

## **Towards Improved Access to Full Employment and Decent Work for Women in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Nigeria has a high incidence of poverty among women and needs to create more employment to tackle the scourge. While women increased their access to non-agricultural employment, their share of employment has remained relatively constant. This paper examines the constraints to full employment and decent work for women. Women are more affected by the contraction of formal employment and decent work, increase in non-typical work which often feature general precariousness, poor payments, and non-coverage by labour legislation or social protection. Women face several constraints in the labour market which are direct results of women's disadvantage in education; labour market mobility; relatively high involvement in part-time; concentration in employment where wages are down; and direct discrimination. Access to decent work constitutes a major cause of poverty among women. An integrated approach to growth and development, focused on gender-responsive employment promotion and economic and social development is needed.*

**Keywords:** access, decent work, full employment, women, poverty,

### **1. Introduction**

Major elements in the factors of production have been identified as man, money, land, material, time, information etc. in other words, capital, natural and human resources. Capital and natural resources are passive agents of development only human resources are the active agents capable of accumulating capital, exploiting natural resources and building political and social organizations. Human resources are the energies, skills, talents and knowledge of people, which are, or which potentially can be applied to the production of goods and the rendering of services. It connotes man in relation to the world of work and such work involves producing things and providing services of all kinds in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of nations. The wealth of a nation can be expressed in terms of the development and utilization of human energies, skills, and knowledge for useful purposes. Of all the resources a nation requires, human resources are the most important. Consequently, while other factors of production are important, human resources are more crucial to production than any other factor. It is the most widely available factor of production at the disposal of poor people around the world and the primary means of earning a livelihood.

While the percentage of women in employment has increased, there is still gender division of labour. Women are more affected by the contraction of formal employment and decent work, increase in non-typical or non-standard work most of which often feature general precariousness, poor payments, and non-coverage by labour legislation or social protection. Many women lack access to decent work and this constitutes a major cause of poverty among women. Women face several constraints in the labour market some of which include; their disproportionate concentration in vulnerable forms of work; horizontal and vertical occupational segregation; wage gaps and the unequal division of unpaid domestic work. These constraints are direct results of women's disadvantage in education; lack of organized voice and bargaining power; constraints on labour market mobility; relatively high involvement in part-time or temporary jobs; concentration in employment where pressures of global competition keep wages down; and direct discrimination.

Nigeria, officially known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria is one of the countries in West Africa. Nigeria shares land borders with the Republic of Benin in the West, Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the North. Nigeria is the most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa and is also termed the ninth most populous country in the world. According to the 2006 National Census, [5] Nigeria has a population of about 150 million. The World Development Indicators put the population growth (annual %) at 2.4 while the GNI (current US\$) is 100.7 billion.

The GNI per capita, atlas method (current US\$) is 620.00. Nigeria operates three-tiers of government namely; the Federal, State and Local governments. The country is made up of 37 States and 774 Local government areas. Nigeria, though endowed with natural and human resources still has a high the level of poverty due mainly to mismanagement of resources.

Many of the women largely live in poverty. Their personal poverty is a lot more pervading than that of the male and this threatens the very survival and health of the nation. Poverty has a woman face since 70% of people in poverty are women. This is a challenge to sustainable development. The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that involve halving extreme poverty has the target date as 2015. Supporting women to create full employment and decent work is a strategy that can be employed in achieving the MDGs on gender equality and women's empowerment and poverty reduction. Resources in the hands of women tend to yield more fruits to the development of the economy at large. When women handle resources, the result is healthier households, healthier children and economic well-being which in turn lead to eradication of poverty from the household to the federal level. In Nigeria, women have always participated in productive labour. The National Report for the 2004 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development [17] indicates that at least 40% of Agricultural production activities, and 85% of agricultural produce, processing and marketing are performed by women. The numerical strength of women in the labour market has been on the increase but their presence and impact has been very insignificant.

