

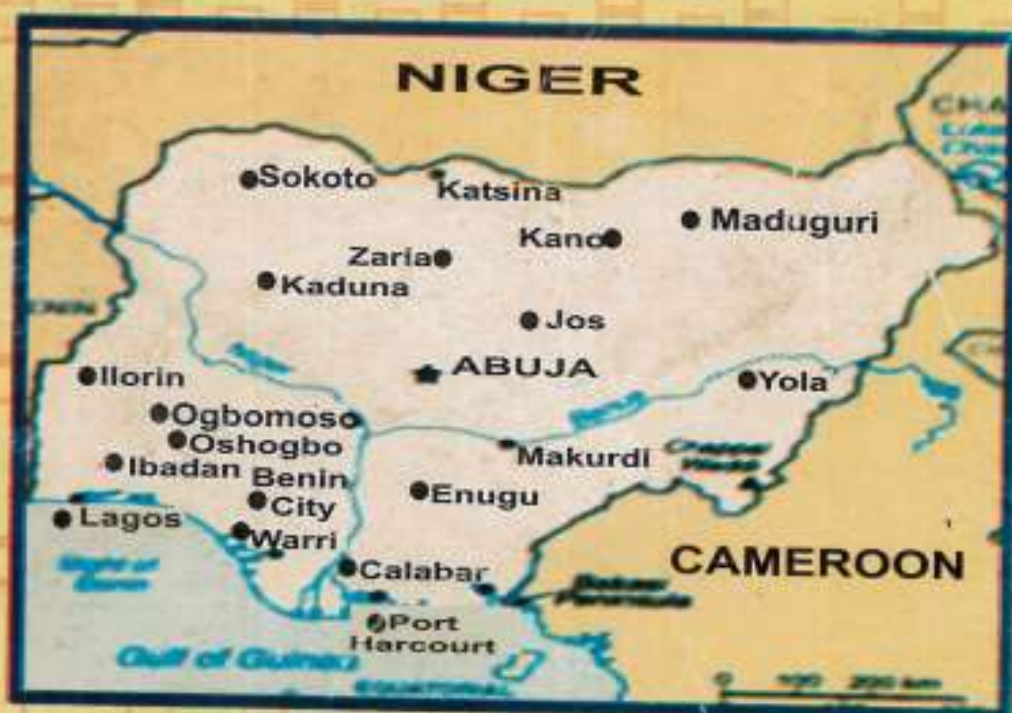


**CENTRE FOR HUMAN RESOURCE  
AND  
GENDER SERVICES**

**(A Division of Rural Linkage Network)**



# **ENGENDERING POLICY FOR ATTAINMENT OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA**



**CELEBRATING THE NIGERIAN WOMAN**

*Editor*

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## Chapter 19

# ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS THROUGH THE ERADICATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (VAW)

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### Abstract

*The study focuses on violence against women as a public health and human right concern and the obstacle it poses for development. It examines the relationship between VAW-both as an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and a means of perpetuating it to the millennium development goals. The study reveals that VAW is highly relevant to all the goals and a key in achieving all of them.*

### Introduction

In recent time the international community has increasingly recognized violence against women (VAW) as one of the most pervasive and prevalent harm to the basic right, freedom, health and welfare of women (WHO 2002). Global researches have shown that VAW occurs in all geographical regions, countries and economic classes, with survey showing higher incidence in developing countries than those in developed countries. According to the United Nations (2007), VAW can be regarded as random act of violence as well as sustained abuse over time. It can be physical, psychological or sexual in nature. There are many forms of violence against women. These include, sexual, physical or emotional abuse by an intimate partner, physical or sexual abuse by family

members or others, sexual harassment and abuse by authority figures (such as teachers, police officers or employers) trafficking for forced labour or sex and such traditional practices as forced or child marriages, dowry related violence and honour killing etc.

VAW is a technical term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (1992) defines VAW as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life'.

Many experts view VAW as a symptom of the historically unequal power relationship between men and women and argue that over time this imbalance has led to pervasive cultural stereotypes and attitudes that perpetuate a circle of violence.

