

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN TRADE UNIONS AND NATION BUILDING

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ABSTRACT

- *“People are born female or male but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. This learned behaviour makes up gender identities that determine societal ascribed gender roles”.*
- Either as a “westernized” or an African Woman with all the traditional circumscription, women since the inception of humanity has been contributing immensely to the political as well as socio-economic growth of their families, communities, groups and nations. Even though most of these contributions, due to various overt and covert reasons, were often not acknowledged nor rewarded, they were however valued. In Nigeria, culture, religion and policies of colonial government were some of the instruments used to perpetuate social inequalities and oppressive form of political stratification of women.
- However, the advent of wage labour and introduction of some government policies that eliminate barriers to access to educational opportunities, skills development and equity in employment allowed for women to join the formal employment and in consequence the trade unions.
- Expectedly, as these women progress in their chosen carriers and also advance in their socio-economic endeavours, quite a significant number of them assume leadership positions in both their offices, unions and families with some of them becoming the bread winner of their respective families.
- Thus, as women’s status in their economic and socio-political arena improve, so also did it generate (and still generating their) obvious interest, involvement and participation in workers’ groups, membership and activities. The trade union movement in Nigeria presently is blessed with a lot of visionary women leaders.
- This paper will briefly discuss various attempts at promoting gender equality both in and out of trade unionism. It will also briefly talk on roles that some notable women have played in development of their communities and unions; then the barriers women generally encounter in their leadership pursuit especially in Trade Unions and finally attempt to proffer solutions to the identified barriers.
- I hope that at the end of this presentation, you will confidently say “I am my sister’s keeper”.

WHY THE SPECIAL FOCUS ON WOMEN?

- The past two decades had evidently experienced a global yearning for the

- upliftment of humanity with various diverse attention accorded women's interests. This need to integrate women both as participants in planning and policy-making and as beneficiaries was first articulated at the United Nations International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City in 1975.
- Hitherto, National and International developmental approaches had been gender neutral. It could be argued that the premise for this monumental shift in attitude and position is probably due to the realization that developmental practices should to allow for unhindered women's participation in all relevant and available economic, as well as socio-political programmes; give women full opportunities to explore and develop their potentials to the optimum and acknowledge their efforts.
- Moreover as cultures change, so also are social roles and values, the socially ascribed division of power with women playing subordinate roles has been discovered to retard social justice, equity, poverty eradication and sustainable development as it is found to hinder women's free exploration and utilization of available opportunities. Consequently, this global focus on emancipation and empowerment of women could be closely linked to the appreciation and the need for re-evaluation of various myths, social customs tradition, and religions doctrines perceived to have subordinated the position of women. For example, the muslim religion forbid women from leading congregational prayers irrespective of their age or Koranic knowledge.
- Inheritance laws and traditions, marriage arrangements, banking systems and social patterns that reinforce women's dependence on fathers, husbands and sons all contribute both to their unfavourable access to resources and their lack of power to change things.
- Furthermore, the health dangers that results from multiple births can contribute to interrupted work and low productivity and it is also discovered that traditional expectations and home-based responsibilities that limit womens' mobility also limit their opportunities for economic advancement and political involvement. Another factor is the lack of educational opportunities, access to information, markets, and myriad of other problems that further reinforces the cycle of women's vulnerability.
- Worthy of note also is the International Agencies reference to women as belonging to the vulnerable group in any given society which has never been seriously disputed or challenged as it
- is assumed that women lack economic security, which is a primary factor in

