ENHANCING GENDER EQUITY AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS ISSUES IN NIGERIA: COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF INFORMATION AND GRASSROOTS MOBILISATION

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Abstract
The study of gender and gender related issues in development studies have emerged as contemporary issues and important trends in virtually all disciplines ranging from arts, humanities to sciences and technology. The attention shown in these areas by the proponents have profoundly affected gender roles in various aspects of human endeavors ranging from governance and politics, commerce and industry, education, law, science and technology etc. It is important to note that these concepts are becoming a central feature of all the disciplines thereby making them multidisciplinary in scope as they help in shaping our lives, our attitudes, and our behavior in the larger societies for our day to day survival and livelihoods. In Nigeria, efforts of several governmental and non-governmental agencies towards ensuring gender equity in the society through various programmes, initiatives and engagements with the wider public are very significant in the last few years. These are done in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) which set out in summary to eradicate hunger, poverty and provide access to good health care. This paper takes a cursory look at the concepts of gender, gender equity/equality, concepts and model of sustainable livelihoods and the MDG's, initiatives and engagement programmes of governments on gender equity and development issues in Nigeria; and the complementary roles of information and grassroots mobilisation towards overall national development. Recommendations and suggestions are made to ensure that the concept of a "weaker sex" and undue disparities in status and role expectations are eliminated from our psyche in all that we do. Appropriate strategies to improve information network and grassroots mobilization among the people irrespective of status and age in our various communities are also included. It is through these and many others that the true meaning of sustainable livelihoods can be achieved for both sexes.

Key words; Gender, equity, gender equity, gender equality, livelihoods, sustainable livelihoods, information, communication, grassroots, mobilization, multidisciplinary, Millennium Development Goals (MDG's)

The concepts of gender and gender equity

In 1995, the Beijing Conference was held and the conference resolutions, streamlined under 12 critical areas of concern to the advancement of womanhood was passed under the popular Beijing Platform for Action, (BPFA) namely: (i) **Poverty, (ii) Education, (iii) Health, (iv) Violence, (v) Armed Conflict, (vi) Economy, (vii) Power**

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& Decision Making, (viii) Institutional Mechanisms for women advancement, (ix) Human Rights, (x) Media, (xi) Environment, (xii) The Girl-Child. With the successes recorded from this conference, more attentions have been drawn to the issue of gender and associated concepts. Over the last few decades, the concept of gender and associated issues have crept into human development agenda and have been widely embraced by local, national and international governmental and non-governmental agencies worldwide. It is important to clearly understand the conceptual meanings of sex and gender as the issues have become more mainstreamed in all our daily interactions.

Sex refers to the biological characteristics distinguishing male and female. This definition emphasizes male and female differences in chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, reproductive systems, and other physiological components. **Gender** refers to those social, cultural, and psychological traits linked to males and females through particular social contexts. Sex makes us male or female; gender makes us masculine or feminine. Sex is an ascribed status because a person is born with it, but gender is an achieved status because it must be learned. Gender is about relationships and these relationships change over time, space and circumstances- (http://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/hip/us/hip_us_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0132448300.pdf).

According to Peterman, Behrman and Quisumbing (2010), since the 1990s, policymakers and development practitioners have highlighted the critical importance of gender in the implementation, evaluation, and effectiveness of programs across a range of social and economic sectors. *Gender and Agriculture,* a recent sourcebook produced by the World Bank and collaborating partners (2009), warns that the "failure to recognize the roles, differences and inequities [between men and women] poses a serious threat to the effectiveness of the agricultural development agenda". Similarly, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) states that although female farmers are primary contributors to the world's food production and security, they are "frequently underestimated and overlooked in development strategies" (UN News Center 2010).

The National Policy of Women was adopted in 2000"... to fulfil the yearnings as well as (promote) the efforts of Federal, State and Local Governments, Non-governmental Organisations, International Development Partners, the private sector, concerned corporate bodies and individuals to integrate women fully into national development, in order to remove those gender inequalities that have evolved through structures and processes created by patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism".

