

Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum

Speech delivered by Prof. Funmi Soetan,
Director CGSPS at the 2012 International Women's Day
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Introduction

The International Women's Day (IWD), originally called **International Working Women's Day** is celebrated on **March 8** every year around the world. Born at a time of great social turbulence and crisis, IWD inherited a tradition of protest and political activism. In the years before 1910, women in industrially developing countries were entering paid work but their jobs were sex segregated with worse wages. Trade unions developed and industrial disputes broke out. In Europe, the flames of revolution sparked off changes in women's lives as they pushed against the political restrictions surrounding them. Throughout Europe, Britain, America and, to a lesser extent, Australia, women from all social strata began to campaign for the right to vote. There were many different perspectives on why this issue was important and how to achieve it.

The culmination of these disputes in the West resulted in the first *national* Women's Day which was observed on 28 February 1909 in the United States following a declaration by the Socialist Party of America. This was followed by an International Women's Conference in August 1910, which preceded the general meeting of the Socialist Second International in Copenhagen. Inspired in part by the American socialists, German Socialist Luise Zietz proposed the establishment of an annual 'International Woman's Day' and was seconded by communist Clara Zetkin, although no date was specified at that conference. On 18 March 1911, IWD was marked for the first time, by over a million people in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. In 1913 International Women's Day was transferred to 8 March and this day has remained the global date for International Women's Day. Since that time, IWD has been pushing women's issues onto the political agenda.

What is Gender Agenda?

Over time and distance, the original gender agenda on political, economic, social and human rights theme designated by the United Nations for women have progressed worldwide. Since 1910, the focus of the celebrations in different regions of the world ranges from general celebration of respect, appreciation and love towards women to a celebration of women's notable achievements in all spheres of life as exemplified below:

- The initial gender agenda of the IWD as proposed by 100 women delegates from 17 countries in 1910 was the promotion of equal rights, including suffrage, for women. This agenda in the early years had political and human rights undertone, as the women demanded for the right to vote and to hold public office. They also protested against employment sex discrimination.

- The 1928 Australian IWD gender agenda organized by the Militant Women's Movement on March 25 called for “equal pay for equal work; an 8 hour day for shop girls; no piece work; the basic wage for the unemployed and annual holidays on full pay”.
- The 1931 IWD Sydney gender agenda a protest and a demand for equal pay for equal work and other special women's demands, as well as more general issues such as resistance to wage cuts, opposition to the Arbitration courts and solidarity with the Soviet Union.
- The 1960's 50th anniversary of IWD gender agenda in Copenhagen as adopted by 729 delegates from 73 countries was declaration of support for the political, economic and social rights of women.
- The 1975 Cuba gender agenda focused on campaign against deeply entrenched macho male attitudes and practices in a new marriage code which made housework the responsibility of men and women was part of this.
- The 2010 IWD theme drew attention to the hardship that displaced women endure. The displacement of populations is one of the gravest consequences of today's armed conflicts. It affects women in a host of ways. Similarly, the UN 2012 IWD theme was Empower Women – End Hunger and Poverty. While the 2013 agenda is **Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum**

The Global Gender Agenda

Globally, the IWD gender agenda has been gaining momentum for championing the gender equity and women's rights over the years through channels such as:

- **Promotion of Gender equality** in access to quality health care, education, politics, public life and journalism
- **Gender Mainstreaming** of International Instruments, policies, plans, programmes and strategies such as the Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1948 Human Rights Charter, The Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- **Advocacy** in defense of reproductive rights and reproductive justice.
- **Gender Sensitive Monitoring and Evaluations of Programmes**
- **Best Practices:** This is a celebration of the achievements of women and gender sensitive programmes for further sustainable change.

Examples are:

- i. The October 2011 Pan-African Conference on Celebrating Courage and Overcoming Harmful Traditional Practices in Africa. which was held at the AU Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- ii. Mainstreaming of Gender into University Curriculum at Makerere University, Uganda

