



CWSI

NEWSLETTER

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Invest
in Women for a
Better Tomorrow

Foreword

WOMAN!

CONNECT WITH YOUR INNER SPIRIT

“They (my girls) have intelligence and use it. A girl of 15 years can control a catechism class of 100 men and really teach them”

Mother Mary Charles Magdalen Walker, RSC.



Rev. Sr. Ngozi Frances Uti, HHCJ
(Executive Director, CWSI)

Mother Mary Charles Magdalen Walker arrived Calabar on October 3rd, 1923, at the invitation of Bishop Joseph Shanahan, CSSp, then Bishop of the Southern Vicariate to empower women and girls in the vicariate. Contrary to what she was told and had in mind about the African girls she came out to teach, she met a group of intelligent girls who were eager to learn, be mentored and determined to excel. The above opening statement was in one of her letters to her Superior General in the 1920s. Of these girls referred to in the above statement, four of them became the foundation members of the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, the first indigenous congregation of women religious in English speaking West Africa. These young “uneducated girls” following in the footsteps of their Spiritual Mother, mentor and friend became positively bold, confident and determined to make the most of their lives. True to her description of them, they were teachers (first Montessori teachers in Nigeria). They were trained as pupil teachers, nurses, catechists and prepared women for marriage.

However, investing in women and girls goes beyond formal

education of being able to read and write. This seemed to have failed us in Nigeria. Seated in my office one day, a young man who happened to be a Lawyer walked in and asked, Sister please what do you do here? I saw the name of the office, Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI) and got curious. I took some time to explain to him our Mission and Vision at CWSI. Then he told me his story. Their parents had sent his sister to study in the USA. One day she had gone to the bank to transact her business and met a Nigerian business man who could not complete the required form. She helped him out, a fellow Nigerian who needed help. One thing led to another and soon a relationship began and eventually she married an ‘illiterate’ even when her siblings were not in support of the relationship. Since then, she has been in an abusive marriage as at the time her brother related this to me. What is the other side of the story? Her parents would not want to hear she is contemplating ending the marriage because they are “knights of the Catholic Church”. The full story is not for this newsletter but certainly one that shows that investing in women and girls has to do more with the wholistic EMPOWERMENT of both women and girls.

The theme for International Women’s Day 2024 is ‘Count Her In: Invest in Women. Accelerate Progress’. This theme

is based on the United Nations 68th Commission on the Status of Women priority theme 'Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective'.

We are by this invited to invest in women and girls. But what does this mean? It is not so much academic qualification as in the short story above but in the wholistic empowerment of the human person created in the image and likeness of God—a healthy body image with self-esteem, bold, confident, self-worth, determined, economically and financially independent. Without some, if not all these attributes, the woman languishes in self-pity and regrets, while the man prides himself with such arrogance telling some other women "I have your better at home as a full-time house wife". The urgent task before us is to facilitate the empowerment of our sisters, daughters, mothers, daughters-in-law and friends who are still not able to free themselves from whatever puts them down from realizing their full and God given potentials. Here the words of Niambi Jarvis come to mind:

When a woman really gets that she is the co-creator of her own life...watch out. She cannot be stopped. No man can beat her body down. No system of thought or external authority can oppress or subjugate her. No malevolent influence can possess her soul. When a woman connects with her own essence, she becomes aware of her connection to the Creator, to others, to nature, and to the

universe. Yes, that's when a woman starts to live full-force!

This is the task before us—to mentor, guide, encourage and walk with our sisters who need our hands to help raise them from where they are. It is a difficult path to walk because of the restrictions placed by culture and religion, the ego that makes parents think of their positions and place in society rather than the happiness of their daughters. Many women have made it through hard work and determination. To these we plead, please come to the help of your sisters. Let us free ourselves from that derogatory saying, "Women are women's worse enemies". Let us prove that gone are the days when that could have been true because of fear and what we were made to believe. Things are no longer the same because we are now our sisters' keeper.

To all the men who support the cause of women and girls beginning from their families, communities, work/business places, in spite of all the name callings, we say thank you very much and please do not relent your effort. For all the women who have made it and are struggling to help others, thank you but remember it's a hard road to travel but we can never give up.

Finally, let me end with the words of George Eliot: **'It's never too late to be what you might have been'**.

Jarvis N. and Barty-Lacey, 2005, 100 Words of Wisdom for Women, Renaissance Press International

About Us

The Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI) is a mission/initiative of the Religious Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus (HHCJ). HHCJ is a Religious Congregation of women founded in Calabar Nigeria in 1931 by Mother Mary Charles Magdalene Walker of the Religious Sisters of Charity (RSC). Mother Mary Charles Walker's apostolate centred on empowering women and the girl-child: educating them on their dignity and fundamental rights as human beings. The desire to continue the apostolate propelled the formation of Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI)

CWSI was registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission in 1999 (CAC No: 12,045). CWSI has consultative statues with the Economic and Social Council—ECOSOC and in affiliation with the Department of Global Communications) at the United Nations. Through advocacy, capacity building, awareness raising and sensitization, research and documentation, partnership and paralegal engagements, CWSI advocates for good governance, economic, political and socio-cultural rights.

CWSI Strategic Goal

CWSI's goal is the holistic empowerment of the woman for social rebirth and the promotion of gender equality/equity.

Vision

CWSI is an organization which envisions women and other vulnerable persons empowered, liberated and active in the creation of a better world

Mission

CWSI propelled by faith in the Creator of all beings, is committed to upholding the dignity of women and other vulnerable persons through capacity building, advocacy, awareness raising, research and documentation.

Core Values (CACI)

- **Courage** – to choose life and not let fear cripple our imagination in the breaking of unjust fetters.
- **Accountability** – to that which gave rise to us and causes us to be transparent to our beneficiaries and partners.
- **Commitment** – to action in freedom for the establishment of a New World; a new order.
- **Integrity** – to speak of what we know: of our experience and the hope we bear.

EDITOR'S NOTE



Welcome to this year's edition of our annual newsletter, under the guiding theme, "Invest in Women for a Better Tomorrow." Centre For Women Studies and Intervention envisions a world where women are not only free from the shackles of societal limitations but are empowered architects of societal progress and well-being.

In Nigeria, the journey of a woman is marked by a series of battles for her rights, dignity, and place in society. Despite making significant contributions to the socio-economic fabric of the nation, women face systemic barriers that limit their access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and political representation. The challenges they encounter are compounded by prevailing cultural norms and practices that undervalue their participation in decision-making processes, both within households and at the national level.

The stark reality we face is a reflection of a broader issue: the lack of prioritized investment in women's development by the government and key stakeholders. This oversight is not merely a failure to uphold gender equality but a missed opportunity for national growth and development. Investing in women is proven to have a multiplier effect on community health, education, and economic prosperity. Yet, in Nigeria, the potential of women to contribute to a better tomorrow remains largely untapped, hindered by insufficient policies, programs, and funding dedicated to addressing the unique challenges women face.

As we navigate through the research articles, stories, achievements, and reflections within this newsletter, we aim to cast a spotlight on the critical need for investment in women. Our organization's efforts over the past year have focused on bridging these gaps—through Advocacy, Awareness raising, Capacity Building, Research, and Documentation. We have seen firsthand the transformative impact of empowering women, not only in their lives but in the broader community.

This year's theme is both a call to action and a belief in the potential of what we can achieve together. It is a reminder that investing in women is not just the right thing to do but the smart thing to do for a better tomorrow. Through the contents of this Newsletter, we hope to inspire action, influence policy, and ignite a widespread commitment to prioritizing and investing in women's development.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. Together, we can and will build a better tomorrow, where every woman's contribution is valued, and her empowerment is seen as pivotal to our shared progress and prosperity.



Grace Eseohe Okosun
(Admin/Communication Officer, CWSI)

CWSI

STRATEGIC FOCUS.

01

Governance and Human Rights:

CWSI contributes to the inclusion of women in the governance and leadership process in Nigeria by mainstreaming gender in decision making and sustain advocacy for the implementation of gender sensitive laws and policies.

02

Migration and Movement of people :

CWSI aims at promoting safe, orderly and regular migration. CWSI further aims at ensuring the protection and empowerment of vulnerable refugees in IDP camps in Nigeria.

03

Research and Documentation:

CWSI aims at becoming a research and documentation centre where data and recommendation briefs on the advancement and protection of the rights of women and girls can be accessed

04

Environment and Sanitation:

CWSI aims at implementing an environmental protection framework and creating community and institutional awareness on mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

05

Economic and Poverty Alleviation:

CWSI promotes and empowers women to be financially independent in order to combat poverty and advance sustainable development of their opportunities.

BURNING ISSUES IN WOMEN'S RIGHTS;

UNDERSTANDING GENDER EQUALITY AND FEMINISM.

The theme for
International Women's Day 2024 is
**'Count Her In: Invest in Women.
Accelerate Progress'**.



Pascal Ignatius Idogbe, ESQ.
CWSI Programme Manager

This theme is based on the **United Nations 68th Commission on the Status of Women** priority theme **'Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective'**. Similarly, Goal 5 of the Sustainable development Goals is: **"Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"**. These are very laudable purposes. Cogent and desirable as they are, their Achievability depends on popular participation of citizens and governments of every country to contribute the realization of the noble objectives. A crucial foundational obstacle to the actualization of gender equality and the call to count women into development processes by investing in them is the backlash against gender equality and feminism. Antagonism against gender equality and feminism is founded on ignorance of the concepts. By logical inference, people will not count women in or invest in them if they misunderstand the intent, purpose and rationale of gender equality and feminism. They will also not contribute to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls as posited in the SDGs if they are labouring under the mistaken belief that investing in women will empower them to overthrow the long-established regime of patriarchy which is advantageous to men. Lastly, they will not participate towards achievement of the noble objective of gender equality and feminism when they wrongly believed that

the concepts threaten to enthrone a new order of power sharing with men which will make women independent, insubordinate and irrepressible. Many men in Africa and particularly in Nigeria would rather ensure that the status quo of institutionalized male superiority over women is maintained. Gender disequilibrium is widely thought by many men and women to be a natural order of divine configuration. It is on this premise that many people contentiously find the terms 'gender equality' and 'feminism' a repulsive absurdity that would neither endorse nor support. In my work as a women's rights advocate, I have encountered challenges of being accused by some duty bearers, gate keepers and even state actors as betraying the brotherhood of men when I make a case for gender equality. Reactions are worse when I identify myself as a feminist. The word elicited bewilderment, sometimes misinterpretation and other times cynicism or indifference. In the worst-case scenario revulsion as it is often times confused with transsexualism. This misinterpretation has occurred several times in the course of project implementation during which I advocated for gender equality and women's and girl's rights or when I canvassed for ending violence against women and girls. This article is predicated on the experiences.

Proceeding on the above background; the objective of this piece is to conceptually clarify gender equality and feminism which are burning issues in women's rights because they are copiously misunderstood. The expected outcome is that demystification of the concepts through this awareness creation would bring about enhanced knowledge, increased participation

and support of citizens for the global gender equality goal and for feminists and feminists' movements which on the long run will culminate in the realization of a just, happier and better world for everyone.