The importance of women's access to labour markets was recognized in Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment, with an increase in women's share of non-agricultural employment included as an indicator of progress. The recognition of the importance of improvements in the quality of paid work for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger led to the addition of "full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people" as a target for Millennium Development Goal. Decent work sums up the aspirations of people especially women in their working lives - their aspirations for opportunity and income, rights, voice and recognition, family stability and personal development, fairness and gender equality. Decent work is central to efforts to reduce poverty, and is a means for achieving equitable, inclusive and sustainable development.

### **The Objectives**

Human resource is often the only resource at the disposal of poor people to meet their basic needs. Lack of access to decent work is a major cause of poverty. The concentration of women in vulnerable forms of work, occupational gender segregation and wage gaps, and the unequal division of unpaid work, differentiate how women and men access and benefit from employment. The impact of the economic and financial crisis on employment is felt more by both women than men. This paper focuses on the access of women to full employment and decent work in Nigeria. It examines the factors that constrain women's access to full employment and decent work, limit the productivity of their labour efforts and undermine their capacity to bargain for better conditions. It also explores policy interventions to address labour market-related constraints.

### **The Significance of Work**

Cohen (2002) [3] notes that work is a defining feature of human existence. It is the means of sustaining life and of meeting basic needs. It is also the activity through which individuals affirm their own identity, both to themselves, and to those around them. It is crucial to individual choice, to the welfare of families and to the stability of societies. Beach (1985) [1] asserts that the income and the satisfaction derived from work have a direct impact on family life and the quality of family relationships. Because it is central to people's lives, work is also at the heart of politics. Work is the lens through which people judge how the economy is faring. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (2004) [14] opines that a balanced budget, structural adjustment, the ICT revolution, trade, investment and the global economy are, for many people, just abstract concepts whose real importance is gauged by their effects on the workplace, and by whether they expand opportunities for work and income.

### **Decent Work**

The International Labour Organization ILO (2009) [8] defines decent work as opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families; better prospects for personal development and social integration; freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives; and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

It addresses the reality that women and men everywhere need to earn a living for themselves and their families if they are to begin to enjoy freedom in its widest sense. ILO (2002) [6] asserts that for most people and their families and communities the main route out of poverty, and the key to reducing the risk of falling into poverty, is decent and productive work. Decent work aims at a substantial reduction in the levels of unemployment and a major improvement in the quality of jobs available to women and men. In Nigeria, the number of labour market entrants has outpaced the economy's ability to absorb them, resulting in high unemployment, underemployment and discouragement. Fapohunda (2004), [4] reports that, on a national basis, open unemployment was over 10%. Most of the unemployment is concentrated in the urban areas. As at September 2010, urban unemployment was over 20% in some states. The unemployment is not only of unskilled workers; it includes unemployment of highly skilled people including graduates of universities and of other institutions of higher learning.

Because women often lack work experience, job-searching know-how, access to the social networks that provide job information, and often do not have skills demanded in the labour market, they suffer the most. Onadeko (1998) [11] affirms that gender discrimination and cultural norms worsen the situation for young women. Young women are less likely to be employed than young men are more likely to be outside the labour force. A way to achieve full employment and decent work for the woman especially in Nigeria is, therefore, to create an enabling environment for employment-intensive programmes to help them overcome the specific disadvantages they face in entering and remaining in the labour market. The adoption of national policies and programmes to respond to the rapid and large rise in the numbers of jobseekers is aimed at ensuring that sufficient decent work opportunities are available to bring a fall in the numbers of the working poor.

### **The Goal of Decent Work**

The primary goal of full employment and decent work is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Employment promotion is a central objective of the decent work. The defense of rights at work necessarily involves the obligation to promote the possibilities of work itself. Decent work is therefore, as much concerned with the unemployed, and with policies to overcome unemployment and underemployment, as it is with the promotion of rights at work. An enabling environment for enterprise development lies at the heart of these objectives. The goal is not just the creation of jobs, but also the creation of jobs of acceptable quantity. However, the quantity of employment cannot be divorced from its quality. It could relate to different forms of work, and also to different conditions of work, as well as feelings of value and satisfaction. It also involves protection against vulnerability and contingency. The lack of decent work has been identified as the primary cause of poverty.