- iii. Developments of policies and practices which are effective in promoting gender diversity in science disciplines and in technical careers
- iv. The 2003 One in Three Women Global Campaign to Raise Awareness about Violence Against Women
- v. The 2009 European Commission's programme on **Women in science and technology**-Creating sustainable careers
- vi. The 2013 Celebration of the achievements of women in the construction industry
- vii. The 2013 Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation's Rural Women's Award in Australia which identifies and supports emerging leaders and change agents who have the capability and resources to drive innovation, productivity and sustainability within primary industries, and build economic and social development within rural communities.
- viii. The World YWCA: For more than 155 years has been advocating for women's empowerment, women's rights and women's leadership. In their **Rio+20 Agenda on Women empowerment and gender equality, Agenda 21**, chapter 24 outlined Global Action for Women to achieve sustainable development. Issues around water, land, globalization, poverty alleviation, environmental impact, women's participation in decision-making and creation of sustainable communities were put on the agenda. Their strategic priorities for the period 2011-2015 focus on women's intergenerational leadership, human rights and movement building and good governance.
- ix. The 2002 Capacity Building for Sustainable Development: An overview of UNEP environmental capacity development initiatives.
- x. **Legislatures: In 2012, there were a total of 17 female heads of state or government around the world.**

Gender Agenda in Africa

Gender inequalities in Africa have been occasioned by the legal environment, patriarchal social structures and cultural practices, as well as the fundamentally male-oriented developmental priorities and decision-making processes relating to public expenditure programmes. The prevailing gender disparity in Africa exists in access to education, healthcare services, participation in politics and governance, as well as non-involvement in decision making processes. Over the years, the role of females in the continent has been erroneously conceptualized to child bearing and house-keeping. This is why the males in this part of the world are groomed for career in technical and scientific fields while females are guided to concentrate their efforts on home economics.

The gender disparity in political participation on the continent is the most severe. The average percentage of female parliamentarians in lower houses of Sub-Saharan Africa is approximately 20.8%, with individual countries ranging vastly from 3.7% in Nigeria to 56.3% in Rwanda. With recent and upcoming elections Kenya, Ethiopia, Mali, Rwanda and Zimbabwe, the 2013 has the

potential to be a year of political change for women in Africa. Therefore, promoting gender balance in all fields and expanding the role of women in decision-making in continental, regional and national structures of the African State is not merely a moral imperative but also a pre-requisite for effective poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth.

Commitment to Gender Equality in Africa

At the continental level, one of the key institutions driving the new Africa Gender Equality Agenda is the African Union (AU) following the expressed commitment taken by Heads of State and Government on gender parity and the adoption of 'The AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa' in July 2004. Among others, the AU declaration commits member states to the promotion of gender equality by:

- Accelerating the implementation of specific social, economic and legal measures to deal with HIV/AIDs among women;
- Expanding and promoting the principle of gender parity in the AU Commission and other organs of the AU,
- Guaranteeing women's rights to land, property and inheritance; and
- Adopting specific measures towards the education of girls and the literacy of women.
- Signing and ratifying the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

Two other articles which amplify the AU's commitment to gender equality in Africa are:

- Article 4(1) of the AU's Constitutive Act which specifies that it "shall function in accordance with the promotion of gender equality", and
- Article 12(3) of the statutes of the AU Commission which provides for the creation of a special unit in the Office of the Chairperson to coordinate all the activities and programs of the Commission relating to gender

The AU's commitment to gender equality in Africa endorses a whole range of global, continental, regional and national commitments, policy frameworks, programmes of action and declarations towards gender equality and the rights of women. These include:

- The Millennium Declaration and Development goals - particularly goal 3 (promoting gender equality and empowerment of women) and goal 5 (to improve maternal health);
- The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;
- The 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development;
- The 1998 Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children;

- The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women.
- NEPAD Framework of Action which identifies “acceleration of the empowerment of women” and “promotion of the role of women in social and economic development by reinforcing their capacity” as part of its objectives.

These commitments have been supported with series of meetings around the continent to envision more ambitious and progressive action. Thus, the new Africa gender agenda promises a new path towards creating conditions for the sustainable socio-economic, political and cultural development of the African continent.

Gender Agenda in Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa with over 160 million people (Census 2006). Over 50% of the populations are female with many of them living below poverty line. The social relations and activities of Nigerian women and men are governed by patriarchal system of socialization and cultural practices, which favour the interest of men above those of women. The women are in subordinate position particularly at the community and household levels and the male children are preferred to the females.

Despite this, the IWD gender equity and equality agenda had gained a high degree of prominence in Nigeria’s national development agenda since the nation became a signatory to many international and regional protocols and conventions promoting gender relations and development. Some of which are: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), The MDGs specifically goal 3, The Beijing plan of action and ICPD. As such Nigeria is committed to the implementation of the:

- **Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill:** Nigeria is committed to the passage of Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill as a means to further enhance women’s equal access to social and economic activities and resources including land, credit, education and all opportunities open to its citizens. This gender and equal opportunities bill will seek to domesticate the provisions of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In addition, the bill already before the National Assembly would domesticate the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.
- **On-going Constitution Review:** The National Assembly is considering the inclusion of the proposition of CEDAW’s provisions in the on-going review of the constitution in compliance with the principles and the provisions of the various gender frameworks.