It has been a herculean struggle to make the world accept the truth that women together with men are born equal and that women and girls possess the same human rights that men and boys have. Ironically, when it comes to women's right or gender equality, common sense is not common. Else, how can we explain why men exercised adult franchise of the right to vote and be voted for while women were disenfranchised and barred from voting? Does it make sense? Throughout history, women have suffered so many inhuman and degrading mistreatments on the premise that they are not equal to men. Gender inequality is gender injustice. You may not believe this, in 1595 it was announced that women are not human beings. This is as far back as 429 years ago that the question was asked 'ARE WOMEN HUMAN'? (see the debate of 1595 between Valens Acidalius and Simon Gediccus) It was conjectured that during procreation, the man was the Causa efficiens while woman was merely the causa instrumentalis. This outrageous thinking was elucidated with the example that "if a smith forged a sword with the help of a hammer, the hammer remained his tool, it did not become a member of his body. By the same token, woman did not become part of mankind when man used her to perpetuate the human race" Can you imagine how insensible and insensitive the thinking has been about the status of women. It stupidly tended to count women among the animals. Ironically, the philosophers of this hypothesis actually believe it is scrupulous. We may discard this oblivious thinking as crass and ignoble ignorance of the ancient but has modern man fared better in fair treatment of women? Obviously not. There are so many thoughtless discrimination and oppression of women in contemporary times. Some these gender inequalities itemized below are currently practiced in many countries of the world and are often state-authorized:

- Women are given lesser opportunities and fewer rewards for their work.
- Being forbidden to drive or ride a bike (major social bulwark), they are denied driving license and can only go out in public if accompanied by a chaperon.
- Upon the pretext that women should not 'flaunt their beauty' women in many conservative countries and communities have to completely cover themselves or risk being attacked. There have been instances where Men threw acid in the faces of women for not covering up in public.
- Women are subject to a host of gender-specific human rights violations. Family, penal, and citizenship laws relegate women to a subordinate status compared to their male counterparts. This legal discrimination undermines women's full person-hood and equal participation in society and puts women at an increased risk for violence.

- Family matters in some countries are governed by religion-based personal status codes. Many of these laws treat women essentially as legal minors under the eternal guardianship of their male family members. Family decision-making is thought to be the exclusive domain of men, who enjoy by default the legal status of "head of household." These notions are supported by family courts that often reinforce the primacy of male decision-making power.

- In many countries, while husbands can divorce their spouses easily (often instantaneously through oral repudiation), wives' access to divorce is often extremely limited, and they frequently confront near insurmountable legal and financial obstacles. Also, battered women cannot file for divorce on the basis of abuse without the testimony of an eyewitness. In some countries, divorce writ can only be given by a man to his wife – never the other way around and when divorce is permitted, the wife has to essentially buy her freedom.

- Access to education is limited for girls in many countries, particularly in Asia and Africa. Fewer girls are not enrolled in school and many are often taken out of school and given out in marriage when they reach puberty. The Nigerian constitution tacitly permits child marriage. It says in section 29 (4) (b) that 'Any woman who is married shall be deemed to be of full age' Cultural factors related to the 'correctness' of sending girls to school and reluctance to send girls to school has a negative impact on girls' education.

- In some countries women don't have the right to travel. Married women must have their husband's written permission to travel abroad, and they may be prevented from doing so for any reason. Women who wish to travel must obtain written permission from their closest male relative to leave the country or travel on public transportation.

- Women are Victims of violence. Their unequal legal rights increase their vulnerability to violence. In many countries, no specific laws or provisions exist to penalize domestic violence, even though domestic violence is a widespread problem. Domestic violence is generally considered to be a private matter outside the state's jurisdiction. Battered women are often told to go home if they attempt to file a complaint with the police. Few shelters exist to protect women who fear for their lives. Spousal rape has not been criminalized in many countries including Nigeria; Husbands have an

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absolute right to their wives' bodies at all times. Penal codes in several countries contain provisions that authorize the police and judges to drop charges against a rapist if he agrees to marry his victim. The Penal code in Northern Nigeria Section 59 (d) says a husband can beat his wife to correct her so long as the beating does not result into grievous bodily harm.

- In some countries family law is not codified and women have no custody rights. Judges have complete power to deny women custody of their children for the most arbitrary reasons.

- In some countries, only fathers are permitted to pass citizenship on to their children. Under the Nigerian constitution, a female foreigner who is married to a male Nigerian has automatic citizenship but Nigerian women married to non-nationals are denied this fundamental right.

- All over the world women suffer grave and diverse sexual subjugation. Many countries criminalize adult, consensual sex outside of marriage. Women are much more likely to be charged with having violated penal code prohibitions on sexual relations outside of marriage than men. Unmarried pregnant women are particularly at risk of prosecution. The penal code OF some countries considers the rape of a virgin as an aggravating circumstance of assault. The message is clear: the degree of punishment of the perpetrator is determined by the sexual experience of the victim.

- Female infanticide is wide spread and clearly illustrate the disdain for female infant; While the child preferred, abortion, neglect, abandonment, and infanticide have been known to occur to female infants. The result of such family planning is that the ratio of girls born and surviving is significantly less compared with the number of boys. This is also due to the disproportionate numbers of female fetuses being aborted and baby girls deliberately neglected and left to die.

- Many women who were considered to have brought disgrace to their families because they entered into a relationship or joined an association or participated in a forum such as the social media platform have been killed. In Asia, numerous young women who were unable to meet up with the obligation of paying the dowry of their finance have also been murdered by their husbands- to -be or their would-be in-laws.

- In some customary law in Nigeria, a wife is regarded as property and often taken as a chattel to be inherited after the death of her husband.

To narrow the global perspective of gender inequality to the Nigerian experience; Makama Godia Allana, a Nigerian intellectual succinctly writes that "Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature which is a major feature of a traditional society. It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women. Women are therefore discriminated upon from, in most cases, acquiring formal education, mistreated and perpetually kept as house help; the average Nigerian woman is seen as an available object

for prostitution, forced marriage, street hawking, instrument of wide-range trafficking and a misfit in the society. Thus, the purported irrelevance associated with the status of women in society has merely reduced an average woman to an inferior commodity" Patriarchy has been identified as the root cause of gender inequality. In words of Andrienne Rich patriarchy is "A familial-social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male." Thus Allana concludes that, 'The plight of Nigerian women, like their counterparts in other parts of developed countries, have been characterized by lack of adequate representation, Lack of access to well-developed education and training systems for women's leadership in general; undue dominance of men in the socio-political scheme of things; Poverty or lack of money or resources; lopsided political appointments and the general imbalances associated with very unjust treatment of the female citizens in its entirety. There is no doubt that this trend negates the collective interests of human fundamental rights and the rights of equality, freedom and personal dignity of women in society. Can anything more be said, it is anchored.

SO, WHAT IS GENDER EQUALITY?

To comprehend gender equality, I would first explain gender inequality which is discrimination on the basis of sex or gender i.e. causing one sex or gender to be routinely privileged or prioritized over another. Thus, against the background of uneven access to education, lack of employment equality, job segregation, lack of legal protections, lack of bodily autonomy, poor medical care and lack of religious and cultural freedom which women suffer, a condition of gender inequality exists where women and "the feminine" are often devalued, and men and masculine traits are favored. Often, men possess more power to control decision making in personal, community, and political arenas and women's needs and interests are under acknowledged or not adequately addressed. In many societies, the learned belief that men should maintain control at all times puts women in situations that threaten lives and well-being. Gender injustice as elucidated in this article is the basis of the call for action that there must be a departure from the wrong notion that women are inferior to men and so should be relegated through the phenomenon of insignificance, victimization, oppression and exclusion. Gender inequality stagnates social progress and inclusive development.

On the other hand, **gender equality means that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are male or female, handicapped or able bodied,**

young or elderly, white or black, or from rural or urban settings. Women are entitled to live in equal dignity, safety and security. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and that right is violated by gender-based discrimination. In other words, Gender equality is a social condition whereby women and men share equal rights and a balance of power, status, opportunities, and rewards. Gender equality can be broadly operationalized by men and women having equitable access and use of resources, equitable participation in relationships, the household, the community, and political arenas, and safety or freedom from violence. Equality in gender does not mean that women and men will have or need the exact same resources, but that women and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on their assigned sex at birth..

WHAT IS FEMINISM

Feminism may mean different things to different people but basically; it is the belief that women and girls are by right entitled to social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Feminism is the advancement and protection of the rights of women and girls. It envisions gender equality for all. Feminists advocate for the rights of women and girls through advocacy, sensitization, policy, law making, research and documentation. **Quite simply, feminism is about all genders having equal rights and opportunities. It's about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realize their full rights.**

It's about leveling the playing field between genders, and ensuring that diverse women and girls have the same opportunities in life available to boys and men.

WHO IS A FEMINIST?

A feminist is a person who believes that female persons have equal rights with male persons and he or she engages in activism to ensure that the human rights of women and girls rights are respected and protected. It's not about hating men. It's not about women being better than men. It's not about eschewing femininity. It is about ensuring that women and girl's rights are not discriminated, subjugated, violated, stereotyped, victimized, or oppressed simply because they are females but that by gender equality with men they should have equal rights and equal opportunity and to live their lives peacefully in the pursuit of happiness and fulfillment of their aspirations.

CONCLUSION:

Gender inequality is anchored on cultural, religious, social and political and economic values. Regardless of where you live in, gender equality is a fundamental human right. Advancing gender equality is critical to all areas of a healthy society, from reducing poverty to promoting the health, education, protection and the well-being of men, women, girls and boys. On this note, women who are victims of the systematic violations of human rights must arise to claim their rights. Having understood gender equality and feminism, every one should harken to the United Nations call to action to **Count Her In: Invest in Women. Accelerate Progress'**. In the words of Hilary Clinton;

"Supporting women is a high-yield investment, resulting in stronger economies, more vibrant civil societies, healthier communities and greater peace and stability. Investing in women is a way of supporting future generations."

Investing in Women FOR A BETTER TOMORROW:

Celebrating the Remarkable Achievements of Prominent Women in Africa

Africa, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, has been home to many influential women who have made significant contributions to various fields.



Magdalene Ohia, PhD

Among them are several remarkable women from Nigeria who have left an indelible mark on history, alongside equally inspiring figures from other African nations. As we delve into their achievements, it becomes evident that investing in women is crucial for building a better tomorrow. Let's take a closer look at the remarkable accomplishments of these women and the impact they have made on society.

1. Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Nigeria)

Dr. Okonjo-Iweala, a renowned economist and former Finance Minister of Nigeria, made history by becoming the first woman and the first African to lead the World Trade Organization (WTO). Her expertise in economics and commitment to global trade have earned her widespread acclaim.

2. Late Professor Dora Akunyili (Nigeria)

Late Professor Akunyili was a pharmacist, professor, and former Director-General of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). She played a pivotal role in combating counterfeit drugs in Nigeria, earning international recognition for her efforts.

3. Folorunsho Alakija (Nigeria)

Folorunsho Alakija is a business tycoon, philanthropist, and one of the wealthiest women in Africa. As the founder of Famfa Oil Limited, she has demonstrated exceptional entrepreneurship and leadership skills, contributing to Nigeria's economic development.

4. Amina Mohammed (Nigeria)

Amina Mohammed is a seasoned diplomat and the current Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. Throughout her career, she has championed sustainable development, women's empowerment, and environmental conservation on the global stage.

5. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigeria)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an acclaimed author whose literary works have garnered international acclaim. Through her novels, essays, and public speaking engagements, she advocates for gender equality, cultural diversity, and social justice.

5. Oby Ezekwesili (Nigeria)

Oby Ezekwesili is a prominent advocate for good governance, transparency, and accountability in Nigeria. As a former Minister of Education and co-founder of the Bring Back Our Girls movement, she has been a vocal voice for the rights of women and girls.

6. Wangari Maathai (Kenya) Wangari Maathai was an environmentalist, activist, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate from Kenya. She founded the Green Belt Movement, empowering women through tree-planting initiatives and advocating for environmental

conservation and social justice.

7. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia)

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf made history as the first female president of Liberia and the first female head of state in Africa. A Nobel Peace Prize laureate, she is widely praised for her efforts to promote peace, democracy, and women's rights in Liberia and beyond.

8. Graça Machel (Mozambique)

Graça Machel is a humanitarian, politician, and the widow of two former African presidents, Samora Machel and Nelson Mandela. She has been a tireless advocate for children's rights, education, and the empowerment of women in Mozambique and across the continent.

9. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (South Africa)

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was a prominent anti-apartheid activist and politician in South Africa. Despite facing persecution and imprisonment, she remained steadfast in her fight against racial oppression and played a crucial role in the struggle for freedom and democracy.