The ILO [10] observes that women have increased their share of employment to 40.5 per cent of those employed in 2008, from 39.9 per cent in 1998, during a period when employment has become increasingly precarious. However, a gender division of labour persists, with a number of interrelated features differentiating how women and men access and benefit from employment. These features include the disproportionate concentration of women in "vulnerable" forms of work; occupational gender segregation and wage gaps; and the unequal gender division of unpaid domestic labour. These factors help to explain the gender-specific impact of apparently gender-neutral macroeconomic change, including the immediate and longer-term implications of economic crises. Working poverty, "vulnerable" employment and unemployment have begun to increase again as the effects of the economic recession spread.

The impact of the crisis on employment is felt by both women and men, but not necessarily in the same manner. Though the concern is for all workers, attention has been paid mostly to the needs of wage workers the majority of them in formal enterprises unfortunately the majority of women are workers in the informal sector. The informal sector in Nigeria employs about 54 per cent of the female labour force. Similarly the quality of women's employment which is usually linked to the forms of employment also has a bearing on women's wellbeing. High incidence of women's participation in the informal sector, part-time work, own-account work, and non-unionised labour is established, and these activities have a high probability of being low-quality employment. Poole & Warner (2001) [12] advocate concern for workers especially women beyond the formal labour market, with unregulated waged workers, the self-employed and home workers. Sommer (2005) [13] affirms that in Africa the informal economy accounts for over 90% of new urban jobs.

### **Constraints of women in the labour market**

#### **(i) Occupational segregation**

The degree of gender segregation is a significant indicator of women's labour market choices which are influenced by both horizontal and vertical gender segregation. Horizontal segregation restricts women to specific sectors and occupations, while vertical segregation limits them to particular positions within occupational hierarchies. Horizontal segregation persists in the labour market in Nigeria and women's movement into senior managerial positions is hampered by institutional barriers, including norms and attitudes. There has been a very gradual reduction in the gender segmentation of labour markets since the 1980s. ILO (2009) [8] affirms that worldwide only a small proportion of employed women (18.3 per cent in 2008, compared with 26.6 per cent of men) work in industry. Women are increasingly found in the services sector, which in 2008 accounted for 46.3 per cent of all women's employment, compared with 41.2 per cent of men's employment. While women have continued to exit the agricultural sector, women are still overrepresented in that sector.

According to ILO [12] estimates, globally the share of women employed in agriculture stands at 35.4 per cent, as compared with 32.2 per cent for men. In sub-Saharan Africa, of which Nigeria is a country the agricultural sector makes up more than 60 per cent of all women's employment. Women constitute a larger percentage of care workers as compared to their representation in the total workforce. Today, there is a significant international migration of Nigerian women for caregiving work, as both domestic and public-sector workers, particularly to countries where the care crisis has generated a high demand for care workers. Again women and men are concentrated at different levels of the labour hierarchy. The "glass ceiling" refers to instances where women's movement into more senior and managerial positions is hampered by institutional barriers, including norms and attitudes. Even in occupations dominated by women, men often occupy the more skilled, and better paid positions. Women are in a minority of positions with authority, influence or decision-making power. They have not made major gains in skilled jobs in the "new" occupations such as those in the information technology industry. Their shares of occupations in computer programming and systems analysis have been significantly low. In information and communications technology-related businesses, such as data-entry services and call centres, women work largely in lower-level positions.

### **(ii) Gender Wage Gaps**

Gender wage gaps have to do with the differences between wages earned by women and men and serve as important indicators of access to decent work. Wage gaps reflect a number of factors, including women's continued disadvantage in terms of education and skills; their lack of an organized voice and bargaining power; gender-specific constraints on their labour market mobility; their relatively high involvement in part-time, temporary and low-income jobs; and direct discrimination. It also indicates the concentration of women workers in forms of employment where the pressures of global competition keep wages down. In some cases it reflects direct sex discrimination in remuneration. The ILO [12] estimates that globally women earn 16.5 per cent less than men. As wage workers, Nigerian women are more often in casual or piece-rate work, where they earn less than men due mostly to low levels of education. Earning gaps also affect women working in the informal economy. Because employment opportunities as wage-earning workers are often denied women as a result of family responsibilities, lack of skills, social and cultural barriers, self-employment is often the only possibility for women to get access to employment and to earn an income. In Nigeria the 2006 Census [5] reveals that 67.6 percent of employed women in the country were enumerated as sales workers while 8.4 percent were craft and production workers, all in the informal sector.

