WOMEN DEVELOPMENT AND NATIONAL POLICY ON WOMEN IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper discusses the document on women in Nigeria (National Policy on Women). Several past administrations in this country have treated women issues and affairs with calculated levity: Carefully side-tracking or blatantly refusing to accord it the necessary attention. It is now a thing to gladden the hearts of all women of Nigeria that, "after four attempts by four former heads of Nigeria's Government," Chief Obasanjo's administration finally granted government recognition to women's issues in this country. The official document on Human Rights' issues as it relates to Nigerian women; this document is known as the NATIONAL POLICY ON WOMEN. This paper therefore focuses on the document which promises to bring delight to the heart of every woman in this country.

Introduction

When late Mrs. Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti joined the vanguard team as the only nationalist and activist during the early struggle for Nigerian independence, hardly did anybody realize then that she had a dream, a clear vision of a future Nigerian woman, that vision was crystal clear in her heart, and like a pivot, it stood firmly on three stand posts-known today as women's rights, women emancipation and women empowerment...

Mrs. Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti later joined by some educated women of like minds, fought daringly and relentlessly for these three pivotal goals of women emergency and relevance in the socio-political reckoning arena of this nation.

Unfortunately, their efforts did not seem to pay off, judging by the relative “denials” and rebuffs their efforts often met with the male dominated government of the day. Thus up to about two decades ago, Nigerian woman became relatively marginalized and subjected to more than a fair share of male chauvinism in almost all spheres of human endeavour. Nigerian women have been denied their rightful position as equal through opposite gender to man; this in flagrant disregard of their provisions of our constitution and several international instruments, articles and charters on women rights, which Nigeria has signed and ratified. Such documents include the International Conference on Population and Development's platform of Actions, the UN charter on Women, the UN Commission on the status of Women and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to name a few.

All these instruments are advocating for the major goals, namely women's rights, women emancipation and women empowerment. Let all the laudable fundamental human rights issues (otherwise known as women's issues) as enshrined in these articles and charters are yet to be fully enjoyed by Nigerian woman even today.

Consequently, because of the role played by women in the country, President Olusegun Obasanjo appended his signature on the policy on women, thus officially approving the long-awaited official document on Human Rights' issues as it relates to Nigerian Women known as NATIONAL POLICY ON WOMEN.
Historical Status of Women in Nigeria

Historically and culturally, the Nigerian women are supposed to be home-keepers; taking care of their husbands first and foremost, the children and other members of the family. Other responsibilities include; farming to feed the family, and also engaging in petty sale of produce, household ingredients and cooked foods. This state of affairs and position of women though demeaning makes Ayu (1992), see them as an important group of people, when he argued that Women have a crucial role to play in the social, political and economic, transformation of any nation and this is no longer a matter of contention.

Recent Western development through industrialization and the magnetization of the world economy have not been able to erode the productive capacity of women their unrecognizable status. It is in keeping with powerful role in the development process that Tadesse (1981) observed that various leaders of government have singled out as a goal, to make fuller use of the women for their development programmes.

The potentials and industry of women have been 'with them since time immemorial. Abama, Anzaku, Kanchok and Mangywat (1993), argued that the resourceful and fruitful efforts of women to sustain and support their families had been prominent even in the pre-colonial Nigeria. Women in those days were involved in economic enterprises like vegetable farming for family consumption and public sale, sale of produce from the farm yields, cooked foods and other petty business activities that kept the various communities in which they lived busy. All these activities took place within the local environment of the women, which in turn encouraged them to evolve some local technology based on the needs. The term 'technology' conceived and considered by many as a new development is refuted by Abama (1998) as not being necessary a new phenomenon to the rural women of Nigeria who for a long time have been involved in pottery making (Ceramic) grinding on the stone (flour milling) weaving of clothes (Textiles) and other household materials, as well as other forms of food technology in storage and preservation. The introduction of western science and technology ironically has excluded the rural women from active participation and control of the development process. This is largely due to the fact that modern production process is separated from the home. In circumstances where women are seen participating in the production process, they are subjected to providing cheap labour and worse still, robbed of their produce through cheap purchase by the big time traders who now act as major agents / suppliers to the manufacturing companies.

Women in Development

Attempting to make women matter to be seen as important has made the state to adopt bold steps aimed at integrating women in national development spheres. Policies and programmes and projects that will improve women's quota and involvement in the development process. They work to ensure among other things.