10. Leymah Gbowee (Liberia)

Leymah Gbowee is a Liberian peace activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate known for her efforts to end the Second Liberian Civil War. Through grassroots organizing and nonviolent protest, she mobilized women across ethnic and religious lines to demand peace and justice.

11. Fatou Bensouda (The Gambia)

Fatou Bensouda is a Gambian lawyer and the former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC). She has been instrumental in prosecuting individuals responsible for war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, advocating for accountability and justice on the global stage.

These remarkable women from Nigeria and across Africa have broken barriers, shattered stereotypes, and paved the way for future generations. Their extraordinary achievements serve as a testament to the power of perseverance, resilience, and the unwavering determination to make a positive impact on society.

The achievements of these prominent women from Nigeria and across Africa underscore the importance of investing in women for a better tomorrow. By recognizing and supporting the talents, leadership, and potential of women, we can foster inclusive growth, sustainable development, and positive change in our communities and beyond. "When women are empowered to thrive, they become catalysts for progress, driving innovation, advancing social justice, and building resilient ". As we honour the legacies of these extraordinary women, let us reaffirm our commitment to investing in women and unlocking their full potential as agents of transformation for a brighter and more equitable future.

Investing in Teenage Mothers:

Fostering Equitable Opportunities for Women

In the journey towards gender equality and women's empowerment, it's paramount to address the complex challenges encountered by teenage girls navigating pregnancy.



Chioma Chigozie-Okwum
(CWSI Youth Representative)

Rather than relegating these young mothers to the margins of society, advocating for their educational continuity and workplace inclusion signifies a strategic investment in fostering a more equitable future for women.

Navigating pregnancy during adolescence presents multifaceted obstacles, often culminating in disrupted educational trajectories. Discrimination, societal stigma, and entrenched biases frequently hinder access to continued schooling for these young mothers.

By safeguarding avenues for education, we not only dismantle discriminatory structures but also provide vital pathways for socio-economic mobility, breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty.

Education serves as a transformative force, particularly for young mothers seeking to navigate the complexities of parenthood while pursuing personal and professional growth. Remaining engaged in educational pursuits empowers teenage mothers with essential skills and knowledge,

positioning them for enhanced economic opportunities and expanded life choices. Through targeted educational support, we equip these individuals with the tools necessary to chart their paths toward self-sufficiency and long-term success.

In tandem with educational advocacy, fostering supportive workplace environments is imperative for facilitating the reintegration of teenage mothers into the workforce. The transition back to employment post-pregnancy often presents formidable challenges, including discrimination, limited job prospects, and inadequate support structures. Implementing inclusive policies that prioritize work-life balance and offer avenues for career advancement not only promotes gender equity but also underscores the intrinsic value of diverse perspectives within the workforce.

“Investing in the holistic well-being and professional advancement of teenage mothers transcends individual empowerment; it embodies a commitment to

nurturing a more inclusive and prosperous society”. By championing educational continuity and workplace inclusivity, we lay the foundation for sustainable socio-economic development while affirming the inherent dignity and potential of every woman, regardless of her circumstances.

The endeavor to support teenage mothers is not merely a humanitarian endeavor; it is an investment in fostering a more equitable and resilient society. By prioritizing educational access and employment opportunities, we cultivate an environment where every woman has the agency to realize her aspirations and contribute meaningfully to the collective advancement of our communities. Together, we can harness the transformative power of empowerment to build a future where all women thrive, irrespective of the challenges they may face.

MIGRATION AND WOMEN: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE



Dr. Emeka Obiezu

National Coordinator

Civil Society Network on Migration and Development (CSOnetMADE)

Across the globe, more people are currently on the move than any other time in history.

In 2015, the number of international migrants was 244 million¹ as compared to 281 million in 2020². It is important to recognize that gender is central to any discussion of the causes and consequences of migration, whether it's forced, or voluntary. Gender plays a role in influencing the reasons people migrate, the place they migrate to, means they use to migrate, and available opportunities. It is important to understand how gender interacts with migration and to respond accordingly.

Although male migration has been the most predominant form of migration discourse, migration among women is also becoming common. In earlier discourses, women were seen as passive and companions to men in migration process, however, the narrative is changing³. In mid-2020, female migrants were 135 million⁴, a 48.2%

of the population of international migrants.

In sub-Saharan Africa, migration used to be male-dominated as well, however, there has been an increasing number of women migrants who had traditionally stayed at home while men took all the risk to migrate in search of economic opportunities. These women, whether married or single are now migrating independently to meet their own economic needs and not only to join a family member or husband. They could leave their spouse at home to care for the children, thus, redefining traditional gender roles.

Women from Nigeria engage in international migration. Female nurses are recruited from Nigeria to work in other part of the world. According to the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives, over 57,000 nurses have migrated from Nigeria between 2017

and 2022⁵. And 87% of nurses in Nigeria are women⁶. However promising the migration experience for women migrants maybe, stories of Nigerian women migrants have been featured in narratives on vulnerability or presumed criminality, particularly sexual exploitation and trafficking⁷.

Understanding the experiences of women in migration is crucial as they play a significant role in migration patterns, yet their stories and challenges often remain under explored. The Nigerian experience provides a lens through which gender and migration can be examine.

Historical overview of Nigeria migrant women

Nigeria is the largest country by population in Africa and sixth largest in the world⁸. It has more than 250 ethnic groups (such as Hausas, the

¹<https://www.iom.int/news/iom-releases-global-migration-trends-2015-factsheet>

²<https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/>

³Ernest George Ravenstein, The Laws of Migration, 1885. CSISS Classics: Ernest George Ravenstein, The Laws of Migration, 1885. CSISS Classics (escholarship.org)

⁴[https://www.iom.int/news/iom-releases-global-migration-trends-2015-factsheet#:~:text=While%20female%20migrants%20constitute%20only,North%20America%20\(51.2%20percent\).](https://www.iom.int/news/iom-releases-global-migration-trends-2015-factsheet#:~:text=While%20female%20migrants%20constitute%20only,North%20America%20(51.2%20percent).)

⁵57,000 nurses left Nigeria in five years – NANNM (punchng.com)

⁶https://escholarship.org/content/qt0z90d857/qt0z90d857_noSplash_8338a42c2e48bf99c31d17778c0f5493.pdf

⁷Gendered Asylum in the Black Mediterranean: Two Nigerian Women's Experiences of Reception in Italy | SpringerLink

⁸<https://www.census.gov/popclock/print.php?component=counter>

Yorubas, the Igbos, the Fulanis, the Tivs, Kanuri, Beriberi, Ibibio, Ijaw) and over 730 native languages. The historical study of migration is clustered in three eras namely, the pre-colonial⁹, the Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonial/post-colonial. The Nigerian migration history is dominated by instances of rural-rural and rural-urban migration¹⁰.

Influenced by both internal and external factors, these migrations brought about significant changes in Nigeria's political and economic landscape¹¹.

In all of the historical forms, the narrative surrounding women migration was overlooked. Migration for numerous Nigerian women migrants, particularly in the colonial and post-colonial eras, emerged as a means to increase their access to education, economic opportunities, financial empowerment etc. Within the internal migration, the two most prominent push and pull factors for Nigerian women migration were economic enhancement and marriage. According to Akeem Ayofe Akinwale in his 2022 study, pointed to structural adjustment measures as major influencer of women's migration in Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s. "Most women migrants with wage employment in the formal sector secured their positions with the help of relatives."¹²

Economic vulnerability undermines women's capacity to achieve financial independence, leading to greater dependence on male partners for financial support. Still persisting today, Nigeria poverty rate reached 37% in 2023 affecting 84 million Nigerians, with women as the

worse hit¹³.

A study by the University of Pretoria found that potential Nigerian female migrants are the breadwinners of most Nigerian families, and the pressure propel them to undertake migration for survival. In the early days, they arrived Europe through regular channels and did jobs like hairstylists, house helpers, and nannies. However, this desperation has also pushed them into the hands of a vast illegal networks facilitating their border crossings. Thus over the last few decades, a significant shift has been observed as many young Nigerian women now embark on irregular migration to Europe, through the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea¹⁴ and other forms of irregular migration including overstay of their stay permit and unofficial change of status. Irregular migration has spelt doom for a substantial number of Nigerian female migrants who have reported experiences of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse¹⁵. Some returnees who shared their experience explained that Nigerian women migrants often face hardship, exploitation and violence. Some fall prey to smugglers and traffickers with false promise of jobs or education in Europe or other regions¹⁶.

It is noteworthy that Nigerian women migrants contribute significantly as their men counterparts to national development and the sustenance of their direct families. Obviously, Nigerian women diaspora are key contributors to Nigerians in diaspora's remittance in 2022 which stood at US\$ 21.9 billion¹⁷. In their destination countries, Nigerian women migrants are marking impressing marks to both

economic, social and political contributions. Ijeoma Lilian Ozoude undertook a study that uncovered eleven immigrant Nigerian women engineers, in the United States of America (USA)¹⁸. Kemi Badenoch made it to the last five UK's Prime Minister's contestants under the Conservative party to succeed Boris Johnson.¹⁹

Beyond economic gains, migration also serves as a means for women to liberate themselves from what some will describe as male-dominated and controlled societal structures to elevate their social status.

Cultural perception/societal norms impacting Nigeria women migrant experience

Women migrating impact and are impacted by cultural perception and traditional family system/societal norms. This is because traditionally, women in Nigeria and around the continent are trained/expected to look after the home and how to be a good wife while men are the "bread winner". Marriage and family are highly valued. Gendered social norms play a role concerning the acceptance of an expectations on women which affect women's actions and activities, impose limited behaviour alternatives, and force women into a fairly narrow range of roles and statuses. However, different cultural perceptions which affect women migration exist. In northern Nigeria, a research on "Migration of Women in Nigeria: The Hausa Case," shows that there exists historical practice of secluding women (kulle). This may cause them to lack exposure to the outside world, thus discouraging migration. The practice of seclusion

⁹Hausaland - World History Encyclopedia

¹⁰Campbell, E. K. 2007. "Reflections on Illegal Immigration in Botswana and South Africa." African Population Studies 21(2): 23-44.

¹¹Migration History and Historiography: Migration History and Historiography | Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History

¹²Akeem Ayofe Akinwale, "The Benefits of Women's Migration for Work in Nigeria," IJMGS Vol2(2), Nov., 2022, <https://ijmgs.nou.edu.ng/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Benefits-of-Womens-Migration-for-Work-in-Nigeria-74-105.pdf>.

¹³Nigeria Overview: Development news, research, data | World Bank

¹⁴https://www.repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/90437/Uroko_Experiences_2022.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

¹⁵The Experiences of and Challenges... preview & related info | Mendeley

¹⁶The New Humanitarian | Nigerian migrants face stigma, hardship on return from Europe

¹⁷<https://nannews.ng/2023/07/26/diaspora-remittances-stood-at-21-9bn-in-2022-tinubu/>

¹⁸Ijeoma Lilian Ozoude, "Exploring the Career Experiences of Immigrant Nigerian Women Engineers,"

¹⁹<https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=10889&context=dissertations>.

is learnt from childhood. Marriage is the only time they have the need to migrate and when they migrate, they are expected to be in company of their husbands²⁰. This is because Young women migrating on their own can be unfairly associated with prostitution²¹.

In the southern part of Nigeria, women migrant can be more liberal as women are migrating. However, this has been met with some negative report especially from female returnees from Edo state. In Edo state, the first generation of women and girls who went to Italy went for legitimate business of buying and selling goods like clothes, shoes and jewelries. However, they became compromised and resorted to prostitution due to high remunerations and demand for sex workers. So, they became traffickers²². In 2015, Nigerian nationals, primarily from Edo state, were the most common trafficking victims in the EU after those trafficked within the EU internally²³. In 2016, nearly 11,000 women who arrived in Italy for sex trafficking through the Mediterranean Sea, came from Edo state²⁴. This has affected how female migrants/returnees are perceived in the region.