### **(iii) The Gendered Distribution of Paid and Unpaid Work**

Significant differences and inequalities exist between women and men with regard to paid and unpaid work, including the division of household responsibilities and care work. Most care work remains unpaid and continues to be classified as non-economic activity despite the important debate about the inclusion of unpaid work in national income accounts. Women's care responsibilities directly affect their choices in the labour market. Urbanization and migration have weakened the traditional family support systems, and the growth of single-headed households, have further increased the burden of care work. Women's increased participation in paid work has not been accompanied by a significant increase in men's participation in unpaid work. Men spend a longer period of their working day in market-oriented work, while women spend more time than men in cooking, cleaning and childcare. Combined market and non-market work results in longer working days for women. Part-time work offers a measure of flexibility to women with care responsibilities. Parenthood often results in women working part time where possible while men increased their hours of work. However, women working part time often face wage penalty. Also, the absence of the option of part-time work can penalize women.

In Nigeria, many poor women take up self-employment as a means of reconciling their domestic responsibilities and their need for income. This is not always a voluntary decision. Working mothers in low income neighbourhoods look after children themselves, and would not have been able to take up employment if their children had not been able to accompany them. Some are not employed due to unpaid household work. While there are a few positive examples of men's increased involvement in caregiving, cultural as well as economic barriers and traditional views of women as caregivers prevent men from taking on more active roles as fathers in family life and caregiving. Domestic work has therefore become one of the major sources of employment for women. Domestic workers are often women who work under difficult conditions sometimes facing exposure to violence and exploitation. Many domestic workers do not have formal contracts and receive no social benefits, such as health insurance or pensions. Unfortunately, the hidden nature of domestic work makes it more difficult to enforce legislation. In Nigeria, despite women's increased participation in the labour market, there has been no significant increase in the sharing of unpaid work, including caregiving, between women and men, and this affects women's employment choices. Some organizations in the country have policies on working arrangements, such as reduction of working hours, flexibility of work-time and location, and the option of part-time work to assist in reconciling work and family responsibilities. Part-time work, which is mainly taken by women however, involve a wage-penalty and long term impacts on pensions.

#### **(iv) Predominance of non-standard forms of work**

ILO (2008) [7] reports that employment expanded by about 30 per cent between the 1990s and the mid-2000s. However, the period was characterized by a contraction of formal employment and decent work (full-time, formal, regular and permanent contracts covered by labour legislation) and a proliferation of various types of "atypical" or non-standard work in both developed and developing countries Nigeria inclusive. The bulk of new employment in recent years, in Nigeria, has been in the informal economy. Such forms of work are generally precarious and poorly paid, with few benefits and not covered by labour legislation or social protection. Charms (2009) [2] affirms that recent estimates suggest that informal work now accounts for more than 70 per cent of total non-agricultural employment in sub-Saharan Africa. Several factors are responsible for the rise of non-standard or atypical work. The downsizing of the public sector and privatization of state-owned enterprises are contributory factors, as retrenched public-sector employees often turn to the informal sector for a living. Another factor is the failure of current growth strategies to generate formal employment for all. The rise of informal working arrangements also reflects the deregulation of labour markets as part of the process of economic liberalization. Employers are able to hire labour on increasingly less secure contracts and outsource activities to workers located in unregistered enterprises or in homes.