- **The National Gender Policy:**The implementation plan for the National Gender Policy also seeks to provide an outline of the framework for implementing gender equality actions across the nation.
- The Gender Policy for the Police
- National Gender Policy Strategic Implementation Framework and Plan
- Gender Mainstreaming in Sector Planning and Programming.

Achievements

- **Participation in Governance:** In terms of participation in Governance, the present administration through the leadership of President Goodluck Jonathan, has for the first time attained 33 per cent women representation in executive positions as ministers, special advisers, permanent secretaries and Directors. Similarly, 50 per cent representation in the Judiciary has also been achieved with the Chief Justice of the Federation being a woman while there are 13 women on the federal cabinet as ministers. There are also numerous women in the top hierarchy of the federal and states civil service, the armed forces, the police, as well as other federal and state agencies and in the private sector. At the National Assembly, women are fairly represented and held key positions in the decision-making process. States like Lagos, Osun and Ekiti also have women as Deputy Governors.
- **Education Reform:** In order to promote gender equality, increase girls access to education, and remove disparities that put the girl-child at a disadvantaged position in education; the National Policy on education had been revised severally (1981, 1998, 2004 and 2007). Other reforms include the Universal Primary Education in 1976, the 6-3-3-4 system of Education in 1981, the Computer Education in 1988 and the Nigerian Information Technology Policy and the Universal Basic Education in 1999. These reforms have brought about increase in school enrolment and literacy level among girls. In spite of this, there still remains low enrolment of females in sciences and technological-related based courses at the University level of education in Nigeria. Females have been opting for disciplines designated as feminine such as liberal arts, education, nursing and law while shying away from courses in Sciences, Engineering, Medicine and Mathematics, which have been designated as masculine subjects.
- **Cultural practices:** Nigerian positive promoted traditional cultural values which strengthens societal moral well-being include respect for elders, caring for the vulnerable, sharing and solidarity, tolerance, dialogue and consultation. It has also been rigorously combating gender based violence and elimination of negative cultural practices that discriminate and violate the human rights and dignity of women and girls which lead to physical and emotional harm. These include practices such as forced feeding of women, FGM, early marriages, practices and taboos preventing women from controlling their fertility, female infanticide, succession and inheritance, wife inheritance and son preference.

- **Health Care Sector:** There has been series of donor funded activities across the country to employ appropriate measures to ensure, on the basis of equality of men and women, access to quality health-care services, including those related to reproductive health care, which includes rights-based approach to family planning for women in order to improve the health of mothers and children. These have been included in policies such as the National Policy on Infant and Young Child feeding in Nigeria, the National Policy on the Health and Development of Adolescent and Young people in Nigeria (FMHN, 2007), National Gender Policy and National Reproductive Health Policy – November 2010

The Gender Agenda at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

In order to actualize the philosophy of the founding fathers/mothers of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and in response to various International Treaties, of which Nigeria is a signatory on gender equity and women's rights, the University Council in November 1996, established the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies as an interdisciplinary research centre for the study of gender, development and pro-poor issues.

The Centre is committed to promoting gender equity, through the development of appropriate policy instrument that would facilitate the process of mainstreaming gender into the university administration, teaching, and research activities. The specific objectives of establishing the Centre are to:

- Strengthen and advance basic and action-oriented research into issues of equity and equality associated with gender, class, ethnicity and political differentiation and utilize the finding to advocate for social change;
- Build national capacity in gender and social development, planning and policy analysis, through teaching, training, consultancy, documentation and networking;
- Ensure gender mainstreaming in policy formulation and development programmes and projects at all levels;
- Stimulate intellectual and public discourse through its publications; and
- Establish and maintain a data base for research on gender and social policy issues.