As a follow up to this, the National Gender Policy in 2006 clearly states *"... to build a just society devoid of discrimination, harness the full potentials of all social groups regardless of sex or circumstance, promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political wellbeing of all citizens in order to achieve equitable rapid economic growth; evolve an evidence based planning and governance system where human, social, financial and technological resources are efficiently and effectively deployed for sustainable development."* These are positive initiatives and modest achievements towards gender mainstreaming in the Nigerian society.

Gender equity and gender equality are concepts used without regard to their technical meanings. Gender equity is qualitative in that it deals with inward feelings, thoughts, emotions and favourable dispositions towards the opposite sex. It serves as the foundations for our actions that precede equality. While gender equality is quantitative in that it deals with

the actualization of our actions in measurable terms towards the opposite sex. It is an action that is a follow up.

According to Idonue (2013), Gender Equity as a process refers to fairness in establishing a set of actions, attitudes, and assumptions that pave way for opportunities and create expectations about individuals irrespective of persuasions defining human beings (sex, race, ethnicity, class, or creed). Equity does not necessarily depict same description as equality. The report of the *Federal Plan for Gender Equality, Status of Women in Canada, 1995: Setting the Stage for the Next Century* which stressed "...that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute to national political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results".

From the above, it is quite revealing that much still needs to be done in areas of gender equity and equality in Africa and particularly in various countries.

There is growing recognition that poverty is not only about income, but about social risks such as discrimination, unequal distribution of resources and power in households and limited citizenship (CPRC, 2008). Gender inequality cuts across economic and social risks, influencing how poverty and vulnerability are experienced. The intra-household division of labour which lead to women contributing high levels of unpaid labour to crop production and processing, as well as other domestic chores are sources that exacerbate poverty at the household level. Typically, in most African societies, women and children are very active in the provision of unpaid labour to farm households. This unpaid labour guarantees women's access to household food resources and a varied range of other benefits. It should be noted however, that there are no available literatures to fully support the burden of unpaid reproductive work and its implications for women's livelihoods in this paper. Practical evidences of this abound in our rural communities in Nigeria.

In South Western Nigeria, women are predominantly engaged in subsistence agriculture, processing and marketing of the finished farm products. Though the statistics are not reliable, evidences from literatures indicate a greater percentage of the number of women in processing, marketing and distributive than in the on-farm activities involving use of energy. This could be attributed to the nature of women as they combine other domestic chores with their livelihoods and opportunities. According to Mosse (1994), part of the problem is that such exercises (including training) tend to be organized in a way that does not suit the time requirements and other practical constraints of women. But another problem is that by their very nature public events tend to attract only certain types of 'public knowledge' that, by social definition, is generated by men and not by women. .

Women are less likely to participate in the labour force than men and, despite new job opportunities in some countries; they are still represented disproportionately in low-skill, low-wage casual employment, receiving lower salaries than men for the same jobs. Employment and income for rural women tend to be seasonal, and women are often held back by traditional views of what is seen as 'acceptable' work for women and lack of satisfactory childcare. Labour studies have analysed women's predominance in the lower levels of formal and informal labour markets as a result of discriminatory employment practices and the extensive gender segregation and segmentation of labour markets (Mupedziswa and Gumbo, 2001; Hansen and Vaa, 2004; Tsikata, 2009).

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Concepts and model of sustainable livelihoods and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's)

The concept of Sustainable Livelihood (SL) is an attempt to go beyond the conventional definitions and approaches to poverty eradication. In a nutshell, it refers to a balance between **conservation** and the **utilization or depletion** of natural resources (Alademerin, 2013)

In 1992 Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway proposed the following composite definition of a sustainable rural livelihood, which is applied most commonly at the household level:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term.

