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PANEL I

Integration of gender perspectives in macroeconomics

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THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATING GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN MACROECONOMIC POLICIES/PROGRAMMES AT NATIONAL LEVELS

INTRODUCTION

1. Whilst the Nigerian Constitution states that every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunity before the law, the role of public policy cannot be overemphasized toward the achievement of gender equality in any nation. Our macroeconomic environment consists of the various policies that are put in place to affect every aspect of economic activity, and these include fiscal, monetary, exchange rate, pricing policy and other measures to foster economic growth and development. It is within this context that the Challenges of integrating gender perspectives can be meaningfully examined. One cannot ignore the growing awareness toward parity in all spheres of life and this informs various government policies/programmes that are geared towards integrating gender perspectives in macro-economic policies in Nigeria.

GENERAL GENDER POLICY ISSUES

2. Nigeria has a National Policy on Women and this fulfils the yearning as well as efforts of Federal, State and local Governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), 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 in our society over time through structures and processes created by patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism. The broad objective is to bring into the mainstream, gender perspective in all policies and programmes, based on a systematic gender analysis at all levels of government.

3. Whilst Nigeria affirms its support for the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women, the alleviation of the numerous constraints to women's full integration into its development process is crucial. The challenges are many but not insurmountable, bearing in mind that the causes of gender inequality are complex and these include low levels of education and training, poor health and nutritional status and limited access to resources among others.

MAINSTREAMING GENDER ISSUES IN NATIONAL POLICY:

4. In the management of the nations' resources, the over-riding objective is the achievement of sustainable growth and development, where all and sundry can participate in good macro-economic policies as measured by low inflation, prudent fiscal stance, realistic exchange rate and best practices in support of finance and trade. In the circumstances, it is submitted that Public Policy can contribute directly and indirectly to reducing gender inequality through:

- Modifying the legal and regulatory framework to enhance equal opportunities. The challenge here is that legal reform itself does not ensure equal treatment. Further public action is required to make sure that gender-neutral laws are enforced at national and local levels.
- Ensuring macro-economic stability and improving micro-economic incentives. Sound economic policies and a well-functioning market are essential for growth, employment generation and the creation of an environment in which the returns to investing in women and girls can be fully realized. Economic instability as well as price distortions is a hindrance hence the economic Reform Programme of the present administration is being fully implemented. A major focus is the elimination of wastes and the re-orientation in public spending toward basic services with high social returns such as education, health care and water supply.
- Redirecting public policies and public expenditures to those investments with the highest social returns and which are most heavily used by women and children such as water supply, and sanitation services, rural electrification and national programme on Immunization (NPI) among others.
- Adopting targeted interventions that correct gender inequalities at the micro level. Targeting is justifiable because women are disproportionately represented among the poor and they are the most vulnerable in the society. This approach is quite popular with the Federal Government of Nigeria.

5. The incorporation of gender perspectives in economic reform policies and programmes at different levels has become part of Government's current activities in Nigeria. A new level of awareness is gradually emerging in the Federal Ministry of Finance, to ensure that all economic policies and planning are gender-sensitive. This will include taking gender differences and inequalities into account in economic modeling in order to better predict macroeconomic outcomes of reform and government fiscal policies.

6. Nigeria has been witnessing steady progress from the weaknesses created by the complexities of its political economy in the past two decades. Weaknesses in economic management and governance reflect in part, the social political challenges and paradox of an oil rich economy whose earnings from oil has not been able to significantly improve the poverty situation of its citizens. This development has forced the present administration in Nigeria to embark on major economic and political reform.

7. Government's strong commitment to the reforms has created platforms for the integration of gender perspectives in macroeconomic policies and increasingly more and more women are being actively engaged in management of macroeconomic policies and programmes. This is made possible through

series of deliberate actions aimed at resuscitating social values which enhance the recognition of women in public institutions and the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in policy formulation at the national level. For instance, it is today part of NEEDS document and national economic agenda to promote women's rights. To this end, the Ministry of Women Affairs and relevant Committees of the National Assembly are required to review substantive and procedural laws that affect women. The Ministry of Labour and Productivity along with other relevant Ministries are also examining areas in which women have traditionally been neglected.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

8. In Nigeria, women are said to constitute about 70% of the poor. This has fueled the need to empower women by enhancing their capacity to participate in the economic, social, political and cultural activities of the country. Among the measures being adopted towards the realization of these objectives are:

- Implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on Eliminations of all forms of discrimination against women;
- Mainstreaming women's concerns and perspectives in all policies and programmes;
- Support legislation for the abolition of all forms of harmful traditional practices against women;
- Promotion of access to microfinance and other poverty alleviation strategies and reducing poverty among women; and
- Increasing access to women on key national issues.

