

Institutionalizing Women Empowerment in Nigeria: The Contributions of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs to Sustainable Development

by Adebola Esther Osegboun

Abstract: Women empowerment is an indicator of social change and an important goal in achieving sustainable development worldwide (United Nations n.d.). Historically and across nations until today, men have had greater access to power and resources and more socio-politico-economic opportunities. In Nigeria, the plights of women are becoming more appalling as men are properly positioned to benefit and advance professionally and socially. Women in Nigeria need to be empowered because their contributions to national development is far too significant to be ignored. While literature abounds on women empowerment in Nigeria, there is a dearth of research on the contributions of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) to women empowerment. It is against this background that this article examines the contributions of the FMWASD to sustainable development in Nigeria through its various women empowerment efforts from 2011-2021. This work is expected to contribute to the efforts to raise public and government attention to the need to foster women's agency and for the government to be able to deliver on its mandate.

Keywords: women empowerment; empowerment theory; sustainable development; Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Development; Nigeria

Résumé : L'autonomisation des femmes est un indicateur de changement social et un objectif important pour atteindre le développement durable dans le monde entier (Nations unies, s. d.). De manière historique et jusqu'à aujourd'hui, dans tous les pays, les hommes ont eu un meilleur accès au pouvoir et aux ressources et ont bénéficié de davantage de possibilités socio-politico-économiques. Au Nigeria, le sort des femmes devient de plus en plus épouvantable, car les hommes sont bien placés pour en tirer profit et progresser sur le plan professionnel et social. Les femmes du Nigeria doivent être autonomisées, car leur contribution au développement national est bien trop importante pour être ignorée. La documentation sur l'autonomisation des femmes au Nigeria est abondante, mais il y a peu de recherches sur les contributions du ministère fédéral de la Condition féminine et du Développement social (FMWASD) à cette autonomisation. C'est dans ce contexte que cet article analyse comment le FMWASD a contribué au développement durable au Nigeria, par ses efforts en faveur de l'autonomisation des femmes entre 2011 et 2021. Ce travail devrait contribuer aux efforts visant à attirer l'attention du public et du gouvernement sur l'importance de renforcer l'autonomie des femmes et de permettre au gouvernement de s'acquitter de son mandat.

Mots clés : autonomisation des femmes; théorie de l'autonomisation; développement durable; ministère fédéral de la Condition féminine et du Développement; Nigeria

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Introduction

Popular thinking in Nigeria contends that women belong to the disadvantaged group in society when compared to their male counterparts, mainly because they are often not treated equally to men. Men possess a stronger ability to utilize force, exert control over resources, have less societal obligations to fulfill, and benefit from positive cultural

ideology compared to women (Huis et al. 2017). The woman is disadvantaged in many areas of life and is seen as one who should be focused on unpaid care work in the home, such as childbearing, cooking, cleaning, as well as taking care of the children, elderly, or physically challenged. According to the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development, women, globally, carry out 76% of the total amount of this work which is a key dimension of gender inequality and a major constraint to women empowerment (OECD 2019). While this is a global problem, it is particularly worrisome in developing African countries. Despite evidence that empowering women can benefit the society at large, women's empowerment particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa has been far too slow and will require concerted effort to achieve (African Union 2020).

In Nigeria, the plight of women is worsening because men are properly positioned to gain maximum benefit from social opportunities, government facilities, and infrastructure (Adeleke 2004). While Nigeria does not have an explicit policy of gender discrimination, certain detrimental traditions, customs, and beliefs regarding women impede their advancement and active involvement in national matters (Ovute, Dibia, and Obasi 2015). Women's marginalization has elicited different policy interventions at the national, regional, and global levels over the years. The United Nations General Assembly, African Union, and national governments have adopted a number of treaties, conventions, and policies aimed at promoting human rights and the advancement of women. Some of these include the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), and the African Charter's Women's Rights Protocol, National Gender Policy, and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), among others (Ntiwunka 2013). In September 2015, world leaders adopted Agenda 2030 and its new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations to replace the MDGs, which ran their course at the end of 2015. A major milestone is the inclusion of a stand-alone global goal, SDG 5, dedicated to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls (Rorsche 2015).