PEOPLE
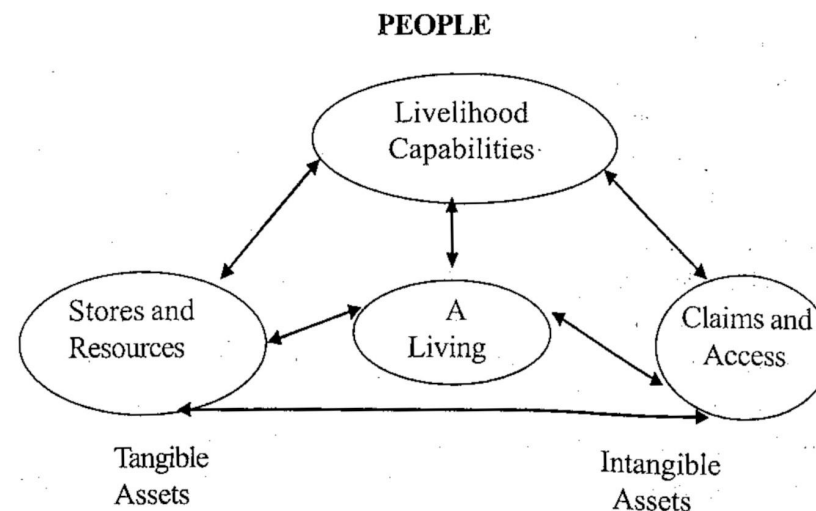
Source: Krantz (2001). Fig: 1. UNDP'S approach to promoting sustainable livelihoods

Fig: 1. UNDP'S approach to promoting sustainable livelihoods

The sustainability of livelihoods becomes a function of how men and women use asset portfolios on both a short- and long-term basis. Sustainable livelihoods are those that are:

* able to cope with and recover from shocks and stresses through adaptive and coping strategies;

* economically effective;

* ecologically sound, ensuring that livelihood activities do not irreversibly degrade natural resources within a given ecosystem; and

* socially equitable, which suggests that promotion of livelihood opportunities for one group should not foreclose options for other groups, either now or in the future.

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In line with reducing poverty at the household levels and for the ordinary citizen to achieve the ideals above, various international and national governments came up with the Millennium Development Goal's (MDG's). The Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) are an internationally agreed set of goals for human development drawn from the Millennium Declaration, signed by all United Nations member states in 2000. Acknowledging the value of equity for development, the Declaration stresses the importance of equality, where no individual or Nation is denied the chance to benefit from development, and solidarity, and where global challenges are managed in a way that distributes the costs and benefits fairly (UNGA, 2000). The eights goals were officially established following the Millennium summit attended by 193 United Nations member states and at least 23 International organizations in 2000. The goals in summary aim at;

(1)   Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger
(2)   Achieving Universal primary education
(3)   Promoting gender equality and empowering women
(4)   Reducing Child mortality rates
(5)   Improving maternal health
(6)   Combating HIV/AIDS malaria and other diseases
(7)   Ensuring environmental sustainability, and
(8)   Developing a global partnership for developmen

MDG's in essence capture a more complete understanding of development which includes indicators for health, gender inequality, education and the environment.

Specifically, all the eight goals are geared towards alleviation of poverty from the society. Statistical figures on poverty from the underdeveloped and developing countries are enormous and the concept gets a mention regularly from the World Bank, IMF, and ADB etc on

daily basis. The successes recorded in the various areas of the MDG's in several countries by the internationally acclaimed indicators to some extent are still questionable.

Initiatives and engagement programmes of governments on gender equity/equality and development issues in Nigeria

Over the past years, discussions at several conferences, seminars and workshops have highlighted the issues of gender mainstreaming and the invaluable roles of women in Nation building. The Beijing Process not only brought to fore the inequalities of opportunities between women and men, but also provides guidelines for actions on the part of Governments, Non-Governmental Organizations and civil society groups in addressing the gaps in order to promote sustainable development globally. According to Ndonue (2013), "many countries of the world, including Nigeria, had affirmed their commitment to the implementation of the guidelines of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA)". She went further to highlight some of the affirmative action thus;

•   Every five years, countries gather to review the implementation of the BPFA. The 23rd Special Session of the UN General Assembly tagged, **"Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century," New York, 2000**, was the first Review in the implementation of the BPFA. Participants at the forum adopted a political declaration and outcome document titled, *"...Further Actions and Initiatives to Implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action."*

•   There have been other review processes notably Beijing +10 (2005) and Beijing + 15 (2010). These processes and other similar Conferences further reinforced gender as a social indicator, to be

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added to standard macro-economic indicators and development target.