- social vulnerability. Emerson (2000) further opined that in general, and around the world, women are poorer than men as women are disproportionately employed in unpaid, underpaid, and non-formal sectors of the economy.
- Researches have also shown that despite the gradual increase in women's labour participation over the years, their number in formal employment is still significantly lower than men's. It is also a fact that women's tendencies to opt out of and re-enter the labour-force market and lack of required education are some of the reasons why unemployment is higher for women than men (ILO, 2000).
- Regrettably also, the non-responsiveness of government and its agencies to adequate implementation of policies like that of education, public health e.t.c. impact on women more strongly than any other group in the society because of their naturally imposed peculiar responsibilities and needs.
- Furthermore, some employment practices do not favour women despite the provisions of the fundamental human rights and freedom of association in the country's labour laws. For example, almost all the new generation banks in Nigeria presently have clauses that do not promote women's interests in their contract of employment, women are still (indirectly) discriminated upon and still encounter sexual harassment of different guises while in employment.
- Worst still, it is discovered that women suffer the effects of financial and economic downturns more than men, the outcome of a research facilitated by the (ILO, 2000) is that women and girls are more affected by crisis (natural and circumstantial) than men and boys because of their gender. This could be due to women's economic dependence on men as well as lack of control of economic resources which do not avail them the power to mitigate the effects of crises like most men.
- Another reason for this finding could be due to women's high levels of pre-crises poverty, secondary status in the labour force, extensive informal-economic work, reduced access to productive assets and to information, as well as extensive domestic responsibilities which all clearly make them economically vulnerable long before crises occur.

EFFORTS AT INTEGRATING WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

- Rathgeber (1997) opined that prior to specifically articulated attempts to involve in and provide for women in development; strategies to advance women's lives had been closely linked with

the modernization paradigm that dominated mainstream thinking of international development from the 1950s into the 1970s, it is linked to the conventional wisdom that modernization, which was unusually equated with industrialization would improve the standard of living in developing countries.

- That through massive expansion of education systems, a stock of well-trained workers and manager would emerge; this in turn would enable the evolution of primarily essentially agrarian societies into industrialized and modernized ones. And as the economies of these countries grow, the benefits of modernization i.e better living condition; qualitative and quantitative education, adequate wages for workers as well as adequate health service would “trickle down” to all segment of the society, women inclusive.
- However, this was not to be and researcher’s had started questioning this view by the 1970s. This improved posture was based on the followings:-
 - The observation that woman’s relative positions did not improve and if at all it did, it was very little over the period in question.
 - There were evidences suggesting that the positions of women in some sectors declined, for example, in the formal industrial sector, women often were relegated to the lowest-paying, mostly monotonous and sometimes health impairing jobs, a condition partly due to their low levels of education, but also due to the role traditionally assigned to women as supplementary rather than principals wage earners and
 - In agriculture, as new technologies were introduced, they were usually directed at men rather than women.
 - Thus, partly due to the little or no impact of this study on women’s life and also realizing that women are an integral and valuable specie in the society, International attention became diverted towards their inclusion in developmental efforts, thus effective from mid-1970 various multilateral agencies and governments began to evolve programs and projects specifically targeted at developing the women folk. Some of these are:-
 - The declaration of United Nations decade for women from 1975 to 1985
 - In 1976, the International Labour Organization (ILO) articulated a Basic Need Approach designed to enable women to provide more effectively for their families’ most fundamental human needs i.e food, clothing, shelter, e.t.c). it was also intended as a strategy to ease women’s work burdens, to enable them to become more independent economically, and to allow them to participate more active in community development activities.

- The ILO conventions actively on Equal opportunity and Treatment i.e.
- The Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention 111,
- The Equal Remuneration Convention No. 100 and
- Convention No. 156 on workers with family responsibilities.
- In response to the instruction of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD to all agencies to establish women in Development strategies and to put aside special funds for activities related to organizations and in development banks Bilateral agencies like the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), the Danish International Development Agency (DANDA) the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA), and the Canadian, International Development Agencies (CIDA) all have adopted strategies to ensure that women in developing countries benefit directly from their programs.
- The Beijing Declaration and of the Platform for Action which proposed a sharing of responsibilities at all level of government, parliaments, local authorities and even within the governing bodies of parliaments.
- The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action which proposed that human rights must be everywhere and for everyone and.
- The human right Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- March 8 of every year being declared the International Women's Day to further promote awareness on women empowerment.
- In Nigeria, the followings are already in place to aid WID
- The ratification of ILO Conventions that promote gender equality and equity in the workplace
- Constitutional guaranteed rights outlined in section 42, chapter IV of 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which gives everyone right to freedom from discrimination on groups of sex amongst other infinite factors.
- The establishment of National Commission for women by Decree No. 30 of 1989.
- The establishment of the Ministry of Women's affairs in 1993
- The establishment of National Commission on Human Rights in 1995
- Adoption of National Policy on Women in July, 2000. This policy was established to encourage women's input into National Development as well as their participation in sectoral and national issues. The policy was also ensure women's equitable benefit in Development.
- Adoption of the Nigeria Labour Congress Policy on Women in 1999.

