

# EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN AND COMMUNITIES TOWARDS PROSPERITY (SDG 3, 5 & 8)

---

PRESENTATION BY:

MS. ABIODUN ESSIET

SENIOR SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT OF  
NIGERIA ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# INTRODUCTION

---

- Rural areas in Nigeria face a host of challenges, many of which are linked to poverty, limited access to basic services, and systemic underdevelopment.
- When discussing these issues, it's crucial to emphasize the importance of centering “wellbeing” and “empowering” women as integral components of addressing these challenges.

- 
- The shift from merely sustaining rural livelihoods to focusing on rural wellbeing represents a transformative approach to development.
  - It goes beyond economic survival to prioritize rural communities' health, empowerment, and economic opportunities, with a special focus on women.
  - By centering wellbeing and aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 5, and 8, Nigeria can make significant strides towards fostering prosperity in its rural areas.

# KEY RURAL ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

---

- **Limited healthcare infrastructure:** Rural Nigeria suffers from inadequate healthcare facilities and a shortage of medical professionals. Many rural residents travel long distances for medical care, and maternal and child mortality rates remain high. Primary health facilities constitute 88% of healthcare facilities in the country and are mostly not well-staffed and equipped with medical supplies.
- **Maternal health challenges:** Women in rural areas face a higher risk during childbirth due to poor access to prenatal and postnatal services. Ensuring the well-being of women through improved healthcare services can drastically reduce maternal mortality and improve overall community health.

# KEY ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

---

- Recent data from a World Health Organization (WHO) factsheet released in March 2023 estimated MMR in Nigeria at 1047 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020. This represents a 14 percent rise from the WHO estimate of 917 per 100,000 live births three years earlier. The maternal mortality rate in Nigeria is therefore more than ten times greater than the SDGs' target. (Reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births.) In 2018 the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in Nigeria was estimated to be 512 deaths per 100,000 live births

## KEY ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

---

- **Malnutrition and food security:** Food insecurity disproportionately affects women and children. Addressing malnutrition, especially for pregnant women and young children, is vital to improving rural well-being. According to UNICEF, Nigeria has the second highest burden of stunted children in the world, with a national prevalence rate of 32 percent of children under five. An estimated 2 million children in Nigeria suffer from severe acute malnutrition (SAM), but only two out of every 10 children affected are currently reached with treatment. Seven percent of women of childbearing age also suffer from acute malnutrition. Now kwashiorkor has been identified in some communities recently.

# KEY ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

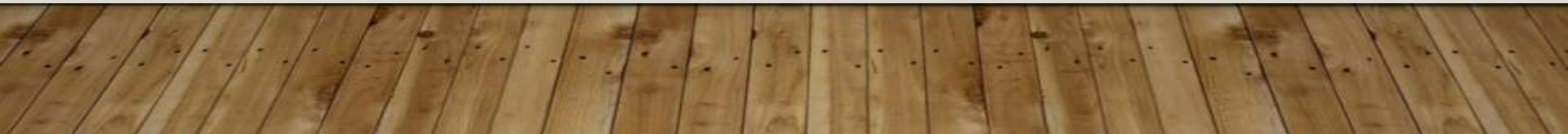
---

- Limited educational opportunities: Rural girls face significant barriers to education, including cultural norms, child marriage, and economic hardship. Prioritizing girls' education is key to empowering women and breaking cycles of poverty. 60% of out-of-school children are girls.
- According to UNICEF, Nigeria has the highest number of child brides in Africa, with 22 million girls married before the age of 18. This trend not only perpetuates cycles of poverty but also denies these young girls the opportunity for personal development and socio-economic advancement.

- **KEY ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN IN NIGERIA**

---

- **Adult education and vocational training:** For women already out of the formal education system, vocational training in agriculture, crafts, and small business management can be transformative. Empowering women through skills development ensures they can contribute meaningfully to their communities' economies.
- **Agriculture and access to resources:** Agriculture is the backbone of rural Nigeria, and women make up a significant portion of the agricultural workforce. However, women have limited access to land, credit, and agricultural inputs compared to men. Financial empowerment of women through better access to credit, land rights, and resources can increase their productivity and boost rural economies.