Nigeria has ratified all the UN Conventions on women, with the aim of eliminating all types of discrimination, particularly those based on gender, as well as violence against women (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs 2006). To demonstrate its commitment towards this goal, Nigeria in 1998 designed a national policy on women to protect women against all forms of discrimination (Nwagbara and Ering 2007). In 2006, a national gender policy was made to replace the national policy on women, and, to implement these agreements and policies, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) has been charged with the overall responsibility for this goal.

Literature on women empowerment in Nigeria (Ntiwunka 2013; Lawal, Ayoade, and Taiwo 2016; Dibia, Sam-Okere, and Dibia 2018; Jooji 2021) is plentiful. However, the specific contributions of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) to addressing issues relating to women empowerment as well as the budgetary allocation to the ministry are yet to receive adequate scholarly attention. This is a gap that my work seeks to fill. The main objective of my work is to examine the contributions of the FMWASD to sustainable development, particularly through its various empowerment projects between 2011 and 2021. In order to achieve this objective, this article is divided into seven sections. Following this introduction, the second section focuses on the paper's conceptual clarification and theoretical framework. The third section explores the socio-economic and political conditions of women in Nigeria. The fourth section presents the budgetary allocations of the FMWASD. The fifth section examines the various empowerment projects by the ministry from 2011-2021. The sixth section highlights the problems associated with women empowerment in Nigeria. The last section is the conclusion of the paper which states that, despite ongoing efforts of the FMWASD, the ministry's limited resources and poor outreach, as well as lack of political will, hinder Nigeria's progress toward gender equality and the achievement of SDG 5.

Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Framework

Here, I explain the concepts that are central to the study: empowerment, women empowerment, and sustainable development. I also explore the theory driving this research effort, which is the empowerment theory.

Empowerment

The term empowerment has been defined and expressed in several ways by different scholars. Wallerstein (1992) explained empowerment as a process in which people acquire social, economic, and political power to liberate themselves from injustices in society. Empowerment refers to the process of granting individuals or groups the ability to effectively utilize their personal or collective power, authority, and influence when interacting with others, institutions, or society as a whole (Dibie 2018). Taking a look at these explanations, one can say empowerment has to do with gaining power (in all areas), building capacities and capabilities of clearly disadvantaged people or groups to be able to do what ordinarily they could not have done of their own accord. Put differently, Gajanayake (1993) noted that empowerment involves supporting individuals to comprehend their situation's reality, analyzing the factors influencing it, and, crucially, taking action to enhance it. Similarly, Page and Czuba (1999) describe empowerment as a complex social process that enables individuals to take charge of their lives. These two positions see empowerment as a thing of the people, by the people, and for the people. That is, a person or people empowered must first be aware of their situation (consciousness), be ready to improve such situation, and must be involved in the process or policies to effect such changes. It is their lives after all.

Kapitsa (2008) states that empowerment consists of two interconnected components: resources (which can be both tangible and intangible) and agency. Tangible resources refer to assets that have a physical form and can be measured in terms of their financial or material value. Examples include money, property, and equipment. On the other hand, intangible resources are non-physical assets that cannot be easily quantified. These include knowledge, skills, abilities, and involvement in political and social endeavours. Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to establish their own goals and objectives and successfully accomplish them. Clearly, without resources, there cannot be empowerment, and without an agency such empowerment policies and projects cannot be duly pursued and achieved. In sum, every person that has hitherto been discriminated against based on disability, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and/or economic status needs to be empowered to attain equity.

Women Empowerment

The concept of women's empowerment emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a radical approach aimed at changing power dynamics in order to promote women's rights and achieve more gender equality (Batliwala 2007). Women empowerment has become one of the central themes in global treaties, covenants, conventions, and declarations. The thinking is that it is

a catalyst to clear-cut development strategies which is targeted at poverty reduction, improved living standards, good governance and profitably productive investments that are critical to the creation of an enlarged capacity that provide men and women equal opportunity and unrestrained access to decision-making and policy implementation institutions and processes. (Mahmud 2019, 350)