Impact of female migration on policy development and the community

The impact of female migration on policy development and the community is profound and multifaceted. While some women migrants may face negative experiences, others find opportunities and benefits in their migration journey. Female migrants in turn have significantly contributes to the global domestic workforce. They constitute 73.4% of international migrant domestic workers²⁵. The remittances sent by women migrant workers improve the livelihood and health of their families and strengthen economies²⁶. Furthermore, women's migration has social impacts. This is because migration affect the social fabric of communication. They influence social norms and advocate for women's rights, challenging traditional gender roles.

As more women migrate, both within Nigeria and internationally, it necessitates the development of policies that address their needs and challenges. These policies not only affect the migrants themselves but also have broader implications for the communities they leave behind and those they integrate into. Thus far, migration policy in Nigeria has been gender-sensitive putting into consideration the specific vulnerabilities and needs of women. This includes policies related to labour rights, protection from exploitation and trafficking, education, legal support among

others.

Given these diverse impacts, it is essential to review and or develop new policies ;land programmes that maximize the benefits of women's migration while minimizing its costs for Nigeria. Such initiatives will focus on ensuring the protection of migrant women's rights, facilitating their integration into host communities, and harnessing the potential of remittances for sustainable development.

Conclusion

The migration experience of Nigeria women migrants is dynamic and underscores the interplay of history, culture and socioeconomic factors that shape their pattern and means of migrating. Their migration experiences reflect a shift from traditional perceptions of women as passive to actively involved and contributing to economies of Nigeria through remittances. While migration offers opportunities for economic empowerment and social mobility, it has also exposed women to vulnerabilities such as exploitation, trafficking, and discrimination. Their experiences play a role in shaping policy development. Thus, this calls for advocacy for continuous strengthening of existing gender-responsive policies that recognizes their needs and vulnerabilities.

²⁰Migration of Women in Nigeria: The Hausa Case on JSTOR

²¹Pittin R. Migration of women in Nigeria: the Hausa case. *Int Migr Rev.* 1984 Winter;18(4 Special Issue):1293-314. PMID: 12340240.

²²https://ceere.eu/pjiel/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/15_PJIEL201601_PJIEL201601.pdf

²³Microsoft Word - WEE Edo State Brief_FINAL.docx (alignplatform.org)

²⁴Human trafficking in Edo State - Wikipedia

²⁵<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-refugees-and-migrants>

²⁶Migrant women—stories you should know and tell | UN Women – Headquarters

INVEST IN WOMEN FOR BETTER TOMORROW

Sister Professor Caroline N. Mbonu, HHCJ



Advancement of women for a better society has been on the front burner of many nations for decades. There exist myriads of literature as well as motivational videos on the need to invest in women for a better tomorrow. On a more practical level, civil societies, religious organizations of various persuasions, to some extent, pursue avenues to increase the visibility and participation of women for greater development and peace in society. **Investing in women for an improved future has followed the path of aligning them in both the socio-cultural, religious, economic, and political space in the country.** But the feminine genius resist domestication regardless of uphill task in attaining equal value. Indeed, it does not require a stretch of the imagination to see that women begin from an early age to exercise critical roles for the progress of humankind through their complex tasks of rearing a child from infancy to maturity. These latent feminine qualities if properly harnessed can potentially further progress in any field of endeavor in society.

To drive to invest in women in the society is not a modern phenomenon. Various cultures have their own idioms to buttress

the significant position of women in society and how to further their role. For example, an Akan (Ghana) proverb puts it succinctly, "Without women 'a lineage is finished'". The Akan proverb has a kindred spirit in the Gospel. The Gospel narrative exposes some women characters through whom Christianity not only found her grounding but has continued to flourish regardless of its Jewish origin.

Against a Jewish background that in some way minimizes women's presence, Jesus of the Gospel, invest in them. In the time of Jesus, women typically do not follow Rabbis, but that was not the case with the Jesus, the Nazareth Rabbi. He had women followers; he invested in the women, to the consternation of the dominant culture that was staunchly patriarchal. This example of Divine-women investment in the Gospel is put out for emulation to Christians and Church leaders of all denominations in their relationship with women as it pertains enabling advancement of the church life and society. A few examples of Divine-women investment from the Gospel would suffice.

We begin with Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus. God reached out to Mary through the Archangel Gabriel. According to the Gospel,

after some discussions between the angel and Mary, she agreed to the Divine plan. Thus, it was her "YES" that cause the Incarnation to take place. It is important to remember that when we celebrate Christmas, in as much as we celebrate the new-born, we equally celebrating the "YES" of a woman, Mary of Nazareth. From this story, the Gospel continues to expose us to something new and beautiful, to a world where sexual characteristics does not determine destiny.

The Gospel according to Luke presents with some fruit of investing in women. The evangelist presents a group of women who follow Jesus from the beginning of his public ministry in Galilee to the end of his early life, to his grave, and even beyond. In addition to being disciples, some of the women bankrolled the Jesus' Movement in that way Jesus and his followers had sustenance to continue the ministry. The suggestions here is women disciples of strong economic standing. More of the rewards of investing in women shows up in Jesus' Passion narrative. When all Jesus male

followers abandoned him and fled, the 'Gospel has it that the women remain, they continued to follow; even at a distant. The culture of the time did not permit them follow closely. Some of the women followed Jesus to the grave—they anointed his body! Was that all? No! The women went back to "visit" the body in the grave. In seeking to honor the lifeless body of Jesus,

the women received the message of a living Jesus, a new life, a better tomorrow—the greatest news of all times, the Resurrection! Ever since, the Divine-woman investment continues to yield the best future for Christians and their associates the world over.

The cursory instance of women in the Gospel shows that investing in

women is not only about critical social economic issue, nor it is about gender inequality. It is about the holistic development, body, mind, and spirit, of a woman. To shape a robust and vibrant future, therefore, invites all, women as well as men to embrace the spirit of the Gospel in promoting women development.

INVEST IN WOMEN FOR A BETTER NIGERIA: FINANCING WOMEN -LED MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM Enterprise (WMSMEs) FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Mr. Kelechi Emeh

Country Rep- Catholic Agency For Overseas Development (CAFOD)

I Investment in women's empowerment through the provision of opportunities tailored to women and girls in education, health, social protection, and food security pays big dividends in terms of economic development. In the words of the UN Secretary General, "Investing in women is not only the right thing to do, but also the economically smart thing to do." From my perspective, humanity cannot afford to ignore or

rather not invest in half of its population. The overarching postulation is that women are drivers of change and any community, country or even continent that has developed, paid particular attention to "investment in women."

Women-led micro, small and medium enterprises (WMSMEs) play a crucial role in their local economies, driving job creation, innovation, combating climate change, and ensuring food

security. According to the NBS report titled "Country Data Overview," women now own a remarkable 40% of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) nationwide, signifying a resounding triumph for gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria's business landscape. Nigeria is not left behind in this quest for women entrepreneurship. There are numerous instances where states with empowered women have also shown higher levels of Internally Generated Revenues and even Gross Domestic Product per capital (E.g, Anambra and Lagos states). In addition, the investment in economic and literacy empowerment of women ensure inclusive economic growth and fulfills the ambitions of the Nigerian Government to meet the SDG goal 5. In fact, the McKinsey Global Institute suggests that addressing gender inequality could amplify Nigeria's GDP by nearly 19%, or \$90 billion, by 2025.

Despite the potential to drive inclusive economic growth and contribute to their households' well being, WMSMEs across Nigeria struggle to access the capital needed to start or grow their businesses. Financial Service Providers (FSPs) such as banks, fintechs, and microfinance institutions play a central role in catalyzing capital for WMSMEs, but institutional biases, risk aversion, capacity and liquidity constraints,

and a lack of tailored products and services hinder their ability to effectively serve this market.

In conclusion and as a solution to this gap in financial services, I would like to use this opportunity and call on Nigerian government, CSOs and Corporate to institutionalize Gender Lens Investing (GLI). GLI offers a solution to bridge the vast funding gap for women entrepreneurs. GLI recognizes gender-based disparities and directs capital to address them, supporting social and/or economic empowerment of women in pursuit of the ethical imperative of gender equity. But beyond that, GLI acknowledges the vast, untapped business potential of supporting women-led businesses in the form of financial returns. GLI often leads to better financial outcomes for investors since women entrepreneurs represent an undeserved yet resilient and innovative market segment. GLI has immense potential for catalyzing women's entrepreneurship and promoting inclusive economic growth.

More dedicated investment scheme like YouWin with focus on WMSMEs is necessary at both state and national level to support the stimulation of Nigerian economy. It goes without saying that when a woman is empowered, then a nation is empowered. I believe that it is time for Nigeria to be bold and invest in women and directly enjoy the dividends of a prosperous future.

Invest in Nigeria women: Accelerate progress in every sphere



Mr. Okeke Anya

Executive Director, Initiative for Community Development and Advancement of Social Orientation (ICODASO)

Increasingly women play significant role in national development. Women are generally contributing socially, politically, economically, culturally and in the religious spheres of society. In these areas, they are effectively participating because they have effective skills and abilities. Beyond their roles in the public sphere, women's contributions to society have been greatly within the domestic domain.

Women, belonging to all age groups and backgrounds get engaged into honorary work towards promoting well-being of the individuals. Some of the honorary ways are, providing coaching classes to children, belonging to marginalized and socio-

economically backward sections of the society, or making donations of food items, clothing and other items of daily use to poverty stricken individuals and so forth as observed by A. K. Mbogiri.

“Women give support to their communities. In most communities, women engage in productive business ventures providing for the entire family”. Women who receive credit facilities for their businesses no matter if they are into petty trading tend to pay bank their loans more than men. In politics, although women are denied political participation in respect of public decision making, they are always in the forefront of fulfilling their civic responsibility in turning out during elections to vote ensuring that the democratic processes in the country are upheld and sustained.

Beyond politics, women contribute in upholding the cultural ethos of

their communities. They participate actively in social life ensuring that they take care of their environment.

Although women perform exceedingly in these roles, women have not received commensurate support and investment for the efforts they put in until recently. The many challenges facing women in their quest to better their lives and contribute to societal development are gradually being overcome. Women in many parts of the country are being given opportunities for quality education which was hitherto denied. The preference for male child education rather than female child education is reducing as statistics will show. Doris Dokua Sasu in a publication on February 1 2022 noted that as of 2018, the gross enrollment rate in elementary schools in Nigeria stood at 68.3 percent. The North Western states registered the highest figures, with 70.3 percent for males and 71.1 percent for females. This is a welcomed development as continuous progress in this area will ultimately equip women to achieve their aspirations in life and collectively contribute positively for societal growth and development.

“There is still a gap that must be filled as far as women in public life in Nigeria is concerned. The lack of investment on women to ensure their full participation in politics must be taken into account”. That the number of women in parliament is one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa should give way. Government and political leaders must invest in new legislations, guidelines and policies to ensure that at least the National Gender Policy of 35% for either sex is upheld in elective and political appointments. Nigeria cannot continue to have about 6% of its females in parliament. A new level of investment must be done in this area to correct the anomaly.

On the economic front especially on land inheritance, families and

The preference for male child education rather than female child education is reducing as statistics will show.

traditional set-ups must begin to think outside the box to ensure that women are given right to inheritance especially landed property. Target 5a of the Sustainable Development Goal urges parties to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws. Communities and governments must work towards achieving this SDGs target to ensure that the economic empowerment of women is improved. This will support other SDGs such as the Goal 1 to end poverty.

Many communities still engage in cultural and traditional practices that harm women. Government and communities must invest time and resources especially to ensure the abolition of such harmful practices to improve the welfare and psychological well-being of women. The continued practice of female genital mutilation, harmful widowhood practices, girl-child marriages must give way for the general welfare of these women (girls).

The perpetration of violence against women must stop. There is the need to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation as espoused by the SDGs. Many

women lose their lives or suffer different life threatening conditions on account of violence against them. Rape and sexual harassment are still very common but are hidden in the closets. The conditions for complaints must be made in such a manner that it will not constitute further harassment and violence to the victims.