- Consequently, gender equality and equity policies emerged as a principal concern for advocating the advancement and emphasizing the mainstreaming of women and men issues equally in development. Gender as a socio-economic and political construct is concerned with the qualitative and interdependent contribution and characters of women and men in society viz-a-viz their benefits.

- The Federal Government of Nigeria upgraded the National Commission for Women into a full-fledged Ministry with a female Cabinet Minister at the helm of affairs. The National Centre for Women Development was transformed into a parastatal. In the same vein, the States Commissions of Women were upgraded into Ministries with female Commissioners at the helm.

- With the approval of the Federal Executive Council in March, 2010 to set up Gender Units in Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to be headed by Officers not below levels 15 as provided for in the National Gender Policy Strategic Implementation Framework and Plan (2008), consultations have reached advanced stage with the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation to ensure proper coordination and sustainability of these Units through the introduction of Gender cadre in the public service. The Gender Units are another important policy tool that we hope will ensure the integration of women into Federal and state institutions.

- The National Gender Policy (2006) prescribes 35% Affirmative Action in favour of women for achieving minimum critical threshold in political offices, parties and public life to bridge the gender gaps in political

representation in both elective and appointive positions at all levels by 2015.

- At the sub-continental level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, 2001, the ECOWAS Gender Policy and set up the ECOWAS Gender Centre in Dakar, Senegal as the implementation mechanism for the advancement of women in this sub-region.

- At the continental level, African Governments responded positively by upholding their firm commitment to gender equality as a panacea for development as articulated in the Women's Rights Protocol, 2003; New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), 2001; the African Union Solemn Declaration for Gender Equality, 2005.

She concluded that "To achieve this feat, it is therefore very important that women should have a strong voice in shaping their environments. This can only be possible with the empowerment of women. Understanding of these linkages bring insights to policy and programmes that help to deal with the gender gaps, gender discrimination and stereotyping in gender policy analysis. Gender equality and women empowerment therefore lead to the actualization of gender equity in achieving the political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security of our country".

Complementary roles of information and grassroots mobilisation towards overall national development

This paper have been carefully prepared in line with the key policy issues which are focused around 5 critical areas –" (i) Culture re-orientation and sensitisation to change gender perceptions and stereotypes; (ii) Promotion of women's human rights and in particular focusing on sexual

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and gender based violence (SGBV) and in supporting new legislations and legal rights of women; (iii) Promoting the empowerment of women and integrating gender within key sectors as highlighted within the NGP – (Agriculture/Rural Development; Environment/Natural Resource; Gender and HIV/AIDS; Health and Reproductive Health/ Rights; Education/ Training; Labour/Employment); (iv) Women's political participation and engendered governance including gender and conflict management and (v) Supporting institutional development including the use of ICT and building strategic partnerships, including identifying new partnerships with men's organisations, faith based organisations and traditional institutions" (National Gender Policy Strategic Framework - implementation plan, 2008 pg 6). All the five key areas above have information dissemination and mobilization efforts of all citizenry in Nigeria as key ingredients and driving forces.

The invaluable roles of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in a rapidly changing world cannot be overemphasized. As a direct consequence of political and economic liberalization, information and communication have become resources of primary importance within the economic sector and an essential of any business enterprise and development issue. Cheap, efficient and reliable information and communication networks aid overall human development. We must accept the slogan that "Information is power" because it is through this that self-perpetuating economic activities and development occur in our various communities. ICTs are transforming the way smallholder farmers irrespective of sex obtain information essentially to increasing their farm productivity or market their produce and improve their livelihoods. Policy maker have a similar need for information in order to define more clearly the policies upon which the future of society will largely be determined. All these are further driven by the urge of the people to move in line of

contemporary development issues - mobilization. As a concept, mobilization encompasses Values, Vision, Voice and Virtues.