1. The participation of women in national development
2. The establishment of national and local programmes to maximize and diversify the potentials of women in rural and urban sectors
3. They work with government and non-government agencies to ensure the effective integration of women in various sectors of economic, political and social development.
4. They play a coordinating role in the national and international agencies and between government and national women organizations.
5. They are involved in developing women pilot projects in the rural and urban slums as well as monitor and assess women programmes and project all over the Federation.
Women and Development Status

Superficial analysis of government policies and programmes on women may suggest that Nigerian women here substantially pushed ahead in tenors of improvement of their socio-economic and political status. With female Ministers, Vice-Chancellors, Permanent Secretaries, State Commissioners, Senators, Members of Federal and State House of Assemblies, Local Government Chairmen and Councillors, top Executives in Federal, State and private services, one is left with or no doubt about government sincerity on women issues. Compared to the Pre-Colonial periods in terms of long term results, the condition of woman in Nigeria today truly requires some improvement.

The National Policy on Women in relation to women's issues comes along so that women can design and base their debates and policies on women affairs.

National Policy on Women

Since after the landmark programme of action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, a large, broad-based constituency now exists worldwide which seek to advance women's well being through promoting their reproductive rights.

However, the impact of this community's effort have not been effective because of the persisting failure of many activist scholars, and policy-makers to situate women's reproductive needs within a holistic rights framework and indeed within the community management roles and potentials are marginalized and left out of the system of national accounting.

Consequently, development planning since the colonial period, has been gender insensitive and although the United Nations Development Decade for women aroused awareness about the strategic and practical needs of women; there was little commitment to incorporate these into national and sectoral policies until the mid 1980s, when they developed the yearning for a national women in Development Policy to facilitate the full integration of women into the social, economic and political life of the nation. This present National Policy on Women fulfills the yearning for a national women in Development Policy to facilitate the full integration of women into the social, economic and political life of the nation. This policy is expected to consolidate the largely silent revolution changes already stimulated by past and current women in development programmes. The policy is therefore another expression of the government's commitment to the development of all sectors of the population and to the institutionalization of process which will pilot the Nigerian society towards social equity, justice and a much improved quality life.

The National Policy on Women is indeed one of the most direct activities of Chapter II Section 17 Subsection 2 of 1999 Constitution which states that:

"Every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law and subsection 3,

"All citizens, without discrimination on any group whatever have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment."
While the constitution guarantees equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender circumstance of birth, etc, the National Policy on Women articulates into a coherent whole, all Gender and Development (GAD) policies and programmes and formulates new policies that will actualize the provisions of the Constitution.

Arrangement of Sections

The Policy document is divided into 8 parts

1. **The Introduction** - which we have discussed above

2. **Rational**
   - The Policy notes that women make up 49.6% of the nation's total population (1991 Census). They are responsible for the reproduction of the labour force and for producing over 70% of the nation’s food supply:
   - Women constitute 18% of the labour market in professional and 4 marginal occupations. Although labour laws are gender neutral and in fact protect women, there is poor implementation and tax laws are discriminatory.
   - Women in formal sector especially in business have little or no access to credit facilities.
   - The policy is based on national constitutional stipulations i.e. all the need to restructure the economy, our political and social institutions to ensure social equity and economic growth.

3. **Goals**
   - The goals of the policy draw heavily from national and international initiatives related to Women in development and aims at the following:
     - Raising national awareness of the citizens constitutional rights
     - Mobilizing and educating the public on human rights in order to remove legal, cultural, religious and other constraint against the attainment of social justice and equity in the society.

4. **Objectives**
   - The policy notes that government is committed to the full integration of women into the development of process to enhance their capacities for improved economic, social and political status and as a means of developing fully the nation's human resources for national, economic growth.
   - Thus, the objectives of this National Policy on Women are to -
     - Ensure that the principles and provision as contained in the Nigerian Constitution are effectively enforced.
     - Mainstream gender perspective in all policies and programmes based on a systematic gender analysis at all levels of government.

5. **Policy Trust**
   - Equity; Social Order and Social Well being
   - Nigeria has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). By so doing, Nigeria affirms its support for the alleviation of the numerous constraints to women’s full integration into its development process.
   - Mechanisms for planned interventions aimed at re-awakening women's self-consciousness and re-evaluation of their self-concept shall be instituted to empower
and encourage them to speak for their rights to equitable distribution of resources and social justice. In fact, society will be reoriented to accept equity complementarily of roles and respect for family values.

6. **Resources Allocation**

The Policy notes that full participation of women in the economic activities of the country can become more meaningful when they have the resources to back up their aspirations and newly acquired self-consciousness/image

- Economic Growth and efficiency will be achieved when the development of women in given priority of Government through empowerment of women with appropriate educational skill development and encouragement and support through various entrepreneurship programmes so that women invest in large, medium and small scale enterprises.

