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Nigerian women and men united to end violence against women- International Women's Day observed in Abuja , Lagos

Abuja

The UN System in Nigeria, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, organised a Town Hall Meeting at the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD) in Abuja on 10 March 2009. This was part of the activities to celebrate this year's International Women's Day. The week-long activities to mark this year's celebration in Abuja included radio and television talk shows, church services and Muslim prayers as well as an Awareness Walk.

It was an interactive dialogue on the role of various actors in the society, and on issues related to establishing and maintaining a continuous chain of care and support for victims of violence in Nigeria .

The session was attended by the First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Hajiya Turai Yar'Adua, and President Tarja Halonen of Finland as a special guest of honour. In her opening remarks, Mrs Yar'Adua stated that "the female gender is not an object of molestation or battery but a specie specially created to be loved and cared for by the opposite sex while she in turn discharges her God-given responsibility with ease, dignity and pride."

The event was attended by United Nations Resident



Nigerian men and women unite in a campaign to eradicate violence against women.

Coordinator Albéric Kacou, who read the message of the UN Secretary-General for the Day, the Minister of Women Affairs, the wives of State Governors , female Parliamentarians, the police, FIDA, religious leaders, and representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) and stakeholders.

On 11 March, hundreds of women took part in the Awareness Walk to raise awareness on the negative impact of violence against women and girls in Nigeria .

Lagos

Prior to this, the UN system in Nigeria held a joint interactive forum with Women's Optimum Development (WODEF) on 'Ending Violence

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Nigerian women and men united to end violence against women - International Women's Day observed in Abuja , Lagos

against Women and Girls' in Lagos to commemorate the International Women's Day. The event held at the United Nations Information Centre in Lagos

The event, which was organised as a part of United Nations system activities to commemorate the Day in Nigeria, brought together top film producers and actresses, and frontline non-governmental organisations on women issues, secondary school students from Lagos, and the media. Among the special guests at the event were Mrs Ajoke Silva of Lufodo Productions, Mrs Kate Henshaw-Nuttall, a popular Nigeria film actress, Mr Tunde Kelani of Mainframe Films, and Mr Charles Novia of November Productions.

Other special guests included Mrs Ada Agina-Ude of the Gender Development Action (GADA) and Mr Kingsley Obom-Egbulem of the Manhood Magazine, who gave key presentations on ending violence against women. Mrs Edna Dafe, Women's Board Lagos, Mrs Nkechi Nwankwo of Women's Leadership



■ *Interactive session on the elimination of violence against women in Lagos.*

Group, and Mrs Josephine Effah-Chukwuma of Project Alert on Violence against Women were also among the guests at the event.

Participants looked critically at the numerous perspectives on the issues of how violence against women and girls affect the society and how best to strategically resolve the challenges. They also looked at possibilities to use the film industry as a medium to address the problems. It was highly recommended that film-makers would shift their focus to producing happy/positive-ending stories. Participants were actually

challenged, in a short task, to find happy conclusions for short movie clips on violence against women during the event.

At the end of the dialogue, participants agreed that more discussions on the issues should be held on a regular basis. It was also agreed that stakeholders should intensify efforts to expand the public space for advocacy, networking and fund-raising to create more awareness and encourage investment in the empowerment of women and girls in Nigeria.

Polio immunisation campaign receiving a boost in Kaduna State

Dr Suomi Sakai, UNICEF Representative in Nigeria, spent three days in Kakau Ward of the Chikun Local Government Area in Kaduna State to monitor the implementation of the March/April round of the immunisation campaign. At the end of her visit, Dr Sakai told the District Head of Kakau, Mr Zakwai Zarmai, and his team, "I am very happy to see organised teams at fixed posts and going house-to-house. It is very important to reach every child in their homes and communities to

help fast track polio immunisation all over Nigeria."

The UNICEF Representative visited 15 houses in the community where she stressed to mothers the importance of taking their children for immunisation against preventable diseases. She also emphasised that regular antenatal care was the most cost-effective way to protect the health of mothers and babies. She praised the community's commitment to ensuring that their children were vaccinated and polio free.

The District Head noted that his district had always brought their children for immunisation and that he personally supervises the exercise to ensure that every parent allows his or her child to be vaccinated. That, according to Mallam Zakwai Zarmai, was the reason why they had no record of polio cases in their community (at 27 March 2009, Nigeria had recorded 106 wild polio virus cases in 22 states; nine of these cases were from Kaduna State).