In this era of digital technology and economy, huge investment must be made for women. Government must enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information, communications technology to promote the empowerment of women. The use of technology has been seen as one sure path of bridging the gap between women and men in the area of education, entrepreneurship and general resource acquisition.

In general, investing in women will contribute to a lot of positive changes for both men and women. It will reduce inequalities which is the root cause of violence against women and definitely prevent violence against women and girls. Investing in women makes for healthier and safer work place for all. Investing in the women promotes their human rights which is fundamental as enshrined in the Constitution of the country.

Government must enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information, communications technology to promote the empowerment of women.



Women: The Bedrock of the Nigerian Society



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Women are central to the continued sustenance of families in the Nigeria society, especially in the face of the current pervasive economic, cultural, political and social challenges. With the present economic downturn in the nation and the attendant social realities which have given vent to insecurity, mass unemployment, hunger, high rate of crime and criminal activities, japa syndrome, increase in out-of-school children and many other socio-economic challenges; the race for survival has become steep and very rough for many families, edging them on to the brink of disintegration. However, the strength, fortitude and entrepreneurial engagements of women who scale all odds to sustain their families in these trying

times, have become mitigating factors tackling the challenges. Nevin, A. S & Omosomi, O. (2020) observed that

“The entrepreneurial spirit is strong, and Nigerian women account for 41% ownership of micro-businesses in Nigeria with 23 million female entrepreneurs operating within this segment. This places Nigeria among the highest entrepreneurship rates globally. The high-level participation of female entrepreneurs in the country is however often driven mainly by necessity, which is the norm in emerging markets where there is insufficient formal employment.”

Women are the backbone of families and communities, providing care, support, and nurturing to their families and society. They also play significant roles in community -building and often take on leadership roles in community organizations in line with pre-colonial dispositions.

Many scholars have noted that in precolonial Africa, men and women played varied roles that were communally ascribed, mutually exclusive and yet possessing certain thematic commonalities. Most African societies develop and sustain forms of hierarchy, which means that they often create several centres of authority and aspire to establish communities where gender relations between women and men are equitable. In Rojas (1994, Par. 3) observation, “Women in pre-colonial societies held a complementary position to men although patrilineal and patriarchal kinship structures predominated Nigerian societies”. Society was structured such that women contributed meaningfully to the growth and development of communities. “In the precolonial period, women played a major role in social and economic activities. Division of labour was along gender lines, and women

controlled such occupations as food processing, mat weaving, pottery making, and cooking” (Falola, 2023, Par. 2). Thus, Amoah-Boampong and Agyeiwaa maintain that “women in pre-colonial West Africa were not a homogenous group that lived static lives relegated to the domestic sphere”, but rather, actively participated in communal engagements, from where they “contested, negotiated, complemented, and transformed their societies through their diverse roles in the political, social, religious, and economic realities of pre-colonial life in West Africa” (2019, p.1). This is especially true for gendered institutions, as a majority of African societies attempt to create some form of gender equilibrium. In politics for instance, “women are not as docile or powerless as contemporary literature tends to portray them” (Falola, 2023, par. 4).

Women played very significant roles in pre-colonial Nigerian society and contributed immensely to the socio-economic development of their various communities. The relegation and subsequent disempowerment of Nigerian albeit African women is a product of colonial policies. The basic unit of social, political, cultural and economic organization is the family, and pervading domestic arrangements in many African communities endow a woman with considerable authority over her children and family. Saidi (2020, par. 1) maintains that “What really defined African gender concepts was that

The relegation and subsequent disempowerment of Nigerian albeit African women is a product of colonial policies.

women were not, as a result of their biological sex, assumed to be inferior and conversely men, based on their biological sex, were not innately superior.” If there is equity as stated, then, one would easily deviate from the opinions of some earlier scholars who present pre-colonial African women as powerless and subjugated (Bruce Mouser, 1997); and identify with Saidi’s further assertion that “The result was that African women had greater respect, standing, and authority than previously assumed, and ... ability—and not gender—determined status and authority in Africa prior to 1900” (2020, par. 1). Falola (2023, par. 2) insists that “the most serious threat to the influence and privileges of women occurred during the 20th century, when patriarchy combined with colonial changes moved to alter gender relations”.

Many scholars therefore insist that prior to Africa’s encounter with the West, women were empowered and held positions of authority and also took part in decision making (Ogundipe-Leslie, 2007; Azuonye, 1992; Meek, 1973). Such scholars have traced the disempowerment of women to the inception of colonialism and the establishment of colonial structures of governance, economy and education which initially excluded women (Ogundipe-Leslie, 2007). Indeed, Qualls (2019) maintains that

“Nigerian women traditionally played more significant roles in society than did Western women. Traditional or tribal society in Nigeria expected women to be significant wage earners in the family. They labored in farming, fishing, herding, and commerce (for instance, pottery, cloth-making, and craft work) alongside Nigerian men. In fact, women traditionally had the right to profit from their work, although the money usually served as a contribution to the family income (Par.1.)”



Women and men's authority within lineage systems changed under the conditions of political centralization and economic diversification (Amoah-Boampong & Agyeiwaa, 2019). In examining women's position and authority in Africa, Saidi further observes that following the advent of colonialism, there was a concerted and successful effort to legalize patriarchal values and consciously institutionalize them as traditional African values. The existence of powerful women's cultural institutions such as the Umuada (Association of daughters of the kindred) among the Igbo of South East Nigeria, and the powerful Iyaloja position among the Yoruba, persuades one to align with the argument that women's roles were functional and that women actively engaged in economic and social endeavours and negotiated power relations in traditional society long before the advent of colonialism.

As I had elsewhere noted, "Many writers and scholars of African literature have captured the peculiarities of African cultural institutions such as women's associations, guilds, and other cultural umbrellas under women's control" (2023, p. 1). Among the Igbo of South East Nigeria, for instance, the Umuada holds sway as a formidable organ of female authority, power and control. The Umuada is an age long cultural institution that wields significant authority and possesses culturally ascribed judicial control over communal or women-centred

affairs in their patriarchal communities in Igbo society even in the present period (Ezeigbo, 1990, p. 154). The activities of the Umuada was captured in African literature (Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, 1958, p.95) as early as 1958. Many other scholars have also noted the centrality of Umuada to women's governance and control in the Igbo culture area. As Ezeigbo (1990, p.154) observes; "The Umuada wielded great influence in their natal homes and their advice and sometimes their decisions were accepted with little opposition from the male members of the patrilineage". Paul Ezenwa (2017, p.42) observes that "In every Igbo town there exists an influential political pressure group and committee of women called Umuada, which exercises jurisdiction over all women affairs". Despite the existence of patriarchal structures in Igbo society as observed by Onwuejiegwu, (1981, p. 32), "the tradition of placing high value on Umuada has survived many centuries and has come to stay" (Maduagwu, 2012, p.134). Among the Yoruba of South-West Nigeria, traditionally, women occupied very powerful positions of authority either as royals or as non-royals. Sowole (2023) reiterated that "non-royal or non-monarchical roles of women have been sustained in traditional Yoruba offices such as Iyalaje (entrepreneur woman), Iyalode (lady of role model) and Iyaloja (woman market leader)". He goes ahead to observe that "in the past 300 or

more years, each of these women offices have been built into the governance of Yoruba community". As royals, women held different positions of authority depending on their placement in the hierarchy or scheme of affairs. Others also held central positions in the traditional religious setting. The king's biological mother, occupied the position of Iya Oba (Queen mother), while other females held titles and positions such as Iyalagbon (crown prince's mother), Iya Mole (Ifa priestess), Iya Yemaja (priestess of Yemaja) and Iyamode (Sango priestess), among others. However, the positions that have been sustained and structured into political and cultural institutions are Iyalode, Iyalaje and Iyaloja. Hardly is any Yoruba traditional rulership complete without the Iyalode and Iyalaje positions. As Falola observes, "Women were also central to trade. Among the Yoruba, they were the major figures in long-distance trade, with enormous opportunities for accumulating wealth and acquiring titles. The most successful among them rose to the prestigious chieftaincy title of Iyalode, a position of great privilege and power" (Par.3, 2023). Sowole also observes that

"For the simple reason that most markets across Yorubaland, indeed, Nigeria, are under the control of the state, Iyaloja's role is recognised and built into the state's governance structure. In Yoruba linguistic expression, 'Iya' means 'mother'. The broader and expanded context has been therefore applied in reference to leadership, across fields (Par. 3, 2023)."

Among the many other ethnic groups spread out across Nigeria, women held positions of authorities that empowered them to superintend over the affairs of their fellow women and even entire communities in the same manner as the Umuada, Iyalode, Iyalaje and Iyaloja exercised authority over their communities. Despite years of oppression, and the institutional

suppression of women orchestrated by the colonial authorities, Nigerian women are re-connecting with their pre-colonial traditional roles, and strengthening existing mechanisms to shake off the shackles of oppression, subjugation and disempowerment and forge ahead despite the uncertain times.

Feminist Coalition's Laila Johnson-Salami, in an interview with Lewis Akindare on critical issues affecting Nigerian women, declares that

"Historically, Nigerian women have been so disenfranchised economically, contributing largely through the informal sector with minimal protection in return... Deep rooted patriarchy means women are constantly stopped from having a seat at the table. But the beauty in we Nigerian women is, we never stop fighting for and claiming our seat at the table... the three most crucial challenges facing Nigerian women... are financial inequality, the lack of political and legislative representation, and insecurity... If we can contribute at large to closing financial and political gaps for women in the country and making the country safer for women, I do believe that we'll be looking at a very different Nigeria in 2050. (Par. 4. 2021)"

For Achebe (1981), "An objective view of society's concern about women's changing status, will indicate that the changing role of Nigerian women is an endless interweaving of continuity and change with challenges posed at every juncture". In her submission, Falola (2023, Par. 7). noted that The most powerful agency of change for the modern woman has been Nigeria's formal education system, from which a large number of elite women have emerged. Intelligent, educated, and

confident, they can be found in all leading occupations; they now challenge many aspects of patriarchy and are gradually organizing to ensure that the political arena expands sufficiently to accommodate them.

Given the success and adaptability of women in various

The most powerful agency of change for the modern woman has been Nigeria's formal education system, from which a large number of elite women have emerged.

sectors of the Nigerian economy and politics such as the business sector, high profile industries, professionalism in various fields, petty trading, artisanship, tailoring, weaving, health sector, hairdressing, film making, content-creation, political seats and positions and a host of other professions and skills; the

contributions of women to the sustenance of families is easily discernible. In line with this assertion, Kehinde Ajayi opines that Harnessing the power of women's political leadership will be critical for the... government, faced with the opportunity to set the country on a new path, It is time to reclaim Nigeria's legacy of women's involvement in political leadership, to ensure that the nation's governance reflects, recognizes, and serves the full scope of its citizenry...(Par.1, 2023).

Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, the president of the United Nations General Assembly for the 73rd session opines that "women in government tend to work in more collaborative and bipartisan ways and employ a more democratic style compared to men's more autocratic style". (Nevin, A. S & Omosomi, O. 2020).

There is no gainsaying the fact therefore, that Nigerian women across various ranks, are increasingly embracing the task of nation building, community stabilization and family sustenance through their various engagements in the economic and political sector. Given the high rate of unemployment, inflation and collapse of many businesses in Nigeria, many families have come to depend on the economic engagements of women as their main sources of survival.



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Invest in women for a better tomorrow.



Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe



Does investment in women make sense at all? Women account for 50.5% of the population in the whole world, yet only 3.5% of all charities aid women projects. The non-profit that specifically serve their needs such as reproductive health initiatives, sexual violence support and prevention. In some of African languages,

some expressions about women carry different meanings and some question like “are women humans?”. Keep coming up. This is a difficult question, which is commonly used in patriarchal societies to doubt the importance and capabilities of women because they are considered less human, less effective and less important. The reason being girls, do not make a home as they are married off and must start their own

families.