Women's empowerment refers to the process by which women gain the capacity to make important life decisions in a situation where they were previously denied this capacity. It is built upon three interconnected elements: resources, agency, and achievements (Kabeer 1999). According to Lasiele (1999), women empowerment refers to the provision of sufficient possibilities for women to enhance their abilities and make contributions to the development of their country and the globe. Fadeyiye and Olanega (2001) see women empowerment as the process of facilitating women to cultivate the ability to realize their full potential. Okemakinde (2014) asserts that women empowerment serves as an effective means to enhance women's competencies, their authority over resources, and their influence in making decisions that impact their lives. It entails the process of enhancing the position of women by promoting literacy, edu-

cation, training, entrepreneurship, and increasing awareness (Alvarez 2013). The primary objective of women empowerment is to achieve a balanced allocation of power between genders, ensuring that both men and women have equal opportunity for economic, social, legal, and political advancement (Sohail 2014).

Sustainable Development

The notion of sustainable development arises from an increasing recognition of the interconnectedness of global environmental challenges, socio-economic disparities related to poverty and inequality, and apprehensions over the well-being of future generations (Hopwood, Mellor, and O'Brien 2005). The concept originated from the publication of *Our Common Future* by the Brundtland Commission in 1987. This publication presents the widely referenced definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the current generations without compromising the needs of future generations" (United Nations 1987, 11). It emphasizes that sustainable development must encompass the pillars of social, environmental, and economic sustainability. Sustainable development is often considered as varied interaction between social, economic, and ecological dimensions of development (Lawal, Ayoade, and Taiwo 2016). The major goal of sustainable development is to achieve reasonable and equitably distributed economic well-being that can be perpetuated continually for many human generations. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. These goals and targets became effective on January 1, 2016, and are applicable to all countries. The text introduces two fundamental ideas: the notion of "needs," specifically the crucial needs of impoverished populations, which should be prioritized above all else; and the concept of limitations imposed by the current state of technology and social structure on the environment's capacity to fulfill both current and future needs (UN World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).

Theoretical Framework

Several theories have been adopted to explain women's empowerment. However, this study adopts empowerment theory as a framework for explaining women empowerment for sustainable development in Nigeria. Empowerment theory grew out of the social and self-help movements of the 1960s and 1970s and later gained prominence around the 1980s and 1990s in the discourse of political science, social psychology, feminism, and development studies as an alternative theory of development. The proponents of this theory include Rappaport (1985), Friedman (1992), Zimmerman (1995), and Rocha (1997) among others. Empowerment theory connects individual well-being with the larger social and political empowerment and suggests that people need opportunities to become active in community decision making in order to improve their lives, organizations, and communities (Zimmerman 2000). Friedman (1992) argues that empowerment must not only lead to a clear improvement in the conditions of life and livelihood of ordinary people but must bring about the rectification of existing imbalances in social, economic, and political power.

Different levels of analysis of empowerment have been identified by proponents of this school of thought. Rocha (1997) for instance came up with five types of empowerment: political empowerment, social-political empowerment, mediated empowerment, embedded individual empowerment, atomistic individual empowerment. Rowland (1997) identified three dimensions of empowerment namely, personal empowerment, relational empowerment, and collective empowerment. Zimmerman (2000) also gave three levels of empowerment viz, individual empowerment, organizational empowerment, and community empowerment. These scholars disagree, however, on which type of empowerment should come first. While Zimmerman emphasizes the individual level, he explicitly states that this focus does not imply it is more important than the other levels. Friedman emphasizes community empowerment rather than individual empowerment. Rocha (1997) suggests movement from individual empowerment to community empowerment. Irrespective of these differences in empowerment levels, the central theme is that empowerment involves processes, and the outcome of such processes results in a level of being empowered. Empowerment is context and population specific and, as such, no single standard can fully capture empowerment for all people in all contexts (Rappaport 1985; Zimmerman 1995). This is where the strength of the theory lies as it recognizes the complex interaction

between multiple agents like poor citizens, grassroot organizations, non-governmental organizations, the state, and international agencies.

The theory has most often been applied to women and has addressed two types of needs namely, practical and strategic needs. The practical needs include food, clothing, shelter, health care, etc., while the strategic needs include structural transformation of the society to remove women from their subordinate social position. As Moser rightly argued, the empowerment policy approach seeks to reach strategic gender needs indirectly through practical gender needs (Moser 1993). The FMWASD budget from 2011-2021 has continued to cater more for the practical empowerment needs of women in Nigeria with the hope of reaching that strategic needs of women in the country.

