

Review of Millennium Development Goals

2015 is set for achievement for certain millennium goals by the United Nation Declaration of 2000. These goals include among others, Promotion of Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. I would like to take this in two arms:

- A. Promotion of Gender Equality.
- B. Empowerment of Women.

The issue of gender inequality has gained so much prominence and concern that governments and NGOs have given vent to its seeming frustrating tentacles especially since the last century.

In addressing gender equality as one of the millennium goals to be achieved by 2015 in the world, one has to identify and itemized some gender inequalities especially as it relates to female gender. My view is that it borders on issues relating to gender discrimination, challenges to womanhood and derogatory practices.

In my country, Nigeria, these are referable to various customs and traditions. It is a man's world where women are referred to as second class and weaker sex, to be seen and not heard. A woman is generally seen as a wife and a mother saddled with family responsibilities. Expected to cook, take care of her husband, children, the extended members of a husband's family and visitors to the house. A woman is married out at puberty so as to make effective use of the reproductive stage of her life. She is expected to have as many children as her husband and his relations, usually her mother-in-law, want. The young one is circumcised at birth or at puberty, depending on tradition of the area, to prevent her from being promiscuous.

Meanwhile, the men were sent to school as they are expected to retain the family name. However, the reverse is the case in most communities in Nigeria now, as the male gender would rather engage in trading and businesses to make quick money as opposed to proper academic training.

Owing to the academic advantage of the men and their inherent chauvinistic attitude they were exposed to earlier in life, they occupied all the positions of policy and law making on independence of most African countries.

Women were relegated to the kitchen and homes and their views were considered as shallow, unreasonable, weak, frivolous, emotional, immature, and short-sighted, etc. These views I must say, have considerably reversed.

The widows were not left out of this inequality, as the family of the deceased man acquired all his assets including the widow but not her liabilities.

I have a personal practical experience during the National Political Election, where the men in my Political Party in my state and shamefully some women preferred a male candidate on the ground that my constituents are still primitive and will not accept a female representative to the Parliament. I proved them wrong.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action could be said to have marked the culminating point in the efforts made at International and National levels to address the issue of gender discrimination and inequality. The strategies being deployed are directed towards a positive and pragmatic affirmative action for the effective participation of women in governance especially in partisan politics, appointive public positions and facilitating higher percentage representation of women in the business circles. The global approach amongst others should be to strengthen grassroots affirmative action platforms and seriously support projects that have the potential of raising awareness and sensitization of the women in public life.

Nigerian's national policy on women states thus:

"To address the imbalance in women representation in the political and social life of the nation especially the decision making levels of the three arms of government..."

In line with the foregoing, some questions will come up for determination and these will include:

1. What challenges are faced by women taking up public life?
2. What steps must the government take to assist women to attain their full potential?
3. What potential areas of business have segregated against women?
4. What are the unique challenges faced by women in businesses and political life?

The Beijing Platform for Action like we all know recommended 30% representation of women in all public positions.

There should be enabling environment for women to have opportunity for self employment earn adequate income and choose flexible hours of work while raising their families or attending to other family matters.

To balance this gender inequality the inherent differences must be recognized as fundamental to achieve any positive result. Though efforts are being made by different governments to bridge gender inequality there is great need to step up the drive to meet up with 2005 target.

The Draft Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and the Rights of Women in Africa amended by O.A.U in 2001 provides copiously in some of its sections thus:

Article 2

- (1) State parties shall combat all forms of discrimination against women through appropriate legislative measures. In this regard they shall;
 - (a) Include in their national constitutions and other legislative instruments the principle of equality between men and women and ensure its effective application.
 - (b) Enact and effectively implement appropriate national legislative measures to prohibit all forms of harmful practices which endanger the health and general well-being of women and girls.

Article 5

State parties shall take appropriate measures to:

- (a) Prohibits all forms of violence against women whether physical, mental, verbal or sexual, domestic and family whether they take place in the private or in society and public life.

Article 10

- (1) State parties shall take specific positive action to promote the equal participation of women in the public life of their countries ensuring that;
 - (a) Women do participate without any discrimination or intimidation in all elections
 - (b) Women are represented at all levels with men in all electoral and candidate lists.
 - (c) Women are partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of state policy.

Article 20

State parties shall take appropriate measures to effective implementation of the following.

- (a) Prohibit that widows be subjected to inhuman, humiliating and degrading treatment.

In Nigeria a lot of emphasis has been placed on the protection of women's rights. The Legislature has made remarkable impact into this area through Bill No. SB. 307 which seeks to prohibit all forms of violence which include physical, sexual, psychological, domestic violence, harmful traditional practices, discrimination against women, to provide adequate remedies for victims, punishment for offenders, establish a Commission on violence against women and a Trust fund for survivors of such violence.

This Bill is all encompassing and encapsulates in a large detail, the degree of degradation and depravity women have suffered. This Bill seeks to identify some of the offences against women, recommends appropriate punishments/sanctions for the offenders. The Bill addresses the issue of attempts at abusing any woman and confers jurisdiction on the judiciary to handle cases of abuse on women and to make appropriate prohibitive and protective orders.

A Non Governmental Organization -- **Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence against Women (LACVAW)** also proposed a Bill which was sponsored in the Nigerian Federal House of Representatives in 2002 titled "**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (PREVENTION PROTECTION & PROHIBITION) Act 2002**". This Bill had the support of the International Human Rights Law Group and United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Bill when enacted into law will represent one of the vents through which the struggle for women liberation will find expression.

The wife of the Vice President of Nigeria has a foundation (The WOTCLEFF) which objective is to fight against trafficking on women and children. She also sponsored a Bill which was passed as law in our Parliament for that purpose. The Parliament also passed a Bill in 2003 to protect the rights of children (Child's Right Act).

The political parties in Nigeria, I must say shifted positively towards balancing this inequality during our last political election by shelving some initial election registration requirements for female aspirants. They also by policy assigned some percentage of elective political seats to female aspirants. In consequence, the number of elected female members improved. I myself benefited from this policy.

On the present appointive positions in my country, the President of Nigeria who is also the Chairman of African Union actively promoted Gender equality by appointing women into very important and sensitive positions in Nigeria. Some of such positions I will list hereunder;

The Finance Minister and the Minister of State Finance
The Women Affairs Minister
The Minister of Solid Minerals
The Minister of State Health
The Education Minister and the Minister of State Education
The Chief Executive of the Nigerian Stock Exchange
The Director General of National Agency for Food and Drugs Agency
The Director General for National Programme on Immunization
The Director General for Bureau for Public Enterprises
The Chairman Investment and Securities Tribunal
Justices of the Supreme Court of Nigeria and
The Court of Appeal but to mention these few.

Overall, my Country is on the right track in advancing the fulfillment of the Millennium Goals.

HON. PATRICIA NNEAMAKA UDOGU
Member House of Representatives, Federal Republic of Nigeria,
Member Pan-African Parliament.