



**CONNECTING GIRLS INSPIRING FUTURE:
THE NIGERIAN GIRL-CHILD AND HER FUTURE**

SPEECH DELIVERED

BY

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**ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2012 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY AND
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Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by acknowledging how honored and humbled I am for the unique opportunity to address this distinguished gathering on the occasion of 2012 International Women's Day. I wish to specifically express my appreciation to the following:

- a. Dr. Akin Awofolaju - President, NIDA NJ
- b. Dr. Ada Odika - COO, World Mission Foundation
- c. Prof. Stella Okerke - Founder/CEO, Daughters of Africa Foundation

My appreciation also goes to all others who contributed to the success of this event.

My first instinct was to dwell on the usual problems faced by the Girl-Child related to FGM, lack of access to education, early marriages, VVF, STD and try to proffer solutions but on close examination, I realized that the future of the Nigerian Girl-Child is encapsulated in the vision of Nigeria to be one of 20 largest economies of the world by the year 2020. This vision is being pursued through the Transformational Agenda of Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, under whose leadership Women Rights, Promotion and Empowerment has been elevated to a national priority.

2. The theme of the conference: **Connecting Girls Inspiring Future - The Nigerian Girl-Child and her Future**, will no doubt,

provide the opportunity for us to discuss the future of the Girl-Child and its relationship to the desire of Nigeria to be amongst the 20 largest Economies of the World by the year 2020. The Nigerian Girl-Child, and by extension, the Nigerian Woman, to paraphrase Benjamin Disraeli, “is the pillar on which our collective future is built”.

Definition of the Girl-Child

3. The Child Right’s Act of 2003 defines a child as a person who has not attained the age of eighteen years. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Child defined a Child to mean every human being below the age of 18 years.

4. However, in Northern Nigeria, a child means a person under the age of fourteen years while a young person means a person who has attained the age of fourteen but is under the age of seventeen years. The Immigration Act stipulates age of 16 as minor whereas the Matrimonial Cause Act puts the age of maturity at twenty-one years. Generally, a girl-child is a female child below the age of eighteen.

Legal Framework

5. The general framework within which Human Rights of the Girl-Child are protected, in Nigeria, are enshrined in the 1999 Constitution – most notably Chapter 4 which guarantee the following Rights;

- a. Right to life
- b. Right to dignity of human person
- c. Right to personal liberty
- d. Right to fair hearing

- e. Right to private and family life
- f. Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- g. Right to freedom of expression and the press
- h. Right to peaceful assembly and association
- i. Right to freedom of movement
- j. Right to freedom from discrimination
- k. Right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria.

6. In the International Arena, Nigeria has ratified the Rights of the Child on 16 April 1991. It has also ratified the following;

- a. Convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women;
- b. The Convention against torture and other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- c. The Convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination;
- d. African Union Charter on Human and Peoples Rights

Nigeria is also a party to the following;

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Nigeria's legal system is characterized by three different traditions of laws:

- English Common Laws – These set of Laws have a National Character and are applied all over the Federation;

- Northern Nigerian Penal Laws – These Laws comprised the synthesized Islamic Shari’ah Laws as applied in the 19 States of Northern Nigeria;
- The Customary Laws – These set of Laws are mostly the synthesis of the cultural laws of 17 Southern States of Nigeria and some parts of the Middle Belt of Northern Nigeria.

Institutional Policy Framework

7. In order to achieve Girl-Child protection and empowerment, The Government of Nigeria created, amongst others, the following institutions:

- National and State Child Rights Implementation Committees;
- Child Development Departments in the Federal and States Ministries of Women Affairs;
- National Council of Child Rights Advocates of Nigeria (NCCCRAN) as the umbrella NGO for Child Rights Advocacy;
- National Agency for the prohibition of Traffic in Persons;
- National Policy and Plan of Action on the Elimination of all Forms of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- National Human Rights Commission; and
- Nigerian Children’s Parliament.

8. All these institutions and many others have focused their energies to uplift the status of women. As you may be aware, all the available data on the population of Nigeria point to the fact that Women constitute well over 50% but they control less than 10% of

its resources. To quote Mrs. Zainab Maina, Minister of Women Affairs, the Nigerian Woman constitute the ***“majority of the poor; they work the longest hours; earn the lowest pay; and receive the fewest benefits. Women’s poverty level seriously affects their status in all spheres. The low status accorded to women under customary and religious laws often results in de Jure and de facto discrimination against women and girls”***

It therefore, became imperative for the Government of Nigeria to pursue policies that have since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action considerably improved the status of women and raised consciousness about women issues.

9. Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, President of Nigeria, whose campaign slogan to women in 2011 was *“give me 100% and I will give you 30%”* in compliance with the Affirmative Action Plan emboldened women from all parts of Nigeria to participate in the 2011 political process. In fulfillment of his promise, President Jonathan gave 35% of his Cabinet to women. The most powerful portfolios (comprising the Coordinating Minister for the Economy/Minister of Finance, Petroleum Resources, Education, Aviation, Women Affairs, Land and Urban Development, and Environment etc) were given to Amazons. These women are the ones pushing forward the Transformational Agenda of the President.

10. The Transformational Agenda of President Jonathan seek to correct the flaws in the country’s drive for development where there is absence of long-term planning, lack of Continuity, Consistency and

Commitment (3Cs) to agreed policies. It revolves around three major sectors of the Nigerian Economy:

- a. Power;
 - b. Agriculture; and
 - c. Economic Reform.
- **Power** – The Government has realized the central role of the provision of power to Nigeria as fulcrum on which all other developmental issues will sprout.
 - **Agriculture** – The administration is concerned with the following:
 - ❖ Fertilizer Sector Reforms
 - ❖ Reformation of Marketing Institutions
 - ❖ Financing of Agricultural Value Chain
 - **Economic Reform** - The major thrust of the Economic Reform is to provide job for the youths who constitute 70% of Nigeria’s population under the age of 30 years. Some of the most important Economic areas being reformed includes:
 - ❖ Manufacturing Sector;
 - ❖ Transport Sector;
 - ❖ Labour and Productivity – 5 Million job annually;
 - ❖ Oil and Gas Reform in both the Upstream and the Downstream. It also promote environmentally friendly oil and gas exploration and exploitation methods; and
 - ❖ Public Expenditure Management – Reform to reverse

recurrent spending out growing the capital expenditure.

In all these that Nigeria is doing, the most identifiable tool for tackling developmental challenges, poverty, unemployment, security and poor state of infrastructure is good Governance. It encourages efficient and effective use of public resources, proper financial management and fiscal prudence.

11. In consideration of the desire of Nigeria to leap-frog its development with a view to becoming one of the 20 largest economies of the World by the year 2020, the Transformational Agenda specifically developed programmes to better the life of Nigerian Women through the poverty alleviation schemes including the following:

- Youth Empowerment Schemes (YES)
- Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)
- Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS)
- Natural Resources Development and Conservation Schemes (NRDCS)
- Rural Finance Institution Building (RUFIM)
- Entrepreneurship Development Centers
- Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGSF)
- Trust Fund Model (TFM)
- Commodity Related Activities
- N200 Billion SME Credit Guarantee Scheme

(SMECGS)

- N200 Billion SME Restructuring/Refinancing Fund (RRF)
- National Microfinance Policy
- National Microfinance Development Strategy (NMDS)
- Financial Inclusion Strategy for Nigeria
- In Care of the People (COPE)
- Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Scheme (SMIEIS)
- Second National Fadama Development Project (FADAMA II)
- Rural Women Enterprises Development Programme (RUWADEP)
- Village Economic Development Solutions Programme
- Farmers' Empowerment Programme (FEP I & II)
- Women's Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE)
- Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW)
- Cropping Season for Women in Agriculture
- Cottage Industries and Skills Acquisition Programmes
- SURE Programme, Social Safety Net

12. In as much as I would like to touch on these programmes, time will not permit us but they have all been set up by the Federal, States and Local Governments with a view to achieving the following:

- a) Provision of basic necessities to hitherto neglected people particularly the Girl-Child and Women Folk;
- b) Restore Economic Independence and Confidence;
- c) Wealth Creation

Most importantly, the Transformational Agenda seek to provide immediate and urgent platform for the engagement of the youth of Nigeria who constitute 70% of its population under the age of 30 years.

13. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, from all that I have enumerated, it will be seen that the Nigerian Girl-Child and her future is very bright because Nigeria is on course for major economic transformation, especially with the foundation laid for the Optimal Utilization of its potentials.

14 The realisation of the Government of the contribution of women to the achievement of the Transformation Agenda and the gearing of policies that have been uplifting the status of women means that the once neglected segment of the society has now come into reckoning and Nigeria's eventual emergence as one of the 20 largest economies of the World by the year 2020, is assured.

Thank you for the invitation and for your attention.