Socio-economic and Political Conditions of Women and Girls in Nigeria

The socio-economic conditions of women and girls in Nigeria is worsened by various factors including variations in educational opportunities, child labour, disparities in employment opportunities, and unequal decision-making capacities in personal and family matters and in public affairs (World Bank 2022). Based on data extracted from the World Bank's (2022) dataset, World Development Indicators (WDI), Nigeria as of 2021 has 104,250,709 females, which constituted 49.3 per cent of the country's total population. In terms educational opportunities, compared to about 71.3 per cent for males, 52.7 of the female population age 15 and above are literate in Nigeria. Although this represents a considerable increase in the female literacy rate from 2003 (43.3 per cent), the gender-gap remains significant. In 2019, 31 per cent of young women were neither engaged in education, employment, nor training. It is important to note that the prospect of female education in Nigeria has been significantly undermined by culture and traditions, poverty, inadequate public advocacy and investment, and insecurity. Recently, targeted attacks against girls and associated education institutions have become a political agenda, campaign strategy, and economic tactic for terrorist, insurgent, and bandit groups in Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country.

Child labour is another dark side of women's affairs in Nigeria, as many underage women and girls struggle to survive and/or support their families through street hawking, agricultural labour, domestic work (house helps) etc. The World Bank (2022) showed that working female children between ages seven and 14, declined from 41.1 per cent in 2007 to 18.7 per cent in 2010, and then rose to 36 per cent in 2011. More alarming, female children have been increasingly exploited in the underworld by baby factories, bandits, terrorists, insurgents, traffickers, and ritualists that have engaged many kidnapped young girls and women as sex slaves and objects of sacrifice, as well as rebel spies, domestic servants, fighters, suicide bombers, and human shields against counterinsurgency forces (Oyewole 2016).

Female unemployment in Nigeria rose from about four per cent to nine per cent in the last two decades. Accordingly, female education tends to be less appreciated in labour market, considering that 21 and 16 per cent of those with advanced and intermediate educations respectively are unemployed, while only 9 per cent of those with basic education are unemployed in 2019. Meanwhile, the percentage of firms with female participation in ownership declined from 20 to 16 between 2007 and 2014. The female share of employment as senior and middle management was about 31 per cent in 2019, while firms with female top manager were only 14 per cent in 2014 (World Bank 2022). These figures, among others, reflect the limited economic capacities of most Nigerian women, with significant implications for decision-making capabilities in personal and family affairs as well as in public spaces.

The education and economic conditions of Nigerian women and girls provide considerable indicators of the health and lifestyle of the population. Female life expectancy at birth remains low, even as it rose from 47 to 56 years between 2001 and 2020. Seventeen per cent of annual female mortality between ages 30 and 70 is caused by cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, or chronic respiratory disease in Nigeria (World Bank 2022).

The percentage of women between ages 15 and 49 that are participating in decisions regarding their own health care, major household purchases, and visiting family rose from 14 to 34 per cent between 2003 and 2018. The percentage of women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife also declined significantly from 64 to 28 between

2003 and 2018. Equally, female-headed households rose slightly from 17 per cent in 2003 to 18 per cent in 2018. Yet, women's representation in politics and public policy remain low. Between 2000 and 2021, women held only three to seven per cent of the seats in national parliaments (World Bank 2022). Similarly, women candidates ran in only about six per cent of all the governorship races across the 36 states in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019, and none won.

The above analysis reveals that, despite constituting almost half of Nigeria's population, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions, underserved in education, face unequal access to employment opportunities, and are disproportionately affected by poverty and violence. Evidence shows that empowering women is one of the most effective ways to accelerate economic growth, improve social outcomes, and achieve sustainable development. It is against this background that different policy initiatives aimed toward women empowerment cannot be ignored or underestimated in Nigeria's quest for sustainable development.