- Approval of 16 week Maternity Leave Entitlement with full pay to female Public Servants at a stretch, beginning not later than 4 weeks from the expected date of delivery.

NIGERIAN WOMEN'S ROLES IN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY

- Ester Boserup (1970) undertook an extensive study of “women in development” which culminated in her published work titled “Women’s Role in Economic Development”. Her premise was the then universal overwhelming notion of the assumption of “men bring the food and women prepare it” in the family setup. This she found to be grossly incorrect in reality. She even discovered, with available statistics that one in four families on the average is headed by a woman.
- Boserup was able to delineate systematically on a global level, the division of labour in a traditional family autarchy, the main criteria being age and sex. She analyzed the changes in traditional agricultural practices as societies are modernized, and examined the differential impact of those changes on the work done by men and women. Her conclusion is that in sparsely populated regions where shifting agriculture is practiced, women tend to do the majority of agricultural work.
- In more populated regions where plows and other simple technologies are used, men do more of the agricultural work. She also discovered that in areas of intensive, irrigation-based cultivation, both men and women share in agricultural tasks. Even though, Boserup’s work was later criticized for her oversimplification of the nature of women’s work and roles, her attempt was seminal in focusing scholarly attention on the sexual division of labour and the differential gender of development and modernization strategies.
- Prior to the advent of colonialism.
- In tangem with Boserup analysis was the practice in African traditional societies when families were ‘mainly subsistent with productive efforts revolving around the farms. This was largely so as families then operated a closed society, with limited needs catered for from the proceeds of farmland. There was division of labour as men, women and children were assigned roles in the farms. Women also did the bulk of domestic chores and contributed extensively to the survival of the families and groups.
- Another area where women’s roles were prominent and effective was the realm of religions. It is no exaggeration to observe that the African Traditional religions served as vehicles for political and socio-economic developments of the communities and societies. It is also a fact that some

of these deities belonged to the female gender with followers headed by dedicated and committed women. Examples of such deities are Osun, Yemoja and Oya in the western states of Nigeria. These deities were highly revered for their prompt response to providing solutions to worshipper's problem.

- Women's roles in employment, particularly in Nigeria could be categorized into agriculture, informal and formal sectors. Evidences from studies show that more women in the Eastern part of the country are involved in agriculture while the western states has more women participating in the informal sector and as for women in the Northern States their contributions are somehow hidden due to the widely practiced purdah system in that region which does not make them feasible like their male counterparts. Nevertheless, they are mostly engaged in the informal sector with their products hawked by their children and dependants.
- Even though generally women's contribution in the formal sector is generally low, there has been a gradual increase in their numbers over the years e.g women's employment in the civil service rose to 14% percent in 2005 from 10% in 1990 (FOS, 2006). Furthermore, recent data showed that academic staffs in the universities remain overwhelmingly male – biased with the females more concentrated at the lower cadre.
- Between 1980 and 1992, the number of Nigerian female Doctors and Dentists increased quite considerably. While the aggregate number of Dentists grew at an annual rate of 15.3 percent, the number of male and female Dentists grew at annual rates of about 13 and 26 percent respectively. Also the proportion of female Doctors increased from 14.3 to 17.5 percent, and for Dentists, it increased much more significantly, from 10.3 to 30.1 percent during the review period (Ojo 1997).
- From this development and since the female population is about 49 percent of the total population in the country, one can infer that
 - - it is either the informal sector has more women workers than the formal sector which perhaps naturally reflects the fact that modern work profile has a larger concentration of women in the informal sector
 - or that the private sector has more women in employment than the public sector
 - - or that many women due to their lack of education could not secure any form of employment. (According to Punch Newspaper 2009, 47% of Nigeria's 140 million people are stark illiterate and over 60% of the illiterate populations are women.