The Four "V" Model originally put forth by Grace (1999) has been remodified to explain how to build ethical orientation leadership and attitude between the government and the governed including youths and students in all areas of human endeavours including agriculture. The "Vs" stand for Values, Vision, Voice and Virtues.
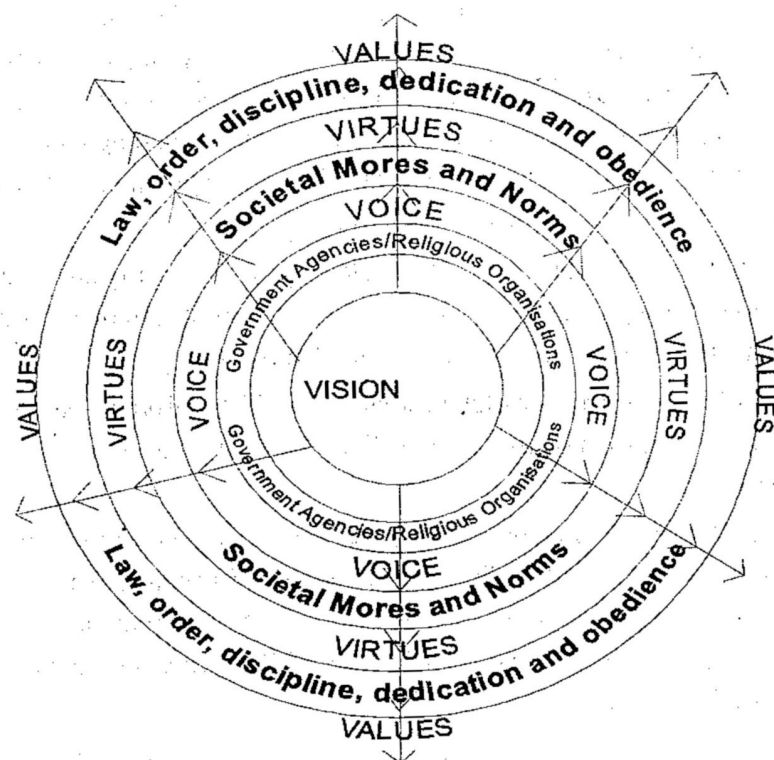
Value: deals with what is considered clean, good, right as against what is evil, bad, wrong etc. It explains in totality the premium placed on an action – the need for us as a nation to feed ourselves.

Vision: A long term plan on a future programme which will bring a purposeful change and impact positively on the lives of people in an area. It is time bound.

Voice: A way of giving proper mobilisation and orientation to people on a programme that will be of immense benefits and also the dissemination of same to the target audience. May be likened to government efforts in areas of OFN, BLP, FEAP, NEEDS, SEEDS, NAPEP etc to women, youths, farmers etc.

Virtue: It is the good everyone in the society and the society itself stands for. It is driven by sincerity of purpose and truth. It is the totality of the norms and mores in the society which should help shape and polish our various ways of life in relation to productive ventures in farm activities – poultry production, parables crop production, vegetable production, fish production etc.

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Fig. The Modified Four "V" Model

Alademerin (2006). Original source: Grace (1999)

The linkage between the Four "V" is the force of mobilisation of the entire citizenry. The process of mobilisation at each stage will focus on ways and means of sensitizing Nigeria's labour force (including women) to generate greater productivity so as to ensure economic recovery and self reliance. Gana (1987) once asserted:

"We are convinced that the way forward is through effective and popular mobilisation of Nigeria's productive forces. If we succeed in mobilising the creative energies of our people for greater production, we would have laid a solid foundation for economic recovery. The missing link has been effective mechanism for mobilising our labour force to transform our abundant natural resources into goods and services".

The vision explains a long term government human development programmes that will mainstream gender and ultimately be of immense benefit to the society. Through government agencies, religious bodies, NGOs etc, the benefits inherent in the programmes are passed onto the society through various media. In maximising the benefits, laws, discipline, dedication, obedience etc regarding the mode of operations of the programmes are spelt out to avoid one running foul of the guiding principles. The values got are not immediate as they take years or even decades to manifest in societies. This was the situation during the regime of Buhari/ Idiagbon in the early 1980s. War Against Indiscipline (WAI) which later metamorphosed into MAMSER was originally planned to be launched into nine phases. Only four were launched before the untimely end of the regime. WAI still stands out as one of the best programmes of any government in Nigeria till today.