## KEY ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

---

- **Prevalence of domestic violence:** Gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, is prevalent in rural Nigeria, where cultural and patriarchal norms often limit women's autonomy. Community-based interventions that address these harmful norms and empower women to speak out are essential for enhancing their wellbeing and safety. According to a 2019 survey by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, 30% of Nigerian women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, while a shocking 68% have encountered emotional, economic, or sexual abuse.
- **Child marriage:** Child marriage remains common in some rural communities, negatively impacting girls' education, health, and economic prospects. Addressing this through legislation, education, and community engagement is critical to empowering young women.

# KEY ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

---

- **Lack of clean water:** Many rural communities lack access to clean water and proper sanitation, disproportionately affecting women and girls who are often responsible for fetching water. This daily burden affects their health, education, and overall well-being. Providing access to clean water and sanitation can reduce the time women spend on these tasks, allowing them more time for education and income-generating activities. The World Bank estimates that 70 million Nigerians lack access to safe drinking water. Only 57% of rural areas have access to clean water.

# KEY ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

---

- Hygiene and menstrual health: Poor menstrual hygiene management in rural areas contributes to school absenteeism among girls and limits women's participation in public life. only 37% of women aged 15-49 have everything they need for proper menstrual hygiene Management
- Limited political involvement: Women in rural Nigeria are often excluded from decision-making.
- In 2024, Nigeria has the lowest proportion of female representation in the upper and lower chambers of the national assembly with 3.62 percent representation in the Senate and 4.4 percent representation in the Federal House of Representatives. Between 2015 and now, the percentage of female representation in the national parliaments in Nigeria continues to decline, ranging from 6 percent in 2015 and 4.2 percent in 2024

## *Understanding the Barriers Faced by Nigerian Rural Women in Achieving SDG GOALS 3, 5, & 8, through the lens of The Capability Approach*

---

- The Capability Approach was developed by Amartya Sen & Martha Nussbaum for assessing human well-being, poverty, and inequality.
- The Capability Approach plays a crucial role in assessing well-being and development by shifting the focus from purely economic indicators, such as income or GDP, to a broader understanding of people's capabilities to lead lives they value (Alkire & Foster, 2011).
- It acknowledges the multidimensional nature of well-being, considering not just income but also factors such as education, healthcare, social participation, and personal freedoms.

- 
- For instance, in the case of the Ijan people, Ekiti state, South-West Nigeria, limited access to education hampers their capability to acquire knowledge, skills, and qualifications necessary or occupational advancement.
  - Without education, individuals may lack the necessary functions, such as literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking abilities, which are crucial for social and economic participation (UNDP 2015).

- 
- Similarly, inadequate access to healthcare restricts individuals' capability to maintain good health and functioning.
  - Without proper healthcare, individuals may face preventable illnesses, limited access to treatment, and higher mortality rates, compromising their overall well being and opportunities for development.
  - Furthermore, the lack of basic amenities, such as clean water, sanitation, and reliable infrastructure, affects individuals' capability to meet their basic needs and engage in productive activities.
  - These factors not only limit their immediate functionings but also hinder their long term potential for occupational advancement and improved well being.

# NATIONAL HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

---

- The capability approach is embedded in our National Human Development Program launched in 2018 to tackle poverty and promote sustainable economic growth.
- The presidency stated in July 2024 that 24 million Nigerians are set to benefit from the Federal Government's Human Capital Development initiatives which aim to improve education, healthcare, and skills training across the nation.
- Human Capital Development is the cornerstone of sustainable economic growth and social progress. Through collaboration, learning, and growth, Nigeria will shape the quality and effectiveness of the Human Capital Development Programme in building resilient healthcare systems, ensuring equitable access to education, and fostering an inclusive, future-ready workforce.”