9. When properly implemented, these measures could become the safety nets of social protection or interventions aimed at safeguarding poor women from becoming poorer and the non-poor from becoming poor.

10. Government has initiated programmes and projects that should reasonably mitigate the plight of this important social group. Because the Federal Government adopts a multi-dimensional approach to solving gender issues, line Ministries are given the mandate to address specific gender related problems from their perspectives. A few of these interventions include:

Special Bank Loan Arrangement

11. The Nigerian women are to enjoy bank loan facilities to enable them set up viable economic ventures like small and medium scale enterprises. For this purpose, the Bank of Industry as well as the Bank of Agriculture, Co-operative and Rural Development are to give priority to loan requests from women

Cottage Industry Project:

12. In order to boost the economic empowerment of women, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development recently completed the Damaturu Vegetable Oil, Kwali Pottery and Bayelsa Salt Industries.

Female Functional Literacy and Health Programme (FFLH):

13. This programme is being implemented through a tripartite collaboration by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, Federal Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization. The objective is to enhance the health status, economic independence and the literacy level of women. Food processing machines, fish driers, irrigation pumps, grinding machines, groundnut extractors, among other equipment, have been distributed to Women Cooperatives in different States, including Abia, Bauchi, Borno, Delta, Enugu, Kwara, Osun, Rivers and Sokoto States.

Modern Bee-Keeping Project:

14. Another economic empowerment project for women is the modern Bee-keeping venture implemented under an arrangement between the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development and the International First Aid Society (IFAS). Women in 10 States have been trained on modern Bee-keeping and honey production technology. All the States of the Federation will eventually benefit from the programme.

Micro-Credit Scheme for Women:

15. Part of the efforts to reduce poverty among women is to organize them into groups through NGOs, four of which have been approved to avail them of micro-credit from the National Poverty Eradication programme (NAPEP). The four include:

- Nigerian Association of Women Entrepreneurs
- Country Women Association of Nigeria
- Women Opinion Leaders Forum
- National Traders and Market Leaders Council of Nigeria

16. Similarly, the sum of 116 million soft loan package for the establishment of various micro-scale enterprises by Nigeria women (where over 4,000 women groups are expected to benefit), has been made available to the National Council on Women Societies (NCWS) by NAPEP. The essence is to establish a Nigeria Women Finance Trust that would foster and have multi-dimensional effects on both the economy and the Nigerian women empowerment endeavour.

Rehabilitation of Vesico-Vagina Fistula (VVF) Patients:

17. In order to address the problem of (VVF) the Federal Government made available 64 million sometime ago to develop surgical, nutritional, psychological,

social, education and economic programmes that would deal with the multifaceted problems and morbidity associated with Vesico Vagina Fistula and to improve the lives of the women victims. The VVF centres are also to serve as NAPEP vocational training centres for women.

The Universal Basic Education Scheme:

18. This has been a major policy of the present administration and right from its inception it has earmarked a substantial chunk of the national budget for meaningful implementation of the scheme. There is a reasonable expectation that the higher the level of education, the lower the incidence of poverty. The scheme does not discriminate between the genders. Therefore, our women are being encouraged to avail themselves of the Mass Literacy and Adult Education programmes being implemented in all States of the Federation.

19. Today, increasing number of economic agencies in both the public and private sectors have come under the management of women. Under the Federal Ministry of Finance, women are playing major roles as heads of Parastatals like the Federal Inland Revenue Service (the first time ever); Investment and Securities Tribunal among women Directors in other Agencies under the Ministry and the Central Bank of Nigeria.

20. The challenges that this integration process has faced include:

- Absences of a strong and credible women advocacy group;
- Weak policy initiative and management;
- The low number of women participation in decision making process;
- Unsustainability of public finance at all levels of government;
- Absence of a critical mass of women with potential for a new and strong beginning;
- Absence of an organ for the enforcement of women's legislation;
- Social-Cultural threats;
- Past weaknesses in governance;
- Social conflicts; and
- Absences of accurate and dependable data on women.