The search for flexible labour arrangements in an increasingly competitive global environment has led multinational firms to locate different stages of or entire production processes in different parts of the world in order to take advantage of differences in wage costs, factor endowments or congenial investment climates. Owing to these trends, there have been changes in the distribution of income away from labour in favour of capital. ILO (2008) [7] adds that the share of wages in total income declined between the early 1990s and the mid-2000s and during the same period, the income gap between the top and bottom 10 per cent of wage earners increased. The decrease in the proportion of unionized labour has reinforced these trends. Access to labour markets and to decent work remains particularly limited for women in Nigeria. Women are disproportionately represented in informal work and concentrated among lower-quality jobs within self-employment. ILO (2009) [8] indicates that at the global level, the share of vulnerable employment in total female employment was 58.7 per cent in 2007, as compared with 41.1 per cent for men.

The report adds that Sub-Saharan Africa has not only a relatively high share of vulnerable employment in total employment, but also a relatively large gender gap in vulnerable employment shares exceeding 10 percentage points. Women in informal work have no access to social security or protection, and have limited potential to organize to ensure the enforcement of international labour standards and human rights. Where employers draw on a labour force that has very few alternatives, they are able to pay exploitative wages. Concerns have been raised about the exploitation of women workers in areas including low wages, intimidation of workers trying to organize themselves, violence and sexual harassment. Contraction of formal employment and decent work has occurred in Nigeria as a result of deregulation of markets, downsizing the public sector, privatization and changes in distribution of income away from labour to capital. The relative risk of poverty is higher for informal than formal employment and for agricultural relative to non-agricultural activities.

In addition, employment in informal activities of the kind in which women in Nigeria are concentrated - own-account workers and unpaid workers in family enterprises - is associated with higher-than-average levels of household poverty than the forms of wage employment in which men are concentrated.

**(v) Domestic workers and violence against women**

Domestic workers majority of whom are women and girls rarely have access to legal protection, assistance and redress for violence committed against them in the course of their work even though it is clear that such violence is unacceptable and a human rights violation. The capacity of women workers to articulate their priorities and needs and demand their rights is often undermined by their vulnerable position in the labour market.

**Increasing Women's Access to economic opportunities in the labour market**

The focus should be on developing women's human capital and capabilities and investing in their ability to adapt to changing labour markets; providing support for their care responsibilities; establishing gender-sensitive labour market regulations; and enhancing their voice and capacity for collective action. No single policy intervention will address the full range of constraints face by women because the women are located in many different sectors of the economy with different occupational status.

**(i) Education and Human Capital Formation.**

Education promotes both gender equality and empowerment of women as well as broader development goals. The Millennium Development Goal 3 highlights the need to close the gender gap in primary and secondary education, and some progress has been achieved in Nigeria. The knowledge and skills gained through education expand the range of employment opportunities. An extra year of schooling can increase women's wages. More Nigerian women are now returning to schooling. Discrimination against women and girls in educational opportunities is a factor underlying gender segregation in the labour market in the country. To achieve gender parity in education measures must be put in place to increase girls' participation in education, including through incentives for families, for example fee exemption and financial support through small stipends or scholarships for girls especially those from the rural areas. To serve as an incentive to ensure the success of the operation, school funding can be linked to the level of participation of girls.

The introduction of quota can be aid in increasing the participation of women in corporate decision-making. Gender-balance requirements can be made compulsory for all organisations. Addressing the constraints in the labour market requires the development of women's capabilities to adapt to changing markets. For instance the average share of women in scientific tertiary studies is still significantly low. Girls must be encouraged to study non-traditional subjects. Gender-sensitive curricula have been emphasized as a way of promoting interest in science among girls. Investments in education need to also address the human capital and capability deficits of the current generation of working women. Poor women who missed out on the expansion of educational opportunities may find themselves unemployed, or trapped in jobs with few promotion opportunities because of their lack of education and skills. The International Organization for Migration IOM (2008) [9] suggests that increased education and training for women can increase their opportunities for migration under skilled migration schemes. Skills development should also address deskilling and skill erosion among women. Different approaches, such as non-formal education, technical and vocational training, agricultural extension services, workplace training, lifelong learning and training in new technologies, can be employed to assist women in searching for better jobs. Bearing in mind the rapidly changing technologies and market conditions, workers especially women need skills that allow them to take advantage of new opportunities.