# NIGERIA'S EFFORTS - GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING (SDG 3)

---

- **National Health Policy:** Emphasizes universal health coverage, with a focus on primary healthcare services. Community Health Workers deployed to rural areas to provide basic health care services, and maternal and child health support, and health education.
- **Maternal and Child Health Programs:** Programs aim to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates such as the Maternal Newborn, and Child Health(MNCH)
- **Health Infrastructure Development:** Investments in rural health facilities improve healthcare access. Initiatives like the Basic Health Care Provision Fund aim to enhance funding for health at the primary level.



# NIGERIA'S EFFORTS - GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT (SDG 5)

---

- **National Gender Policy:** Promotes women's rights across health, education, and economic sectors. One of the high point of this policy is the 35% affirmative action, allotting 35% of appointments in the public sector to women.
- **Women Empowerment Programs:** Initiatives such as the National Women Empowerment Fund provide financial support and training for women entrepreneurs, helping them to start and grow businesses. The Government's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan also emphasizes gender inclusivity.
- **Legislative Frameworks:** Laws such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act and the Gender Equality Bill are aimed at protecting women's rights and promoting gender equality in all aspects of life.

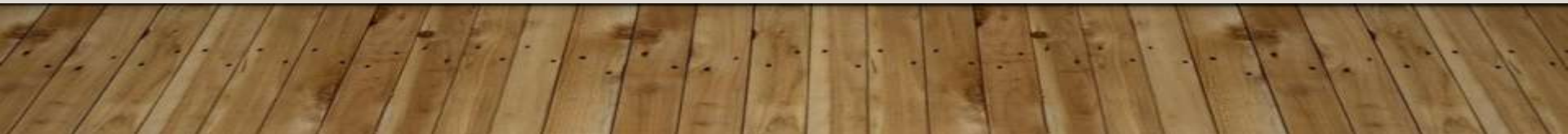
# NIGERIA'S EFFORTS - DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH (SDG 8)

---

- **Support for Agriculture:** Given that a significant portion of Nigeria's rural population depends on agriculture, programs aimed at improving agricultural productivity, such as the Anchor Borrowers' Programme, provide farmers with access to finance, technology, and training.
- **Skills Development and Vocational Training:** Programs equip rural women with marketable skills & services to increase their employability and economic independence.
- **Social Protection Initiatives:** Programs like the National Social Investment Programme provide cash transfers and social assistance to vulnerable groups, including rural women, enhancing their economic resilience.

# CURRENT REALITY OF THE NIGERIAN RURAL WOMAN

- High maternal, child, and newborn mortality rates; socioeconomic inequalities in healthcare access.
- Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in Nigeria is over ten times higher than the SDG target. (WHO) factsheet released in March 2023 estimated MMR in Nigeria at 1,047 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020.
- Nigeria has high prevalence of FGM, though reduction progress is slow.
- Low female political representation, with just 3.62 per cent representation in the Senate and 4.4 per cent representation in the Federal House of Representatives.
- Cultural norms and early marriage still hinder educational access for rural women and girls.
- 95% of women are in informal work with limited access to financial resources.



# RE-STRATEGIZING TO EMPOWER RURAL WOMEN

---

- **Strengthening Healthcare Access:** Provision of mobile clinics, training for community health workers, and provision of infrastructures.
- **Promoting Gender Equality:** Awareness programs and leadership development targeted at rural women.
- **Policy Reforms:** Strict enactment of policies that support gender equality, access to quality and affordable health services, quality education, basic amenities, and economic access. Policies and interventions should aim to enhance capabilities by providing equitable access to these things.
- **Strengthen Public-Private Partnerships:** Fund projects for health, education, and empowerment.
- **Community-Led Development:** Ensure rural women's voices are included in decision-making.
- **Scaling Digital Literacy and Connectivity:** Improve rural women's access to digital resources.

# CONCLUSION

---

- Empowering rural women is key to unlocking the potential of rural communities.
- A comprehensive approach that centers on well-being and empowerment can create lasting change.
- This approach benefits not only rural women but entire communities.