21. In consideration of the girl child education as a core value in education in Nigeria, public expenditures are equally being tailored to address such considerations particularly in States that have neglected women education. Women like men are now becoming more intensively involved in policy design, implementation and monitoring through deliberate "shop for women" programme adopted by my colleague, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and I.

22. I agree with the view that to increase women's possibilities to react positively to macroeconomic incentives, we will require the implementation of a set of actions including:

- The provision of social infrastructure and services (childcare, health services, water supply, etc.), which competing scarce current public finance has not provided for particularly, as gender perspective investment is yet to become popular among countries with heavy debt burden like Nigeria;
- Security of their property and inheritance rights through legal reforms including the establishment of mechanisms to enforce claims;
- Support to the development and provision of financial services and encouragement of financial institutions to support and be seen to be encouraging and integrating gender issues into their business plans; and
- Investment into girls' and women's education and training to increase their mobility with regard to the labour market. As part of its on going economic and political reform programme, Nigeria hopes in the days ahead, to develop social employment schemes and funds targeted at women as part of all efforts towards furthering and integrating gender perspective in our national life.

23. To achieve this objective, economic development programme is being tailored to address the following malaise: As we wait for the full evolution of this new regime, immediate challenges remain the capacity to tackle poor and inconsistent macroeconomic policies. These key challenges include:

- Increase participation of women in the economy through the expansion of employment, increasing their productivity and skills and widening their access to other productive assets;
- Empowerment and organization of women to enable them participate more effectively in social, political and economic processes through the Mobilizing local resources for refinancing through native age grade funds and thrift societies;
- Targeting resources to programmes directed to the poorest localities and groups, which constitute mostly women to improve their conditions through Commercial and special bank using differentiated models to achieve similar objective;
- Deriving appropriate social protection schemes to meet the basic needs of women, especially the handicapped, marginalized women and youth. This will involve the development of Programmes peculiar to a people for which much education may not be needed to capture a significant proportion of informal economic activities among women;

- Mobilize and augment community, national and voluntary funds for anti-poverty programmes to fight poverty among women and to release them to participate in macroeconomic activities to inform, educate and train women for useful participation in national development.

OTHER CHALLENGES

24. One of the challenges of integrating gender perspectives in Nigeria's macro-economic policies/programmes has to do with judicious allocation of limited resources among rising competing needs. A fundamental approach to the efficient management of the nation's finances inevitably led to the economic reform programme that is currently being implemented, especially at the Federal Government level.

25. The economic reform agenda has a utilitarian focus that highlights the physical and human infrastructural basis for growth and poverty reduction through priority funding of gender sensitive sectors such as health, (HIV/AIDS) education, water and provision of electricity, among others. To the extent that resources are never sufficiently available, the Federal Government continues to reappraise its projects and programmes from time to time to ensure that public investment in economic and social infrastructure is gender sensitive.

26. It is realized that often times the poorest groups in society stand to lose the most from economic distortions. High and rising inflation places a disproportionate tax burden on the poor, including low-paid wage earners and those with fixed income. For this and other reasons, inflation tends to hit women harder than men. In implementing Nigeria's economic reforms, the issue of rising inflation, the poor exchange rate of the Naira poor GDP are macro-economic issues that continue to be vigorously tackled.

27. It is also to be noted that our economic reform agenda emphasizes macro-economic stability as well as the removal of price distortions. The reform also promotes labour-demanding growth in agriculture and industry and more accessible basic social services in education, health care and water supply. These are areas mainstreaming gender perspectives have been pronounced.

THE WAY FORWARD

28. Although not all issues that bear on gender equality can be effectively addressed by individual nations, Nigeria's quest for macroeconomic stability and sustainable development will continue to be gender sensitive.

29. By promoting transparency and accountability in public finance management and reducing corrupt practices, the Federal Government is invariably directing more public resources to the real sector of the economy where greater impact could be made to the lives of women and the less

privileged in the society. Besides, greater labour productivity, a higher rate of human capital formation and stronger economic growth will be achieved.

CONCLUSION

30. The Federal Government of Nigeria appreciates the importance of women and children in the scheme of things and would continue to welcome their participation in projects and programmes designed for their upliftment. By so doing, it hopes to make a real difference to the future well-being and prosperity of her people.