Women at the same time are considered a source of wealth because they bring income to their families through the bride price which must be paid at the time a girl is being married off. The bride price can be in form of money or valued animals like cows and goats. This would be one point where investment in women would make a lot of sense.

Investing in women can only be possible and powerful instrument of social change, especially when women are healthy, educated and empowered socially and economically to understand their importance and place in the society by giving them a voice to tell their own life story. In this way women can take up leadership roles in the society by spearheading transformative change.

It follows, then that perception of value of women shift as communities see evidences of their impact. An investment is therefore needed to spark this virtuous cycle and provide women a pathway to higher education, programs and mentorship support for women. When women activities become a priority, societies experience a change. Women need to be empowered to become contributors to the economy of their households and the society at large.

Investment in women pays big dividends in terms of economic development both directly and indirectly. The most direct route is via workforce participation which boosts production and thus income savings and tax contributions at household, community and national level. Women also support the economy through unpaid labor. Such as child bearing, elderly care, water hauling and preparing food. women's economic contribution whether paid or unpaid labor in the form of smaller family size, more educated children and more stable societies can transform economic outcomes. Investing in women is not just the right thing to do it's also smart economics. The benefits of investing in women are evident



“ Women need to be empowered to become contributors to the economy of their households and the society at large. ”

across the world; women support their communities, repay their loans faithfully, and provide exemplary leadership on issues from politics to health.

Too often women are viewed as vulnerable victims. It's time to recognize women as leaders and Entrepreneur's as agents of change in their families' communities and countries, women leaders are changing their communities at grass root levels every day. Investing in women brings out this Leadership and entrepreneurial qualities that most women possess, many women are entrepreneurs and supporting their business ventures is a vital part of investing in them, this can be through access of resources, capital and mentorship which helps to establish and grow their business leading to economic independence.

they must first feel safe and secure in their bodies, homes, workplaces and communities. Today, one in four women nationwide experience domestic abuse in their lifetimes, citing financial insecurity as primary reason for staying with an abuser, with gender based violence towards women engrained into our societal culture, violence towards women is common not only in homes, but throughout workplace and communities, economic power often determines women's option for safety, investment in women as a core of eliminating violence and harassment for good, which is critical on removing the economic barrier that trap women in the cycle of violence. Investing in women can help shift the cultural norms and socially constructed belief about women in the society in order to have a better tomorrow.

Lastly for women to thrive,

SUMMARY REPORTS

FROM PROJECTS CARRIED OUT BY CWSI IN 2023

COMMUNITY ACTION TO END CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE(CAECEFM)

The project titled "Community Action to Ending CEFM and Other Harmful Practices against Women and Girls," undertaken by the Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI) with support from the United States

Agency For International Development (USAID), constitutes a pivotal effort aimed at curtailing Child Early and Forced Marriages (CEFM) and other forms of violence against women and girls in communities within Cross River and Jigawa States. the project employs a multifaceted approach encompassing awareness campaigns, advocacy, community sensitization, socio-economic empowerment, and the documentation of research findings. Its primary objective is to mitigate the prevalence of CEFM through education, socio-cultural reform, and the empowerment of young women and girls.

The project's objectives are to equip girls and young women with the knowledge to effectively assert their rights, elevate community awareness to foster socio-cultural reforms, secure the endorsement of traditional leaders, law enforcement, and women-led groups in the campaign against CEFM, and to compile and circulate data on the causative factors of CEFM alongside viable preventative measures.

Key accomplishments of the initiative thus far include significant outreach and sensitization campaigns that have reached over 2,340 members of the community. These efforts focus on enlightening the community

about human rights, the detrimental effects of CEFM and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), and the critical importance of education for the girl child. A total of fourteen targeted outreach programs have been successfully conducted, significantly raising awareness regarding the rights of CEFM survivors and the negative consequences of such practices.

Furthermore, substantial progress has been in areas of policy development and advocacy. The formulation of community bylaws, coupled with radio programming, has been instrumental in altering community perceptions about CEFM. Fifty-five traditional and community leaders have received guidance and technical assistance to officially ban child marriage within their communities.

The project has also observed a notable increase in the reporting of violence, particularly in Akamkpa LGA in Cross River state, which signals an enhanced community awareness and a collective willingness to address and report abuse. This is a direct indication of the project's positive influence on community behavior and attitudes toward violence against women and girls.

Feedback from the community has highlighted an increased awareness and a growing determination to advocate for change. Numerous community members, inspired by the project's efforts, have sought support for their children's education and taken steps to annul arranged forced marriages. Notably, the Women Leader of the Andaza Community in Kiyawa LGA, Jigawa State, has remarked on the significant impact of the project in promoting the education of the girl child

and empowering young women to make informed decisions regarding marriage.

In conclusion, the "Community Action to Ending CEFM and Other Harmful Practices against Women and Girls" project is making significant strides in addressing the challenge of CEFM within the targeted communities. Through its comprehensive strategy of sensitization,

advocacy, and policy development, the project is establishing a solid foundation for ongoing efforts to eradicate CEFM and enhance the empowerment of women and girls. The concerted commitment of community members, government officials, and traditional leaders underscores a collective resolve to create environments where the rights and dignity of women and girls are respected and valued.



CAPACITY STRENGTHENING FOR 30 STAKEHOLDERS ON ENDING CEFM AND VAW/G IN OBALINKU LGA, CROSS RIVER STATE



HUMAN RIGHTS SENSITIZATION OUTREACH IN SCHOOLS IN CROSS RIVER STATE:



GROUP PHOTOGRAPH OF STUDENTS AT HANDMAIDS GIRLS COLLEGE OBUDU



GROUP PHOTOGRAPH OF STUDENTS IN COMPREHENSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL, OBUDU



GROUP PHOTOGRAPH OF STUDENTS AT ANGIABA SECONDARY SCHOOL, OBUDU



GROUP PHOTOGRAPH OF STUDENTS AT OBALINKU COMMUNITY SECONDARY SCHOOL.



GROUP PHOTOGRAPH FROM TOWN HALL MEETING IN KIYAWA LGA

STRATEGIC WOMEN

ADVANCEMENT IN GOVERNANCE (PHASE 1 1)

The SWAG Phase 2 Project, is a continued collaboration effort between CAFOD and CWSI, aimed at addressing the exclusion of women from politics, democratic governance, and decision-making processes in Kogi State. Building upon the successes achieved by its predecessor, SWAG Phase 1, this initiative has been dedicated to enhancing gender sensitivity and advocating for the equal participation of women in all levels of governance and decision-making within the region.

The project was underpinned by a series of well-defined objectives designed to ensure a progressive impact on the political and governance landscape of Kogi State. These objectives focused on elevating women's advocacy and participation in

governance by leveraging the momentum and capacities developed during the inaugural phase of SWAG. Furthermore, [the initiative sought to engage the Kogi Women Empowerment Coalition \(KWEC\) to establish a robust network in support of women's involvement in politics and governance.](#) It also aimed at enhancing the awareness and

enforcement of the Kogi State Violence against Persons Prohibition Law (VAPPL) to protect the socio-political rights of women. Additionally, the project encouraged strategic collaboration and networking among women politicians to foster support and collective action towards increasing their representation and influence in governance.

Throughout its implementation, the SWAG Phase 2 Project achieved a number of significant milestones. A key achievement was the orchestration of a day-long Town Hall meeting, which brought together thirty local government leaders, KWEC leaders, and other key stakeholders from across Kogi's senatorial districts. This event served as a dynamic platform for discussing and amplifying the political influence of women, with the aim of garnering widespread support for their active and equal participation in politics.

In a notable summit held in Lokoja, sixty prominent women leaders from the state's three senatorial districts were convened. This gathering provided a unique opportunity for participants to share strategies and insights on enhancing women's roles and presence in the governance sphere, further highlighting the collective ambition to improve women's political engagement.

The project facilitated a series of comprehensive three-day workshops that engaged thirty participants, including SWAG Cell Facilitators and KWEC leaders from all senatorial districts. These workshops concentrated on the practical application of the Kogi State VAPP 2022, the "Women in Leadership Strategic Advancement Guide," and DELTA Codes, aiming to promote awareness and effectively protect women's rights.

The initiative also extended its outreach into four Local Government Areas (LGAs) through significant efforts led by KWEC and SWAG facilitators. **These activities were focused on educating communities about the VAPP of Kogi State, raising awareness about violence against women, and fostering community engagement in support of women's rights.**

Furthermore, strategically planned advocacy visits were conducted by KWEC members and women in local government leadership positions, targeting three constituencies. These visits played a pivotal role in securing backing for enhancing women's representation and influence in governance, rallying community leaders, and policymakers to the cause of advancing women's roles in the political domain.

In conclusion, the SWAG Phase 2 Project has made considerable strides towards realizing gender-inclusive governance in Kogi State. Through its focused efforts on capacity building, networking, and advocacy, it has established a robust foundation for promoting the equitable participation of women in the political and governance landscape. The project's accomplishments signify a substantial step forward in the journey towards achieving gender parity in governance and decision-making processes within the state, laying down a blueprint for future initiatives aimed at empowering women in political spheres.



GROUP PHOTOGRAPH OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE TOWNHALL MEETING ORGANIZED IN KABBA, KOGI STATE



CROSS SECTION OF PARTICIPANTS AT THE TOWNHALL MEETING HELD IN OKENE, KOGI STATE



GROUP PHOTOGRAPH OF PARTICIPANTS AT THE WOMEN IN POLITICS SUMMIT HELD IN LOKOJA, KOGI STATE



LIVE RADIO SESSIONS WITH KWEC VICE PRESIDENT, MR IBRAHIM ADEJO (PRIME FM RADIO HOST) AND GUESTS.

INFORM PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER ON **SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE** (INPACT-ON-SGBV) FUNDING MEMBER: AFRICAN WOMEN DEVELOPMENT FUND (AWDF)

In addressing the critical challenges of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) manifested through intimate partner violence, sexual assault, rape, and early pregnancy within refugee settlements, the organization CWSI launched a significant initiative titled 'Inform Parents and Children Together on SGBV (INPACT-ON-SGBV)'. This project, spanning across five refugee settlements in Cross River and Benue States (Adagom 1, Adagom 3, Ukende, Obanliku, and Adikpo), was set for a duration of three years, aiming to mitigate the pressing issues affecting women and girls in these communities.

The project commenced with a comprehensive baseline survey conducted from the 24th to the 28th of July, 2023, across six refugee settlements. This initial phase reached a total of 343 respondents, providing a foundational understanding of the SGBV landscape within these areas, which would inform the subsequent interventions.

Following the baseline survey, a series of sensitization and awareness campaigns were conducted from the 2nd to the 19th of August, 2023. These campaigns, reaching a total of 922 individuals from the refugee settlements and host communities, employed participatory methods to educate participants on human rights, SGBV, and gender. Feedback and

suggestions from these sessions underscored the need for establishing community advocates, continuous sensitization efforts, and the provision of support to refugees affected by economic exploitation.

Furthermore, the project's commitment to addressing the psychological aftermath of SGBV was evidenced by the engagement of a consultant for psycho-social counselling, this included financial assistance to a minor from Adikpo for medical expenses associated with early pregnancy.

Advocacy visits to community leaders within the project area resulted in significant pledges of support towards reducing incidences of SGBV. This included the promulgation of gender-friendly laws and the provision of communal land for farming to alleviate the hardships faced by refugees.

The capacity-building component of the project saw a staff member of CWSI participating in a five-day training organized by the African Women Development Fund in Ghana, aimed at enhancing the project's efficacy.

In terms of direct support to affected individuals, the project distributed welfare packs containing essential items to beneficiaries, alongside financial support for traumatized victims, demonstrating a holistic approach to addressing the needs of SGBV victims.

Additionally, the project's outreach efforts were augmented through a radio program launched at the Cross-River Broadcasting Corporation. This served not only to raise awareness about the INPACT-ON-SGBV project but also to facilitate community engagement and feedback.

