



PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

BY

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AT THE

56TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW)

THE EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN AND THEIR TOLE IN POVERTY
AND HUNGER ERADICATION, DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT CHALLENGES
AGENDA ITEM 3(a)(i)

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 2012.

Madam Chair

My delegation would like to congratulate you and members of your Bureau on your election to steer the affairs of the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. We are confident that the outcome our deliberations will serve to move forward the women empowerment agenda.

Nigeria aligns with the statement made by Tunisia and Algeria on behalf of the Africa Group and the Group of 77 and China respectively.

In line with the Beijing Declaration, my delegation is convinced that, women's empowerment, their full participation in all spheres of nation building, including economic decision-making and access to resources are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. To this end, Nigeria is committed to alleviating poverty, enhance growth and development of women at all levels, especially in the rural communities.

In my country, women constitute about 50 percent of the national population. Majority of them reside in the rural areas and contribute about 60 percent of local food production. Despite the contributions of women in the agricultural sector, their role in promoting economic and social change continues to be inadequately recognized and undervalued.

Madam Chair

The Nigerian Government's vision 20:2020, which currently drives its economic transformation at all levels, seeks to redress the subordinate role of women in the Nigerian society. It emphasizes poverty reduction, hunger and self-sufficiency in food production.

To further demonstrate our efforts at bridging the gender poverty gap, a review of the microfinance policy framework for Nigeria was carried out in April 2011. One of the core targets of the reviewed policy is to eliminate gender disparity by ensuring that women's access to financial services increased by 15% annually, that is, 5% above the minimum of 10% across board. This policy also requires that Micro-finance Banks (MFBs) include in their periodic returns gender disaggregated data of their products and services. This is in addition to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) setting up entrepreneurial development centres to train women on entrepreneurship and formation of cooperatives to enable them access credit from Bank of Industry (BOI) and National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND). In the same vein, women development centres in each of the 774 local government areas are being reactivated to provide "second chance" opportunities to rural women to enhance their livelihood and well-being.

As part of Government's commitment to provide an enabling environment, the administrative, policy and legal environment for formulating and implementing gender responsive programmes are constantly being strengthened for effective response to emerging challenges. These have led to increased recognition for women and their inclusion at various levels of decision making. For instance, women currently occupy 33.4% of the cabinet positions. For the first time in Nigeria, a woman was elected as the Majority Leader of the House of Representatives. At the various State Houses of Assembly, we have female speakers, female deputy speaker, female majority leader, female minority leader, Chief Whips, Deputy Chief Whips, among others.

Madam Chair

In order to reduce the high incidents of child mortality and morbidity in rural areas, the Government introduced a National Ambulance Intervention Scheme. Over four thousand midwives have been recruited and deployed to rural areas to provide skilled birth attendants. Incentives are also put in place to improve antenatal care. Over the years, considerable efforts and enormous financial resources have also been committed towards achieving universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS, including Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT).

Education is key to breaking the circle of poverty. In line with this, the Nigerian Government has put in place several strategies to bridge the gender gap. One of such measures is the Girls Education Project (GEP) introduced to increase girl child enrollment and retention in schools. Worthy of mention is the Government Conditional Cash Transfer (GCCT), which specifically targets the girl child. The programme has, over the years, reduced street hawking and increased school enrolment and retention of girls in schools in the rural areas.

Another intervention programme of the Government is the Subsidy Re-Investment Programme (SURE-P), a social safety net, aimed at alleviating the impact of the oil subsidy removal on vulnerable populations. Under this programme about 10, 000 women and youths are employed in each state of the Federation to carry out public works.

To address gender-based violence, several initiatives have been put in place by Government, Civil Society Groups and International Organizations. Some of these include – development of Policy on sexual harassment in schools,

development of a Gender Policy for the Nigeria Police Force, and training for Senior Police Officers to respond to issues of violence against women.

Madam Chair

In conclusion, Nigeria reaffirms its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. My delegation would also seize this opportunity to reiterate its commitment to the empowerment of rural women. We believe that the rural woman plays a pivotal role and remains crucial to the overall success of efforts directed at development in every society.

I thank you Madam Chair.