Budgetary Allocation of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD)

FMWASD was created as a response to the United Nations agreement to establish institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and associated matters. The ministry started out as a National Women Commission in 1989, which was an initiative of the wife of the then Head of State, Mrs. Maryam Babangida. However, in 1995, the National Women Commission was upgraded to a full-fledged Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, which meant that the country had achieved one of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. The ministry has the mandate of advising the government on gender- and children-related issues as well as issues pertaining to persons with disabilities and the elderly (UN Women 2016). In addition, the ministry has within it an agency called the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD), which has a mandate for gender training and capacity building, research, and documentation as well as addressing other relevant concerns of Nigerian Women.

The ministry has received considerable budgetary allocation in every fiscal year to pursue its objectives. However, the question that begs for answers is whether the ministry has the prerequisite institutional identity and resource base to pursue its gender mainstreaming objectives. On the average, the FMWASD budget represents 0.07% of the national budget. This marginal allocation reflects the level of government's commitment to gender-focused programs and services in Nigeria's national development agenda. Given the ministry's role in addressing systemic gender inequities, and the fact that women make up to half of the country's population, these figures are strikingly inadequate. This budget reflects the government's tokenistic approach to addressing women's issues. Women empowerment requires adequate funding, yet the FMWASD lacks sufficient resources to lead this effort within the government. Also, the budget of the ministry has experienced notable fluctuations over the years. For instance, between 2015 and 2017, the ministry's budget saw a decline. However, in 2018, the budget allocation more than doubled, offering a significant boost to the ministry's capability for implementing programs. This progress was short-lived, as the allocation was reduced again in 2019. In 2020 and 2021, the ministry's budget saw a substantial increase, marking the highest allocation within the decade, and invariably an increase in its capital expenditure. For instance, the ministry's capital expenditure doubled in 2021. Nonetheless, these trends show the lack of substantial investment in the ministry and the critical need for consistent and predictable funding to ensure long-term impact.

Table 1: Total Budget of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2011-2021

| Year | Total National Budget (₦) | Total Ministry Budget (₦) | Total Budget of the NCWD (₦) |
|------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2011 | 4,226,191,559,259 | 2,810,641,366 | 325,800,791 |
| 2012 | 4,749,100,821,170 | 4,184,514,997 | |
| 2013 | 4,987,220,425,601 | 4,624,437,917 | 834,376,390 |
| 2014 | 4,695,190,000,000 | 4,530,575,191 | 746,909,804 |
| 2015 | 4,493,363,957,158 | 3,093,073,863 | 1,121,004,836 |
| 2016 | 6,060,677,358,227 | 3,555,252,814 | 916,014,073 |
| 2017 | 7,441,175,486,758 | 3,629,888,264 | 2,087,377,937 |
| 2018 | 9,120,334,988,225 | 7,409,748,628 | 2,295,800,779 |
| 2019 | 8,916,964,099,373 | 5,566,696,400 | 2,255,515,443 |
| 2020 | 10,594,362,364,830 | 8,193,235,758 | 3,123,577,696 |
| 2021 | 13,082,420,568,233 | 12,919,466,492 | 5,627,382,287 |

Source: Compiled by the author with data extracted from Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bill (2011-2021)

Another notable trend in this budget is the consistent drop in the ministry's allocation during election years, specifically in 2011, 2015, and 2019. Although the data in Table 1 does not include allocations for years prior to 2011, the significant declines observed in 2015 and 2019 strongly support this pattern. The implication of this is that the ministry is unable to sustain some of its major projects during election years.

The ministry is one of the least-funded ministries in the federation, partly because it is not considered on par with other departments such as the ministry of defence, ministry of police affairs, ministry of interior, ministry of health, and ministry of education, among others. The priority sectors in the national budget over the years have been defence and security, education, health, infrastructure, and social investment. While these areas are important, women are unlikely to benefit maximally from these sectors because these sectors are not subject to a gender-based analysis. In

terms of resources, it appears that the FMWASD needs to be empowered as an institution in order to deliver on its mandate. The women ministry's budget should be prioritized if the government is really serious about empowering women and attaining gender equality.

Women Empowerment Programs by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

The empowerment programs elucidated here are from the FMWASD projects as found in the Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bill during the period under study. From my study, I discovered that the ministry, over the years, has had quite a number of commitments including advocacy and sensitization programmes, support for women-focused NGOs, girl-child education, economic empowerment, establishment of skill-acquisition centres, agriculture, supports for women and girls with disabilities, technology and innovation, and women's political empowerment, among others.