- More worrisome is the fact that despite obvious increase in education, knowledge and skill of women, the modern world of employment is experiencing occupational segregation by sex. Women's quantitative increase in formal employment has not been matched by qualitative improvements in employment. Women are yet to break through the "glass ceiling". Indeed, they still form a minority in decision-making. Managerial positions, gender discrimination and unequal division of labour, such as in the sharing of family responsibilities are still prevalent in most modern societies.
- Discussing women's role politically, it could be safely said that Nigeria women have contributed significantly to the growth of the nation. It is not an exaggeration to affirm that women played prominent and decisive roles in the socio-political history and decision-making processes of their respective traditional societies. In pre-colonial Nigeria, through their selfless sacrifices and gallantry, they served as catalysts for brokering peace during crises.
- They also led military expeditions to expand and protect their communities through warfare. These women held titles and shared power to some extent with their male counterparts. Some were palace women who were part of the government of their time and had recognized positions within the political hierarchy. Example of such women include Magajiya of Daura around the 9th century, Magira Aisa Kili and Magaram of the Safuwa dynasty in Ancient Borno Kingdom, Queen Amina of Zazzau; Moremi of Lagos; Emota of the Bini Kingdom just to mention a few. (NOA, Nigerian Women And Democracy).
- Furthermore, during the colonial era the Aba women played a strategic role in curtailing the excesses of the British taxation system. The reaction of the women, which became known as the 'Aba Women Riot' in 1929, scared off the British.
- In postcolonial Nigeria women like Chief Jane Mokelu, Hajiya Gambo Sawaba, Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Lady Oyinkan Abayomi made remarkable contributions in politics through their active participation.
- Painfully though, despite the prominent roles played by these women, the involvement of women in the political system in Nigeria is yet to be remarkable for any observable appreciative respite for the women folk.
- In the first and second republics, women were under represented in politics. Most of their involvements were restricted to the women wing of political parties and sometimes ceremonial functions. Only one woman was appointed into the Senate of the first republic. There was no woman in the House of Representatives and subsequently the Federal Cabinet.

- No woman was appointed into the Constituent Assembly that drafted the 1979 constitution. Only one Senator and 3 members (HR) were elected in the second Republic. The 3rd republic did not also fair better despite an observable increase in women's interests in politics in the late 80's and early 90s
- The fourth republic could be said to have witnessed an appreciative increase in the level of women's participation in politics when compared to the previous republics. For example, there were 3 women in the Senate, 13 in the House of Representatives, 143 councilors, among others. The regime also produced the very first female governor in Nigeria. The present democratic dispensation has 9 Women Senators, 6 Women Deputy Governors and 26 Women in the House of Representatives amongst others. This representation although increasing is obviously very low and stills far from the 30% minimum required for affirmative action.

WOMEN'S ROLES IN TRADE UNIONS

- The patriarchal conceptions of women's role in the socio-political growth of the country directly reflected on the structure and operations of the first generation of trade unions that emerged in Nigeria. These unions were the Nigerian Civil Service Union (NCSU) in 1912, the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) in 1931 and the Nigerian Union of Railwaymen (NUR) in 1932. Almost all members of these unions were men with their leadership being dominated by men, indeed according to Benedicta Dauda (2007) the trade unions were formed around the male gender hence the name National Union of "Railwaymen".
- She further opined that the first significant effort made by NLC to articulate women workers' interest was the setting up in 1981 of the Department of Women Affairs which was charged with the responsibility of
 - - Ensuring equal pay for work of equal value
 - - Ensuring non-discrimination on job opportunities based on sex
 - - Ensuring strict observance of ILO conventions on women in employment
 - - Setting up serving institutions including home Economics Centres.
- However, these aims were not implemented then mostly because of the in-depth prejudices of male trade unionist as they saw the plan as "efforts to liberate women". Osimemu reported that only three out of the thirty six chapters of NLC i.e Lagos, Oyo and Anambra State Councils established women wings as directed.