Kakau Ward has a population of

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Polio immunisation campaign receiving a boost in Kaduna State

26,108. Over 5,000 of the residents are children under 5 years old who are vulnerable to polio. During the last Immunisation Plus days (IODs) held between 28 February and 3 March, the Ward was well represented. Although there is no public health facility in Kakau, the community seems to have adapted well to the fixed-post format of vaccination. The Health Councilor of the Local Government Area said work would soon start building a clinic a piece of land provided by the community.

Dr Sakai urged the State



■ Dr Sakai giving a child polio vaccine during a field visit in Kakau village in Chikun LGA, Kaduna State.

government to ensure that the Primary Health Care Development Agency functions well so that it can coordinate primary health care activities--work that will help achieve the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs). UNICEF calls on governments at all levels, the private sector, civil society organisations, the media, parents, traditional rulers and religious leaders to help eradicate polio and to unite for Nigerian children by making practical contributions to children's wellbeing and to support the realisation of their rights in the constitution, the Child's Rights Act, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Union Charter on the Rights of African Children.

WHO calls for implementation of 'STOP TB' strategy in Nigeria on World TB Day 2009

Nigeria commemorated World Stop TB Day on 24 March. The slogan 'I am stopping TB' was adopted as the national theme for this year's celebration. At a press conference to mark the occasion, the Honourable Minister of Health, Professor Babatunde Osotimehin, said that TB (tuberculosis) was still a major public health problem in Nigeria, with the country ranking the fifth among the 22 high TB stricken countries which collectively bear 80% of the global burden of TB. The Minister revealed that the number of TB cases notified in the country increased from 31,264 in 2002 to 90,307 in 2008; more than 450,000 TB cases have been successfully treated free of charge in the past five years in Nigeria.

In addition to Federal Government officials, guests at the occasion included representatives of partners from WHO, USAID, CIDA, ILEP and CDC, the network of persons affected by TB, and non-governmental organisations working on TB.

According to the Minister, the TB burden in Nigeria was further compounded by the high HIV/AIDS prevalence of 4.6%. Consequently, the Federal Ministry of Health developed a strategy to maximise collaboration between HIV and TB programmes in Nigeria and had instituted a policy that all TB suspects and patients would be screened for HIV while all HIV positive patients would also be screened for TB. As a result of this policy, about 58,942 TB

patients (65.2% of the registered TB patients in 2008) were screened for HIV last year, out of which 14,698(24.94%) were found to be HIV positive.

Professor Osotimehin informed the gathering that the emergence of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) was adversely affecting the TB control efforts in Nigeria, although the true burden of drug-resistant TB in Nigeria is largely unknown. To improve identification of cases, the Federal Ministry of Health has established, with support from the Global Fund, a National Reference Laboratory for the diagnosis of MDR-TB at the Nigeria Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) Lagos, and is supplying equipment to one zonal reference

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WHO calls for implementation of 'STOP TB' strategy in Nigeria on World TB Day 2009

laboratory in each of the six geopolitical zones of the Federation. The Ministry is also sourcing for second line anti-TB drugs.

Additional Government actions to reduce the high TB burden in the country includes the establishment of the AIDS, TB and Malaria (ATM) task force directly under ministerial supervision. These measures, according to the Minister, will go a long way in supporting the Government's efforts in advocacy and mobilisation of additional resources from the private sector and multilateral organisations for the control of TB in Nigeria. They will also improve the chances of reaching the Stop TB and MDG targets for TB control by 2015.

The WHO Country Representative, Dr Peter Eriki, presenting the goodwill message of the African Regional Director of WHO, Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, for World Stop TB Day 2009, recalled

that although the organism that causes tuberculosis was discovered by Robert Koch exactly 127 years ago, TB was still a major public health

problem especially in the African Region. He further explained that the region accounts for 30% of the global TB burden even though it represents approximately only 10% of the world population. Furthermore, the region's ability to identify cases and ensure successful completion of treatment remains below the set targets.

problem especially in the African Region. He further explained that the region accounts for 30% of the global TB burden even though it represents approximately only 10% of the world population. Furthermore, the region's ability to identify cases and ensure successful completion of treatment remains below the set targets.

The WHO African Regional Director stressed for "the implementation of the STOP TB strategy in it is entirety" in all the countries of the region including Nigeria, in order to improve case detection and treatment outcomes. This should include systematic community mobilisation which would result in bringing a greater number of suspected TB cases to the health facility for screening.

"Every diagnosed TB patient must be placed on quality TB treatment, and control programmes at all levels must strive to minimise patient transfers, defaults and deaths" so as to help break the chain of transmission of TB infection.



The WHO Representative in Nigeria, Dr Peter Eriki, pins a STOP TB badge on the Hon Minister for Health, Prof B Osotimehin.