Economically, the ministry has implemented economic empowerment projects that either take the form of training/skill acquisition and distribution of materials/equipment to women. From 2013-2015, the ministry implemented a nationwide project to support women cooperatives under the initiative called the Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE) and a women small- medium-scale entrepreneurs support programme under the Business Development Fund for Women (BuDFoW). Also, in 2017, empowerment materials/equipment were provided for women and youth in 23 states of the federation. This project was continued in 2018 and 2019 with 26 and 10 states respectively as beneficiaries. Another major empowerment project by the ministry was the cooking gas projects advocacy and community mobilization of women in the 774 local government areas in Nigeria in 2020 and 2021. Through this cooking gas project, 331,000 cylinders with burners (6kg) were procured in 2021 for distribution to women in 15 states of the federation. There were also some empowerment projects targeted at specific local government areas and senatorial districts, which involved the distribution of sewing accessories in places like Anambra central senatorial district (2020), Ndokwa/Ukwuani federal constituency, Delta state (2020), Aguata, Anambra state (2018) etc. The ministry also empowered women in the agricultural sector by training them and providing farming tools and machines. Some of the major agricultural projects were a cassava processing integrated industry for women in Ado/Otta LGA, Ogun state in 2013; a rice-milling factory for women in Yewa North, Ogun state in 2013 and 2014; and a palm oil-processing cottage industry for women in Ipokia local government, Ogun state in 2013 and 2015. One major shortfall of these empowerment projects is that they do not have a wider reach. They also lack continuity and inclusiveness. Moreover, the rationale for picking some of these states or local government for empowerment projects is not clear.

The ministry also provided technical and financial support to women non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women cooperatives in order to boost their economic standing in the country. For instance, in 2011, 2013 and 2014, the ministry provided grants to women-focused NGOs across the federation. In addition to these, the ministry has established and continues to fund skill-acquisition centres across the federation. The ministry has responded to the issue of Chibok girls (who were kidnapped by Boko Haram in 2014 from their school in Chibok, Borno State) which sparked global outrage and the #BringBackOurGirls (BBOG) movement. It sponsored a specialized education programme for the rescued Chibok girls in 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2021 costing over a billion naira (Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bill (2017-2021)). The ministry has also implemented initiatives to increase girls' enrollment and retention in schools by sponsoring programs on girl-child education. The campaign against gender-based violence appeared 11 times covering years 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020 and 2021. The ministry is also committed to the provision of quality and affordable information, commodities, and sexual and reproductive health services to women and girls with disabilities.

Table 2: Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development Empowerment Projects, 2011-2021

| Project Name | Number of Project |
|---|-------------------|
| Advocacy & Sensitization | 30 |
| Women NGOs | 13 |
| Vulnerable Groups | 32 |
| Education | 33 |
| Economic Empowerment (Training & Materials) | 80 |
| Legislation/Policies | 21 |
| Women Cooperatives | 4 |
| Centres(Skill acquisition, children resource, rehabilitation, women development, etc) | 75 |
| Women Political participation | 5 |
| Agriculture | 14 |
| Girl-Child Education | 5 |
| Council on Women Affairs | 8 |
| Conventions/Conferences | 17 |
| Chibok Girls | 4 |
| Women Shelter | 2 |

Source: Data extracted from Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bills (2011-2021)

Politically, the ministry has organized several advocacy projects on gender equality. A major achievement of the ministry is championing the National Gender Policy, which aims to eliminate gender discrimination and promote equality in all sectors of society. Also, the ministry organized nationwide advocacy and sensitization activities to promote the livelihood of women and children in 2018, 2019 and 2020. Notably, the ministry has had five major projects on women's political participation. It has also continued to pursue and review substantive legislation and policies that affect women in Nigeria. In addition, it has continued to pull its weight behind international convention related to women and has sponsored women focused conferences, such as the national conference on women and political participation in Nigeria in 2019.

The above analysis shows that the FMWASD understands its mandate and wants to promote as many empowerment projects as possible. However, the frequency and consistency of these projects over the span of 11 years remain insufficient. Many initiatives were one-time interventions, lacking the continuity for widespread impact and inclusion. This inadequacy cannot be separated from the financial constraints highlighted in the previous section. The next section will focus on the challenges facing the ministry.