There should be opportunities for continuous learning for both waged and self-employed workers to upgrade their competencies and learn new skills throughout their lives. Women need inputs to improve their self-confidence, awareness of their rights and negotiating skills. Where programmes are available for women, they tend to be restricted to subjects traditionally perceived as women oriented, such as home economics, secretarial studies, tailoring, hairdressing and beauty care. Where such training results in employment opportunities, it is usually in jobs which are poorly paid. Even where courses include information and communications technology training, women tend to be relegated to word-processing; while men dominate software development. Access to new skills through vocational training helps to address some of the barriers women face in the labour market. While increasing numbers of women are finding jobs in non-traditional occupations many had to start their own businesses in areas such as woodwork, repairs of small appliances and manufacturing, because of the prejudice they faced from prospective employers. Formal training increases career options but there are still barriers to women's entry into those jobs.

**(ii) Redistributing unpaid work**

The redistribution of the burden of unpaid work between women and men needs the transformation of both individual attitudes and behaviours and institutional arrangements, especially in the labour market. The level of involvement of all stakeholders must be increased since greater sharing of responsibilities between women and men will not adequately address the persistent challenges of caregiving. To combat the inequalities in unpaid work, public provision of services and labour-saving technologies and infrastructure is important. Private sector and community groups must also support the provision of services and infrastructure. In addition there is the need for redistribution of the burden of unpaid work between women and men. Investments in public infrastructures like water, transportation and energy significantly reduce domestic work, including caregiving within households. Technological advances such as running water or electrical appliances further reduce time and energy burdens. Therefore access of poor households to infrastructure and technologies must be increased. To facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life there is need for investment in educational services as well as reliable and affordable provision of care facilities and services especially for children, the sick and older persons. This can be in form of day care centres, preschools and kindergartens. Private sector and NGOs have become active providers in this regard.

**(iii) Regulatory frameworks**

To eliminate gender inequalities and discrimination and ensure access to full employment and decent work; gender-specific and gender-neutral regulations are needed. However, both of them can be instrumental or have unintended detrimental impacts. Some gender-specific forms of legislation intended to protect such as the ban on women's night work have sometimes put restrictions on women's employment options. Laws intended to protect women workers, also risk limiting their mobility and access to employment. Other gender-specific regulations that seek to address constraints on women's employment may jeopardize women's employment chances if they entail costs, particularly if such costs fall on private employers. Sharing the costs of desirable gender-specific provisions between employers, employees and government would simultaneously reduce gender-based discrimination and dampen negative wage effects. Some seemingly gender-neutral regulations can have important benefits for women workers. The extent to which they benefit vulnerable women workers will depend, however, on conditions in the labour market and the level of enforcement. For instance the regulation of minimum wage often has a favourable impact for the most exploited sections of the workforce.

Minimum wages provide a benchmark for bargaining for fair remuneration by workers, even in the informal economy. Regulation that is gender-sensitive and properly enforced can protect vulnerable workers, help bridge the gap between formal and informal working conditions and create more unified labour markets. It is, however, increasingly difficult to ensure that all women benefit from labour market regulations because so much of women's work in the country is in the informal sector, which remains beyond the reach of such regulations. Core labour standards, no matter how effective, are often limited to the formal sphere. There is a renewed universal commitment to respect, promote and realize the principles of: freedom of association and recognition of the right to collective bargaining; elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour; abolition of child labour; and elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation. Regulation of the labour market affects the way employers contract for the services of labour and includes the rights and responsibilities of the parties, the terms and conditions of work and the resolution of disputes. The overarching objective of full employment and decent work is to move more workers into formal work to increase access to rights, social protection and collective bargaining power. The international labour standards of the ILO, the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and other international instruments, such as the Millennium Development Goals, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, provide a solid international basis for extending rights to the informal economy.