- The NLC head office was also indifferent to this development. Probably, the congress then couldn't have fared better as the Women's Affairs Department was headed by a male unionist.
- Thus, before 1999 when Comrade Rita Goyt was nominated as a member of the caretaker committee that restructured the NLC, there was no visible woman involvement at the activities of NLC at National level.
- However, effective from 1999, contributing their quota to the growth of NLC are Comrades Lovina Okoro as ex officio member; Comrade Esther C. Timothy as Auditor, and Comrade Loretta Balogun, also as ex officio member. Presently, Comrade Ladi Illiya is the National Chairperson of the women Commission, a Vice President of the congress as well as the National President of Non-Academic Staff Unions of Nigeria (NASU). Her roles in these positions are invaluable.
- The NLC also launched its gender policy which according to Comrade Rita Goyit, seeks to mainstream gender and ensure a greater inclusion and participation of women at all levels of the NLC. This desire and commitment is captured in the Gender clause, which is meant to permeate all actions, policies and empowerment activities in the NLC. "The NLC affirms its belief and respect for equal opportunities for all Nigerians regardless of gender. The NLC recognizes the peculiar nature of women's role as affecting their ability or inability to participate effectively in the public sphere.
- Empowerment of woman should therefore begin from a re-examination of the place of women within Nigerian society. The NLC is, therefore, committed to building a world where gender justice reigns, which recognizes that change for women within the labour movement demands an internal restructuring, complemented by external working partnerships. Gender justices as a cardinal principle of congress shall mean equal access to employment opportunities, absence of discriminatory practices against both genders and recognition of the productive and reproductive roles of each gender".
- Other areas covered in the policy include Internal Restructuring, Human Resource Development, Equal Employment Opportunities, External Partnership, and Building Bridges of Cooperation with Civil Society and Governmental Relationships. All these are strategies aimed at mainstreaming gender.
- The policy also made provision for affirmative Action, which stipulates that women are to occupy not less than 30% of leadership positions. The NLC will also ensure that unions are encouraged to adopt the policy and the affirmative actions.

- As part of the efforts in addressing gender issues in the NLC, the education policy states that; gender issues should be integrated in all educational programmes and activities; exclusive education programme must be provided for women members; women should make at least 30% participation in non-women exclusive education activities; education should be used to promote and encourage women's participation in the unions at all levels.
- Thus, in September 2003, the NLC held its first successful Gender Conference with the theme. "Building Women: Building Unions". This period also marked the 25 years of the NLC. The Gender Conference had the following objectives: to provide a forum for mapping out a strategic vision and plan of action for the National Women Commission of the Nigeria Labour Congress, to constitute the NLC National Women Commission (NWC), develop and promote union wide consensus on Gender Equity, to scrutinize employment practices in Nigeria, assess gender profiles in work organizations and identify factors that support discriminatory practices with a view to recommending appropriate measures that would guarantee equal access to employment for all genders.
- Other objectives include making input into policies on women and considering appropriate national policy engagement strategies, considering and adopting strategies for networking between the unions and other organizations in the civil society and government agencies doing work on gender. The highlight of this Gender Conference of the NLC was the constitution and inauguration of the leadership of the National Women Commission, which is made up (9) nine officers.
- The other umbrella body of workers, the Trade union congress even though comparatively very young in existence has made considerable inputs also towards women development. Indeed, the giant contributions of the first National President Comrade Beatrice Obiajulu are evident in the various monumental roles that TUC has been playing towards National Development and membership cohesion. She actually provided TUC quality leadership from inception.
- However, it is quite apparent that these contributions of women trade unionists to their unions growth is till a far cry from the desired. Women representations in these National Unions still require a lot of pushing up. Perhaps, the existence of NAWOJ and the recorded achievements influenced the emergence of a woman as the first president of TUC.
- According to the ILO, Unions should evolve strategies that will consistently encourage equal representation of both men and women in leadership positions because of the following reasons.

- women account for an increasing proportion of the workforce;
- to be credible and strong, unions must address the priority concerns of its current and potential members; and women concerns are numerous.
- to be credible to women, unions must demonstrate that gender equality is an integral part of their own policies and structures;
- growing numbers of women workers are standing up for their rights and seeking support for their rights;
- women members are positively changing the way unions work and improving the image and influence of unions;
- the promotion of gender equality helps unions strengthen and reaffirm their key role as agents of social change;
- the promotion of gender equality provides common grounds for unions to forge alliances with other social actors.

