainable growth, peace and better health now and in the next generation. The contribution of women to national development is almost indispensable. What happens today to women and girls matters a lot and they have grave consequences on the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the future. That's the reason that most of the MDGs' implementation seem to revolve around women. The important role of women in the nation notwithstanding, gender inequality and women underdevelopment pervaded every facet of Nigerian life. Many good policies in the past could not upturn the menace. However, MDGs detailed as responses to past failures, were expected to change the status of women in the Nigerian society. Unfortunately, their impacts have been very small or negligible. Reaching the target of 100 per cent by 2015 would require accelerating progress considerably. Women are still grossly under-represented in leadership and key decision-making bodies at all levels (federal and state legislatures, cabinets at both federal and state levels, civil services, public enterprises, and private companies). Furthermore, progress in economic empowerment has been slow and corruption has stalled most of the great expectations. Crucially, persistent cultural beliefs and practices across the country undermine efforts to achieve gender equality more rapidly. With the 2015 target year just by the corner, more efforts must be brought to bear on the implementation strategies for better outcome. To reverse the negative trends, the following are recommended;

i. Since 54 million of Nigeria's 80.2 million women live and work in rural areas where they constitute 60-79% of the rural work force, government policy should prioritise agriculture and rural development. The Nigeria Land Administration Act should be publicised, and implemented to expand women's access and entitlement to land. Banks on their part should also make their services more accessible to women by designing products and services to meet the needs of women from different backgrounds in Nigeria.

ii. The provision of reproductive health services to vulnerable populations should be made a priority. The government should ensure that health services are available to young married women, and those who cannot leave their homes. They should provide free, accessible and safe care during delivery.

iii. The public sector at Federal and State level should consider policies and incentives to ensure that women fill 50% of public sector posts. They ensure that women fill at least 30% of posts of leadership, eg for judges and permanent secretaries. The public sector should address this issue by conducting a gender audit to identify where gender equity can be strengthened in recruitment, promotion and pay. States should allocate 10% of their budgets to education.

iv. The importance of developing girls' education cannot be overstated. To capitalise on the potential of its people, and ensure healthier, more educated, empowered and productive citizens, Nigeria must invest in educating the mothers of the next generation. The evidence is irrefutable. Educated women are more likely to use health services and to have fewer and better-nourished children, and their children are more likely to survive. Girls who are educated will also contribute to future economic growth. Education policy can influence parental decisions about the age at which daughters marry. Measures to encourage girls to attend school, particularly by addressing cultural barriers in the north of the country, and to provide the economic incentives for them to attend school in the southeast, are urgently required. The User fees, levies and "rents" for education should be abolished for girls and women. Making these essential services free would send a powerful message about the value of girls and women to the nation.

v. Civil society groups, the media and communities should monitor the implementation of reforms relating to women. They should fund NGOs and civil society organisations committed to the promotion of good governance by giving preference to organisations whose constitutions and policies promote accountability and gender equity. Nigerian civil society organisations should also promote gender training and orientation for political parties and help communities to hold politicians to account as well as ensuring that women's votes count.

vi. A national campaign should be mounted to tackle gender violence and raise awareness of its detrimental impacts on society. Greater legal protection should be provided to victims of gender violence, while the government should do more to reduce trafficking of girls and women.

vii. There should be constitutional reforms to spell out sanctions against early marriage and early childbirth, especially when there is unwillingness on the part of the girls.

viii. The Independent National Electoral Commission should conduct a focused drive on female voter's registration and run specific voter education campaigns for women during elections, while political parties promote women's participation more effectively.

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