The achievements of the INPACT-ON-SGBV project within this reporting period are noteworthy, encompassing an enhanced understanding of human rights, SGBV, and gender studies among

participants, the provision of welfare packages to settlers in the project areas, and the delivery of psycho-social counselling services to traumatized victims. These outcomes reflect a committed and

multifaceted approach to combating SGBV in refugee settlements and underscore the project's potential to effect meaningful change within these communities.



FGD WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERS IN ADAGOM 3 SETTLEMENT DURING THE BASELINE STUDY



CWSI STAFF AND CHIEF AGULE SAAAONDO (KINDRED HEAD OF UGEE/MBAKUNLE IN ADIKPO KWANDE LOCAL GOVERNMENT) DURING THE ADVOCACY VISIT.



CWSI STAFF WITH REFUGEE IN ADAGOM 1SETTLEMENT DURING THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION FOR THE BASELINE STUDY



GROUP PHOTOGRAPH WITH REFUGEES AFTER THE SENSITIZATION PROGRAM AT IKYOGEN ADIKPO SETTLEMENT BENUE STATE.

Communities mobilizing To stop Gender Based Violence and Human Trafficking (GBV-HT)



TRAINED ACTION GROUP MEMBERS FROM YALA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA POSE IN A PHOTOGRAPH SHOWING FORTH THE CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDANCE ACQUIRED AFTER THE TRAINING ON GBV AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI), with support from Development and Peace Canada, is carrying out a project aimed at mitigating Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Human Trafficking (HT) within Cross River State, Nigeria. This project is operational within three distinct Local Government Areas: Bekwarra, Yala, and Ogoja, with a focused objective to facilitate the amendment of customary laws to prevent GBV and HT. A pivotal objective of this project is to augment the representation of GBV and HT victims in traditional decision-making frameworks, thereby ensuring their experiences and perspectives inform meaningful change.

The strategy implemented by the GBV-HT project is both comprehensive and multifaceted, beginning with engagements with traditional leaders to secure their endorsement and cooperation towards achieving the project's objectives. A critical component of this initiative is the establishment of a Project Action Group, comprising individuals who have directly experienced GBV and HT. These survivors, now serving as Change Agents, collaborate closely with traditional leaders and their communities to advocate for the elimination of GBV and HT.

A fundamental aspect of the project's methodology has been the organization of training sessions across the targeted local governments. These sessions aim to deepen the Action Group members' understanding of GBV and HT, including the complexities of customary law and the mechanisms available for its modification.

The project has seen significant collaboration between the project

team, traditional leaders, women leaders, and community members, leading to enhanced support and partnership. This collaboration has resulted in the development of detailed work plans by each Action Group, outlining strategies for community mobilization and advocacy against GBV and HT. To facilitate the structured and effective functioning of the Action Groups, comprehensive rules of work and participation have been formulated and adopted.

In line with these strategic plans, CWSI has appointed local monitors, referred to as Focal Trustees, within

the communities. These individuals are responsible for monitoring the project's progress and its impact on community norms and behaviors concerning GBV and HT, utilizing a custom template designed by CWSI for this purpose.

Through its targeted efforts, the project is not merely addressing the immediate challenges posed by GBV and HT but is also laying the foundation for enduring change in community attitudes and legal frameworks, ensuring a safer and more equitable future for the inhabitants of Cross River State.

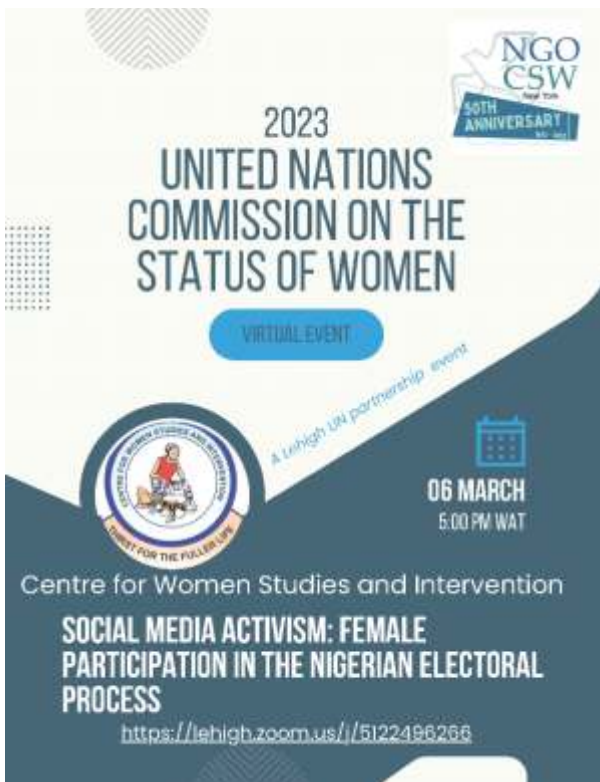


GROUP PHOTOGRAPH WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS OF UKPAH IN BEKWARRA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS-RIVER STATE DURING THE ONE-DAY VISIT FOR THE NOTIFICATION OF PROJECT

REPORT FROM

CWSI YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE

AT LEHIGH UNIVERSITY, BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA



A. SIDE EVENT AT THE 67TH SESSION OF THE UN'S COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 2023

In March 2023, from the 6th to the 17th, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) conducted its sixty-seventh session, marking a significant moment in the global agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. This session, characterized by its focus on "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age," was convened to address and harness the transformative potential of digital advancements for the betterment of women's and girls' lives globally. Representatives from Member States, United Nations entities, and ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from various regions worldwide were in attendance, underscoring the session's global significance and inclusive approach.

In alignment with the objectives of the CSW67, Centre For Women Studies and Intervention, (CWSI) hosted a virtual side event titled "Social Media Activism and Female Participation in The Nigerian Electoral Process." This event, conducted via Zoom, attracted 52 participants and aimed to explore the impact of social media activism on enhancing female political engagement in Nigeria. The session was inaugurated with a presentation by Emma Hartman and Rolake, Youth Representatives from Lehigh University, Bethlehem, USA, who provided an analysis titled "Statistics on the Level of Female Representation in Governance in Nigeria." This presentation served as a precursor to a panel discussion on the efficacy and challenges of social media activism.

The panel featured Barr. Precious Uwubiti, the Gender Officer for CWSI, and Abraham Solomon, a Social Media Influencer for CWSI, who addressed several pertinent questions. These encompassed the unique advantages of social media activism in engaging young women and girls,

Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI) engages with young women and men serving as interns at the university, who play a pivotal role in disseminating information about CWSI's endeavors and the obstacles encountered by women and girls through campus activism. Below is a concise overview of the activities undertaken by the Youth Representatives in 2023.

the misconceptions held by Nigerian girls regarding the electoral process, and the strategies for utilizing social media platforms to alter outreach effectively.

Ms. Uwubiti emphasized social media's critical role in mobilizing attention towards women's rights and the importance of young women's participation in the democratic process. She highlighted how social media extends the reach and influence of advocacy efforts, facilitating community building, increasing visibility of women's and girls' challenges, and fostering collaborations across networks on a national and global scale.

The session also provided a platform for interaction with participants, allowing for an enriching exchange of ideas and perspectives. Mrs. Omolola Mamedu, CAFOD's program officer for peacebuilding and governance, raised a critical point regarding the challenges of quantifying the impact of social media campaigns, highlighting the necessity of moving beyond traditional metrics to assess engagement and influence accurately.

The event concluded with a statement from the Executive Director on the imperative of integrating women and girls into technology and the digital age. This integration was presented not merely as beneficial but as essential for their inclusive development and empowerment.

This side event at the CSW67 underscores the pivotal role of digital education and technological innovation in advancing the agenda for women's and girls' empowerment. It reaffirms the commitment of the global community and organizations like CWSI to leveraging digital platforms for social change, advocating for gender equality, and empowering

women and girls in all spheres of life.

B. UNITED NATIONS DAY, 2023

To commemorate United Nations Day, the CWSI Youth Representatives organized a compelling awareness campaign on Lehigh University's campus, dedicated to illuminating the vital mission of the Centre For Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI). They skillfully engaged with students passing by, providing insightful explanations about the NGO's core objectives and the significant role university students can play in furthering these goals. Additionally, they distributed buttons emblazoned with the CWSI logo, a symbolic gesture of solidarity and a call to action for the student body.

The centerpiece of this event was a meticulously crafted tabloid, purposefully designed to shed light on the pressing issue of gender violence. Through a powerful collection of images, it vividly portrayed the grim realities faced by women in Nigeria, thereby advocating for urgent action against such injustices. This visual narrative not only informed but also evoked a deep sense of empathy and

responsibility among the viewers.

Furthermore, the CWSI Youth Representatives fostered a spirit of collaboration by joining forces with other Youth Representatives on campus. This synergy led to a brainstorming session that was both productive and inspiring, culminating in the generation of innovative ideas for upcoming events. These future initiatives aim to not only continue raising awareness about gender violence but also to explore effective ways to mobilize the student community towards meaningful action.

In line with the CWSI's vision, this UN Day celebration served as a pivotal moment in engaging the youth, highlighting the power of informed activism and community involvement in addressing and combating gender-based violence. Through educational outreach and creative advocacy, the CWSI Youth Representatives have set the stage for a series of impactful, student-led initiatives that promise to contribute significantly to the global fight against gender inequality and violence.



INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK 2023



During International Education Week, the Youth Representatives of Centre For Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI) took a significant step forward in raising awareness about the NGO's vital mission and its steadfast commitment to combating gender violence. This week-long event served as a prime platform for advocacy against the deeply entrenched malpractices that perpetuate gender-based violence, highlighting the urgent need for systemic change.

A highlight of the event was the opportunity for the CWSI Youth Representatives to engage in a meaningful dialogue with Lehigh University's esteemed president, Joseph J. Helble, Class of '82. This conversation was not just a ceremonial exchange but a profound moment to discuss the pressing issues of gender equity, particularly in the context of Nigeria. They outlined the multifaceted approach of the CWSI in addressing these challenges, from grassroots activism to influencing policy changes, underscoring the organization's role as a critical force for social reform and women's empowerment.

Moreover, this interaction provided a unique chance to explore potential collaborations between the university and CWSI, envisioning a partnership that could leverage academic resources and student activism in support of gender equity initiatives. The dialogue with President Helble was a step toward bridging the gap between academic institutions and NGOs, recognizing the powerful synergy that can emerge from such alliances.

In addition to this impactful conversation, the CWSI Youth Representatives utilized various channels and activities throughout International Education Week to educate and mobilize the student body. Through workshops, informational booths, and engaging presentations, they effectively conveyed the gravity of gender violence and the critical role that education and advocacy play in eradicating such injustices.

This week's efforts were a testament to the CWSI's unwavering dedication to fostering an informed and compassionate global community, ready to stand against gender violence and advocate for a more just and equitable world.

CWSI Youth In their capacity as Youth Representatives, the dedicated team from the Centre For Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI) regularly embarks on insightful journeys to the United Nations. These trips are pivotal, offering them the invaluable opportunity to participate in a wide array of panel discussions, conferences, and negotiation sessions. Such experiences are not only enriching but are instrumental in broadening their global perspectives and enhancing their skills in diplomacy and negotiation.

The engagements at the United Nations serve as a critical platform for the CWSI Youth Representatives to immerse themselves in the intricate dynamics of international relations and human rights advocacy. They gain firsthand exposure to the complexities of formulating and implementing policies aimed at combating gender-based violence, promoting gender equality, and empowering

women and vulnerable groups worldwide. Moreover, these visits allow the Youth Representatives to network with like-minded individuals and organizations from various countries, fostering a sense of global community and collaboration. They can exchange ideas, share best practices, and learn from the successes and challenges of others working in the field of gender rights and social justice.

By participating in these global forums, the CWSI Youth Representatives not only represent the voices and concerns of those they advocate for but also bring back valuable insights and learnings to their organization. This knowledge transfer is vital in refining their strategies, developing more effective programs, and enhancing their advocacy efforts to make a more significant impact in the fight for gender equity and social reform.