FACTORS THAT INHIBIT WOMENS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEIR UNIONS

- Despite various legislations, attitudinal change and dispositions towards full integration of women into Trade Union activities not much success has been recorded it is obvious that wssomen' responses still need to be improved upon.
- The followings are the identified barriers by the ILO.
- Women do not understand or appreciate how unions can benefit them;
- Women fear reprisals from employers (including losing their jobs) for joining unions;
- Women do not have time to join or participate in union activities because of conflicting family responsibilities, and childcare facilities are lacking or too expensive.
- Women often lack the confidence to join unions or to aspire to leadership positions;
- Religious and cultural norms and traditions prevent women from joining;
- Women face oppositions from their spouses or families; when they decide to be active unionists
- The male-dominated culture or activities of the union or hostile reactions from male members discourage women from joining;
- Stereotyped ideas persist about womens' abilities, preferences and roles;
- Unions are not sensitive to the needs of women workers;
- Membership dues are a problem especially for poor working women;

- Women are more likely than men to be in atypical forms of work or in the informal sector where they are difficult to reach and organize.
- There may be legal constraints to some groups of women workers joining unions;
- Entrenched union rules and structures are not conducive to womens' participation and advancement to leadership positions;
- Informal procedures in the unions for nominations or appointments rely on established male networks.
- Other identified barriers to women participation union activities are
 - - Religion – some religious affiliations have beliefs that prevent women from working and thus reduce the probability of joining and participating in trade unionism. Also while in employment, some religions affiliations forbids women from interacting with males who are not their husbands or family relations.
 - Male union environment – the prevalent notion is that working in a union is a 24r hour a day job. While men occupying the existing union structures find it easy to perpetuate some prejudices, values and stereotypes unfavourable to women.
 - - Limited experience and training - some unions have evolved electoral guidelines, which stress union experience and training, prerequisites that women lack
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 - - Limited experience and training - some unions have evolved electoral guidelines, which stress union experience and training, prerequisites that women lack
 - Long and unusual work hours – responsibilities of trade unionists, either elected or appointed involve long, sudden unusual hours and traveling, which female workers may not be able to cope with.
 - - Marital status, a married woman may find it harder to participate in trade union activities than a single or divorced woman.

WAY FORWARD

- Even though in recent years, Nigeria has made noticeable progress in strengthening women's capacity so as to enhance their contributions towards National growth in all realms, all the stakeholders need to improve on their efforts for more distinct and sustainable impacts.

Expected from these stakeholders (Government, Employers, Society and Unions) which we will now examine in turn are:-

Government

- In order to promote gender equality in employment, women should be given greater educational opportunities by the family (parent, guardian or spouse).
- Furthermore the promotion of sound education for women at all levels is essential for national development as the adage goes: “educate a man, you educate an individual – educate a woman, you educate a nation”. To reinforce this, the Minister of state for education Hajia Aishatu Dukku recently said of the ways to enhance womens education is the establishment of more Adult Education Centres.
- Also, government should remove unorthodox means of discriminating against women in our labour laws. For example, section 34(1) and section 44 of the Labour Act allows for an employed person recruited for service outside Nigeria to be accompanied by members of his family including up to two wives and children. Family refers to wives and children with no provision for husbands.
- Again, this act prohibits women from being employed on night work in industrial and agricultural undertaking positions, except in nursing or supervisory management positions and are not to be employed in underground manual work in mines. This provision tends to restrict employment opportunities for women as they could be seen to be “gender blind”. Women should be employed in all fields of employment, however, appropriate protection and safety measures should be provided for all workers male and female alike in terms of equipment and facilities. (Benedicta Daudu 2007).
- Government should ensure that educational facilities particularly at the tertiary level are provided with due regard to the absorptive capacity of the economy for educated manpower. The curricular content should be made more relevant to labour market demand. The economy should be diversified to create job opportunities.
- There is need for economic planners to identify industrial sub-sectors of the economy with high concentration of women and see that additional resources are invested in these particular sectors. Such a strategy would tend to perpetuate the clustering of women in low skill, low income jobs with limited promotion possibilities. The perpetuation of women workers in a few

occupational categories within a small number of industries would also make them vulnerable to technological development.