The WHO Regional Director also stressed the importance of the private sector, individuals, families and communities in TB control noting that "the fight to control TB cannot be won by health care providers in the public sector alone".

To round up the commemoration of World TB Day 2009, Dr Eriki decorated the Honorable Minister of Health, Professor Babtunde Oshotimehin, and several of his staff with a StopTB strategy badge.

UNDP conducts baseline survey of communities in Niger Delta

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) embarked on a baseline survey for the Niger Delta Local Development Programme (LDP) in Akure, Ondo State, on 23 March 2009. The survey was being conducted in selected communities in LPD's pilot Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Okitipupa and Ilaje in Ondo State and Ogbia and Sagbama in Bayelsa States.

The aim of the study is to establish

the status of public services in the LGAs, to collect benchmark data for each of the six components of the LDP, and to develop project Monitoring and Evaluation plan based on baseline study findings.

Okitipupa has a total of 13 wards with 166 communities, while Ilaje's 12 wards have 300 communities. In Bayelsa state, Ogbia has 13 wards and 49 communities while Sagbama has 14 wards with 38 communities.

The 2-month process started in Akure with a five-day training of 31 Community Development Assistants from Okitipupa and Ilaje, as data collection officers. This was followed by field activities in two LGAs. Data collectors were enlightened on LDP's objectives, goals, approach and strategies. They received trainings on monitoring and evaluation data collection which included practical sessions for data collection, data verification, basic

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UNDP conducts baseline survey of communities in Niger Delta

data analysis and reporting.

The study team was led by LDP's Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist Aimtonga Amani Makawia assisted by two consultants, Dr Samuel Abiem and Professor Uka Ezenwe.

A total of 1,250 heads of households from 144 communities of the LGAs in Ondo State were interviewed during the field data collection exercise. The study also mapped public services in the 31 Wards of the LGAs, while selected key informants (such as youth group leaders,



■ Data collection through focus group discussions in Okitipupa LGA.

women leaders, religious leaders, traditional leaders, community leaders, teachers, market women leaders, and the LGA Chairpersons)

were interviewed. At the state level, the study team interviewed heads of planning research and statistics unit, state planning commission, heads of works department, project monitoring unit, and the head of finance department. Focus group discussions were also held with the LGAs heads of departments and councilors.

The field activities were later followed by a review and verification of data in Akure.

Third Conference of ECOWAS Education Ministers held in Abuja

“I call upon the Commission to take a more proactive or leadership role ... to mobilise partnership within the UN system and multilateral agencies and civil society organisations in accompanying Member States in the implementation of the Second Decade of Education in Africa”. Those were the words of the Director of UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa (BREDA), Mrs Ann Therese Ndong Jatta, who in her opening remarks, also reiterated the commitment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to support the Member States of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) in their efforts to improve quality education in Africa. This view was also shared by the Honourable Minister of Education, Dr Sam Egwu, who enjoined the Ministers of Education to take cognisance of the major international conference coming up in 2009 and share a common vision

and speak with one voice.

These remarks were made on the occasion of the 3rd Conference of ECOWAS Education Ministers which was held at the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja from 17 through 20 March 2009.

Prior to the meeting of ECOWAS Ministers of Education on 20 March 2009, experts from the ECOWAS Member States and Development Partners met at the Headquarters of the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja between 17 and 19 March to exchange views towards the achievement of the objectives of the Third Conference of Ministers. Participants from the following Member States attended the meeting: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d' Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Nigeria. Strategic partners also represented at the meeting included UNESCO Abuja, BREDA , Nigeria National Commission for UNESCO, World

Bank, UNICEF Regional Office for West and Central Africa , and the Association of African Universities.

The purpose of the Third Conference of ECOWAS Education Ministers was to review the structures that were put in place by the first and second Conference of ECOWAS Ministers of Education, as well as to harmonise the implementation of the Plan of Action (POA) for the Second Decade of Education in Africa. This Plan of Action which runs from 2006 through 2015 emphasises that education should play a pivotal role towards the development of Africa. In this regard, Mr Jean de Dieu Somda, Vice President of the ECOWAS Commission who represented the President of the ECOWAS Commission, recalled that education was an important element for socio-economic development, good governance and integration of States and thus urged all participants to critically analyse the education

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systems in their countries in order to provide sustainable approaches and reforms. As the First Decade was not successful, it is hoped that the Second Decade would achieve all of its objectives.

Among the issues examined included ECOWAS priority areas in education, the harmonisation of the objectives of Education for All (EFA), consideration and adoption of draft statutes for the ECOWAS Fund for Education and Training, the report of activities of the network of the education sector response to HIV/AIDS in the ECOWAS region, financing projects and programmes, and areas where ECOWAS and its partners could intervene directly in the sub-region.