- Patriarchy, ideology and legal framework in Nigeria gives men ascendancy in inheritance, authority and decision-making in and outside the home. Therefore effects will be geared through education, enlightenment and national awareness programmes aimed at discouraging gradually the methods used in the society to prop up patriarchy e.g. that only males can inherit their fathers (though in Islam this is not so) male (son) reference; strict adherence, egalitarian principles shall form the basis of early socialization of children by all relevant agencies.

- Culture being a way of life of a people embodies their attitudes, values, beliefs and life styles. It is dynamic and should therefore reflect the current needs of the people for a meaningful and sustainable development. The National Policy on women shall eliminate all those aspects of our culture that inhibit the development of positive self-identity of women and their participation in society. This can be done through mass media, formal and informal education.

7. **Education**

It has been identified as a key to the improvement of women's living conditions as better education leads to better health. The policy notes that women's educational status in any nation correlates with its level of development. Thus, the higher the level of women's educational status, the more developed a nation.

Government shall in this regard increase, girls and women's participation in education irrespective of their location and circumstances. The objectives of the policy in this regard include provision of compulsory free primary and secondary education for all children and as a right for all citizens most important to expand facilities for "second chance" education for all, and to discourage or forbid withdrawal of girls under 18 years of age from schools for marriage through local sanctions.

To do all this, the implementation strategies of the policy include: Making local school accessible to children in their respective communities at a maximum of three kilometers radius, ensure the training and retraining of teachers, as well as provision of encouragement and incentives for education of girls in the science and technology fields and encouragement of community participation to matters of education.
8. **Science and Technology**

The Policy notes that Nigeria has abundance of natural resources but lacks the technological know-how to maximize their extraction and refinement for national development.

The Policy objective in this regard is to involve women in the choice, procurement, innovation, adaptation and application of science and technology.

As an implementation strategy, science and technology education shall be enhanced at all levels of the education system especially in women education and programmes and sensitization of the community workshops, seminars and mass media in promoting the importance of science and technology for children and women.

9. **Health**

The Policy notes that women are acknowledged as primary providers of healthcare for their families, the communities and societies. However, because of cultural practices, social inhibition, illiteracy, low social status and low social-visibility, their health concerns and needs are often overlooked by policy makers and implementers. In addition, the policy notes that women's major health problems are high maternal mortality rates, associated with pregnancy and child birth and unsafe tract abortions, reproductive tract infections (RTIS) including sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDS, cervical and breast cancer, teenage pregnancy, vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF), poor distribution of trained medical personnel and low level of socio-economic development all contribute to poor health status.

The Federal Government has already in place a National Health Policy with the goal of establishing a comprehensive health care system based on Primary Health Care, that is promotive, protective, preventive, restorative, and rehabilitative to every citizen of the country within available resources so that individuals and communities are assured of productive, social well being and enjoyment of living.

The objective of the Policy include the enhancement of the implementation of the Primary Health Care Delivery system to meet the health needs of women and other vulnerable groups, to encourage the participatory approach of health development and the involvement of women in health decision making organs by recruiting more women in such positions. To eliminate harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) that affect health of girls and women.

Implementation strategies in this area include the coordinating of the roles played by all tiers of government to ensure the pooling of all available resources for effective administration of health care service delivery.

The community especially women groups shall be integrated into the overall health delivery system by their full participation in the planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of existing health care system. Family planning shall be promoted, expansion of the current training programmes to Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) to include traditional women healers to enable them function in more hygienic conditions and recognize cases beyond their competency for referral.

10. **Employment**

The Policy notes that the prosperity of a nation depends on the efficient utilization of all factors of production, land, capital and labour. Before now the labour of women has been used on a small scale in the formal sector of the economy, a result of social discrimination in education and training as well as the gender based division of labour which is reflected in the formal sector of employment.
Thus, the objectives of the Policy is to eliminate all discriminatory practices against employment of women in the public and private sectors of the economy and to create conditions of employment conducive to women's special roles in reproduction and community management.

As implementation strategies in this area, government sponsored and private training institutions shall be encouraged to organize gender sensitization programmes on the role of women in the development process to raise awareness of this target group and the Ministry of Labour and Productivity is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that all labour laws relevant to women in development are adhered to.

11. Agriculture
The Policy notes that women provide an estimated 60 - 80% of labour input in agriculture especially in food production, processing and marketing and although several efforts have been made by several agencies unfortunately women's contributions in this regard is not adequately acknowledged in the development of Agricultural Policy and Programmes. This situation must be corrected.
The objective of the Policy as part of the need to enhance the visibility and productivity of women's work in the agricultural sector, is to also remove the obstacles to women's access to land, water, necessary credit and other-productive inputs, extension services training in Agriculture, appropriate technologies and tools.
Implementation strategies here include all levels of government giving adequate financial support to direct agricultural extension services, create special revolving loan fund for women etc.