- Economic planners can also identify growth sectors and analyze the job descriptions to pinpoint those areas which require appropriate female skills. Then they should develop appropriate women's training and placement programmes.
- Also, an effective policy of rural development to embrace agricultural development, the provision of social amenities and infrastructural facilities and agro-based industries in the rural areas should be pursued with vigour for the benefit of the women who are largely left behind in the rural areas when their menfolk have migrated into the cities. These would expand modern sector job opportunities in the rural areas including the agricultural sector.
- Government should also ensure the provision of quality and quantity of education for the girl child. Also, the practice of girl child marriage and child abuse should be abolished. Adequate monitoring apparatus to ensure compliance with these policies should be put in place.
- The primary health sector policies should be reviewed to make adequate provisions for women's peculiar health requirements.
- Government should establish an agency for social securities welfare and safety nets to cater for the needs of special categories of people especially those in the vulnerable group where we have high concentration of women.
- Government should also devote more efforts to implement the provision of the affirmative action.

Employers

- Employers should promote gender friendly policies and actions to enhance women's contributions.
- There should be establishment of crèches and daycare centers for babies of female employees to stay within the vicinity of their mothers while at work.
- Employers could also make working hours flexible to accommodate women to conveniently juggle official responsibilities with other needs.
- Employers should review all policies, practices, procedures and the working environment to be gender friendly. In particular, issues to be reviewed should include
 - - recruitment and advertising procedures
 - - selection criteria

- - pre-employment testing
- - job classification and grading
- - remuneration structures
- - employment benefits
- terms and conditions of employment
- - working facilities
- - training and development
- - performance evaluation systems
- - practices relating to management systems
- - practices relating to management of HIV/AIDS in the workplace
- - promotion, transfer, demotion
- - disciplinary procedures and practices
- - patterns of dismissals, voluntary
- - terminations, and retrenchments
- - corporate culture
- - subtle forms of discrimination and stereotyping

Society

- Discrimination based on religion, tradition or custom such as the pudah system which prevents healthy and even educated women from contributing their quota to national development should be eliminated.
- Spouse and family members should encourage and maximally support women as they advance in or seek leadership positions. According to Hon. Nkiru Onyejeocha, “most of our women are not getting to the peak of their political career because of the lack of support from their husbands, so, men should please trust in their wives”. This notion cannot be disputed as nature has structured marital relationship in a way that it is the men that determine both the Productive and Reproductive lives of women.
- - Women in positions of leadership should also encourage others to aim high
- **Unions**
- “According to the ILO ***“Unions are still not ‘women-friendly and the inclusion of gender perspectives in all trade union policies and programmes far from being achieved”***”

- ***“Unions can – and must – take up the challenge of transforming the labour market through equality and justice. While it is true that women have been swelling the ranks of the unions, more action is required to ensure their access to union leadership positions. Much remains to be done to organize them, in particular those belonging to vulnerable groups (e.g the informal sector and atypical work) and young women”.***
- From the above and looking at the emerging employment trend in Nigeria, it is apparent that unions need to seriously improve on their organizing capacities to allow for a very large percentage of women, presently not organized, contribute immensely to their unions’ growth.
 - Unions should also facilitate more regularly gender – biased educational programmes to build and enhance the capacity of female members.
 - - Unions activities should be timed and structured in a way that will provide opportunities for women to conveniently juggle their domestic responsibilities, official demands and unions requirements.
- The quantity of female representation at the National Delegates Conference, the National Executive Council (NEC), the Central Working Committee (CWC) and the National Administrative Council (NAC) of unions needs to be improved upon to reflect the provision of the affirmative action and to give women their much earned voice in their union activities. The number needed should be made explicit and adhered to.
- - Unions should make budgetary allocations for running of women commission and units.
- Unions should prioritize gender issues in their Collective Bargaining with employers and employ gender officers at all levels of union activities.
- In conclusion, the aforementioned suggestions are not mutually exclusive and need to be pursued simultaneously. Furthermore, there is need for mutual respect, co-operation and understanding amongst all the stakeholders in employment situation. This will involve coming to grips with the need for attitudinal change by both men and women and will require a broad, comprehensive and innovative approach. Thus, the general aim of enhancing women’s roles to National and Union development will need maximum utilization of direct legislation by the state, the formation of collective social mechanism with a lot of flexibility and innovation as well as reliance and enhancement of the mutual support of family structures.
- ***Thank you for your attention***