16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM 2023



In commemoration of the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence, Centre for Women Studies and Intervention orchestrated a significant one-day program, at the Catholic Resource Centre, on the 29th of November, 2023.

Aligned with the global theme for this year's 16 Days of Activism, spanning from November 25th to December 10th

2023, "Unite! Invest to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls"—the event sought to contribute significantly to the collective efforts aimed at eradicating gender-based violence. The initiative, known as "Unite to End Violence against

Women," represents a sustained, multiyear endeavor dedicated to preventing and eliminating violence against women worldwide, with a particular focus on the Nigerian society.

This significant occasion brought together esteemed representatives from Faith-Based Organizations, including but not limited to the Catholic Women Organization, Anglican Women's Guild, CAFOD, Confraternity of Christian Mothers, and the Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), along with various NGOs and individuals united by a shared commitment to ending violence against women and girls. The collaboration of these diverse entities underscored the collective resolve to address and eradicate the scourge of gender-based violence within the Nigerian context.

Keynote speakers, Comrade Ene Obi and Mrs. Saudatu Mahdi, provided insightful perspectives on the challenges and strategies related to combating gender-based violence. Comrade Ene Obi emphasized the need for increased female representation in governance and decision-making as critical to addressing the issue. She highlighted various forms of violence against women, including emotional and psychological abuse, and

called for a collective effort to promote respect, dignity, and support for women across all societal levels. Obi advocated for condemning victim-blaming, adopting survivor-centric approaches, and fostering collaboration among civil society organizations to empower women and build their self-esteem.

Mrs. Saudatu Mahdi focused on the power dynamics at play in violence against women, urging an end to societal complicity, complacency, and impunity that perpetuate such violence. She stressed the importance of expanding efforts to combat violence against women, incorporating corporate responsibility, and forming partnerships to enhance the impact of these initiatives. Mahdi acknowledged the complexities in completely eradicating violence but emphasized proactive steps within families and communities to change the narrative.

A significant outcome of the event was the drafting of a communique. This document encapsulated the

key insights, recommendations, and collective resolutions articulated during the discussions. It serves as a roadmap for future actions and a call to stakeholders at all levels to commit to concrete steps towards eradicating gender-based violence. The communique underscores the event's emphasis on unity and collective action as essential in the ongoing fight against gender-based violence, reflecting a strong commitment to effecting substantial change in Nigerian society and beyond.

The event underscored the importance of unity and collective action in the fight against gender-based violence, reflecting a strong commitment to making significant strides towards its eradication in Nigerian society and beyond. It represented a crucial step in the broader "Unite to End Violence against Women" initiative, showcasing the power of collaboration, awareness, and targeted action in addressing this pervasive issue.



OUR SUCCESS STORY

ESTABLISHMENT OF ACTION GROUP IN CROSS RIVER STATE

In Cross River State, CWSI started an initiative aimed at mobilizing communities to combat gender-based violence and human trafficking, a response to alarming findings from a survey which CWSI carried out under the UN Trust Fund ATEVAW project, highlighted the widespread occurrence of gender-based violence (GBV) and human trafficking (HT) within these communities.

Despite the prevalent awareness of GBV and HT among the community members, there had been a notable absence of targeted efforts to combat these issues effectively. The CWSI's project aimed to fill this gap, mobilizing local resources and community will to address and eradicate these deeply ingrained social problems.

A cornerstone of our project strategy

was the formation of the Project Action Group (AG), a task achieved through a rigorous selection process. This process was designed to ensure the inclusion of genuine survivors and passionate advocates for change, thereby empowering those most affected to lead the charge against GBV and HT within their communities.

Among those selected was a notable community chief from Bekwarra LGA, who himself had been a victim of human trafficking. His eagerness to contribute to the project underscored the initiative's

significance, offering a personal testament to the transformative impact of community-led interventions.

MEDIA SENSITIZATION ON CHILD EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE (CEFM) AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN CROSS RIVER AND JIGAWA STATE

Our project, "Community Action to Ending CEFM and Other Harmful Practices against Women and Girls," has made significant strides in altering the socio-cultural landscape of selected communities across

Cross River and Jigawa States.

In Jigawa State, our partnership with Freedom FM (99.5FM) Dutse unveiled a critical platform for discourse through the radio program "Mu taru Mu gyara" ("Let us come together and solve the problem"), focusing on the pivotal role of girl child education in eradicating CEFM. Spearheaded by the project officer Muhammad Musbahu Basirka and featuring academician Ukasha Ismail, the program dissected the detriments of child marriages and underscored the transformative power of education. The engaging discussions, enriched by community calls, highlighted the urgent need for continuous sensitization and the socio-economic empowerment of families, reinforcing the community's commitment to protecting the future of its young girls.

Similarly, in Cross River State, the CRBC 89.7FM Ikom program "Together 4 all: Operation Protect Our Girls," became a beacon of hope and a call to action. Listener contributions vividly painted the current challenges and reinforced the project's timeliness, urging for greater community responsibility in safeguarding young girls from abuse and forced marriages. A landmark activity within this Project was a 1-day capacity strengthening engagement for stakeholders in Obalinku LGA, Cross River State. This assembly of traditional leaders, religious leaders, law enforcement, and community organizations underscored the collective resolve to end CEFM and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAW/G). Through comprehensive discussions on laws, support systems, and community-led strategies, this meeting not only fortified the network of support for affected individuals but also charted a course for sustainable community action against these harmful practices.

INCREASED REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE IN KOGI STATE

The SWAG Phase 2 Project, a collaborative effort between the Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI) and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), represents a significant progress towards addressing the systemic exclusion of women from politics, democratic governance, and decision-making processes in Kogi State. This initiative builds upon the foundational achievements of SWAG Phase 1, with a renewed focus on promoting gender sensitivity and advocating for the equal participation of women in governance at all levels.

The SWAG project resulted in increased representation of women in governance and decision-making in Kogi State. At the point of CWSI-CAFOD exit from Kogi state, the total number of women in governance is as follows:

- Nigeria has three tiers of government. The Federal, State, and Local government is at the grassroots. Sixty-six women were elected into the twenty-one Local Government Councils of Kogi State. Twenty-one of the women held Executive positions as Vice Chairman. There were forty-five women elected Honourable Councilors out of which twenty held the exalted positions of Leaders of the respective Local Government legislative councils.
- One woman (Natasha Akpoti Uduaghan) was elected into the Senate as the first-ever female senator from Kogi State.
- Two women were elected as representatives of their constituencies into the Kogi State House of Assembly.
- Three women held high-ranking executive positions as Head of Kogi State civil service, Secretary to the State government, and Commissioner for Women's affairs.
- Twenty-two women unprecedentedly held positions as "beaded" Chiefs and members of various traditional ruling Councils in

Kogi state. (This was hitherto a position that was exclusively for male members of the tribal kingdoms)

- One woman held the position held the position of Aide-de-camp to the Executive Governor of Kogi State. (This was also a position reserved for men)
- Kogi State domesticated the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) 2023 which provided for the rights and protection of women and girls from socio-cultural, economic, and political forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls (VAW-G)

PERCEPTION SHIFT ON SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV) IN CROSS RIVER STATE

In an effort to confront the prevalent issues of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), including intimate partner violence, sexual assault, rape, and early pregnancy, particularly affecting women and girls in refugee settlements, CWSI with support from African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) implemented a project titled "Inform Parents and Children Together On Sexual and Gender Based Violence (INPACT_ON_SGBV) in Cross River State.

The narrative of change began unfolding right from the inception of the project. Initially, the refugees and host community members were skeptical about the potential impact of the INPACT-ON-SGBV project. Their skepticism stemmed from past disappointments, where interventions by other development organizations failed to deliver tangible benefits, often feeling like mere data collection exercises without addressing the community's specific needs. However, CWSI's transparent introduction of the project's activities and its committed timeline for outcomes over the next three years encouraged the community to embrace the initiative with newfound hope and enthusiasm.

This shift in perception was monumental. CWSI's comprehensive approach not only educated the participants on SGBV but also fostered an environment where they felt comfortable sharing their personal experiences and the impact of SGBV on their lives.

Empowered with knowledge and support, the refugees transformed into advocates within their settlements, spreading the objectives of the project. They began forming clusters of women, girls, and youth groups to further discuss and disseminate

information on the project's theme. A girl child movement was established as a mentorship platform to inspire girls to dream, develop life ambitions, and advocate against sexual and gender-based violence.

AWARDS AND *Recognition*

Honoring CWSI's Transformative Community Work in Cross River State.

Project Title: Action To Eliminate Violence against women (ATEVAW)

Centre for Women Studies and Intervention, a grantee of the United Nations Trust Fund and Spotlight Initiative, implemented the Action To Eliminate Violence against women (ATEVAW) project from 2020-2023 in four LGAs of Cross River State. The project aimed to dismantle gender-based inequalities, empowering women to be agents of change against violence against women and girls (VAWG). Engaging men and empowering women aligned with UN principles, SDGs and the Maputo protocol. A key project component was a media campaign through CRBC, leading to positive changes in customary laws. CRBC in recognition of CWSI's colossal contribution to ending VAW/G in Cross River State, gave CWSI an outstanding Award.

Also, in the ATEVAW project, the king of Ekajuk Kingdom bestowed a title on CWSI project Staff as the “**MOKU ASAGIRE 1 OF EKAJUK KINGDOM; signifying “THE NUMBER ONE CHAMPION OF WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT”**”

Project Title: Communities Mobilizing to stop Gender-Based Violence and Human Trafficking (GBV_HT)

As a result of the success of the Development and Peace project titled, ‘Communities Mobilizing to stop Gender-Based Violence and Human Trafficking (GBV_HT)’. CWSI received recognition for transforming communities, empowering women and Girls and addressing prevalent issues of Gender-Based and Human Trafficking in Cross River State. **The Paramount ruler of Bekwarra LGA honored CWSI with the title “ UKPERE ENYIYE OF BEKWARRA KINGDOM” Meaning “ THE SALVAGER OF WOMEN.”**

Furthermore, the project led to the bestowal of traditional titles on CWSI staff by the Paramount Ruler of Bekwarra LGA, His Royal Majesty Linus Ogbeche Odey, and His Royal Highness, Ntul Atul Innocent Nwake of the Ekajuk Kingdom, recognizing them as forefront champions in women's development.

These awards and titles were given to Sr. Chinyere Obinna, HHCJ, CWSI's Legal/Human Right's Officer. However, one of the awards was received on her behalf by the Executive Director Sr. Ngozi Frances Uti, HHCJ

Pictorials From the Award Recognition and Titles Conferment:



Inspirational QUOTES

"When women are empowered and can claim their rights and access to land, leadership, opportunities, and choices, economies grow, food security is enhanced, and prospects are improved for current and future generations." **__Christine Lagarde**

"The story of women's struggle for equality belongs to no single feminist nor to any one organization but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights." **__Gloria Steinem**

"Investing in women is smart economics, and investing in girls, catching them upstream, is even smarter economics." **__Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**

"Empowering women is key to building a future we want." **__Bineta Diop**

"When women are empowered and can claim their rights and access to land, leadership, opportunities, and choices, economies grow, food security is enhanced, and prospects are improved for current and future generations." **__Christine Lagarde**



At CWSI, we believe that giving women, girls and other vulnerable persons the skills, information, and opportunities to fulfill their potential that will create vibrant, healthy and inclusive communities.

Help us give these PERSONS and COMMUNITIES- space to make transformative choices.

PLEASE MAKE A DONATION TO CWSI VIA THE LINK

<https://cwsing.org/support-our-work/>, and make real change, right now.

OR

Account Number: 1000908660
Account number: Centre for Women Studies and Intervention
Bank: UBA

For more information kindly check our

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Every like, share, and donation brings us closer to our goal.
#EmpowerWomen

Centre For Women Studies and Intervention - Invest In
Women For a Better Tomorrow

CWSI



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