In order to achieve these goals and objectives, the Centre through funding support obtained from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, has developed the OAU Gender Equity Policy and a draft policy on Anti-Sexual Harassment policy. With funds from the Association of African Universities (AAU), a draft policy on HIV/AIDS has also been developed. The Centre also conducted a situational Analysis in 2002 of the existing gender issues in the university. The study showed that there were gaps in employment, leadership positions and neglect of gender issues arising from cultural, attitudinal and behavioural biases against gender equity. For instance, the Situational Analysis Report showed:

- That female enrolment has never exceeded 30.0% of total enrolment: out of the total enrolment of 18,389 in 1999/2000, 27.3% were females. During the 2001/2002 academic year, female enrolment decreased from 27.3% to 24.2% (i.e. out of a total enrolment of 6,980 students only 24.2% were females).
- Significant gender difference in the student graduation figures between the faculties. For instance, females made up about 25% of the 1999/2000 graduating students, with only 5.0% of these graduating female students coming from the Faculty of Technology, whereas 70.6% were from the Faculty of Education. The same trend was observable in the postgraduate enrolment figures.
- Gender disparity in employment as the data for 2001/2002 indicate that females constituted close to 19% of the university staff, the majority (62.7%) as Administrative, Senior and Technical Staff. Females only contributed 13.6% of the total staff strength.
- **Limited** participation of females in University administration and decision making. **Out** of the statutory committees, male representation is approximately 10 times that of females on 6 committees and 5 times on 5 committees. The gender gap is widest in Senate where the ratio is 19 males to 1 female. As at 2002, of the 206 Professors at OAU, only 9 (4.3%) were females.
- Lack of understanding of the concept of “gender”. One of the consequences was the neglect of gender analysis in personnel, organizational and community life.

Bridging the Gender Equity Gaps at OAU

- **Enrolment and Scholarships:** In order to bridge gender gaps in enrolment, the Carnegie Corporation of New York in its support and collaboration with Obafemi Awolowo University through the Gender Equity Project at the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies has so far awarded scholarships to over one thousand and eight hundred (1,800) female undergraduates, over two hundred and ninety (290) female postgraduate students and over thirty six (36) staff Fellowships to female academic staff.
- **Employment, appointment and promotions:** By promoting gender equality and equity agenda across faculties, disciplines and units in the University, there has been increase in enrolment of female students into faculties that were formally dominated by men. The number of women in decision making has also increased. For example, OAU had its first female Deputy Vice Chancellor in 2007. The number of female Deans and Heads of Departments has also increased over the years. OAU is the only University in Nigeria that has successfully sensitized its members on gender issues.
- **Gender Sensitization /Motivational workshop:** The O.A.U-Carnegie Corporation has also been sponsoring Gender Sensitization /Motivational workshop for Female Undergraduates, Post-Graduates and Staff in Science and Technology Faculties in the University for the past three years. Other workshops include, Gender Equity in Science and Technology, Leadership Training for Female students and Female Academic staff

and Gender Disaggregation of Data. These workshops were facilitated by International Consultants across the continent of Africa.

- **Female Scholarship Endowment:** The Centre for gender and Social Policy Studies has established Female Scholarship Endowment to raise fund for the Female Scholarships Scheme. This is to ensure sustainability of the female scholarships since the Carnegie Corporation grants have ended. Under the aegis of the Ekiti Development Foundation, the Special Guest of Honour, Chief (Mrs.) BisiFayemi, First Lady of Ekiti State, Justice Bola Babalakin (Rtd.) and the First lady of Oyo State, Chief (Mrs.) Florence Ajemobi have all donated into the Female Scholarship Scheme. We are therefore appealing to all well-meaning Nigerians, particularly the great alumnus of this University and friends of OAU, to support this laudable scheme.

Strategies for Moving the Agenda Forward

Moving the agenda forward requires action at various levels. These include the need to:

1. Protect women's rights and build their capacity to claim those rights (women's rights are human rights);

2. Mobilize at the community level to continue building awareness, educating, training and equipping women to make better choices and provide them with access to resources to live sustainably and build sustainable communities;

3. Empower women and increase their participation in political and decision-making processes and improve their capacity to influence change at the community, national and global levels as a strategic move to reduce poverty and promote gender equality;

4. Hold national governments accountable as duty-bearers, to fulfill their obligations through better laws, policies aimed at achieving climate, environmental and social justice and for enforcement of same; and

5. Provide affordable access to technology, especially green technology and training to increase its use for alternative, productive and sustainable livelihoods.

Summary and Conclusion

The Gender Agenda has come to stay as a vehicle for advancing gender equity and the rights of women. Therefore, given the many expressions and forms of violence against women in Nigeria, it is of utmost priority to ensure comprehensive efforts to eradicate this problem in all processes of prevention, care, protection, and reparation addressing the rights of women who face discrimination, abuse and violence. Therefore, in order to propel the momentum of the gender agenda in Nigeria, it is imperative that government at all levels should continue to address different forms of violence, discrimination and abuse faced by women across these issues:

1. *Legal frameworks, policies and good practices to prevent violence against women and girls*
2. *Systems of care for women who face violence*
3. *Access to justice within a human rights framework*

Thank you.