12. Industry
The Policy notes that because women are visible in petty trading it gives the false impression that their enterprises are successful and acknowledged. But recent assessment of women's enterprise show that the constraints to their ability to capitalize and to sustain themselves and their families are enormous. Such constraint will have to be removed to ensure the efficient utilization of their labour in those enterprises for socio-economic development.
The objectives include to facilitate access to institutionalized credit, to provide access to information, to educate women on different investment opportunities and expose their products to domestic and international channels and to train women for business development and management. Implementation strategies include setting up of technical support services in all tiers of government to assist women plan and manage their enterprise and sponsoring of women to specialized trade missions (trade fairs) in order to expose them to opportunity etc.

13. Environment
The Policy notes that women have close interaction with the environment since their roles in the society make them primary environment managers either as users or as those that contribute to its degradation. Therefore they must participate in its protection and management.
The Policy objectives among others are to increase awareness of environmental issues and women's role and capacity for environmental improvements. Implementation strategies
include the encouragement of women's participation in decision-making, designing, management and execution of environmental policies and the carrying out of awareness campaigns on the needs for environmental protection.

14 **Legal Reform / Legislative Protection**
The Policy notes that the legal framework of a nation is perhaps the most direct measure of its commitment to new policy initiatives. Writing a National Policy on Women will be an incomplete exercise without ensuring consistency between existing legal provisions and their implementation. Proposals for legal reforms or legislative protection in this context are means of enforcing existing laws and initiating the enactment of new ones to protect new policy guidelines—in line with the call in the Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women.

Although the Nigerian Constitution is explicit on Government's aspirations that all citizens be treated as equal under the law, these aspirations are limited in fulfillment because of the complexity of the Nigerian legal system arising from a-tripartite system of laws (Statutory, Customary and Sharia) which are sometimes contradictory. There is need for harmonization and legislative protection for vulnerable women.

The objects here is to enforce existing law that protect women, amend existing laws where necessary if there are deficient or enact new laws where necessary and abolish those laws which discriminate against women through a carefully worked out programme of social mobilization and awareness generation. Implementation strategies include ensuring access to free or low-cost legal services especially for women, and Government shall fix minimum of 18 years at first marriage to ensure that the girl-child enjoys her fundamental rights to education and proper mental development.

15 **Social Services**
The objective is to improve living standards of Nigerian Families. To implement this, there is need for good rural road network and transportation system, adequate provision of water, housing and other utilities.

16 **Political and Decision-Making**
The Policy notes that although women make up roughly half the population in the country that is not reflected in the political and decision-making process and structures of the nation. In the 3 tiers of government women are grossly inadequately represented.

The objective here is to redress the imbalance and ensure that women are given equal opportunity to participate fully in politics and decision-making. There is also the need to ensure the elimination of all gender-based discrimination in employment etc.

Implementation strategies include that Government should implement affirmative action of the ration of 30% representation of women in all the tiers of government to ensure women's advancement for a trial period up to the year 2010 and the sensitization of our traditional and religious leaders on the need to encourage women participation in politics.

17 **Media Relation and Publicity**
The Policy notes that the role of the media as an agent of change is pivotal to the development of a nation. The media is therefore critical to efforts at women development. However, the
Women Development and National Policy on Women in Nigeria

Nigerian media being male dominated is not sensitive to issues related to women and as such requires re-education and re-orientation

18. The Need for Gender Dis-Aggregated Data
   The Policy notes that the absence of reliable data for planning is one of the major constraints to the development of GAD Policy. Thus Government shall ensure that mechanisms are put in place for government institutions responsible in national planning for data collection to desecrate all data on gender basis.

19. Gender Proposals for Action
   The Policy proposes two major categories of action: domestic and International. Domestic action involves all tiers of government, NGOs, community leaders in fact everybody in the country. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development must gear up to perform its defined roles by coordinating the activities of the various ministries etc

Conclusion
   The National Policy in Women being a detailed government document designed to show-case the full extent of the Government's determined commitment to Nigerian women's rights, issues and their full integration into the mainstream of government activities and policy making. The National Policy on Women is a detailed document which if given the necessary impetus by Government will go a long way to indeed put women on the road to meaningful integration fully into national development, in order to remove those gender inequalities that have evolved in our society overtime.

References
Abama, E. A. (1998), Nigerian women and the development process. A paper delivered at the inaugural meeting of Women Entrepreneurs, Jos Chapter,