After the deliberations, experts from the Member States of the sub-region identified lapses in the implementation of educational programmes and activities in West Africa, and agreed on the harmonisation of training programmes, promotion of quality education, competitiveness in the workforce and regional integration

through national networks. For the successful implementation of the POA, the meeting recommended that the Member States define



■ ECOWAS Ministers of Education gathered for the conference in Abuja, March 2009.

concrete actions with a view to ensuring understanding and ownership of the programmes.

At the one-day Ministerial Conference of African Union Second Decade of Education for Africa, the following priority areas were agreed upon as ECOWAS areas of emphasis with UNESCO as its major partner: 1) supporting girls' education; 2) expanding open distance learning through the new technologies; 3) revitalising technical vocational education and training (TVET); 4) promoting the teaching of science and technology; and 5) increasing the support programme

for HIV/AIDS prevention in the education sector.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional group of fifteen countries founded in 1975. Its mission is to promote economic integration in "all fields of economic activity, particularly industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions, social and cultural matters". Its objectives include the

achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through education, science and technology, culture and communication in cooperation with UNESCO. Both organisations seek to promote integration, peace and security through close cooperation among the nations. The UNESCO Abuja office, headed by Director and Country Representative Joseph Ngu, plays the role of liaison between the ECOWAS Commission and UNESCO Headquarters.

UNODC holds Town Hall meetings for Justice Sector

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) convened the first ever town hall meeting for criminal justice administrators, stakeholders and citizens of Kaduna State on 12 March 2009. The meeting was held under the framework of the project 'Support to the EFCC and the Nigerian Judiciary' funded by the

European Union (EU). A similar exercise had already been conducted in Anambra, Benue, Enugu, Delta and Katsina States since January 2009.

The town hall meeting served as an interactive platform for Kaduna State citizens and other institutional stakeholders to engage their representatives from the judiciary,

the police, the prison service, the Ministry of Justice, the Bar Association and other criminal justice practitioners on the current state of affairs in the State judiciary. In the course of the discussion, some tough questions emerged, and many used the occasion to express their discontent on a number of issues, notably lengthy trial time, frequent

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adjournments, lack of legal aid, and, above all, the persisting vulnerability of the police to corruption and other forms of abuses.

Participants appreciated that they could express their concerns and frustrations when dealing with the justice system, and they felt encouraged by the steps already taken as well as those yet to be carried out under the four-point action plan that had been launched by the different state judiciaries including Kaduna since 2007. This action plan puts forward a wide range of measures to enhance access to justice, increase timeliness and quality of justice delivery, strengthen transparency, accountability and integrity of the courts. The plan also attempts to improve on the coordination and cooperation mechanism among the courts, the attorney general's office, the police, the prisons and the bar. What makes it unique is that, unlike most action plans launched by the Federal as well as the state governments in the past, the action plan not only assigns clear responsibilities but it establishes timelines and provides for cost estimates, clear benchmarks and a baseline against which progress is to be monitored. Objective data collected by the Legal Defence and Assistance Programme (LEDAP) with the assistance of the UNODC and the

European Commission (EC) allows close monitoring and evaluation of progress made.



■ A cross section of participants at the Kaduna Town Hall meeting.

While acknowledging the support received by the State Government and the international partners, the Chief Judge emphasised at the meeting that judicial reform was a process that would call for continuous improvement and excellence. Despite past achievements, he noted, there was no time to be satisfied because much remained to be done to continuously develop and maintain a justice system that would protect citizens from crime, and uphold and advance human rights, democracy and the rule of law. He went on further to say that the next frontier for the judiciary and the justice sector at large, laid in the area of introducing information technology and integrated interagency case management systems as well as rooting out some of the continuing shortcomings that undermine access to justice. In conclusion, he endorsed the earlier remarks of other Chief Judges and

high level justice sector representatives that the town-hall meeting was indeed an exercise of democracy in action.

The town-hall meeting participants were also presented with a series of court user guides explaining different legal procedures from a court user perspective. These guides provide basic information to court users on issues such as arrest, detention and bail,

basic criminal and civil procedure, alternative dispute resolution and matters of relevance to witnesses and victims. As such, the court user guides address a critical information deficit, one of the key barriers for the general public to access the justice system with a view to seeking redress for legal problems.

The representatives of the UNODC and the National Judicial Institute stressed the importance of basic legal education and information for court users, and expressed their hope that the court user guides would be made available to citizens through courts, police stations and prisons as well as the members of the Bar and the NGO community in the State. They also underscored the role and responsibility of the media to disseminate such information to citizens.