Though the specific causes of VAW vary on a case-by-case base, World Health Organization [2009] identified the following community and individual risk factors that may increase rate of VAW

- **Individual:** personal attributes associated with higher risk of violence include limited education, young age, lower socio-economic status, history of abuse and substance used and, for partner violence, the choice of partner. Partner traits that put women at risk include alcohol or drug use, low educational level, negative attitudes about women or being abused as a child.
- **Family and relationship:** within families risk of violence increases with marital conflicts, male dominance, economic stress and poor family functioning.
- **Community:** within communities, risk is higher where there is gender inequality and lack of community cohesion or resources.
- **Societal:** on a broader level, higher risk is found in societies with traditional gender norms or a lack of autonomy for women, and where there are restrictive laws on divorce and ownership and inheritance of property, or when there is social breakdown due to conflicts or disasters

### **Implications of Violence Against Women**

There are series of implications of violence against women in Nigeria. A wide range of research highlights the serious and civil consequences of violence against women.

Several health consequences can result directly from both short term and long term effects of violence. Women who experience violence have an increased risk of poor physical and reproductive health. The immediate consequences that might directly result from violence is injuries which may manifest in different forms such as fractures, gunshot wounds, bruises and even death. Death can also be in form of suicide, honour killing, maternal death from unsafe abortion. Other health consequences of physical and sexual abuse to girl and women include chronic urinary tract infections, gastro-intestinal disorders, irritable bowel syndrome, depression, limited mobility and poor overall health.

According to the World Health Organization (2009), the social and economic costs of violence against women are enormous and have ripple effects throughout society. Women may suffer isolation, inability to work, loss of wage, lack of participation in regular activities, and limited ability to care for themselves and their children. Eleanor (2002) also pointed out that women that have experienced violence are less likely to hold jobs and are more likely to live in poverty than those who do not experience violence. According to United Nations (2007) women also are less likely to participate in political activities or development projects because of the threat of physical violence.

### **Government Intervention Policies**

Violence against women is a violation of human right regardless of the environment in which it occurs. This reality has been acknowledged by the majority of states resulting in international commitment that creates obligation to respect, protect and guarantee access to health care, prevent and sanction and rehabilitation services.

Nigeria criminal law has a number of provisions relating to sexual and domestic offences that are especially relevant to women's right. Rape is statutorily prohibited by section 357 of the criminal code, applicable in southern Nigeria and by section 282 of the penal code applicable in Northern Nigeria. Chapter iv section 42 of the Nigeria constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender.

The Beijing summit held in 1995 was instrumental in prompting the Federal Government in the same year, to establish ministries of women affair and social development at both federal and state level. According to UNICEF (2001) the increased consciousness of gender issues was also reflected in the launching of a succession of anti-poverty programmes such as the Better Life Programme (1994), the Family Economic Advancement Programme (1997) each of which made a special point to improve the position of women. Other national policies and programmes relating to improving the well-being of women and protecting their rights include the social

development policy of 1989 and the national policy on women which was adopted in 2000.

Despite available local legislation and Nigeria's ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC), the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the protocol of the Africa Charter on Human and People's Right on the Right of Women in Africa, the UN Convention Against Torture and other treaties which prohibit VAW, it is still much prevalent. However the ratification of these treaties even though they are not entered into domestic laws means that Nigeria has assumed responsibilities to uphold the obligations incumbent on state parties. Therefore Nigeria must live up to expectation by accepting her full responsibilities of ensuring that VAW is eradicated.

### **Violence Against Women and the Millennium Development Goals**

The Millennium Development Goals MDGs are currently the highest-level expression of the international communities development priorities that were articulated from the actions and targets contained in the millennium declaration that was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of states and government during the United Nations millennium summit in September 2000. The MDGs are eight goals that respond to the world's main development challenges which commit the international community to an action agenda that should be achieved by 2015. The MDGs are:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender quality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

These goals and their targets have been accepted by the international community as a frame work for measuring and assessing national and global development progress.

On a critical examination of the Millennium Declaration, one will see the underlying relevance of Violence Against Women (VAW)-both as an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and a means of perpetuating it to the eight MDGs and a key to achieving them.

Violence in general and VAW in particular is a major obstacle to growth and development which may hinder the realization or the achievement of the millennium developmental goals in Nigeria.

### **The Nexus between VAW and the achievement of the MDGs**

The realization or otherwise of all the eight MDGs depends on the extent to which each of the goals addresses gender based constraints.

#### **MDG-1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

Extreme poverty and hunger compound women vulnerability to abuse. The threat of abandonment and eviction constrain women who are extremely poor and hungry to remain in abusive bondage. Studies have shown that women who experience violence are less likely to hold jobs and are likely to live in poverty than those who do not experience violence (Eleanor 2007). Violence and the fear of violence may cause some women to avoid public places such as schools and work place. Such women may not be able to provide emotional and financial support for their families and communities and thus impede or militate against the realization of MDG-1. If MDG-1 is to be realized, all international treaties on the Declarations and Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) must be adopted, domesticated and tenaciously implemented with a sense of purpose and direction.