Problems Associated with the Institutionalization of Women Empowerment in Nigeria

The FMWASD undoubtedly has made some progress on its mandate of promoting gender equality and the attainment of sustainable development through women empowerment projects at various levels. However, the ministry has been faced with some constraints that has continued to limit its activities, one of which is lack of adequate budgetary provision. Women constitute almost half of the country's population, hence proper revenue should be allocated to the ministry that cater to this group of people. These financial constraints indicate the lack of political will to prioritize resources for gender-specific issues. As presented in Table 1, the FMWASD's budgetary allocation on the average represents 0.07% of the national budget. Moreover, the ministry's budget, if pitched against the population of women on a yearly basis, will show how insignificant the contribution of the ministry is to sustainable development. That is why women are still socially, economically, and politically marginalised in Nigeria. Taking a close look at the expenses of the ministry on women empowerment between 2011-2016, there were only two major nationwide economic empowerment projects: Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE) and Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW), while other projects/programs were implemented at specific locations.

Another challenge is the issue of inclusion. Noticeable in these empowerment projects is the insufficient inclusion of states such as Yobe and Bayelsa. The implication is that many women want to be empowered but, sadly, they don't have access to many of these programmes. As a matter of fact, a lot of women across the country are not aware of these programmes and therefore not benefit from them. This raises a question of whether the ministry has lived up to its mandate.

Lastly, most of the empowerment projects of the ministry revolved around meeting the practical needs of women, such as the distribution of sewing and grinding machines, hairdressing salon kits and equipment, motorcycles, empowerment materials, popcorn machines, ice block machines, cooking gases, etc. While these are worthy and needed projects, considering the level of poverty among women in the country, the approach is usually short-term and does not integrate women into all facets of national life. The cooking gas project, as a case in point, can improve the livelihood of women. However, what happens when the recipients cannot afford to buy Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) to put these cooking gases to good use? They will likely go back to the use of charcoal and wood. This shows the importance of more sustainable, long-term empowerment strategies to address structural economic barriers among women.

Conclusion

The FMWASD has continued to work towards its vision and mission in various capacities, through economic empowerment, political empowerment, advocacy and sensitization, grants to women-focused NGOs, agriculture, education, etc., even though these programmes are underfunded. From 2011-2021, the ministry's budget has been consistently meagre, representing just 0.1% of the national budget. This shows lack of political will—which cannot be divorced from patriarchal norms that undermine the prioritization of resources for gender-specific issues. The empowerment programs of the ministry within the period of study also reveals that, though the ministry has many commitments, most of these programmes do not have a wide coverage and not inclusive.

The 2022 fiscal year is eight years to the expiration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and an evaluation of the current state shows that Nigeria is not on the path to meeting the SDG 5 targets. This can be confirmed by the Global Gender Gap Index report in 2022, which shows that, out of 146 countries, Nigeria ranked 50 in economic participation and opportunity for women; 134 in educational attainment; and 141 in political empowerment, leaving just Iran, Qatar, Brunei Darusalam, Kuwait and Vanuatu behind. This huge gender gap has serious implications for the attainment of sustainable development, which, halfway to the 2030 target, is unlikely to be achieved. A ministry that is meant to cater to women, who represent almost 50 per cent of the country's population, needs enough resources to have both short- and long-term impact on women empowerment. The vision and mission statements are clearly stated, but the capability of the ministry in terms of resources is low. Ironically, the institution that is meant to serve as an agent to achieving SDG 5 clearly needs empowerment.

As recommendations, the federal government needs to be more decisive in lifting Nigerian women out this miry clay called inequality, and one of the ways to do that is to invest in the women's ministry. Also, the ministry should also seek funds from international bodies that can sponsor projects on a larger scale. Additionally, the ministry should partner with state ministries of women affairs and women-focused NGOs to complement its efforts. Lastly, the ministry should promote grassroots engagement by expanding outreach to rural areas. However, beyond the role of the FMWASD, women empowerment requires collective action from every individual committed to building a just and equitable society. Women should not just be beneficiaries of empowerment programs but also become active architects of sustainable development.

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