In some other parts of the world, mobilizations have been initiated to create sustainable livelihoods. In Bangladesh, in common with neighbouring South Asian countries, social forestry (SF) is used rather flexibly as an umbrella term for public, private and communal initiatives for ensuring "active participation by the rural people in planning, implementation and benefit sharing of tree growing schemes"(Task Force, 1987)". SF is viewed here within the broader framework of rural development. It include afforestation programmes in marginal and degraded state and communal

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forest lands; village woodlots; farm forestry; strip plantations alongside railways, highways and embankments; community plantations' on public or communal joint management and benefit-sharing arrangements between the government and local communities; homestead forestry (home-gardens); and varied other manifestations of agro-forestry.

According to William, Massoud and Othman (1998) there are some community participation approaches that have been developed for sustainable livelihoods particularly in association with nature conservation and sustainable resource use programmes. Although there are many variations, these approaches can be grouped as below as they have relevance to benefits of communal mobilization efforts;

- Community service and out-reach programmes: often established in association with protected area management with the aim of resolving conflicts between the protected areas and surrounding communities through relation building and community development projects funded from protected area revenues. An example of such a programme is the Tanzania National Parks Community Service 'SCIP' programme.
- Integrated Conservation with Development Projects: piloted in the 1980s, these projects sought to bridge conflicts between conservation and development but focusing on the linkages while emphasizing the maintenance of biodiversity. The projects aim to facilitate the participation of local people in planning and decision- making processes of the protected area while simultaneously trying to address the social and economic requirements of participating communities (Stocking and Perkin, 1992). There are numerous examples of ICDPs, such as those at the East Usambra forest, Tanzania and the impenetrable Forest, Uganda.

- Community-based conservation programmes: developed in Zambia (ADMADE) and .Awareness-raising programmes by governments and NGO;s about gender-based Zimbabwe (CAMPFIRE) in the 1980s with variable success, these programmes sought, at least in part, to empower communites to manage their own wildlife resources as means for development and conservation. This was done by variably endowing participating communities with rights of resource custodianship, management and revenue retention. A large emphasis is placed on community institution strengthening, and development of micro-economic management skills and capabilities.

It is evident that mobilization can be effectively used as a conflict resolution and economic empowerment strategies in the rural communities.

Recommendations and suggestions

In a changing development context of awareness, education, empowerment, poverty reduction, erratic climate change, democracy and good governance etc, the links between women's overall empowerment and development, livelihoods and food security are vital but are appropriately not adequately recognized and addressed. In spite of policy papers, regulations and laws on gender and women issues in Nigeria, a lot more are still left unattended to with regards to disparities in the number of women in political offices either by appointments or by elections, leadership and managerial positions at local, state and national levels. In reality, the situation is better than what were some years back before 1995. To assure of gender equity and equality in the society, the followings are hereby recommended:

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- The supervisory bodies of tertiary institutions in Nigeria- National Universities Commission, National Board for Technical Education and National Commission for Colleges of Education should take steps in ensuring that Gender studies is made a compulsory course in general studies to be organized by respective Institute or Centre for Gender studies in each Nigerian tertiary institution.

- Gender studies as a full-fledged discipline should now be offered at degree level in all Nigerian Universities.

- Encouraging institutional policies that will reserve a certain percentage of elective offices for women in Students Union Government elections in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

- Some disciplines like Agriculture, Adult Education, Community development, Social studies, Home Economics, Health Education etc should have more courses in Gender studies at undergraduate and post graduate levels in our institutions.

- Gender offices at local, state and national should create awareness-raising programmes about gender-based violence, and including financial support and empowerment for women and children escaping abusive environments (e.g. NGO pilot initiatives in Ghana) thereby creating enduring and sustainable opportunities for the vulnerable groups.

- Gender-awareness and analysis training for programme staff in government offices at local, state and national to help them identify the gender specific risks and vulnerabilities to be tackled and targeted by their programmes.

- A centralized local, state and national database that will facilitate coordinated care and service access for programme participants and provide links to complementary services (e.g. access to micro-credit and micro-entrepreneurial training for women); other empowerment opportunities etc.

- Intensification of more awareness programmes on local and national mass media on gender issues.

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