#### **MDG-2 Achieve Universal Primary Education**

The country Nigeria cannot prosper and realize MDG-2 if the girl child progresses to adulthood poorly educated, frustrated and facing uncertain future due to discrimination and other forms of violence against women. Statistics abound to show that there is a great threat to women education. Girl and women are under educationally represented and disadvantaged in most states of Nigeria. According to UNAIDS (2002), alarmingly, 65% of the world's children who do not attend school are girls, and two third of the world's illiterate people are women. Until recently there is no legislation or enactment specifically made or promulgated to remove disparity. A nation that pays little or no attention to the girl child or women education may be consciously and or unconsciously hindering her socio-economic and political growth and may also be reducing her fertility rate and increasing her poverty level (World Bank, 1993).

The realization of MDG-2 may be hindered by gender-based factor including violence and lack of security that prevent girls and young women from entering and completing school.

**MDG-3 Promote Gender equality and empower women**

The promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women is recognized as key in achieving all the eight goals. In an interim report by the millennium project on progress towards MDG-3 points out that: development policies that fail to take women to be actors in those policies and actions will have limited effectiveness and serious cost to societies. The reverse is also true: the achievement of MDG-3 depends on the extent to which each of the other goals addresses gender-based constraints and issues.

Generally, women face an array of barriers to their full participation in various aspect of social life, due to entrenched cultural attitudes which put girls at a disadvantage in education and discourage or hinder women's participation in various types of employment as well as in politics and public life.

MDG-3 provides underlying basis for promoting equality and women's empowerment as a sustainable development strategy and a key strategy for the realization of all the eight MDGs and eliminating violence against women

**MDG-4 Reduce Child Mortality and MDG-5 Improve Maternal Health**

Violence against women is a serious obstacle to improving maternal and child health and also a threat to the health and well being of women.

VAW has been identified as a leading cause of female injury, deprive women of bodily integrity by eliminating the ability to consent to sex, negotiate safer sex and determine the number and spacing of their children (karanja 2003). This has led to higher incidence of maternal and infant mortality.

**MDG-6 Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases.**

In addition to women's greater physiological susceptibility, social, cultural and legal forms of discrimination compound their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. In addition to this, Nigerian women confront a male dominated power structure that upholds and entrenches male authority in the home and such customs as the payment of bride price where by men essentially purchase their wives sexual favour and reproductive capacity ,under scores men's entitlement to dictate the terms of sex and the number of sex partners. Thus exacerbating their vulnerability to HIV infection (Abama and Kwaja 2009)

VAW undermines HIV/AIDS protection thus making MDG-6 unrealistic.

MDG-7 Ensure Environmental Sustainability and MDG-8 Develop a Global Partnership for Development.

Violence against women together with harmful gender norms and discriminatory legislation prevent women from being full partners in developmental projects. Development strategies should ensure women's ability to participate as full social, economic and political partners, unrestricted by harmful gender norms

### **Recommendations**

Considering the enormous contributions of women in economic and socio-political development of Nigeria, the following recommendations are considered useful if VAW is to be eradicated

1. All forms of discriminatory practices against women should be eradicated, special legislation should be enacted for gender considerations in all forms of human endeavour
2. There should be comprehensive review of existing laws to remove all provisions that are inconsistent with the anti-discriminatory provisions of the constitution in all three spheres of law.
3. Protection laws should be publicized and women informed about the means they can take to seek justice.
4. There should be deliberate formation and planning of government education policy in line with the United Nations declarations on the emancipation of women.
5. Special workshops should be organized for secondary school girls. They should be counseled on the changing nature of the society and importance of women empowerment
6. Laws and policies should include a specific budgetary allocation in order to ensure their adequate implementation
7. The multi-sectoral co-ordination should be adopted in the implementation of laws and policies that address gender based violence
8. The establishment of information system in each sector that cares for women who are victims of violence is very necessary in order to get feed back on the compliance with laws and policies.



## Conclusion

It is obvious that violence against women have done more harm than good to the educational, health, economic and socio-political advancement of women in Nigeria. VAW if not checked will negate the realization of the MDGs. Many women have excelled in their different areas of endeavour because they were given opportunity to do so. For example the socio-political significance of women like Prof Alele Williams, Dr (Mrs) Ngozi-Iweala and Prof Dora Akunyili comes from the efficient use they made of their education and profession.

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