Voice and bargaining power Social dialogue involves all types of negotiation, consultation or exchange of information between representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy. ILO (2008) [7] observes that most social dialogue institutions did not include issues relating to gender equality in their agendas. The priorities and needs of women should be voiced in such dialogue. Actions taken in Gender equality issues are not adequately addressed in social dialogue because of women's vulnerable position in the labour market and lack of participation in organizations that can represent their interests.

In Nigeria, women are more likely than men to work from home, on their own account in the informal sector or in private homes as domestic workers where they may be isolated from other workers who share their interests. Building the capacity of working women to play an active role in organizations which can represent their needs and interests is important. Women have actively demanded their economic rights through a range of organizations, including political parties and trade unions, as well as women's organizations and networks. Trade unions in Nigeria have not always been at the forefront of struggles in support of the rights of vulnerable workers, particularly women. There have been concerted efforts, with some success, on the part of women activists to promote greater sensitivity to women workers' needs in mainstream trade unions. However, as Omole (2002) [10] affirms trade unions in Nigeria have become increasingly concerned with social issues that go beyond the traditional concerns with wages and working conditions, including issues related to gender equality and demands for family-friendly policies. Some trade unions have set up special mechanisms to ensure that women's issues are not overlooked. There have been a few women-only unions and organizations promoting the rights of women workers.

Moreover, there are constraints posed by inadequate labour administration. The labour inspection services in the country are not adequately staffed or equipped to enforce standards effectively in the informal economy, especially in terms of covering the myriad of microenterprises and small enterprises or the growing numbers of homeworkers.

### **Recommendations**

Full employment and decent work plays a vital role in development and good standard of living, which is the key element of success in any economy. The preserve of pervasive and persistent poverty, unemployment and under-employment lead to a static or retrogressive development. Decent work promotes opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work rather than discriminating on sex, ethics and age distribution. This implies that, the standard of living will be high and also it will overcome discrimination of employment in the labour market, including the progressive eradication of inequality between men and women in the world of work. Furthermore, it will also create conducive environment for development.

This paper recommends a range of policy interventions, including the development of women's capabilities to adapt to changing labour market conditions; support to reduce unpaid care work; gender-sensitive labour market regulations and enhanced capacity for collective action to combat the constraints women face in the labour market. All stakeholders must assume greater responsibility for caregiving. Gender-specific and gender-neutral labour regulations can be employed to eliminate gender inequalities and discrimination and ensure access to decent work. Where gender-sensitive regulations are properly enforced they protect vulnerable workers, bridge the gap between formal and informal working conditions and create more unified labour markets. The Nigerian government must develop and implement gender-sensitive employment-centred growth strategies, based on full and productive employment and decent work for all citizens especially women. Again appropriate measures must be adopted to identify and address the negative impacts of the economic and financial crisis on women and girls and maintain adequate levels of funding for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

For Nigeria to meet the full employment and decent work target for women, discrimination in employment between men and women in the world of work must be giving full attention. The central place of decent work in the new development paradigm must not be underscored. Organizations must strengthen decent employment links between economic growth and aggregate poverty reduction, it must be prerequisite for creating decent employment including the transformation of the economy from low productivity, traditional Agriculture to labour intensive high value agriculture and agro-processing and to the growing industrial and services sectors by taking the advantage of globalization opportunities. The best way to create an enabling environment for the private sector and stimulate pro-poor economy growth is not less government but better government. In addition, to creating more decent jobs to fight poverty especially as regards women, it will be necessary for international organizations to renew their efforts to work together in a true partnership of mutual responsibility and accountability. Building partnership at all levels is essential for promoting decent work in Nigeria. To improve investment climate and make markets work better, there will be need to move beyond competition based on cheap labour or natural endowment.

### Conclusion

This paper concludes that an integrated approach to growth and development, focused on gender-responsive employment promotion and informed by the interdependency between economic and social development is needed to ensure women's economic empowerment and access to and control over resources. Social objectives need to be incorporated into economic policies. Economic growth strategies should give attention to the real economy and focus on creating a gender sensitive macroeconomic environment, full employment and decent work. The adopted of the recommendations highlighted in this paper can facilitate women's equitable access to full employment and decent work as a way out of poverty for women in Nigeria.

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